

Quench not the Spirit

A study of 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20, NASB

In The Bible the work of the Holy Spirit is sometimes likened to fire (See Isaiah 4:4; Revelation 4:5.). On the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit came in His fullness upon the believers who waited, **"there came a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house . . . And there appeared to them tongues as of fire . . ."** (Acts 2:2-3).

Fire has many uses in life. It provides warmth in the winter. It allows for the preparation of food, or driving an automobile. In fact, fire is essential to life. Without the continual burning of the sun, earth, as we know it, would die a cold death. So when the **"tongues as of fire"** appeared on the believers that first Pentecost, that event indicated that the sovereign God was infusing into the church new life from above. But having received it from the Holy Spirit, maintenance of that life becomes the responsibility of individual believers and churches. So in his letter to the church at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul commanded, **"Do not quench the Spirit"** (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

As a young boy I remember summer days when along with a couple of other friends from the neighborhood, we would take long hikes down the railroad tracks into the country. We carried our BB guns, canteens and knapsacks, the latter of World War II vintage usually purchased from a local Army surplus store. The hike involved making a day camp near a pond or a creek, and lighting a fire over which we would cook cans of beans, fry burgers, or roast hot dogs and marshmallows. When it came time to break camp and return home, we doused the fire with water, either poured out from our canteens or dipped from a nearby pond. The sight and the sound of the dousing remain vivid in my mind to this day--the hissing of hot coals, the steam, and the rancid smoke. That's the sense of the word **"quench."** It means to put out, to extinguish the flame. We see in this command that the activity of the Holy Spirit can be suppressed, even become extinguished in the life of a local church. Then how is it that individuals or local churches extinguish the work of the Holy Spirit?

In 1 Thessalonians 5, we note some of the newer translations (NASB, ASV, NIV, RSV) place a semi-colon between verses 19 and 20, indicating that in the translators' view, the thoughts expressed in the two verses are not separate, but coordinate and complimentary. This is further indicated by the fact that the negative "not" precedes both imperatives ("do *not* quench" and "do *not* despise"). It is then fair to understand that verse 20 provides one example of how the Holy Spirit can be quenched. When they despise **"prophetic utterances,"** pastors, Christians and churches quench the Holy Spirit's ministry in them and amongst them (1 Thessalonians 5:20).

In the early church, prophecy involved the announcement of God's *unmediated* Word. Through the prophet God's Word came directly to the people. It came in the form of **"prophetic**

utterances". Now that God has finished speaking to His people in that way (1 Corinthians 13:8), it may be viewed that teaching and preaching the Bible takes the place of prophesying so long as the Scriptures are communicated as they are written, line upon line, precept upon precept, the whole counsel of God. Preachers and teachers *mediate* God's Word. If this is not done in the local church, then the pastor who will not teach and preach the Bible, and perhaps the people who will not listen to it, "**quench**" the work of the Spirit in their midst for the Holy Spirit inspired the Word (See 2 Peter 1:21.).

Then as pastors in America refuse to preach the Word, or congregations refuse hear the Word, churches die a steaming, smoking and rancid death. Churches that "**quench**" the Spirit in this way become burned over relics, the charcoal ashes being the only testimony to what was, once-upon-a-time, the Spirit's vital flame in their midst.

Dear friend, that is why we along with many of our congregations, do not experience authentic spiritual power or revival. It may be that the Word is not central in our private lives as busyness distracts us from spending quality time reading, studying and thinking about the Bible on a daily basis. Or it may be that the Word is not central to the church's public worship (See 2 Timothy 4:2.).

Populist and mainstream evangelical religion these days seems to hold biblical preaching to be either secondary or unnecessary. Many preachers are conspicuous not for what they preach--their sermons being ball park biblical schmoozes with their seeker-sensitive audiences--but for what they don't preach. As Malachi indicted the priests of his day, they are "**partial in the law**" (Malachi 2:9). As many pastors and congregants either depreciate or ignore the whole counsel of God, as people get excited over excitement, as worship teams, drama and dance become more important than heralding the sacred text, the fire is quenched. Emotion, motion and commotion attempt to compensate for the lack of Christian reality and provide the illusion that a fresh work of the Spirit is being experienced when in fact it is not. But emotional catharsis neither compensates or substitutes for a genuine working of the Spirit. Either way, the fallout of ignoring the preached word is that the Spirit's work in our lives and midst is not fueled, but extinguished.