

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pastor Eric Chang

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YOUR REDEMPTION IS DRAWING NEAR (2)

Luke 21:28

In our previous lesson, we studied Luke 21:28 and the meaning of redemption. Jesus said, *But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.* We saw that there is an aspect of redemption that is future. We have been redeemed, yes, but we have not been fully redeemed. That is why Jesus said that our redemption is drawing near.

Redemption: already-not yet

Right now, we live in the period between what is already there and yet not there. This 'already-not yet' character of redemption is seen in several other aspects of salvation. Look at these examples:

- We have been adopted. *Romans 8:15: For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"* And yet, we are still waiting for our adoption. *Romans 8:23: And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*
- The kingdom of God is among us. *Luke 17:21: Nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.* And yet, we are asked to pray that it comes. *Matthew 6:10: Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*
- The believers are the bride of Christ. *Ephesians 5:25-26: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.* And yet, we will attend the wedding feast of the Lamb at the second coming of Christ. *Revelation 19:9: And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'*

Grieving the Holy Spirit

So you see, salvation has come, but it has not fully come. And between our current redemption and our future redemption, we find in the Scriptures many warnings addressed to the Saints. Ephesians 4:30 is one of them.

Ephesians 4:30. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

As I just mentioned, this exhortation is addressed to Christians. The believers are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. To 'grieve' (*lupeo*) means to offend, to vex, to sadden. This can happen when a person

acts contrary to the counsel of the Holy Spirit. Basically, a believer grieves the Holy Spirit when he behaves immorally, when he allows impure things to be part of his life and his thoughts.

How important is this warning? Does it really matter whether we grieve the Spirit of God or not? We saw the last time that the believer will be spared from the wrath of God to come. So logically, grieving the Spirit or not grieving the Spirit, no matter how bad it is, will not change our final outcome. We will be saved on the day of redemption anyway. We will be saved from the wrath of God. But is that really so?

Paul writes in Colossians 1:22-23, *He has now reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, **provided that you continue in the faith**, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

Christ has reconciled us to God, and this present status will carry on into the future, but notice Paul's words, 'provided that we continue in the faith,' i.e., as long as we remain faithful. It is important to see the conditional nature of that reconciliation. A person must continue in the faith, not turning back from the commitment that he has made to God. Salvation is based on faith. Not on some past act of faith, but on a continuing faith.

Now the question is this: is it possible for a believer to walk away from the faith?

The possibility of faithlessness

When we take Paul's teaching as a whole, it is easy to notice his emphasis on the faithfulness of God in fulfilling the promises made to His people. Let's look at a few examples of this.

- 1Thessalonians 5:24: *He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.* The God who calls men to His kingdom will not fail to prepare them to enter it by making them holy.
- Philippians 1:6: *And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* Having begun a good work, God will carry it through to the end.
- 1Corinthians 1:7-8: *Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* After divine grace has been bestowed richly on the church, the Lord Jesus will also confirm them to the end so as to be blameless.
- 1Corinthians 10:13: *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.* When temptations come to believers, God is faithful and will not let them be tempted beyond their strength. He will provide a way for them to endure.

As reassuring as these promises are, they do not eliminate the possibility for a disciple to rebel against God and refuse His protection. The faithfulness of God does not rule out the possibility of the faithlessness of men. In other words, divine protection does not rule out the need for human vigilance. There is nothing automatic or magical about God's promise to keep His people from evil. And this is shown by the fact that it is possible for the believer to grieve the Spirit of God. God will not force us to obey Him if we chose to disobey Him.

A pledge of our inheritance

Now here I would like to go back to the topic of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is spoken of in two ways. First of all, we are told that the believer receives the Holy Spirit as a pledge. We read that in 2Corinthians 1:22, 2Corinthians 5:5 and Ephesians 1:14. Let's take a look at Ephesians 1:13-14.

*Ephesians 1:13-14. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were **sealed** in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a **pledge** of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

The Holy Spirit is given to us as a pledge of our inheritance. Notice that we have not yet come into possession of our inheritance. For now, we have only received a pledge. Our inheritance will come later. So when we become a Christian, we begin to experience God in our life because we received the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is given to us as a pledge, as a first installment, as a guarantee we read in certain translations, as a foretaste of salvation.

The second thing about the Holy Spirit is that He sealed us. *You were **sealed** in Him with the Holy Spirit.* We know the concept of a seal. It may take the form of a rubber stamp which we use to stamp an official document. Or we may have a metal stamp which presses a mark into the paper. In this case, we do not have to use any ink. When we lift up the stamp, we see the seal in 3D. The whole idea of a seal is to authenticate a document, to show that a particular document is genuine. So when you receive the Holy Spirit, it indicates that you are a true child of God. As Paul says, *If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ* (Romans 8:9). You are not a true Christian if you do not have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's mark upon you that testifies that you are a genuine believer.

What is the mark of the Spirit? The mark of the Spirit of course is seen in the fruit of the Spirit. People can see that a Christian is genuine because there is a quality about his life that is different. That quality is produced by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has done something in this person and that shows in his life. His whole character is changed. He has a new attitude of love toward other people and toward God.

Does it matter whether we grieve the Holy Spirit or not? It certainly matters! Because if you keep grieving the Holy Spirit, you will have to face the question as to where is the evidence of the Holy Spirit in your life. Remember the word 'pledge' in v. 14 of Ephesians 1. It is also translated by the word 'guarantee.' We can compare that to a warranty. Let's say you have a watch that has a 3-year warranty. After one year, your watch does not work anymore. You bring it to the merchant to have it fixed. Before the merchant agrees to fix it, you will have to show him that your watch is still under warranty (with the receipt of the purchase for example). If you cannot provide the proper document, it is unlikely that your watch will be repaired for free.

The Holy Spirit is our guarantee. We have to make sure that we keep our guarantee by not grieving the Holy Spirit. Otherwise we will be in the same situation as a person who has a watch under warranty but he cannot produce the evidence of that warranty. We have only one evidence of our guarantee. It is the Holy Spirit. He is the guarantee. When Paul says, 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit,' he is saying, 'He is your guarantee. Don't lose that guarantee. Because if you lose the Holy Spirit, you will be in the same situation as those who are in the flesh.'

Losing the Holy Spirit

This raises a serious question. Is it possible to lose the Holy Spirit? Can the Holy Spirit leave a believer? In order to answer that question, we will look at several passages of the Bible. You are probably well aware that in the OT, many times, the Holy Spirit was taken away from people. Let's take a few examples of this.

*1 Samuel 16:14. Now the **Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul**, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.*

Saul was the first king of Israel. He was anointed by the prophet Samuel. Many times in his reign, Saul had openly defied the Lord by deliberately disobeying Him. Eventually, the Spirit of God departed from him. Since Saul had forsaken God, God withdrew from him His Spirit. And Saul was gone. That is the tragic end of the first king of Israel.

The same situation happened to another man. Samson. Samson is well known for being a man of enormous strength. He is often pictured as a very muscular man, like Hercules in the Greek mythology. He was able to destroy a temple using his bare might. With the jawbone of a donkey, he defeated a whole army of Philistines. But it is important to understand that Samson's strength was not a natural strength at all. The Bible tells us that Samson had only one source of strength. That source was the Spirit of God. And when the Holy Spirit of God left him, Samson was no stronger than any other man. We will look at a few passages. Notice the constant association of 'the Spirit of the Lord' and Samson's strength.

*Judges 14:6. And **the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily**, so that he tore him as one tears a kid though he had nothing in his hand; but he did not tell his father or mother what he had done.*

*Judges 14:19. Then **the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily**, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil, and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle.*

*Judges 15:14. When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And **the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily** so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands.*

Here we see that when the Holy Spirit came over Samson, he was exceptionally strong. He ripped a lion apart. He killed thirty men. He broke the ropes that were on his arms.

But one day, Samson gave his secret away. He told a woman by the name of Delilah, who was a secret agent for the Philistines. So long as Samson was judge of Israel, the Philistines could not beat Israel. They had to knock out Samson. That is why the Philistines sent Delilah to find the secret of Samson's strength. And Delilah did her job very well. She discovered that the secret was Samson's Nazareth vow. Samson was totally committed to the Lord through this Nazareth vow. As long as he was under the Nazareth vow, his power was untouchable. Nobody could break his power. And the mark of his Nazareth vow was his long hair. His vow could be broken through the shaving of his head. Then he will no longer be under the power of God. And that is exactly what happened. His head was shaved and he was left powerless. The Philistines were then able to capture him. His strength was no more than that of an ordinary man because the Spirit of God had gone away from him.

This is another example of the Holy Spirit leaving a person because of disobedience. Samson was disobedient to the Lord. He broke his vow, or allowed someone to break it for him. He knew very well what would happen if he told Delilah. But he told her all the same. That is disobedience.

Let's read another passage. This one concerns David.

Psalm 51:11. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

This psalm had to do with David's sin concerning Bathsheba, when he committed adultery with her. He was pleading for forgiveness and asking that God may not remove His Holy Spirit in view of his repentance.

On the ground of disobedience

We see in the OT that the Holy Spirit can be taken away, but always on one ground, and one ground alone: because of serious disobedience and persistence in that disobedience. This principle remains the same in the NT. Look at this verse.

Acts 5:32. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

God gives His Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. Here we have a present participle in the word 'obey.' It is a continuous tense. This means that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who continually obey Him, who have the attitude of obedience towards God. It is not just one act of obedience in the past.

It also follows, when we reverse this principle, that God does not give the Holy Spirit to those who do not obey Him. And it opens the possibility that God will remove the Holy Spirit from Christians who resist and disobey Him.

In Romans 6, Paul said, 'Once you were disobedient. When you became Christians, by faith, you yielded your life to God. You became obedient to Him.' In Ephesians 4:30, he said 'But now, do not grieve the Holy Spirit by being disobedient again.' What did Paul have in mind in saying this? He had in mind the OT. He is warning us that what happened to the Israelites in the OT can happen to the Christians too.

What happened to the Israelites in the OT? They grieved the Spirit of God. Psalm 78:40. Notice the word 'grieve.' *How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness, and **grieved Him in the desert!***

That is exactly what Paul is warning the Christians not to do. 'Don't grieve the Holy Spirit. The Israelites in the OT did that very thing. And as a result, they fell in the wilderness. They perished.' And he told us in 1 Corinthians 10:11 that the things that happened to the believers of Israel are examples and warnings to us. When the Israelites grieved God in the wilderness, they perished. Likewise, when a Christian persistently grieves the Holy Spirit, he will perish.

The assurance of final salvation

Let me close with those words. In many places, the Bible talks about the believer's assurance of salvation. God has called His elect to be conformed to the image of His Son and to participate in His glory. There is no power in the universe that can stop that. On the other hand, many exhortations in the Bible are addressed to believers which imply that they also have their part to play in their salvation. And this is what we emphasized in this lesson about grieving the Holy Spirit. The need for this kind of verse shows that there is a possibility for a Christian to fall away. God's grace does not operate in a mechanical manner where the believer is inevitably carried on to perfection. It cooperates with his free will.

Redemption, in its fullness, is future. God has given to those who trust in Him the first fruit of the Holy Spirit, the seal of the Holy Spirit. He is our guarantee. We must make every effort to hold on, by God's grace, to this guarantee. We must keep the Holy Spirit in our lives by obeying Him day by day. The believer who commits himself to the grace of God in this way can be certain that nothing will separate him from the love of God. He can rejoice right now in the hope of final salvation.