

Quench not the Spirit

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Acts 5:1-17
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You know, rightfully so, we come and we celebrate the fact that we serve a God of second chances, we serve a God of third chances, and that when our life finds its way to the gutter, that Jesus Christ, his mercy and his grace is strong enough to pull us out of that gutter, but today can I challenge you with something? You don't have to fall into the gutter. You don't have to fall into a lifestyle, you don't have to fall into decisions that require being pulled out of the mire and the muck, today can we be challenged to so love and serve the Lord that rather than, yes, he will pull us out of the gutter but can we say he made it to where I didn't have to go there to begin with. The challenge today though, yes, he will pull us out, is also that he can prevent us from ever falling in.

Let's pray together.

Lord, as we come to this moment and as we come to this time, Lord, you have prepared our hearts, Lord, as we have celebrated your goodness and your grace, now we're going to be challenged by your word, Lord, a word that will today prayerfully be fitly spoken. God, help us to be moldable. Help us to be malleable. Help us to allow you as your word tells us multiple times, for you to be the Potter and for us to be the clay. As we read, as we study, as we're challenged, O God, may every single voice but yours be drowned out today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to two specific places in the New Testament: the book of 1 Thessalonians 5 and the book of Acts 5. Now 1 Thessalonians 5 is just a very simple statement that we're going to use kind of as a springboard to go back into Acts 5 which is going to be an illustrative story of the subject matter of today. Those of you that may be new at this today, guest, visitor, or maybe you haven't been with us in a while, we are studying the person and the role and the power of the Holy Spirit in our life this summer season and up until this point, we've studied who the Holy Spirit is and what he desires and how he desires to move in our life, we've talked about spiritual gifts and the fact that he wants to empower us to do through his power more than we could ever do on our own. Last week, we talked about what does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit, what does it mean to be so yielded to his presence and his power that he increases and we decrease. Up until this point, for lack of better terms, it's all been positive; that God desires to move and work and to gift us and to fill us, but today we look at the other side of the coin.

There is a challenge that is put before us in 1 Thessalonians 5 and this was the challenge that was given to the early believers in Jesus Christ. If you take all the letters of the Apostle Paul, 1 Thessalonians is the very first one chronologically. These were the first words given by his pen and his hand to the newly established, newly formed, newly infused with the Holy Spirit body of Christ. He begins by sharing with them that their testimony, no matter what they may look like on the outside, they turn from worthless idols to serve the living God. He talks about the basics of sanctification and justification and even the end times and the return of Jesus Christ. But when you get to chapter 5, at the very end there is just a myriad of statements just guidance for life when it comes to how to do this thing known as Christianity and I want you to notice what verse 19 says, "Quench not the Holy Spirit." In other words, do not get to the place in your life where the Lord is moving in your life and you allow the Holy Spirit to be quenched. We've talked that he bestows gifts. We've talked about the fact that he fills us and today we're going to speak of the fact that we can quench the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are told to not let it happen.

Now I want to begin today by taking that verse, "Quench not the Spirit," kind of breaking that apart and we need to define some things, we need to look at some definitions because when we look at this concept of quenching or putting out, can I be very clear from the very beginning? When we talk about quenching the Holy Spirit, we're not talking about losing the Holy Spirit, we're not talking about losing our salvation, we're not talking about our seat in heaven being transferred to a seat in hell. That's not what we're talking about. In fact, every story, every illustration, everything we're going to address today are to those who are believers in Jesus Christ operating in the power and the filling of the Holy Spirit and there are things that occur in their life that allow the Holy Spirit to be quenched.

Now, that's a very particular definition. Eight times in your New Testament the word "quench" or the concept of quenching is utilized, and in every single one of those incidences, it involves fire. Now let me take two sides of the equation here. In Mark 9, Jesus is speaking to those who are contrary to him, those who do not want to believe that he is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and in Mark 9 he speaks of the consequence, he speaks of the result, he speaks of what happens when you live a life in rejection of him. It says that there is a place that the Bible calls hell, and by the way for those of you that get upset about that, Jesus talked about hell twice as much as he did heaven, and when describing that place called hell, here's what he said, "The fire is not quenched." He said it three times in one very brief sermon as almost to get our attention, "Hey, guys, it never goes out."

On the other side of the equation in what we know as the book of Ephesians 6, we as believers in Jesus Christ, we're encouraged to put on the whole armor of God: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and it talks about the shield of faith, the shield of faith which purpose is to quench the fiery darts of the enemy. Every single instance that you see quenching in your New Testament, it involves taking that which involves fire and seeing the flame diminished or put out.

I do not find it by coincidence, I do not find it accidental that in Acts 1 when Jesus Christ told them before he ascended, "Hey, wait here in Jerusalem. When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you'll know it when it happens." Remember what happens in Acts 2? It appeared to them as cloven tongues of fire. So the very particular definition that we have is simply this: that those who are believers in Jesus Christ, those who have believed upon him for their salvation for the forgiveness of their sins, as the Holy Spirit begins to move and operate in their lives, there can come a place or it wouldn't be told of us in 1 Thessalonians 5, that we can quench or put out the movement of God in our lives. It's a dangerous but necessary concept to grasp.

Let me help you with a picture there. I'm going to give you a word when it comes to quenching the Spirit. This is a word my boys, they'll be in the next service and they just laugh at me. They just give me those goofy eyes when I use this word. They say, "Dad, you're obsessed with this word." Well, it's a word that I love, it's called momentum. Momentum. We're all familiar with it, right, whether it's in our business world, whether it's in the sports world. Momentum as I've defined it is this: a series of consecutive victories. When you have momentum, you are making progress, you are increasing, things are getting better, but you can also have momentum in the opposite direction, can you not? In fact, Dave Ramsey, the personal financial guy, he has a great statement about momentum, he says, "When you have momentum, you look smarter than you really are, and when you don't, you look dumber than you really are." And it's a really good statement because what he's trying to express is that as you begin to have victory and as you begin to have success, things begin to build and things are getting better and better and better but there can come a point where all of the momentum ceases. In fact, as you look at this concept of momentum, can we just agree that in the book of Acts they were experiencing momentum? I mean, after all, there are 120 of them, they're in the Upper Room, they're scared out of their minds. Jesus has said, "Wait here. Trust me, it's going to get better." The Holy Spirit comes, 3,000 people get saved. That's significant. Then they're put in prison, let out of prison, back and forth, they're questioning what's going to happen, then all of a sudden in Acts 4, 5,000 people get saved.

Can we just agree today that in the book of Acts we are experiencing momentum? What happens though when all of a sudden it's quenched? What happens when the progress is halted? You see, in the sports world, it's so visible. For those of you, and I know this is one of those sports that you either love it or hate it and I'm not going to ask you which one you are, it's the sport of what we call Nascar. That's right, Nascar. Drive hard, turn left. We know how it rolls. That being said, when it comes to the sport of Nascar, you do understand it's a sport governed by momentum. Those cars as fast as they are, 200 mph, they don't get there in five seconds. In fact, oftentimes it takes multiple laps for them to get up to full speed. But every now and then you'll have someone at the front of the line, every now and then they'll be in the top 2 or 3, and there is what we call on the track, there's a groove. In other words, this is the place you want to be on the track for everything to work out the best and every now and then one of them will get brazen or one of them will make a mistake or whatever it may be, and they will get out of the groove. They go from what they call the clean air to the dirty air and if you've ever

witnessed it, it's an amazing study on momentum. Why? They'll go from first place to 20th place in a matter of seconds. They lose all of their momentum and guess how long it takes to get it back? You've got it: several laps.

What we see even in the sports world, the game of football, baseball, basketball, we've all seen it, that once you make one shot it leads to a second and a third. Well, how about the opposite equation? Anybody been on the unfortunate side of momentum where you're ahead in the game and everything's going well and you make one mistake and it leads to a second and a third and a fourth and pretty soon the scoreboard flips on you?

One of my wife's and I's favorite movies and I wish the language wasn't what it was and it is called "The Replacements." If you're familiar with this movie, it's the story of a bunch of NFL players who go on strike and the replacement players are brought in, guys who always dreamed of playing the sport but never had the privilege at that level. They are brought in for the last four games of the season and this team that is put together at the last minute and they're ragtag at best, they lose the first game pretty dramatically. They've got to win the next three games in order to be successful. The coach brings the team in and they begin to discuss some things and the coach is trying to get their attention. He says, "Guys, I want to talk to you about fear. I want to talk to you about what scares you. What is it that you fear?" And if you've seen the movie, you know it's hysterical. One of the guys says, "Coach, I'm scared of spiders." Another guy goes, "I'm scared of bees." And they go on and he's like, "No, no, no, that's not what I'm talking about," and he focuses on the quarterback, the once legendary quarterback of a major university who never went pro, and he says, "Shane, tell them what I'm talking about." And he says, "Quicksand." And they say, "Quicksand? What are you talking about?" And he said, "Quicksand is where you find yourself in a position where you make a mistake and you can't stop but make another mistake and a third and pretty soon you can't get out of the situation and you're stuck in it."

You see, when we talk about momentum today, when we talk about quenching the Spirit of God, realize that as the Lord builds momentum in our life it can turn the opposite direction very very quickly, and what did the Lord tell us in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, "Do not quench the Spirit." Do not find yourself in a place in life where the Lord is moving, he is operating and things are headed in the right direction and you decide to get out of the groove, you decide to say, "I want to do it my way," you decide you know how better to live life, because you will go from the head of the pack to the back real quick and you will go from everything being in the clean air to not so clean almost immediately.

I want to illustrate this back in the book of Acts 5. In Acts 5, we have the story of a couple who quenches the Spirit in their life and what I want to see in this story in Acts 5 is an illustration for us of how the Lord utilizes what we know as discipline and what his desire in our life is when it comes to quenching the Spirit of God. What we see are two individuals who decide to get out of the groove. They decide to do things their own way and we see how the Lord operates in their life, and allow me to say from the beginning, this is the warning shot to all of us. You do not want to end up like this couple.

Acts 5:1, it says,

1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? 4 Whiles it remained, was it not your own? and after it was sold, was it not in your own power? why have you conceived this thing in your heart? you have not lied unto men, but unto God. 5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. 6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. 7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yes, for so much. 9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that you have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried your husband are at the door, and shall carry you out. 10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. 11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

What you see happening in the book of Acts is you see a classic case of momentum. As I mentioned earlier, the Spirit of God is moving. It was first 3,000. Then it's 5,000. Now at the end of chapter 4, it says the believers have gathered together, they're selling their houses, they're selling their stuff, they're giving to those who are without. I mean, incredible momentum, incredible progress, and all of a sudden these two folks show up and they're going to get out of the groove. They're a warning to each and every one of us of what can occur when the Lord is more interested of the health of the whole than the success of you as an individual.

These two folks, they had made some money. We don't know how much. It doesn't tell us and it doesn't matter. They show up and all of a sudden they lie and when they lie, they drop dead. Now I've heard it once, I've heard it a thousand times, people say, "Well, Jeff, don't you say we serve a God of second chances?" Absolutely. They say, "Don't you say we serve a God of third, fourth, fifth, infinite chances?" Absolutely. "Then why is it that they didn't get a second chance? Why is it that they just dropped dead on the spot?" Let me challenge you to say this: that they did get a second chance, they did get a third chance. You say, "How do you know that?" Peter asked them four different questions and at no point in the questioning did he say, "Yup, you're right." At no point did he stop and say, "I need to turn around." At no point did repentance come in. He just took it, agreed with it and dropped.

Do you know what it reminds me of? It reminds me in the Old Testament of a character by the name of Cain. Do you remember Cain and Abel, the two brothers? They come and

they offer their sacrifices to the Lord, Abel's was acceptable, Cain's was not. The Lord comes to Cain and says, "Hey, Cain, don't you realize you're headed the wrong direction? Sin lies at the door. You need to fix this." What did he decide to do? Kill his brother. God gave him a second chance. God gave him the opportunity to right the wrong.

Allow me to share with you kind of a formula of how this happens in our lives. It happened in Cain's life, it happened in Ananias and Sapphira's life, and it can happen in ours. If you want to quench the Spirit, if you want to cease what God is doing in your life, the first thing you do is desire something that's not ordained by him. You desire what you want in spite of what his word says you need. The first thing is desire, here's the second thing: deception. You get deceived in believing this is a good idea. You get deceived by the enemy just like Adam and Eve in the garden, just like Cain did, just like countless folks in Scripture including Ananias and Sapphira, who believed this is actually the best order of operation, then you disobey. You actually play out the deceived desire in your life and then do you know what happens? Death. You see, what you see in Ananias and Sapphira is they were not the victim of what we call one and done because they were already believers. The Holy Spirit already indwelt them, was speaking to them, convicting them and showing them this is not the way to go, and what did they say? No. No. No.

So what does the Lord do? In his discipline, what he decides to do is he prunes them. Now, pruning is a difficult concept to grasp because what pruning is, is taking that which has life, taking that which is growing and removing that which would hinder growth. Now we live in the south and oftentimes people accuse us of what we call crepe murder. Do y'all know what crepe murder is? That's where you take a crepe myrtle and you just hack it, is what you do. I mean, to be honest, I know when it's time to trim my crepe myrtles because I go around and there's just sticks all over town. But what's the purpose? The purpose is to take that which is withered, take that which will hinder growth, to remove it so that greater growth can take place.

What can happen? I want you to imagine what would have happened in the life of the early church if Ananias and Sapphira had been allowed to not only propagate but to provide encouragement for what they had done? The Spirit would have been quenched and what you see is their individual pruning was for the benefit of the whole.

Now I'm going to share a story with you that happened some years ago in my life and some folks find this story kind of a hard pill to swallow but it's a true story. I was pastoring a church in another state and things were going well, the Lord was moving, we were seeing lives changed, and I'm just going to say this the best way I can. If you've ever been in "a body of Christ," a body of believers, every now and then there are what we call some proverbial sticks in the mud. Do you know what I'm talking about? Some folks that just say, "I ain't changing. I ain't moving. I don't care. I'm going to do it my way." There were a few of those, okay? Not this service but... no, I'm kidding. There were a few of those. I say that to every service. It's alright.

But I'll never forget I had a man in that congregation that came up to me one day after one of the services, he put his arm around me. I don't know if you've ever had one of these conversations where they put their arm around you but you're both looking forward, do you know what I mean? You're not looking at each other, you're both looking this way. He put his arm around me and said, "Don't worry, pastor." He said, "We're about five or six good funerals from revival." Let that settle in for just a moment. Here's what he was saying: sometimes the Lord has to prune in order for proper growth to occur. You don't want to be the object of pruning. You don't want to be Ananias and Sapphira. You don't want to be the person who says, "I'm gonna get out of the groove and do it my way," and quench the Holy Spirit. You see, we don't have to fall into the gutter, folks. We don't have to.

You say, "But why would God do this? Why would God instrument discipline?" Because he's interested in preventing the disease of the whole. You see, if Ananias and Sapphira's attitude had been infiltrated into the church, everybody would have then thought, "Oh, it's okay to do this." No, it's not because they were doing the exact opposite of what the Holy Spirit had shared with them.

Two quick stories, one from the Old Testament, one from the New. In the Old Testament in the book of Joshua 7, the Israelites, I mean, they're doing great. They're winning battle after battle after battle and then all of a sudden they take the spoils and the Lord says, "Do not keep the gold. Don't keep the silver. Don't keep the precious stuff. Give it all to the treasury." The next thing you know, they can't win a battle. Nothing is going right. Nothing is going forward. I mean, they can't get anything done. Joshua, their leader, cries out to God and says, "God, what's wrong here?" Do you know what he says? He says, "There is sin in the camp. Somebody has disobeyed. Somebody has kept the spoils for themselves." They go through a search and they discover that a man by the name of Achan had harbored the gold. He had harbored the silver and he admitted, he said, "I did it. I went against it." And that's why Israel has fallen on tough times. They take care of Achan and guess what? The victories come again.

In the New Testament in the book of 1 Corinthians 5, we have a man, and by the way, the church at Corinth is known as the carnal church. There was a man whose lifestyle, his behavior, his mannerisms were so horrific that even the Apostle Paul said, "The Gentiles don't even think this stuff up. It's awful." He was having a relationship he had no business having, doing things he had no business doing with this person, and do you know what the Lord does? He has this person removed from the body so that he does not infect the whole. Now let me remind you when you read 1 Corinthians 5, the door was left open. The Apostle Paul said, "Hey, when you repent and you get right, you're welcome back, but until then, the disease of unrepentant sin must be removed." You see, what you see in Acts 5 is an illustration of what can occur when we decide to quench the Holy Spirit in our lives. God can choose to prune us, to prevent us from tearing the whole thing up.

So what is God's desire? As you open Acts 5, you see the questioning by Peter, you see the questioning by the apostles, "Why have you done this thing? Why did you go down this path? Why have you lied?" Let me tell you what is God's desire right now: if you find

yourself – and by the way can I just be honest? I think all of us as believers in Jesus Christ at some point are guilty of having quenched the Holy Spirit. We're all guilty of it. At some point God has said, "I want you to go this way," and we've said, "I'm not going that way." At some point God's been moving in our lives and we've said, "Enough's enough. I'm not going anywhere." We've all experienced this, right? It just happens. So what is the precise desire of God? To admit it and confess it and to deal with it. What did they do? They harbored it. They sat and said, "Oh, nobody's going to find out." Can I just share with you? In the world that we live in with technology today, everybody is going to find out everything and yet we say, "Oh, nobody is going to find out." Oh, yeah they are.

So what do we see? They did not confess, they did not admit it, and they did not repent. 1 John 1:9 says if we've sinned, he is faithful and just to forgive us if we confess our sins. If that is where you find yourself today, maybe you'd be willing to say, "Do you know what? In my life, I've quenched the Holy Spirit. God's been moving at times past. There was a day in my life where he was real and active and I'll be honest, I got out of the groove. I decided to cut my own path. I decided my way was better than his way." Can I encourage you today just to be honest with him? Just to be honest, just to admit it, just to confess it.

That's exactly what he desires but I want to share with you the problem. Let me share with you why time after time and person after person refuses to do so. Look at verse 2 of Acts 5, it says, "And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet." There was a conspiracy. Now I know that's one of those words everybody gets all nervous about. We say conspiracy, you're talking tin foil hats. No, no, no, a conspiracy by definition is just a plot by two or more people. That's all it is. And what you see here is a conspiracy where he and his wife got along to the side and said, "This is a good idea for us to do this. We are going to keep back for our own." Here's the problem, hear me clearly: you quench the Holy Spirit and you do not return from it when you value the opinions of other people in rebellion more than God himself. We have a natural tendency to gain the favor of those in the same boat we're in, do we not? I want to justify my actions so I'll go to somebody who's done my actions. I'll justify my behavior so I'm going to find somebody who's out of fellowship with God and get their opinion on this because you know they're going to side with you. What happened, though? Both of them ended up getting pruned. Both of them fall by the wayside.

I began the message today by encouraging you, you don't have to fall into the gutter, folks. You don't have to find yourself in a position where the Lord and he is willing and graceful to do it, will pull you out of the mire and the muck of life. You say, "Well, how do I keep from falling into the gutter?" Don't quench the Holy Spirit. Don't get out of the groove. Don't cease his activity in your life. Don't get to the point where you say, "Do you know what? I think I'm smarter than God is and I've got this down." Case after case after case in Scripture teaches us and shows us that every time we think we know more than God does, it never works out. Do not quench the Holy Spirit. Momentum is a powerful fragile thing that the Lord utilizes in our life for his sake and his glory. Don't quench it.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. As we speak about the movement of the Holy Spirit and the quenching of the Holy Spirit, there may be some of you here today whether in person or on the other side of the camera saying, "I don't even possess the Holy Spirit. I don't even know what all that is." Basically it's simple, that when we acknowledge that we've messed up, when we acknowledge we've sinned and we believe that Jesus Christ is the answer to our sin problem and we confess that, the Bible makes it clear that the Holy Spirit, God himself comes to reside and empower us from within. Maybe you're that person today who said, "Man, that's what I need more than anything." Can I encourage you just to have a conversation with the Lord? You don't have to have it out loud, you don't even have to say the same words I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I just want to confess, I just want to admit that I'm the problem. I've sinned. I've messed up. I'm the problem and I believe that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sin on the cross and to raise from the dead three days later so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, I don't know a whole lot but I do know today that Jesus is the only answer to my sin problem. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me and I'm asking you to save me."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if that's the conversation you had with the Lord, we'd love to have a conversation with you. But maybe today you admit you know you've been saved for years, some of you could raise your hand and say, "I've been saved for decades," and you remember a time where the flame of the Holy Spirit was bright and moving in your life but today you realize, do you know what, it's been quenched. I've gotten out of the groove. I've done my own thing. Would today be that day where you admit it, you confess it, and you allow the Lord to build the momentum of his Holy Spirit again in your life?

Lord, as we come to this time in our service, God, we do thank you for the second chances, the third chances, the fourth, fifth and sometimes in our terminology, the infinite chances that you've given us. God, I know there are those today who are in the gutter of life and I know you're willing to pull them out but, God, I also know there are those that are debating about going to the gutter of life and, God, I pray that you would keep them from falling in. Lord, today may we yield to the person and the power of the Holy Spirit in our life. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be right down here at the front.