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EPHESIANS 4:30-32

Ephesians: Recognizing Who You Are in Christ

Today I'm going to share an idea with you that comes from this passage. It's a theological concept. We're going to go deep today. In other words, we're going to go into some heavy stuff today. I hope I can keep your attention in the midst of that because I want you to understand this idea. We're going to talk about sin, we're going to talk about God's response to sin, and we're going to understand how we then can respond to God in the midst of that. Very important.

If you get this wrong then there are errors you can fall into. Some people overemphasize the love of God, deemphasize the sin and God's response to it, and end up with the kind of a fluffy faith that doesn't address sin hard enough in life. Then there's some who are so hard on sin you wonder if God even loves you anymore. Those are two errors we want to avoid.

I want to try to guide you through this so you can understand this. If you understand this one concept it will help significantly in your own relationship to God, how you perceive God and how you draw close to Him.

Ephesians 4:30 says this to start out with: *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

Let's talk about how we view and understand God. The Bible gives us several clues to understand who God is and how He desires to relate to us. Much about God is incomprehensible. We can't understand Him because of our finite minds. God is infinite. For example, the fact that He's infinite means that He had no beginning and no end. As soon as we try to wrap ourselves around that idea we get lost because our finite minds cannot understand an infinite God. In fact, if we could understand everything about God then He wouldn't be God. The reality is God is bigger than us. We can't understand everything about Him.

But the Bible gives us clues to getting to know God and understand who He is. He uses verbiage that we as people can understand. We have human ways of understanding God so that we can relate and understand Him better.

When the passage says that God grieves it's attributing an emotion to God. I want to talk about emotions in that sense and how we can understand God because it's a human thing. We're looking at God as if God had these emotions or if God has other things. God is spirit and therefore doesn't have eyes or hands or a face, but the Bible talks about God's eyes or God's hands or His face. Because when we understand those expressions about God they allow us to understand Him better. So God has given us this ability to get to know God using human terms,

like eyes and hands and face and emotions and so on, so we can get to know Him. Let me show you some examples of this in the Bible.

In Deuteronomy 33:26-29 notice the description of God in human terms and what it does for us when we see that. *“There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemies before you, saying, ‘Destroy them!’ So Israel will live in safety; Jacob will dwell secure in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens drop dew. Blessed are you, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will tread on their heights.”*

Does God really ride in the chariot on the clouds? Is He really a sword and a shield? No. Those are descriptive words that allow us to understand God and to trust Him better. They are picture words that give us an understanding about who God is.

When we go to Ephesians 4:30 today we have a picture word, a picture verse that helps us understand God and how He wants to relate to us. Notice how it says in verse 30, *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* So we’re attributing emotions to God. What emotions are attributed to God is very important because it helps us understand God and how He wants to relate to us and how He views us.

Emotions in general help us as people in a number of ways. But one of the ways that emotions help us is they either help us draw close to someone or pull back from someone. That’s just one of the ways that happens in emotions.

Here’s why this truth is so important today. If we view God as grieving our sin then we’re drawn closer to Him. If we view God as angry when we sin then we move further away. A very important understanding I think about who God is and how He relates to us. This one truth if we understand it today can help you have a significantly close relationship with God. He doesn’t just want to be transcendent out there in the universe. He wants to have a personal relationship with you and me. He wants to be personally involved with us on a daily basis.

So here’s the big important question that I want you to think about today with me. Does God get angry with Christians when they sin? That’s what I want to look at with you because I believe the answer is no. Let me explain this. I think for some of you this is going to be tremendously freeing. It’s going to grab you and you’re going to say, “Wow. I can draw closer to God now.” Now I don’t want you to think I’m taking a soft stand against sin. I don’t think that’s true and I think you’ll see the balance as we go through here. In fact if you misapply this truth then I think you can end up with some wrong theology. So I want to be careful how we talk about this. We’re going to come back to this idea of God’s firmness when it comes to sin in a moment.

In the Old Testament we saw something happen. We saw that when God’s people sinned in the Old Testament He was angry with them and took a stand against them. Very important. But something happened that changed the way that God relates to us now and that happens because we moved from Old Testament to New Testament, an old covenant to a new covenant. Christ’s

sacrifice at the cross becomes very significant here. Because Christ's sacrifice was payment in full for the penalty of sin past, present, and future. Do you believe that? If you believe that Christ's sacrifice paid the penalty for sin and God's wrath was taken care of in the cross then that's going to make an important statement about how God relates to you and me now, even when we do the wrong thing.

Let me share with you some scripture that'll help you understand what I'm saying. It's not just me speaking; I want you to see from the Bible what God says. The question is does God get angry with Christians when they sin? That's the question we're looking at.

I want to look at a passage in the New Testament that's reflecting on that. What the writer of the Hebrews is doing here is he's looking at the Old Testament covenant and he's helping us see that now in New Testament times we're living in a different way.

Here's what he's saying as he's quoting the Old Testament. Hebrews 8:8-13 says, *"The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. There's something old and something new. In the Old Testament they did the wrong thing, He turned away from them. Very important.*

This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

What happened between the old covenant and the new covenant? Theologically something happened there and it has to do with God's response to sin in a believer's life. He says, *"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* Interesting. We haven't talked about God's anger yet here, but we're talking about what happens between the old and the new covenant.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 get this idea. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! What is the old, what is the new? Let's read on. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

Let me show you another. Romans 4:7-8: *"Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them."*

Also in that chapter, Romans 4:22-25: *This is why “it was credited to him (the him is Abraham) as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

Something happened in the resurrection and crucifixion of Christ. Something happened that provided justification to us so we can have a different kind of relationship with God.

Now let's ask the question about God's anger. Does God get angry with Christians when they sin? John 3:36 says this: *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.* The person who's a Christian is redeemed, saved, and receives this eternal life. That's a contrast between the person who doesn't accept Christ and the wrath of God remains on them. In other words, the wrath of God doesn't remain on the Christian who has made a commitment to God inside.

Now put that together with our verse for today, Ephesians 4:30. God's visceral response, His emotional response attributed to Him regarding our sin isn't anger, it's sadness. Interesting. For the Christian no longer does sin have to be punished. For believers it's already taken care of, but sin damages our lives. So there's still a response from God towards sin. Not for justice, but because we're missing out on something and God desires us to enjoy the tremendous benefits that come with the Christian life He designed for us. So it makes Him sad, so to speak, as we're trying to understand God, sad when we are not responding to the sin in our lives.

If you imagine God is angry with you, first of all you miss the salvation that God has provided for us, that God somehow still needs justice. The penalty for all sin has been paid, so the imagination of God being angry with you when you sin pushes you away from God as if God is displeased with you. That's not the case. If you're a Christian God is very pleased with you. When we sin He is grieved because He knows the damage we cause ourselves and others by not living according to His plan.

So why do we obey then? If God doesn't get angry with us, why do we obey? Because we aren't externally motivated. We're not obeying God just because of fear of punishment, we're motivated eternally out of love, out of gratefulness, out of a desire to have the blessings that God provides. If we attempt to relate to God out of fear of His wrath, we're putting ourselves back in the old covenant and walking away without grace.

It's important for us to understand this idea, the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant, and it gives us a tremendous theological freedom but a personal freedom as we come before the Lord. It's very important.

We don't want to get stuck at the cross and imagine ourselves continuing at the cross because we have the resurrection three days later. Somehow in the midst of the resurrection God does this amazing thing and frees us and provides us with new life. The resurrection changes almost everything.

But, let's ask this question. What about the fact that the word of God says that God disciplines us as His children? Because He does discipline us when we sin. So we have to consider that question. But our understanding of discipline often comes from our own training from our parents. It often comes with a sense of the way our parents disciplined us, many times disciplining us with this sense of a punitive response. You did this, so you get that. Some kind of an angry response that sometimes does some damage to us theologically.

I think that's important because I think if we misunderstand this idea even as parents we get ourselves into trouble. This external form of motivation is not only theologically wrong, but it warps our understanding of God. Externally focused parent training teaches children to ask the wrong questions about life.

If you were raised with heavy doses of reward and punishment in your life as a child that means your parents often said things like, "If you don't cut it out, I'm going to..." and then they imagine some terrible thing that they're going to do to you if you don't cut it out. Or on the other end they say, "Do this and I'll give you that." It's external rewards. "Clean up your toys and I'll give you a video so you can watch." Parents who rely too much on externals in their approach to child training teach kids to ask the wrong questions about life. And inadvertently they teach their children bad theology I'm convinced.

So if we're raised with that kind of mentality, "if you don't cut it out I'm going to..." or "if you do this I'll give you that" reward and punishment then we end up asking the wrong questions out of life. What am I going to get out of this? Or can I get away with this without anybody knowing? Wrong questions.

When parents have good theology it comes out in their words. After all, why should a child clean up the mess? Is it so they can get something out of it or is it because it's the right thing to do? The way that we work with our children communicates theology to them.

This problem with this idea of discipline being attached to a punitive or justice response is that that's not what the word 'discipline' means. The word 'discipline' primarily comes from the word 'training' or 'teaching.' That's what it means. It doesn't have anything to do with anger or punishment inherently.

One good example of this difference between discipline and punishment has to do with a trainer, a coach who helps you to get where you want to be, to do what you want to do, to move from where you are to where you want to be. The training's hard, it's painful sometimes. But in the end there's no anger and punishment involved unless you've got a bad coach. The idea is training and God wants to do the same thing with us. God's disciplining us like an athletic training experience.

When God looks at us He sees the perfection of Christ because of the cross and the salvation that we have if we've accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We're perfected in Christ spiritually. However, we still have sin habits that need to be addressed in ways which we don't understand God, that hinder us from relating fully to Him and to other people. That's why God has placed the Holy Spirit into our lives, to be in that role. That role that helps to discipline us, to

help us experience God's grace in various ways. There's no anger or punishment involved in that process. In fact, scripture specifically says that it's the goodness of God or the kindness of God that draws us to repentance.

Let me show you this. In Romans 2:4 it says, *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?* Not punishment. Not anger. It's God's kindness that leads us in that direction.

Now we have to ask some important questions as we look at this subject. From the Bible we see some times when God actually is very firm with sin. Remember Ananias and Sapphira? Boom! They're dead in the church. God has a desire to keep His church pure. So in that case His firmness knocks off Ananias and Sapphira. They're gone.

In fact in the passage we read often when we celebrate the Lord's Table 1 Corinthians 11. It says these words: *For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*

In other words, many of you have been executed because you misappropriate God's communion time. That tells me God's pretty firm when it comes to sin. Very important for us to understand that concept because firmness is part of God's whole plan. It goes together. God wants to train us. Firmness is there. He wants to protect His church so firmness is there. We need to be aware of that. We need to be conscientious in our desire to move toward God and do what's right. We can't just presume upon the grace of God and then go sin.

That's why there was a problem in Romans 6 and so Paul is developing this whole idea of faith and how we're saved by faith and grace saves us. The question is asked in Romans 6, well then should we go back and sin? What's the motivation for us to go forward? The very fact that the question is there is an indication that the truth is present that our motivation is to do what's right because of something going on inside of us, not because of this fear of punishment.

God usually disciplines or trains us through our circumstances. He allows and even orchestrates our circumstances so they fall apart in such a way that they will expose our areas of sin or wrong thinking about God so that we'll be motivated to seek the truth. He doesn't do this because He's angry, He allows natural events or consequences so we'll turn to Him for answers and become conformed to the image of Christ.

The reason it's so important to understand the distinction here is because when we believe that God is angry with us then we tend to pull away from Him rather than move toward Him. When we know that He's allowing events in our lives to train us then we're more likely to turn to Him and ask the question, what can I learn from this? How is God preparing me for the future? If we believe our circumstances are punishment for our misdeeds or that we've done something wrong, we tend to injure them and pull away from God in a personal way. Very important.

We just have to ask the question. In your life do you find yourself pulling close to God? Especially when you do something wrong. When you do something wrong you want to be drawn

to God and say, “God, please forgive me for that,” instead of saying, “Oh no. God knows I just sinned. I’m going to pull away.” We move toward God instead of pulling away from God in the midst of these things.

We know that His unconditional love is our motivation to stay close to Him and to view life circumstances as this precious gift that He’s given to us. I think that when we understand this it makes a radical impact on our faith in the Lord, our personal walk with Christ. Because we’re either going to be moving closer to God or we’re going to be moving further away.

If you’re pulling away from God because you sinned then you’re not thinking rightly about God because God is your coach. I don’t want to say God’s a coach. Let’s see, the Holy Spirit is a coach to us, guiding us to move forward, and He wants us to be moving forward in that particular way. We want to take those mistakes that we make, the things that we need in order to move that direction.

What I want to do is amplify an idea here that I see in scripture that will help us significantly to understand God grieves or the Holy Spirit grieves when we sin, that God doesn’t get angry with Christians when they sin. Obviously God is angry at sin. He hates sin. But because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is paid for us, we’re free.

I want to talk to you today if you’re not a Christian and you’ve come today. I want to talk to you for a minute because mainly the message today is for Christians. But if you’re not a Christian today and you’re listening to this you need to understand some very important things about this, about what God is saying here. In fact, I think this might be a great motivation for you to choose Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior for yourself.

When we say “Savior” we imply that someone has a problem, that they need to be saved from something. Some people think that they’re pretty good already and thus the saving that takes place is very minimal. “I don’t need that much.” In fact some people believe that God takes nice people and makes them nicer through salvation. That is not true. What God does is He takes sinners and saves them. We must understand that.

If you’re not a Christian today you want to grab this idea and understand. “Wow, that’s really interesting. God takes me as a sinner and moves me through a saving process to this close relationship with Him where the wrath of God is taken care of.” We also have to understand that if you’re not a believer yet today then you are an object of wrath. You must understand that. Certainly God loves you, but you must understand that the sin that you have from past, present, and future is attached to you so that when God sees you the wrath of God is there. This is so motivating it seems to me. You want to say, “Oh man, I don’t want to do that! I want to get saved! I want to become a Christian because I do not want that happening in my life.”

You see, God has a problem. God loves us very much. But God is holy. The fact that He loves us means He wants to draw close to us and have this personal relationship, but because He’s holy He cannot be in the presence of sin. So God created the solution that we call salvation. And that solution of salvation is the way that God bridges His holiness and His love together.

Let me show you a passage of scripture that ties this together, that helps you understand, if you're not a Christian today, that God loves you deeply and you don't want to be an object of God's wrath. So this is the motivation to get saved. Let's look at John 3:16 and following.

Sometimes we just quote John 3:16, which is about God's love. Let's look at the rest of the verses too. John 3:16 says, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Now notice the difference between believers and nonbelievers. *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

Salvation is not optional. Salvation provides for you the basis upon which God then is able to help you to be the person that He wants you to be. But it starts with this personal commitment that you make to Him. It starts with you asking Him to be your Savior, not just turn you into a nice person. We're talking about what it means for God to save us. That's why this is so significant.

Once you understand this truth about who God is and that He loves us and He wants to draw close to us then we want to become a Christian. Get rid of that wrath part and then allow God to perfect us and be the people that He wants us to be. When we understand this radical truth and we're drawn to God because of His love for us, knowing that He doesn't tolerate sin but He works with that sin in our lives to move us in a progressed forward, then we can look at our own lives. It changes the way we respond to life situations and that's why we come to the next two verses.

Now that we've talked about God and God's grieving over our sin as opposed to God being angry with Christians when we sin, I want you to look at the next two verses that talk about our response and how we handle our own anger. Verse 31 in Ephesians 4 says, *Get rid of* and now there's six words for anger. In case you might not fit into one category, there's six of them that will help us all fit in here somewhere.

Get rid of all bitterness. That's anger that's accumulated because of past offenses that's causing you to be more easily angered and more dramatically angered on the spot. That's what bitterness does. *Get rid of all bitterness.*

The next one's *rage*. Rage is anger that's controlling you. The energy that's come in; you can't even think straight. You're just furious. That's rage.

The next one is *anger*. The next one is *brawling*. That's fighting because you're angry.

The next one is *slander*. Slander is saying mean things about someone because you're angry.

Along with every form of malice. Malice is laying on your bed and planning evil because you're angry with someone. That pretty much ties it up there.

Six different words for anger. And he says get rid of them all. We shouldn't be keeping those things as Christians. You do not want to have those things as part of your identity, as part of who you are.

How are you going to get rid of those? We go to the last verse, verse 32. *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other.* Why? Why are we forgiving each other? Because they deserve it? No. We're *forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

You have to understand. The reason you want to get rid of your own personal anger issues doesn't just have to do with so you'll be a more pleasant person. Although there are benefits to you for not harboring anger. But the real benefit is you're getting rid of them because then you're being more like God. Then you're being more responsive to God. You're able to enjoy God more. You'll be able to draw closer.

Anger pushes us away and sadness draws us closer to a person. I'm convinced that anger is one of the spiritual problems that hinders a person's ability to be close to God. If you have an anger problem it's hard to connect with God. What we want to do is we want to get rid of all those things. That's what it says. *Get rid of* them. Not tolerate them. Not even manage them. *Get rid of* them all. That's what it says. Then you can move forward.

Notice verse 32. *Be kind and compassionate.* You want to start getting rid of your anger? Then you're going to work on these things. Being kind, being compassionate, being forgiving. Three words, three ideas that help us start moving past the anger that's grown inside of us that's caused a problem.

In verse 30 it says, *do not grieve the Holy Spirit.* We grieve the Holy Spirit when we sin. But I want to take you to one more verse. Let's look at 1 Thessalonians 5:19. *Do not quench the Spirit.*

I want you to understand the difference between grieving the Holy Spirit and quenching the Holy Spirit. You grieve the Holy Spirit of God when we sin. If you are in sin, that grieves God, but you quench the Holy Spirit when the Holy Spirit prompts you in some way and you don't respond to it. You say, "I don't want to hear that right now." God says, "I convict you of sin," and says, "Hey, you need to change this. You need to apologize to your wife or husband." Or "you should really make this right." Or "you should really not take that thing from that person." Whatever it is, we get this prompting from the Holy Spirit that might even say something like, "I love you. You're my daughter." And we say, "No, I can't listen to that." As soon as we ignore some message that the Holy Spirit is trying to prompt us with we're quenching the Spirit's fire in our lives.

The idea of quenching is there's a fire going on inside and we're putting water on it. That's the idea of quenching it. The Holy Spirit wants to build a fire inside of us and He wants to do that so we can move forward and enjoy the life that He's called us to have and so that we can be effective.

So, one, we don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit by our sin, but we also don't want to quench the fire that's inside. We have to be careful of that so we can move forward and enjoy what God has for us.

The beautiful thing about the Holy Spirit, part of what we're looking at today, is the work of the Holy Spirit. Part of what we see here is that the Holy Spirit is this person who helps us in the midst of our lives to do what we need to do. When Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit in the gospel of John He calls Him a Comforter. The idea is someone who comes alongside to help.

Today we have life coaches, all kinds of life coaches. But I want you to know that every person has a life coach who's a Christian. You have a life coach who's the Holy Spirit who comes into your life and helps you to manage your life in a particular way. The Holy Spirit is strategically helping you.

I just want to ask you to do this: I want to ask you to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit today. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you because maybe the Holy Spirit will remind you of some sin that needs to be addressed. You just need to get rid of it. Maybe the Holy Spirit will prompt you in a way that says, "I want to build this fire inside of you so that you can go forward." You want to listen to what He has to say. It's a beautiful thing when we respond to the Holy Spirit in our lives.

If you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior then you want to make that commitment. High motivation here to trust Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior because what God does is He takes that and He takes something great inside of our hearts and inside of our lives. Your view of God is important because it will affect how you live and what you do.

Let's do this. Let's have our worship team come back up here and lead us in a couple of songs. I'm going to pray. When you guys come up and lead us in these songs the rest of us are going to be worshipping the Lord and coming before God in this sensitive moment and asking God to speak to us in what He wants to do inside of our hearts. Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, it's interesting in the Bible that you describe the Holy Spirit like a wind. I imagine like a fan blowing papers around and things all over the place; that the Holy Spirit just blows where it wishes. We often don't know where that blowing is going to take place. Lord, you do that inside of our hearts. You take us one direction and then take us another direction. We want to have such a close relationship with you that the Holy Spirit can just speak a whisper and we can hear that and we can move in the direction you want us to move. So, Lord, we want to be sensitive today to who you are. Make us sensitive to sin so that we're eager to move away from it, to trust you. Point out the area in our lives where we're being misled in our own hearts. Teach us what it means to follow you and to love you and to serve you totally. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.