

Do Not Quench the Spirit!

by Samuel Storms

The Holy Spirit's work in our lives is essential, and we must be careful not to quench or diminish His personality and multifaceted ministry.

Duration: 52:01

Scripture: Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:19-23

Topics: "Quenching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by confessing that he struggled to decide on a topic to share with the audience. Eventually, he realizes the importance of seeking God's guidance and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead. He then focuses on the passage from 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22, emphasizing the need to not quench the Spirit and not despise prophecies. He encourages the audience to test everything, hold fast to what is good, and abstain from every form of evil. The speaker also highlights the danger of being cautious to the point of quenching the Spirit's work and discouraging believers.

Transcript

Would you please take your Bibles and turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. Let me just say a couple of words of introduction before we read this passage and then pray and turn our attention to it. I must confess to you that I labored, indeed agonized, greatly over what I would share with you all this evening. Dan can tell you he and I were emailing back and forth trying to get a sense for where the Lord was leading and I suggested actually two topics that I had settled on in my heart and then later changed my mind.

Well Dan, I've changed it for a third time because I finally came to my senses and thought it might be a good idea to ask God what he thought. And after I did that, I really felt a deep conviction about speaking to you all on a particular passage and theme tonight. And I hope and pray that it will be helpful and instructive and encouraging to you here at Christian Fellowship.

By way of just introduction to why I came to this conclusion, I began to reflect this past week once again on the wide variety of churches where I have had the opportunity to minister over the last three or four years, of all denominational stripes, of all theological orientations, of all kinds of style and substance. And I've come to a conclusion about those churches that would classify themselves, theologically speaking, as either Pentecostal or Charismatic or Third Wave or some would like to use the word continuationists because they believe in the continuation of spiritual gifts. But whatever you want to label those churches, if

you kind of put them all in one basket, as it were, and I've looked at them closely and talked with pastors and the people who fill these congregations, and it's very obvious that there is a serious crisis that is occurring within churches that believe in what I would call a robust view of the Holy Spirit's ministry today.

Now again, I don't want to sound like an alarmist, far less a sensationalist when I say this, but it seems to me that in most cases in these kinds of churches, they are gravitating to one of two extremes. In fact, at dinner tonight, I didn't even mention the topic, and Phil even commented that he has observed this as well in the body of Christ across our country. On the one hand, it seems that many of these kinds of churches have given themselves over to what can only be called gullibility and a naivete that actually borders on recklessness, so open, so undiscerning concerning the things that at least claim to be the work of the Spirit that they are very near to falling into heresy.

And at the other end of the spectrum, there are those churches who still, at least in terms of their theological affirmation, believe in the gifts of the Spirit, but they are so fearful and so cynical because of abuses that they have seen that they are on the verge of falling into what I would call paralysis. They're just not moving anywhere at all. The first group are so desperate for anything that smacks of the supernatural and oftentimes so biblically uninformed that fanaticism and extremism and an embarrassing state of affairs has taken over.

As I said, they're on the verge of sometimes committing some serious theological heresies, oftentimes scandals, whether of a financial or a sexual nature have been revealed in some of these congregations. Not that the others are immune to that, but it seems to be more prevalent in those. And yet on the other hand, the second group are so tired and weary of the fanaticism, so of the extremes of the lack of biblical integrity that they have, as it were, pulled in the reins on what the Holy Spirit can do in their midst.

They struggle with doubt. They're increasingly cynical about the supernatural. They have become what I would call practical cessationists.

A cessationist is, you know, somebody who believes that gifts of the Spirit ceased in the first century. Well, these people don't believe that, but they practice as if it were true. In other words, they rarely, if ever, pray with expectancy for the sick.

They don't make it possible for the gift of prophecy to operate in the body of Christ. And this division, again, isn't one that occurs between so-called charismatic churches and so-called evangelical cessationist churches. It's happening within charismatic churches themselves.

And it's a real crisis, and it's very dangerous, in my opinion, and I believe very disheartening to our Lord. So I want to speak to both groups tonight, but especially the second. So with that in mind, I want you to look with me at a very short passage of Scripture, 1 Thessalonians 5. I think you know it well, beginning with verse 19.

Do not quench the Spirit. I'm reading from the English Standard Version, by the way. Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil. Let's pray. Father, help us tonight as we open Your Word.

Open our hearts to the truth of what You have revealed here through the Apostle Paul. Father, I pray that that if any here tonight are particularly given to an undiscerning gullibility to things of the Spirit, or if there

are some who have perhaps been wounded by extremism in the past, and they're increasingly cynical and closed, Father, I pray that You would speak to each. Speak to us all.

Grant us wisdom and discernment in knowing Your ways and Your will for Your people. Help us, Father, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I doubt if many of you have heard the name Octavius Winslow. A man died in 1878, but I want you to listen to something that he said about the Holy Spirit, and I'm quoting. All that we spiritually know of ourselves, all that we know of God and of Jesus and His Word, we owe to the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

All the real light, sanctification, strength, and comfort we are made to possess on our way to glory, we must ascribe to Him. Where He is honored and adoring thoughts of His person and tender, loving views of His work are cherished, then are experienced in an enlarged degree His quickening, enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting influence. I don't even remember where I found that quote in Winslow's writings, but it expresses a truth that I believe that we as Christian men and women need to hear today, especially today.

Think again about what he's just said. Everything that you know about God the Father, to the degree that you understand His attributes, His love, His power, His grace, His majesty, everything you know about God the Son, the fact that you have come to faith in Jesus, you have put your confidence in His work on the cross, you owe to the ministry and the work and the illumination that the Spirit of God has brought to bear on your soul. Whatever change you've experienced as a Christian, whatever degree of conformity to the image of Christ you've experienced, to whatever extent you understand His Word, whatever encouragement you have ever felt in a time of despair, whatever consolation in a time of depression, it is all due to the work of the Spirit of God.

That's why Winslow says correctly, where He is honored and adoring thoughts of His person and tender loving views of His work are cherished, then Christian men and experienced, as he says, in an enlarged degree, the glorious benefits of His work. The antithesis, the opposite of honoring the Spirit, the very complete and utter antithesis to cherishing Him in His person and His work, is what the Bible calls quenching. I can't imagine a more serious offense to the heart of God than when the people who have been the objects and the recipients of this glorious work of the Spirit, in turn, conduct themselves and speak and act and orchestrate ministries in the local church in such a way that they quench that very Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God wants and wills to work in our midst. I hope you know that. And here in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul describes the Spirit under the imagery of fire.

He is a flame, as it were, whose flame we must be very careful not to extinguish. It's a stunning image. The Spirit, as it were, longs to operate in our midst, to make known His presence, to inflame our hearts, to fill us with the warmth of His indwelling power.

And what do we do in response so many times? We organize in the church what I would call a Christian bucket brigade, and we try to douse the flame of His presence and His power with all sorts of warnings and extra-biblical rules and legalism and fear and a flawed theology that says He doesn't really do today what He did in the first century. We have all sorts of ways of quenching the work of the Spirit. It's interesting when you look at the New Testament, as best I can tell, there are, and these aren't all of them, but there are at least five primary sins that can be committed against the Holy Spirit.

As you know, in Ephesians 4, Paul warns about grieving the Spirit. In Acts chapter 7, Stephen in his sermon accused the religious leaders of resisting the Spirit. Here we read about quenching the Spirit.

In Matthew 12, Jesus warned about blaspheming the Spirit. And in the book of Hebrews, He talks about insulting or outraging the Spirit. Now, I happen to believe, but I can't go into it, that blasphemy of the Spirit and outraging the Spirit can only be committed by non-Christians.

But we, if we are not careful, could easily grieve, resist, or quench the Spirit of God. Now, before I say anything more about how it is that we quench the Spirit and what we need to do to counter that, let me just say a brief word about the mere fact that it is possible for us to do this. That's a remarkable concept that Christian men and women can actually quench, put out the fire of the work of the third person of the Godhead.

It's amazing to me that the Apostle would tell us that the Spirit of God has, in a sense, granted to the Christian the power and the authority either to restrict or to release His work in our midst. Now, as was mentioned to you from the subtitle of one of my books, I'm a Calvinist. I have a very high view of divine sovereignty.

Some people tell me too high a view. So I do not take easily to any suggestion that limitations can be put on what God does. Certainly the Spirit of God is omnipotent.

He can accomplish His will. But the fact remains that the Spirit comes to us, Paul says, as it were like a fire, a flame, either to be fanned into the fullness of the heat, as it were, that He wants to bring to bear in our lives or to be doused by the water of human fear and control and flawed and fallacious theology, especially when it comes to spiritual gifts, manifestations of the miraculous and the supernatural, the Spirit of God will rarely, if ever, force Himself upon us. For example, we don't need to turn there.

Let me just remind you of Paul's remarkable statement in 1 Corinthians 14, verse 32. Here Paul is giving guidelines and instruction on how spiritual gifts are to operate in the local body. He specifically addresses the issue of tongues and prophecy as you know.

And yet you oftentimes hear people say, well, you know, when the Spirit comes it's just so powerful, it's just overwhelming, I can't help myself. And if I step outside of the Pauline instruction, if I violate those guidelines, well, it was just the Spirit, you know, that just took over and took control and I couldn't help myself. And Paul says in direct response to that, the Spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets.

His point is that the Spirit does not act upon us as though we were automatons or puppets. He happily subjects Himself to our decision concerning when and how we deliver prophetic words in particular, that's what he had in view in 1 Corinthians 14. People, this is a frightening thought.

What an incredible responsibility is placed upon us that we can make choices that determine when and how and to what extent the Spirit will manifest His presence in our midst. Paul doesn't say here, hey folks, don't worry about the Holy Spirit, don't worry about your theology of how He operates. You know, don't give a second thought to how you structure your services and your worship and your times of prayer and ministry.

I mean, the Spirit's going to do whatever the Spirit wants to do regardless of what you say or do. That's not what he says. Now, as again, as I said, it doesn't come easily for me to acknowledge this, but here Paul tells us, the Thessalonians and you and me today, if you so choose, you can quench, extinguish, douse,

diminish the work of the Spirit in your midst.

Don't do it. That's a very serious exhortation that is delivered to us. Our responsibility is to fan the flame of the Spirit's fire, to intensify the heat, to rekindle what may have grown cold through our neglect and our indifference.

Facilitate the Spirit's work. Teach about how the Spirit operates. Encourage people.

Make it safe for them to follow the Spirit's guidance and His lead. Don't create an atmosphere of hesitancy in which people are terrified of making a mistake and being denounced in public or cast out of the church. Don't forbid the speaking in tongues.

Don't despise prophetic utterances. When you discern the Spirit's presence, throw gasoline on the fire. Now, having said all that, let me mention, if I may, in the time we have, very quickly, seven ways that we quench the Spirit of God, seven ways that we need to be very careful lest we, as it were, blow out or douse or somehow extinguish the work that the Spirit of God wants to do among us.

Number one, we quench the Spirit whenever we conduct ministry in such a way that His personality is ignored or we pursue life as Christian men and women in such a way that the Spirit is described or spoken of as if He were no more than an abstract power or energy. Gordon Fee, a great New Testament scholar today, commented in one of his books about a student of his that was having a hard time dealing with the personality of the Spirit. He said, the student wrote on one of his tests, God the Father makes perfectly good sense to me.

God the Son I can quite understand, but the Holy Spirit is a gray, oblong blur. I understand that. I can relate to it.

We don't have any problem thinking about God the Father within the Trinity, God the Son, because Father and Son are personal terms, but the Spirit, it almost strikes us more like the force of Star Wars or some sort of pervasive, vibrating energy that gives life to all around us. It's hard to hug a spirit, isn't it? Or to be hugged by it. There are times, tragically, when people in the body of Christ, well-meaning no doubt, talk about the Spirit of God as if He were somehow the divine equivalent to an electrical current.

You know, stick your finger of faith into the socket of His anointing presence and you'll get the jolt of your life, that kind of language. If you haven't ever heard it, you've been spared. This kind of mechanizing of the Spirit, this reducing the Spirit to some kind of impersonal force is offensive.

It diminishes ultimately what the Spirit will accomplish in our midst. May I remind you that although the Greek word for spirit is neuter in gender, that doesn't have anything to say about whether there is personhood to the Spirit, because Jesus on many occasions refers to the Spirit with masculine pronouns. The Spirit has all the qualities of a person.

In fact, if I were to ask you all to write down, what are the differences between Phil and this lectern? I hope that they would have a few that they might come up with. You would say things, well, a person like Phil has a mind, he can think, he has self-consciousness, he is moral, he makes choices, he has affections and feelings and emotions. A lectern is just lifeless, it's just an object, it's a thing.

Well, all of these attributes are predicated in the Spirit in the Bible. It talks about his mind, he thinks, talks about the fact that he has feelings, he can be grieved, Ephesians chapter 4 says that. He can be insulted,

he can be sinned against according to Acts chapter 5. He exercises his will, it's according to the Spirit's will that certain gifts are distributed to certain people.

The Spirit performs all the functions of a person. He talks, testifies. As I said, he can be lied to, he can be tested or tempted.

The Spirit can enter into relationship with people. He encourages, he strengthens, he teaches and all of these, I have a multitude of texts that confirm this. So we need to be careful when we talk about the work of the Spirit that we do not reduce the glorious, precious Spirit of God to some kind of impersonal energy.

We need to realize we are talking about one with whom we have intimate relationship. Secondly, we quench the Spirit whenever we neglect or overlook or worse still deny some feature of his multifaceted ministry. Let me explain what I mean by that.

There are a number of people in the evangelical world who don't believe that we should even talk that much about the Holy Spirit. And they appeal to something Jesus said in John 16. You remember in the room Jesus said this, when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

He, that is the Spirit, will glorify me, Jesus. He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine, therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

That's a great passage. But the point they derive from this is that the Spirit therefore will never draw attention to himself. In other words, his divinely appointed task in the economy of redemption is to shine all of the light on God the Son to instruct us concerning who Jesus is.

In other words, he will glorify the Son and therefore his ministry is supremely Christ-centered or Christocentric. And therefore, even for me to be speaking to you tonight about the Spirit and talking in the terms that I am, some would say, you know, that's really not biblical in light of what Jesus said. But we must be very careful to avoid the error of what I call reductionism.

And what I mean by that simply is that we try oftentimes to reduce the ministry of the Spirit to Christology, as if the Spirit does nothing else but shine a light on Christ. Now make no mistake, I believe that the primary role of the Spirit of God in your life and in this church is to illuminate and to make known and to exalt the person and work of Jesus Christ. That is the primary role of the Spirit, but it's not the sole role or task of the Spirit.

Don't make the mistake of arguing that the primary purpose of what the Spirit does is the exclusive purpose of what He does. All I need to remind you about is the hundreds of verses in the Bible in which the Spirit, who inspired the text, talks about Himself. The many, many instances in which the Spirit makes His presence known.

You just have to read Acts chapter 2 and what happened at Pentecost to take note of that. The fact that the Spirit of God gives direction to the church, Acts chapter 13. Acts chapter 15, it is the Spirit who guides and leads the Apostolic Company to draw the conclusions they did at the so-called Jerusalem Council.

It's the Spirit who awakens in us, according to Galatians 4, the awareness of our adoption as God's children. It's the Spirit who provides the guarantee or down payment that what we have now will be

consummated. In every one of these arenas, to the degree that we neglect that truth, we are quenching the Spirit.

So the fact of the matter is, whereas the Spirit's primary work is Christological in nature, that's not the sole or exclusive thing that He does, and to the degree that we neglect or ignore or even deny this multifaceted work of the Spirit of God, we throw water on the fire of His presence. A third way, we quench the Spirit whenever we suppress or legislate against His work of imparting spiritual gifts and ministering to the church through them. Now, some people hear me say that, and they respond by saying, now, Sam, does that mean that you are saying that the doctrine of cessationism, the idea that the gifts of the Spirit ceased in the first century, that that doctrine, when it is taught and when it is allowed to govern the life of the church, are you saying that that's quenching the Spirit? Yes.

Let's just get that question right out of the way. Absolutely, that is what I am saying, without hesitation. People, the church is in a desperate state today.

Do I need to remind you of that? The church needs every resource that God has been pleased to provide. Can you imagine contracting with someone to come to your home to do repairs or remodeling, and they show up with a hammer and a screwdriver, and that's it? You know, we need every tool, every instrument, every resource that God has provided to do the work of the kingdom in building up the body of Christ. And I mean all of the gifts.

I am not just talking about the controversial gifts of 1 Corinthians 12. I am talking about the gift of teaching, the gift of administration, and of mercy, and of serving, and of evangelism, and of giving to the degree that we do not instruct and encourage and release people into these arenas. We are quenching the Spirit of God in our midst.

A fourth way that we quench the Spirit. Now, listen carefully to this. I may have to repeat it twice.

We quench the Spirit whenever we create what I call an inviolable and sanctified hegemonious atmosphere in our corporate gatherings or in our small group meetings, such that the spontaneous work of the Spirit is virtually impossible. In other words, I have in mind so constructing how worship is done, or so controlling the flow and the development of a class or a small group meeting, that the spontaneity or the special leading of the Spirit in terms of how we pray, and how we preach and teach, and how we sing and worship is not permitted. Now, again, please don't misunderstand me.

I am not advocating chaos. I am not saying anything goes. I am not suggesting for a moment that should your pastoral leadership provide guidelines and instruction that they are therefore guilty of quenching the Spirit.

Let me go on record in saying that right now. That's not what I'm suggesting. What I'm talking about is creating an atmosphere that is dominated by fear, in which people are just, they're on edge, hesitant, if they ever sense the Spirit is doing something or saying something because they are terrified of being rebuked and marginalized in the life of the church.

And so inhibition begins to rule rather than freedom. And they are disinclined to contribute when in fact the Spirit may well be seeking to minister through them. They are anxious about what others are going to think because we've created this kind of atmosphere.

I confess to you, for years of my ministry, I quenched the Spirit of God in my preaching. I was absolutely terrified of ever departing from the notes that I had in front of me. To me, that somehow was dangerous.

If I ever felt a prompting or a moving of the Spirit to move in a different direction or to speak on a particular theme or emphasize something or even, lo and behold, feel that there might have been a revelatory word that was given to me, I would find a way to justify ignoring it. Everyone who's ever preached the Word of God will tell you on those remarkable occasions, it doesn't happen all the time or even often, when the Spirit of God, as it were, takes over in the midst of a message to do something that maybe wasn't even planned on. Or consider how this takes effect in our worship.

I know you all are familiar with the passage in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5. In Colossians 3, 16, Paul exhorts us to teach and admonish one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Now I doubt if I'm saying anything that's new to you all tonight, but let me just say it anyway. Have you ever thought about the distinctions in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs? If you haven't, you need to.

Psalms, nobody disputes that. He's talking about the Old Testament Psalter, those 150 psalms, those hymns of praise. Hymns, most likely, was Paul's way of describing the compositions that were coming forth in the early church that primarily focused on Christ.

I think, for example, of Mary's hymn of praise in Luke 2 called the Magnificat, or Paul's Christological hymn in Philippians 2, verses 6-11, or the one in Colossians 1, verses 15-17. But what in the world are spiritual songs? There are some who say, well, that's just another way of saying the other two. Well, if it were, then why did Paul bother? Why be so redundant? Psalms and hymns are songs, and psalms and hymns certainly are spiritual.

We don't want them to be carnal. But there's something in spiritual songs that goes beyond what happens when you sing a psalm or you sing a hymn. And I am convinced that what Paul is talking about are spontaneous outbursts of praise that just come through individuals or through a worship leader that weren't planned, that are spontaneous, improvised.

They can be prophetic in nature. But where you just have an atmosphere, and those of you who've been in these kinds of services often, or in worship services or conferences or small groups, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Where the Spirit within us is given free reign to declare and to praise and to sing something that isn't in the book or on the overhead transparency or in the bulletin.

And it is a marvelous and edifying and Paul says, instructive and admonishment toward other believers as we minister one to another in this way. I can't begin to tell you the countless occasions in which I have been so richly blessed when the Spirit of God has been given the freedom to operate in that fashion. Now again, it's not something that is to be given such free reign that there are no guidelines.

It's difficult. You talk to musicians. You talk to worship leaders.

Even the best will say to be discerning, to be able to know what the Spirit of God is doing is not easy. And it can't just be a free for all. But at the same time, we need to facilitate that kind of manifestation of the Spirit's work among us.

A fifth way that we quench the Spirit is whenever we make others feel hesitant, unsure, or even fearful of following the Spirit's lead in their life. Not simply what we do within our own souls, but when we actually conduct ourselves in such a way that others begin to recoil, to constrict, as it were, in their spirit. I have to

confess to you, for about the first 15 or 16 years of my marriage and of my ministry, I quenched the Spirit in my wife.

I never consciously thought that that's what I was doing, but I had created in her mind an image of what a godly Christian was supposed to be, and I had taught her very faithfully what I thought the Spirit would or would not do today. And she was very faithful and very loving, and if I can even use the word that people don't like today, very submissive in the way that she yielded to my leadership in that regard. I still believe in leadership of the husband and the family, but I got to tell you, not like that.

Because I suppressed and I quenched what the Spirit of God could otherwise have been accomplishing in my wife. I think one particular vivid example that stands out in my own experience, and I share this story in my book, *Convergence*, but just briefly I'll tell you back in October of 1970, a long time ago, and I'm getting ready to get in trouble because I was going to say, in October of 1970 when I was a sophomore at the University of Oklahoma. Now we got that out of the way.

I had a life-changing encounter with the Spirit of God, and God very graciously and mercifully blessed me with the gift of tongues. And I was very active at that time in the Ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ on the campus at OU. In fact, I was the student leader.

I hosted all of the corporate gatherings. I was on the steering committee with the staff members. And in that day, it's no longer the case, but in that day, any charismatic expression was absolutely forbidden in Campus Crusade for Christ.

And I'll never forget, after this happened, I went back to my fraternity house. I called one of the staff members who was my leader. I said, I've got to share something with you.

And he immediately came over, picked me up. I got in his car. I hadn't said a word, and the first words out of his mouth were, you spoke in tongues tonight, didn't you? I said, yeah, I did.

It was incredible. And then the next words, you can't do that and stay involved with Campus Crusade. And I just remember this.

It's like he just punctured the balloon, and I just so deflated. The air just went out of my life. I said, what? He says, you know, we just don't believe that that's a legitimate spiritual experience in this day and time.

And if you're going to remain the student leader and be a part of the leadership team, you're going to have to renounce that and just promise me that you won't ever do it again. The Spirit of God was quenched in me as I yielded to that man's instruction and his leadership. The consequences for the next two decades in my life, I won't even go into detail.

It was just horrific. A sixth way that we quench the Spirit. I'm using here the words of John Piper.

In talking about the work of the Spirit in the church and wanting to facilitate it, John once said that we quench the Spirit through what he called the verbalized institutionalization of caution. The verbalized institutionalization of caution. And what he meant by that was when leaders will stand in a pulpit or small group leaders will share or an adult Bible class or even one-on-one and we say, oh, yes, well, of course we believe in the gifts of the Spirit.

Of course we believe in the operation of prophecy in our midst. And then after we have made that kind of grudging concession, we then launch into a long, impassioned, austere warning about all of the horrific things that might happen if we go too far. This long, verbalized institutionalizing of caution and whatever good we may have accomplished in our instruction and encouragement concerning the Spirit, we just have immediately destroyed and robbed from people's hearts.

Be wary of affirming on the one hand your belief in what God has done, what the Spirit is doing, but then through the long...don't misunderstand me. Sometimes we need warnings. Sometimes there are things we do need to be cautious about.

But it can be done in such a way that people are still encouraged to be open to the Spirit's work and not feel judged and quenched. Seventh and finally, and this brings me...believe it or not, it took me all this time to get to my passage. That was an introduction, people.

Look at 1 Thessalonians 5, the seventh and final way, and the primary manifestation of Spirit quenching is when we despise prophetic utterances. Look again at Paul's language. I don't know what English text you're reading, but I want you to see very clearly what he does here.

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Now, most New Testament scholars will point out to you that when Paul says do not quench the Spirit, he's thinking primarily, not exclusively, but primarily of the despising of prophetic utterances.

Don't sever these two elements in Paul's language here. The way you don't quench the Spirit is by facilitating the exercise of prophecy. Look at the parallel between verse 19 and verse 20.

Do not quench the Spirit, and if I can just kind of paraphrase here, but...excuse me, do not quench the Spirit, which consists of despising prophecies, but rather test everything and hold fast to what is good and abstain from every form of evil. Now please note carefully how Paul's argument unfolds here. Perhaps the most important word in this passage is that word but, with which verse 21 opens.

I hope it's in your English translation. Paul is setting up a contrast. Rather than quenching the Spirit by despising prophetic utterances, examine everything.

In other words, the word everything or all things here in verse 21 is a reference to the prophetic utterances in verse 20. That leads to the conclusion that the good that he mentions in verse 21, to which we are to hold fast, and the evil in verse 22, from which we are to abstain, are references to the prophetic utterances in verse 20. How many times have you said to somebody when you wanted to get them to do something right, and to avoid...you said, oh, don't you remember Paul's words? Hold forth to what is good and abstain from every form of evil.

Well that's good advice, but that's not what he's talking about here. The good are those prophetic words that after being judged and weighed and assessed, are concluded have indeed come from God. We are to hold to them, Paul says.

The bad, the evil, are those alleged prophetic words, which after being judged we have determined are not from God, are either carnal or fleshly, or perhaps even the counsel of the enemy himself. You know, the fact that Paul had to write this is stunning in and of itself. The church at Thessalonica may well have been the most mature church in the ancient world.

Paul's glowing endorsement of them in chapter one of his first letter, how they had received the word of God, not as the word of men, but for what it is as the word of God. How they had embraced it in the midst of much affliction, and yet stunningly in that church there were people who were disenchanting with the spiritual gift of prophecy. You might say, well, why? Why were they inclined to despise and disdain prophetic utterances? And the answer is, for the same reason you are.

Think about it for a moment. Perhaps you have watched people with the gift of prophecy use it to control the lives of others and with great damage done to them, and you just go, oh, I just don't like that. Or maybe there were cases where an individual with the gift of prophecy used that to expand their power base in the church, and to perhaps argue that they deserved a place at the table of leadership when in fact they were unqualified for that.

Or perhaps the gift of prophecy has in a congregation or small group been overused and overemphasized, almost as if it's the only thing of value in the Christian life. Or maybe you've watched how words have come forth, and they weren't judged. They were just kind of left hanging out there, and you didn't know what to do with them, and they ended up coming to nothing.

Or maybe it's just because you think it's weird. Just weird. It just makes your skin crawl, and it's embarrassing.

Maybe people who really have genuinely the gift of prophecy present themselves as if they're highly favored, and that God really has blessed them in a way that he hasn't blessed you. Or maybe words were spoken even over your life, and they didn't come to pass. I could go on and on and on, people.

You know what I'm talking about, and you know what happens deep within. You say to yourself silently, if not to others, well if that's what this spiritual gift is all about, I don't want anything to do with it, and I don't want to be a part of a church that has anything to do with it. Now listen to me.

It doesn't matter how badly people have abused this gift. It is a sin to despise prophecy. If Paul commands the Thessalonians, he commands us, do not despise prophetic utterances.

If you find yourself feeling contempt and disdain and frustration over the abuses, and they exist, make no mistake about it, in the exercise of this gift, and you just are, you've clenched your fist, and you grit your teeth, and you've kind of resolved in your heart, I'm just not going to go there. That's sin. Now, you say, but wait a minute Sam, is the alternative, is that it? It's either I quench the spirit by despising prophetic utterances, or I just throw open the gates to anything that claims to be prophetic? Absolutely not.

Look at what Paul says. It isn't anything goes. The alternative to not quenching the spirit is what? Examining every word.

Judging every word. Evaluating. Assessing.

Paul doesn't correct the abuse by commanding disuse. He corrects the abuse by saying, judge it. Bring the light of scripture to bear on what is happening.

There's a real life baby in that bath water that you want to throw out. Be careful. It's biblically informed discernment that he calls for.

We are neither to gullibly believe every word and let it go unjudged, nor are we to cynically reject them because it's just weird and out of control. We are to judge and evaluate and assess. That is our responsibility in the body of Christ today.

I don't have time to go into this. Let me just quickly say, you're saying, well, how do we do that? Well, obviously you know that you apply the authoritative and infallible word of God. I say this so many times, and I don't know if people really grasp what I mean.

We have no idea how much confusion and bad doctrine and abuse and all sorts of fanaticism in the body of Christ could be eliminated if we just had a basic biblical literacy in the body of Christ. If we understood the fundamental principles of the book of Proverbs alone, you could eradicate virtually so much of the chaos, confusion, and ethical compromise among Christians today. When people say, God told me I could do this, and I felt led to do that.

If we just understood the principles of Proverbs, we'd say, no, wait a minute, time out. No, God didn't say that to you because God said this in his infallible word. We so quickly and cavalierly say, well, we need to judge prophecies in light of God's word, but we really don't understand what that means.

Why? It's because we are basically illiterate when it comes to the ways that God acts. If we understood the principles according to which God operates in relation to his people, if we just looked into biblical history, and then when somebody comes along with some outlandish and outrageous claim that they've heard the voice of God tell them this or to do that, you'd say, you know, as best I can tell, that's just not how the God of the Bible operates. Here's how he operates, where we bring these prophetic words to the test of 1 Corinthians 14, 3, where Paul says that their purpose is to encourage, to edify, and to console.

Ask, did that word encourage or did it discourage? Did it build people up or tear them down? Did it console them or confuse them? That's a good way of testing words. The test of love, does it contribute to mutual affection in the body of Christ? The test of community, what do other wise leaders and Christians and mature believers with many years in the Lord say about this? And the test of personal experience, does it come to pass? Isn't it amazing that the Apostle Paul himself, although he knew he was operating and speaking and writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, commended the Bereans because they wouldn't take him at his word. They said, we want to test, we want to look and examine in light of the Scriptures to see if these things are true.

Paul wasn't at all offended, in fact, he applauds them. Would that we could do that today. So many times, and I will stop.

You know, I hear some outrageous things as you do. I can still remember the prophecy of the man on television who told us of the date of the second coming of Christ, that was about 15 years ago. Well, we're still here and he isn't.

Or the prophecy that I heard just a few years ago from two so-called well-respected individuals, who I'm not saying they don't have the gift of prophecy, but who said that California was going to suffer such a devastating earthquake that half of it was going to fall off into the Pacific Ocean. Well, maybe it should, but it hasn't. If you're from California, just understand.

Or, you know, these vague, pious platitudes that people espouse that you sit there and say, you know, my eight-year-old understands that and mentioned the same thing to me the other day. And it just, it's just

vacuous and empty and it doesn't seem to be of any benefit. These things exist and it causes us, oftentimes subconsciously, unaware to our own hearts, to withdraw, to recoil.

And in the process, we pour water and we extinguish the fire of the Spirit in our midst. The Bible does not call for us to be gullible or naive or to operate in an anything-goes atmosphere because we're so afraid of quenching the Spirit, but neither does it endorse a hypercritical, cynical, skeptical, censorious attitude that pours water on His fire. You may disagree with some of the things I've said tonight.

You may want to reject my suggestions, don't buy my books, but please, I beg of you, I plead with you, do not commit the sin, and it is a sin, of quenching the precious Holy Spirit of God. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we need your help.

We need the illumination of your Word. We need the wisdom of seasoned saints in the body of Christ. We need all these things and more, Lord, that we might facilitate and make possible the turning up of the heat of the Spirit's fire in our presence.

Oh, Father, what an awesome thing you have placed upon us, that the Spirit of God will so manifest Himself in our midst that we can either extinguish or intensify what He's doing. Lord, forgive us for having neglected what the Spirit is doing and who the Spirit is. Forgive us for having allowed fear rather than faith to dominate our lives.

Give us wisdom. Give us the maturity in Christ that is needed so that this precious gift and all the gifts and all the ministries that the Spirit awakens and energizes within us can be accomplished for the glory of Christ and the praise of His name and the edification of His people. We pray this in Christ's name and for His sake.

Amen.

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