

How We Grieved the Holy Spirit in This Election

We have just endured the most bitter and divisive presidential contest in a lifetime. The whole nation is shell-shocked. Our ears are ringing and our heads are pounding after being bombarded for more than a year and a half with noisy rhetoric.

Imagine if an alien spaceship tried to decipher the jumbled message that has been transmitted from the United States for the past 19 months. "Trump is a racist! Hillary is a nasty woman! Trump gropes women! Send Hillary to prison! The election is rigged! Remember Benghazi! Trump hates Megyn Kelly! Megyn Kelly hates Newt Gingrich! Blah blah blah blah blah!"

I have loathed every minute of it. I'm looking for a T-shirt that says: "Thank God it's over."

My struggle wasn't caused by the bickering about Obamacare, Hillary's email server, Donald Trump's insults or Bernie Sander's liberal lectures. I don't mind the arguments and put-downs on the news, because I can turn off the television when I want to. And I believe there is a place for legitimate political debate. What grieved me most was seeing the hatefulness Christians threw at each other during this election cycle.

I've heard Christians swear at each other, verbally assault each other, and dissect each other in self-righteous Facebook posts. I've watched one Christian demonize another Christian simply because they have different views on a public policy issue. And I've seen how the racial divisions in the church grew deeper when a pastor decided to politicize a sermon or tell people they had to vote a certain way to please God.

About half of our population will be celebrating the winner of

this election next Tuesday, while the other half will be licking their wounds. I don't believe the Holy Spirit will be taking sides. I believe He is grieved by the way the church behaved.

What exactly does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? The clue is found in Ephesians 4:30, which says: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Then the apostle Paul goes on to explain how to avoid grieving the Spirit.

He writes: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has forgiven you" (v. 31-32).

The point here is that the Holy Spirit is quenched when we mistreat each other. Our relationship with God is not just about how we act individually. Christianity is not a Lone Ranger religion. If we don't treat each other with love and respect, the Spirit is not happy. He withdraws His blessing and waits for us to repent. He calls us to community.

It's interesting that one of the behaviors mentioned in this verse is "clamor." This is the Greek word *kraugē*, which means "to shout or cry loud or insistently." It refers to the volume level of an argument. Yes, you can grieve the Holy Spirit with your tone of voice.

There is nothing wrong with disagreeing. But when our disagreements become shouting matches, and our tone becomes harsh or vindictive, the Holy Spirit tunes out. He does not like it when we shout, scream, rant and spew venom at each other.

Yet many Christians today defend this behavior. We have been trained well by the sharp-witted commentators on Fox News and CNN. We have the idea that standing for truth requires us to blast our opponents out of the water. We wield our verbal

swords and skewer our enemies like Roman gladiators in the coliseum. And the crowds cheer when we slay our political opponents with snappy one-liners. *Touché!*

God, forgive us. We have called what is evil good. We thought we were exhibiting moral courage when we brashly attacked a brother who had a different opinion about immigrants or health care policy. We thought God was pleased when we shouted down the woman who disagreed with us about transgender bathrooms. We thought God was on our side when we angrily quoted the Bible and waved our fists in the air.

We didn't have a clue that the Holy Spirit had withdrawn from us. He was grieved. We didn't realize that just because a person is right about something does not mean they have God's blessing. Moses was a great man of God, but when he struck the rock in anger he forfeited his chance to enter the Promised Land.

If you have allowed anger to take control of your life during this crazy political season, pull away from the ruckus and let the Holy Spirit adjust your attitude. Go on a fast from ranting and raving. Stop being outraged and encourage somebody. Forgive those who disagree with you. Love those who voted differently from you. Set politics aside and act like a Christian. {eoa}