

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver Street  
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## WHY NOT SIN?

Ephesians 4:30

By

Steven J. Cole

April 20, 2008

© Steven J. Cole, 2008

For access to previous sermons or to subscribe to weekly sermons via email go to: [www.fcfonline.org/sermons](http://www.fcfonline.org/sermons)

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture  
Quotations are from the New American  
Standard Bible, Updated Edition  
© The Lockman Foundation

April 20, 2008  
Ephesians Lesson 36

## Why Not Sin? Ephesians 4:30

C. H. Spurgeon relates a conversation that he had with a Wesleyan man who believed that he could attain spiritual perfection on this earth. The man had invited Spurgeon to his home, but Spurgeon told him that there probably would not be room for him, because the house would be so full of angels. After Spurgeon made a few more playful remarks, the man flew into a rage. When Spurgeon asked him if perfect men get angry, the man denied that he was angry, although Spurgeon says that he had a peculiar redness about his cheeks and a fiery flash in his eyes. Spurgeon says he thinks that he rather spoiled the man's perfection!

Then Spurgeon writes, "My own experience is a daily struggle with the evil within. I wish I could find in myself something friendly to grace, but, hitherto, I have searched my nature through, and have found everything in rebellion against God." He then mentions his struggles with sloth, anger, pride, and distrust in God (*C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], 1:229).

It would be wonderful if we could reach a place in the Christian life where sin was no longer so tempting! It would be nice if the longer you were a Christian, the more immunity to sin you built up, so that it just glanced off you. But the fact is, a man after God's heart such as David, after years of walking with God and writing many inspired Psalms, succumbed to the temptation of adultery, deception, and murder. The wisest man on the earth, Solomon, who had several personal encounters with God, fell into the sin of idolatry. If you think that you've arrived at a point where certain sins no longer tempt you, remember Paul's warning (1 Cor. 10:12), "let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."

Because sin appeals to us with such powerful force, we need a motivation for holy living that is stronger than our sin. Since sin often brings immediate pleasure and fulfillment, we need to think through the biblical answer to the question, "Why not sin?"

The Bible gives us many good reasons not to sin. For one thing, sin hurts you. God designed His commandments for our blessing and protection. There are built-in consequences when we violate His holy standards. It's like the traffic laws. You can drive fast, run red lights, and drive on the wrong side of the road in order to get where you're going faster. For a while, it may work. You may think, "This is great! I don't have to obey those restrictive laws!" But, sooner or later you're going to get hit by a semi-truck and it won't be fun any more!

In the same way, God warns us that whatever we sow, we will reap. If we sow to the flesh, we will from the flesh reap corruption (Gal. 6:7-8). So even if sin gives us pleasure for a while, the Bible clearly warns that eventually it leads to death (Rom. 6:23).

Another reason not to sin is, sin hurts others. This is obvious with many sins, such as murder, rape, stealing, hatred, gossip, etc. But, it's also true of sins that we may commit in the privacy of our own thoughts. As Paul said (4:25), we are members of one another. If my heart decides that it has a right to do as it pleases and it stops functioning, my entire body suffers. If, as a member of the body of Christ, I indulge in sin, even if they are secret sins that you cannot detect, I have damaged you because we are both members of the one body of Christ. My sin will hurt my wife and children, because it weakens me as their shepherd and example. So you should not sin because sin hurts you and it hurts others.

Another reason not to sin is, God will judge sinners that do not repent. It often looks as if sinners get away with their evil ways. Hugh Hefner, the founder of the evil Playboy empire, has lived in luxury and sensuality with the sexiest women that any man could desire. Recently on his eightieth birthday he said something to the effect that he had enjoyed a good life and had no regrets. But all of that will change soon, when he dies and stands before God and faces eternal punishment in hell! The Bible gives abundant warning that no unrepentant sinner will escape God's judgment. So that is a good reason to repent and turn from sin!

We could probably come up with more reasons not to sin. But we still haven't come to the *best* reason not to sin, which Paul gives us in Ephesians 4:30, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." He is saying,

We should not sin because our sin grieves the Holy Spirit, who has sealed us for the day of redemption.

In the context, Paul has been showing what it means to live as a Christian in a pagan world. We are not to live as the rest of the world lives (4:17-19). Rather, as those now created anew in righteousness and holiness of the truth, we are to put off the old life, be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and put on the new life in Christ (4:20-24). Specifically, this means laying aside falsehood and speaking the truth (4:25); being righteously angry and yet avoiding unrighteous anger (4:26-27); not stealing, but rather working hard and giving to those in need (4:28); and, not using speech that tears down others, but using our words to build up others (4:29). Paul will go on to say (4:31-32) that as Christians, we must put off all bitterness and anger, and instead be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving towards one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven us.

But right in the middle of giving all these specific behavioral changes, Paul gives us the supreme motivation for why we should not sin, namely, that our sin grieves the Holy Spirit, who has sealed us for the day of redemption. It's an astounding thought, because God is immutable (unchangeable) and He is in no way dependent on His creation for His happiness. He is the eternally blessed God (1 Tim. 6:15)! So there's a mystery here that we cannot fully understand. In some sense, God's being grieved at our sin is an anthropathism, which means, attributing human emotions to God so that we can understand. It's similar to an anthropomorphism, such as when the Bible speaks of God's right hand or His mighty arm. We are not to understand it literally, but the Bible is stooping to our level, so that we can get a handle on the meaning. Let's explore Paul's thought:

1. Your sin grieves the Holy Spirit because He loves you.

This verse is one of many that clearly prove that the Holy Spirit is a person, not just an influence. Cults, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, that deny the Trinity, say that the Spirit of God is simply His power or force at work in the world. But you can't grieve a force or a power. You can only grieve a person.

You especially can grieve a person that loves you. You can tolerate unkind remarks from a stranger, because he doesn't love

you and you don't love him. But when someone that loves you makes an unkind remark, it hurts. The deeper the love, the deeper the grief when sin hurts the relationship.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Darkness and Light* [Baker], pp. 265-266) points out that this verse distinguishes Christian ethics from every other ethical system. Other religions have ethical standards, but none of them command their followers not to sin because their sin grieves God. And, Paul is not appealing to his readers to adhere to a certain moral standard simply because it is the right thing to do. He is not even appealing to them to obey these moral commands because it will benefit them, although it will, as we have seen.

Rather, he appeals to them on the basis of their *personal relationship* with a loving God. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit! Through faith in Christ, you enter into a personal relationship with the Triune God. His Spirit now dwells within you. Your body is His temple. On the basis of these facts, Paul exhorts you to glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Sin strains the personal relationship that you are now to enjoy with the loving, indwelling Spirit of God.

We may think about the love of God and the love of Jesus Christ, but most of us don't think often of the love of the Holy Spirit. But we know that as a member of the Godhead, the Spirit is love because God is love (1 John 4:7; see also, Rom. 15:30). Also, we probably think about fellowship with God and with Jesus, but the Bible also talks about the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). This may refer to the fellowship that the Spirit produces between believers or to our fellowship with the Holy Spirit. But the point I'm making is, the Holy Spirit is a divine *person*, not merely a divine force. Because He loves us and because He desires fellowship with us, our sin grieves Him.

To illustrate, suppose that a father warned his teenage son, "I love you very much and I want the best for you. I want us to have a close relationship. For these reasons, I don't want you ever to use illicit drugs."

But, the boy is out with the wrong crowd and everyone is using drugs. His friends say, "Come on, it feels really good. Try it just this once!" The boy yields and is high on drugs when the police raid the party. The boy's parents are deeply grieved that their son

would do such a thing. If all that the boy says to his parents is, "I'm sorry that I used drugs," he has missed an important aspect of his sin. He should realize that while he was wrong to use the drugs, his greater wrong was grieving his father and mother who loved him so much. He has strained a close, loving relationship by his sin. Paul is saying, "Don't sin, because your sin grieves the loving Holy Spirit of God, who dwells within you!"

2. Your sin grieves the Holy Spirit because He loves others.

Because (as we saw) our sin always hurts others and because the Spirit loves others, our sin grieves Him. In the context, Paul has especially been referring to sins that disrupt the unity of the body. Verse 30 (in the Greek text) begins with, "and," connecting it to verse 29. In that verse, rotten speech implicitly tears down others, whereas gracious speech builds up others. The same may be said of lying (4:25), of sinful anger (4:26, 31), and of stealing (4:28). All of these sins hurt others. Since God loves these other people, your sin grieves Him.

It's like a father who sees one of his children hurting one of his other children. He loves them both and he wants them to get along, so it grieves him to see the one hurting the other. Even so, the Spirit of God who produces unity in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:3) is grieved when we sin against one another.

3. Your sin grieves the Holy Spirit because He is holy.

The Greek construction of verse 30 is literally, "And do not grieve the Spirit, the Holy One of God..." It puts an emphasis on His holiness. God's holiness means that He is absolutely apart from and opposed to all sin and evil. First John 1:5 says, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." First Timothy 6:16 says that God "dwells in unapproachable light." In Isaiah's vision of God (Isa. 6:3), the holy angels cry out, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory."

There is a popular misunderstanding that God's grace means that He tolerates a certain amount of sin in His children, much as a doting father sees his toddler disobey and chuckles, "He's just a chip off the old block!" But the Holy Spirit *never* chuckles at our sin. He is *holy*, which means that *all* sin, especially the sin of His redeemed children, grieves Him. It was God's absolute holiness

that sent His Son to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. If He were not holy, He could have just dismissed our sins. But His holiness demands that the penalty be paid.

If our trust is in Christ, then we do not need to fear God's future judgment for our sins. But, because He is holy and because He loves us, the Holy Spirit is grieved at all our sin. He knows that we will only share His eternal joy when we share His holiness. Thus (as we'll see in a moment), He applies loving discipline to purify us from our sins (Heb. 12:10).

Thus, your sin grieves the Holy Spirit because He loves you and sin hurts you and strains your relationship with Him. Your sin grieves the Holy Spirit because He loves others and your sin hurts others. Your sin grieves the Holy Spirit because He is holy and hates all sin.

4. If you grieve the Holy Spirit by sinning, you will suffer certain consequences.

Again, it is vital to remember that these consequences always stem from the Spirit's love, not because He is mean or He wants to take away your fun. Quite the contrary, true, lasting joy is only found in true, lasting holiness. Sin brings temporary pleasure (Heb. 11:25), but long-term pain. Holiness is often more difficult in the short-term, but it brings lasting peace, joy, and pleasure (Heb. 12:11; Ps. 16:11). First, we will consider some consequences that you *will* suffer if you grieve the Holy Spirit. Then we will look at some consequences that you *will not* suffer, contrary to what some teach. (For the following points, I am relying on Charles Spurgeon, "Grieve Not the Holy Spirit," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pilgrim Publications], 13:129-130; and on Lloyd-Jones, pp. 274-275.)

A. Some consequences that you *will* suffer if you grieve the Holy Spirit:

(1) You will suffer the Spirit's loving discipline.

All of the other consequences that I will mention are variations of the Spirit's discipline. Hebrews 12:5-11 makes it clear that because God loves us as His children, He disciplines us so that we will share His holiness. There is not always a direct link between some known sin on our part and our trials, but sometimes there is. In other words, sometimes the trials that God sends into our lives

are for the purpose of positive training in righteousness, to mature us in our faith. At other times, there is a direct link between some known sin and God's discipline. When David sinned with Bathsheba, God took their child in death and He used ensuing family problems to chasten David (2 Sam. 12:10-14). But all of our trials are from God's loving hand and we are exhorted not to regard them lightly or to faint under them. If we are aware of some sin that has led to the trial, we should confess it to the Lord and learn from it to avoid that sin in the future. I can only comment briefly on the rest of these consequences:

(2) You will lose the sense of the Spirit's presence.

Since the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit permanently indwells believers (John 14:16-17). Under the old dispensation, David had to pray after his sin, "do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11). But now the Spirit permanently indwells every believer (1 Cor. 6:19; 12:13). But, if we sin, we will lose the sense of His presence with us.

(3) You will lose the sense of God's love.

God does not stop loving you, but you will not experience His love as long as you remain in your sin.

(4) You will lose the joy of your salvation.

After David repented of his sin, he prayed that God would restore the joy of his salvation (Ps. 51:12).

(5) You will lose the assurance of your salvation.

The Epistle of First John gives us many ways that we can be assured of our salvation. It is clear that if we are grieving the Spirit through our sin, we cannot enjoy that assurance.

(6) You will lose God's comfort in your trials.

You cannot draw near to the throne of grace to receive mercy in your trials at the same time you are grieving the Holy Spirit.

(7) You will lose the assurance of answered prayer.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Ps. 66:18). He will hear a prayer of repentance, but we cannot ask God to bless us with answers to prayer while we are in sin.

- (8) You will lose the ability to bear fruit and gain rewards in your service for Christ.

If your heart is not in fellowship with the Spirit, you cannot rely on Him to produce lasting fruit for Christ.

- (9) You will lose the joy of fellowship with other believers.

Sin not only creates distance between you and God, but also between you and other believers who are walking with God. If you are grieving the Spirit through sin, you will hate being around godly Christians because they will convict you of your sin. I could list more consequences, but briefly, let's consider...

- B. Some consequences that you will *not* suffer if you grieve the Holy Spirit:

- (1) You will *not* lose the indwelling of the Spirit if you grieve Him.

I already commented on this, but emphasize it again. You will lose *the sense* of His presence, but He permanently indwells every true Christian.

- (2) You will *not* lose your salvation if you grieve the Spirit.

I recently had an email from a woman I do not know, who was concerned that she had blasphemed against the Holy Spirit and lost her salvation because she had not followed His prompting years ago. But Paul's point here and a major part of the motivation that he gives for why we should not grieve the Spirit is that He has sealed us for the day of redemption. (We saw this truth in 1:13-14, so I refer you to that message.) The Holy Spirit Himself is the seal, given to us at the moment of salvation. He keeps us until the day of redemption, which is the day of Christ's second coming, when He will claim us completely as His own. The Holy Spirit is God's pledge or down payment, given until the day when Christ takes us to be with Him and redeems us from not only the penalty of our sins, but also from the presence of all our sins.

A seal had three primary functions. *First, it made something secure.* When the guards put the Roman seal on the tomb of Jesus, it was

secured from anyone tampering with it. A seal on a bottle of medicine tells you that it is secure from anyone contaminating it.

*Second, a seal identified the owner.* We still have this practice in branding cattle. The mark shows who owns it. The Spirit's presence shows that we belong to God for eternity.

*Third, a seal authenticated the object sealed as genuine.* When a king took his signet ring and pressed it into the wax on a letter, the recipient knew that it was authentic. We follow the same practice when a notary public puts his seal on a document. The Spirit authenticates that we are God's true children.

So, when you sin, God will discipline you, sometimes severely, because He loves you and He knows that sin will destroy you. But He promises never to leave you. If He has saved you by His grace, He will keep you by His grace. Don't grieve His Holy Spirit, who is the seal that guarantees your salvation until the day of redemption.

### Conclusion

I have used this personal story before, but it illustrates the point of our text. I was reared in the church and I had made several "decisions" for Christ and I was baptized at age 12. But when I was in high school, I was not walking closely with the Lord. He only knows whether or not I was truly saved then.

Often I was with friends who were drinking or scheming on how they could get into bed with girls. The thing that kept me from joining them in these sins was that I knew my parents loved me and that if I came home drunk or if I got a girl pregnant, they would be deeply grieved. Many times I turned away from these temptations because I thought, "If I do that, I will hurt Dad and Mom, and they love me so much." Their love kept me from sin.

Paul is saying, "God loves you far more than any earthly parent could. He has sent His Holy Spirit to live in you as His temple. Don't grieve Him by sinning!" That is the main reason *not* to sin.

## Application Questions

1. Do you think of the Holy Spirit as a person or more as a "force"? Why is the latter detrimental? How can you change your thinking on this?
2. How can a Christian gain a greater sense of the Spirit's presence? Is this a feeling or something we "take by faith"?
3. Should we give assurance of salvation to a person who says that he is a Christian, but who isn't repentant of his sin? Why/why not? Cite biblical support.
4. How can we know whether our trials are due to some sin in our lives or not? If we sin and repent, can we avert the discipline? How can we know what lessons the Lord is teaching us?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2008, All Rights Reserved.