

Quench Not the Spirit

by Catherine Booth

The sermon emphasizes the importance of yielding to the Holy Spirit's strivings and not quenching His efforts to influence and convict us of sin.

Scripture: Psalm 95:7, Proverbs 29:1, Matthew 23:37, John 16:8, Hebrews 3:7

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Resisting God"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the capacity of man to resist God, emphasizing the power to quench the Spirit and the consequences of rejecting God's influence. She highlights how the Spirit strives with man by convicting of sin, appealing to fears and hopes, and urging for present submission. Catherine warns against quenching the Spirit by stifling convictions, refusing to consider the future consequences of sin, and persistently resisting God's call to surrender. She stresses that those who quench the Spirit show no concern for their souls, lack desire for God and righteousness, and risk losing the possibility of Salvation.

Transcript

I THESSALONIANS V. 19.-'Quench not the Spirit.'

THESE words imply the greatest wonder of human existence--the capacity in man to resist God. Truly, man is a wonderful being; and this is not surprising when we remember that he was made originally in the image of God, mentally as well as spiritually. Although fallen, eclipsed, dwarfed, yet the outline of man's make his faculties, capacities, possibilities remain the same. Some theologians, in their desire to exalt God, very much debase and under-estimate man; whereas the best way to glorify the Creator is to give Him full credit for the excellency of His workmanship. God made man a wonderful being. 'Is it not written in your law,' says the Saviour, 'I said, ye are gods?' 'And,' He adds, 'the Scriptures cannot be broken'; that is, there is a sense in which it is true. Man is the sovereign of himself; no being, no power can coerce his will. He can resist all the moral forces of the universe; and it is this power which constitutes his greatness and his danger. There it is, an undeniable fact. He can resist all the persuasions and entreaties of his fellow-man either to good or evil. He can resist all the power of the Devil. The demoniac, the possessed with a legion, could not be kept back from Jesus when he willed to go to Him; and we are exhorted to resist the Devil, implying, of course, that we have power to do so.

Man can also resist God, and absolutely refuse to obey and serve his Maker, as did Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Jews. Stephen charges it on the Jews, as the climax of their wickedness, that they had persistently resisted the strivings of the Spirit of God. 'As your fathers did, so did ye; ye do

always resist the Holy Ghost.' God created man with this power, and He will not invade or ignore it. He saw it best on the whole to make man free, even though he would abuse his freedom, rather than to make him a slave, being bound to a certain result by the law of cause and effect, as the sun and stars or the animals, and consequently having no power of virtue himself, nor of bringing any moral glory to his Maker. God retains His power over man as a Sovereign, not by coercing his will, but by rewarding or punishing him according to the use he makes of his freedom--according to his willing and acting.

Every humane earthly Government goes on the same principle. It does not put a subject in irons in order to prevent him from committing crime, thus destroying his freedom, and taking the responsibility of his action on itself; but it reigns over him in his freedom by punishing him when the crime is committed. Thus God reigns over man as a free agent, and thus only; and there is no text in the Bible, interpreted consistently with itself and with correlative passages, which represents God as reigning in any other way--other than as a moral Governor. Hence, when He wants to influence man in any given course, He condescends to reason with him, and to offer to his consideration motives and consequences, in order to induce him to choose as He desires. God does not take him by the collar, metaphorically speaking, and drive him in a given course, with his will or without it, in the same way as He drives the sun and stars along. This would be a reflection on His own wisdom in having made him a free agent at first. God is always consistent with Himself, and therefore He conforms all His treatment of man to the freedom of his nature; hence He persuades and strives with man by His Holy Spirit.

We want to note, first, the object or purpose for which the Spirit strives with man. Of course the very idea of strife between two parties supposes that they are at variance; there could be no strife if they were agreed. In this case it proves that man is in a state of alienation and opposition to God, and consequently in a state of condemnation and death. Now, God wants to win man back from this lost condition to one of submission and Salvation. This is His first great aim and purpose. This is what He wants with every unsaved man and woman in this Hall--that you should get down and submit to Him. He does not ask you to go to chapel, or join the Church, or pray, except to cry for pardon; but to get down and give up your heart to Him, to choose whom you will serve, and do it at once, and then everything else will follow. GOD MEANS SALVATION--Salvation for every man and woman here. Christ died for you. He wants to save you, and sends you the Spirit to this end.

I want you to note, further, that there is no Salvation without the Spirit. 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.' No man will seek God without the Spirit. Oh, that all men would seek Him who have the strivings of the Spirit! How many millions would soon be saved! But we want to point out, in the second place, how men quench the Spirit.

The Spirit strives first by convincing of sin. He is sent to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. This He does by bringing the law of God to bear on the past life, showing the sinner the awful condemnation resting on him because of his past transgressions: also by revealing the innate alienation and rebellion of his heart. He turns, so to speak, His light on the sinner's soul, and shows up the depravity and impurity within. God's way is always in keeping with the laws of man's nature; and we are so constituted that before we can be induced to change our course, we must be convinced that our present one is wrong.

Now, the great aim of many sinners is to satisfy themselves that they are all right; or, if wrong at all, not much wrong. Now God sees that there is no possibility of Salvation until men see that they are all wrong, and therefore He strives, contends, with them--labours to make them realize that they are guilty. His

course with infidels is just this; He does not answer their quibbles, but thunders in their consciences, 'Guilty! guilty! and in danger of everlasting death!' Alas! Instead of yielding to these strivings, men quench them by stifling their convictions; and they do this by hiding them, refusing to give them expression in tears and prayers, as the publican did. They keep silence; and none, but they who feel it, know what a hell is thus created in the soul. David said, 'When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring.' This stifling of conviction is done to much greater extent than any of us imagine.

Men think it is unmanly, weak, to confess their sins; they are ashamed to confess what all Heaven would be interested in hearing. There are some here who have been convinced many a time from their childhood upwards. If you had yielded to these strivings, given expression to your shame, sorrow, and remorse for your past sins, your hearts would have melted and gushed out in tender penitence towards God and man; but you damned up these feelings, silenced your conscience, and thus resisted the work of the Spirit on your heart. Beware! this is the process by which millions have filled up the measure of their iniquities. They stifle convictions by rushing into counter excitements, such as inordinate devotion to business. Thousands will perish through unlawful absorption in lawful things. Drink! I heard of a man saying a short time ago, that he got drunk every night for a fortnight, in order to stifle his convictions of sin. Pleasure! I heard of a young lady not very long ago, who said that she needed a ball three times a week to save her from getting melancholy about her soul, which meant, of course, to enable her to resist the Spirit of God. Others run headlong into sin. I knew a man who ran races for wagers, who became deeply convinced, who, when remonstrated with and implored to decide at once for God, answered, 'I will run another race, if I do run into Hell. Perhaps you say, 'Oh, these were foolhardy and obstinate rebels. I have never done like that.' No, but you have equally fought against the Spirit, and stifled the convictions which He has begotten in your soul.

Secondly, men resist the Spirit by absolutely and persistently refusing to consider the future--to look at the consequences of a life of sin. The Spirit is continually explaining this; He reasons of righteousness and of judgment. God seeks to influence men by fear as well as by hope. It is quite rational for a man to abandon a course which he comes to see will end badly; and fear of this bad end is a right and proper motive to be used in deterring him from it. On this principle the Spirit of God appeals to men's fears. He uses fear of retribution in this world, thundering in the sinner's conscience: 'Be sure your sin will find you out.' 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' I know a gentleman who is constantly in fear of some calamity. The sight of a coffin or a funeral puts him almost into hysterics. He lives in constant dread of death. Why? Because his conscience is guilty, and forebodes coming retribution. The Spirit of God reproves and condemns Him continually. I knew another man, who, when he was playing cards, would see in letters of fire, traced on the backs of them, such texts as 'The wicked shall be turned into Hell,' 'The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever,' and for a long time the Spirit thus followed him, warning and entreating, until, thank God, he yielded and got saved. Thus the Spirit follows many long months and years. Those who will not yield to love, and will not be drawn, He seeks to alarm and drive, in the first instance, by their fears. And how do men act? One would think they would come at once from the broad road that leads to all this misery. But no; they try to banish these fears--to drown the thoughts of these possibilities, some in one way, some in another, according to their temperaments and circumstances.

I heard of a man when I was preaching in Portsmouth, who was heard to say to a companion, after listening to the truth, 'Come on; let's go and wash it off.' Alas! How many wash it off, or, in other words, quench the Spirit!

Suppose that a friend of yours in Australia were made acquainted with some terrible calamity about to fall on you and your family; and suppose he were to come all the way to England to warn you, and to try to avert the danger; but instead of welcoming him, listening to and being influenced by his counsel, you were to cold-shoulder him, resent his interference, and shut him out of your dwelling. What would be the result? Would he not be grieved and offended, and leave you to perish? And yet this is exactly how you are treating the Spirit of God.

But, further, men quench the Spirit by refusing to look at the blessedness of a life consecrated to God.

The Spirit tries to influence men more by appealing to their hopes than to their fears. He sets before them, often in early childhood, the desirableness of pardon, peace, and purity, and the nobility of a life of influence for good and usefulness to others. With some minds these motives are more powerful than fears of suffering, death or Hell. So He dwells almost exclusively on them, trying to allure the soul through its hopes to accept of Christ and His Salvation, Alas! With many this has been as ineffectual as the other. They will not yield--they cling on to some idol, to some forbidden indulgence. They refuse to be influenced, they resist, and resist the Spirit, until, long grieved and resisted, He takes His sad flight.

Fourth. Men quench the Spirit by deliberate and wilful refusal to yield when the judgment is enlightened, and the duty of present submission is fully admitted. The Saviour said, 'I judge not according to outward appearance.' No, because some who appear the least sinners in the sight of men are the greatest in the sight of God. The Pharisees, with their outside morality and knowledge of the law, were far greater sinners in the estimation of Christ than the publicans and harlots who thronged to hear Him. Sin against light, against conviction and Divine influence, is the climax of rebellion. This is the great condemnation, that when light is come, men love darkness rather than light.

The amount of light determines the amount of guilt. 'Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.' 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not sinned, but now they have no cloak for their sin.' O, sinner, how often has He come and spoken to you! how often have you heard Him distinctly say to you: 'Son,' 'daughter,' 'give Me thine heart!' How often has He knocked at the door, but you deliberately said 'No!' You resisted and, struggled against His influence. Your proud heart lifted itself up against Him who would have gathered you, but you would not. Oh, it is to be feared there are many living around us who have quenched the Spirit by determined opposition; and there are multitudes in Hell who have lost their souls, their Salvation, and their God, not through the commission of some great crime against society, or against themselves; but they have lost all and perished for ever by deliberately and persistently refusing to surrender themselves to God.

This is the one sin which seals all other sins on the soul. All other sin can be forgiven, but this will not stoop to be forgiven; it will not let the soul come near enough to God to ask forgiveness; it makes Salvation impossible while it is persisted in. This was the last drop which filled up the cup of the iniquities of those Jerusalem sinners. If, after all their hardness and impenitence, they would have received the testimony of Jesus, and, even at the eleventh hour, the last hour of their day of grace, had ceased to resist the Holy Ghost, they might even then have been saved. The Son of God Himself says it: but they 'WOULD NOT.' They wilfully and determinedly resisted the Spirit, until they drove Him finally away from their hearts and their city, and wrung the sad, pathetic words from the lips of the Son of God, as He wept over them: 'but now they are hid from thine eyes.' O Christian, where are your bowels of compassion, that you can see souls all around you going on day after day, year after year, in enlightened headstrong

rebellion against God, and not weep? Alas! How few see or feel these terribly awful truths. May the Holy Ghost reveal them to every one of us, that we may never cease to persuade men; and when we cannot turn them, to say with the prophet, `If ye will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride and with a greater than he, `Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.'

But I want to glance at the CONSEQUENCES of quenching the Spirit. Those who quench the Spirit have no concern about their souls--no desire after God, pardon, or righteousness. There may be remorse, fear of death and of Hell, but no desire. Desire after righteousness and God are produced alone by the Spirit. Man would be as destitute of it as Satan, without the Holy Spirit, hence He was the first great gift procured for us by Christ and given to our race after the fall in the covenant of grace. David and all the prophets attribute all the good in man to the operation of the free Spirit of God. Now this is a most important point for us to note, in order to prevent any one making a mistake in judging of themselves or others.

People who have quenched the Spirit do not often think so till death overtakes them; they are generally utterly indifferent. The want of all feeling on the subject of the soul's Salvation is one of the signs of having quenched the Spirit. When a person begins to feel, it is a sign that the Spirit is striving. Have you any desire for pardon, righteousness, or God? If so, you still have the Holy Spirit. Oh, praise God! Will you submit now, this moment, and come to Jesus? If you will, though it be the eleventh hour with you, you shall be saved. For though we have no distinct revelation on the point, from two or three incidental passages it seems highly probable that, when the Spirit departs, life soon ends.

The great purpose for which God keeps sinners in existence is that He may save them; but when the Spirit is quenched, there is no more possibility of Salvation, therefore His purpose is frustrated. Such people must do much harm to others; so in pity to others probably God takes them away. I trust it will never fall to the lot of any of you to watch such a one die. Much more do I hope that you may not die so yourself; and, Oh! that there may be no danger of such a terrible fate, yield now. `Now is the accepted time.' You know not how much longer the Spirit may strive. You know not how nearly God's patience may be exhausted. You know not but the refusal of this invitation may fill up the measure of your iniquities, and seal your doom for ever. Oh, I beseech you, quench not the Spirit.

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