

QUENCHING THE HOLY SPIRIT

"Quench not the Spirit." I Thessalonians 5:19

Quenching the Spirit is an expression which is used only once in the Bible, and then in connection with Christians. It is a metaphorical expression for putting out a fire. Throughout the Bible the Spirit is frequently alluded to under the symbol of fire. The offence, then, consists in quenching or putting out the divine flame of the Spirit in the heart.

One of the most common symbols used in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit is that of fire. The word "fire" is used in four ways when it comes to the power of the Spirit.

1. Fire describes the purifying power of the Spirit.

"When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the Spirit of judgment, and by the Spirit of burning." Isaiah 4:4. As you meditate upon this verse, remember that as the Spirit of judgment, the Holy Spirit condemns filth; and as the Spirit of burning, He consumes the filth.

2. Fire describes the consuming power of the Spirit.

"He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire; whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Matthew 3:11-12. The consuming power of the Spirit is thus expressed by our Lord. The judgment aspect of the Spirit is here emphasized by the Master.

3. Fire describes the energizing power of the Spirit.

"There appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." Acts 2:3. You will notice that a separate flame rested upon each disciple; and that indicates the bestowal of individual gifts for service, and the power to exercise those personal gifts.

4. Fire describes the illuminating power of the Spirit.

"And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Revelation 4:5. And this term indicates the Spirit's power to penetrate and to illuminate. Seven is one of the perfect numbers of Holy Writ. And so you have a symbol describing the perfect light and radiance of the Spirit of God.

Now, let us consider the symbol, The Holy Spirit as Fire. From God's Word we make certain observations.

1. Fire warms.

"I am warm, I have seen the fire." Isaiah 44:16. This verse suggests a cold wintry day and the cheerful, warming effect of a glowing fire. You come indoors and you are extremely cold. You sit down in front of a blazing fire, and as you sit there before the fire you are warmed.

We live too much in spiritual winter; we need the Divine Fire to warm our cold hearts. What we sorely need today is the fire-flame of the Holy Spirit. Fire warms. There is the absence of the love for souls, zeal in service, fervor in prayer, devotion and consecration, sacrifice in worship, and the igniting power

of influence. We are not set on fire for God. We need this fiery work of the Spirit. A Chinese Christian was asked what he thought China's greatest need was, and he replied, "Give us men and women with hot hearts, who can tell the story of Jesus." And the whole world needs burning hearts.

2. Fire spreads.

"Who maketh His angels Spirits; His ministers a flaming fire." Psalm 104:4. If you like, you can link on to that, "The fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field." Joel 1:19. The igniting power of fire is indeed terrible. Fire spreads with a remarkable rapidity. You know what a fire does to a forest or to a prairie when it breaks out.

O the power of one little flame, lit by the Holy Spirit in the bosom of the humblest. We think of what happened on the day of Pentecost. Peter, before Pentecost, was afraid to confess his Lord before a servant girl; and yet on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon him as fire, and because fire spreads, through the simple testimony he gave 3,000 were brought to the feet of Christ.

3. Fire illuminates.

"The shining of a flaming fire by night." Isaiah 4:5. "He was a burning and shining light." John 5:35. John the Baptist was that lamp burning and shining. Now, burning can stand for enthusiasm and deep spiritual experience. Shining can stand for knowledge and wisdom and intellect. I am glad that the burning comes first; experience before education. Where the two are combined, you have twin sisters. But of the two, let us have men of experience; men who know God; men who know something of the indwelling power of the Spirit of God; men who have hot hearts to tell about the love of Christ. John was first of all a burning light. Then he was a shining light. Fire illuminates. All of us are cognizant of the illuminating power of the Spirit of God. As the Spirit of light, the Holy Spirit operates in a three-fold way.

(1) He throws light upon the Word.

It is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit to illumine the Word He has inspired. He has the power to open our eyes that we may behold wondrous things out of God's Book. Perhaps you have stumbled across a certain truth and said, "Well, I never saw that in the Bible before." But it was there all of the time. Through the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit your eyes were opened to see that very thing. So the Holy Spirit is the illuminator and interpreter of the Word.

(2) He throws light upon our path.

If we are beset with problems and difficulties in life and service, we have an infallible guide in the Holy Spirit.

(3) He reveals sin.

We need not fear His illuminating power, for what the light reveals the precious blood can cleanse.

4. Fire consumes.

"And there rose up fire out of the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes." Judges 6:21. "For our God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:29. There burns within the heart of the Spirit, a Divine hatred for sin. Fire is expressive of the Divine judgment upon sin.

5. Fire softens.

"For God maketh my heart soft." Job 23:16. This is a wonderful expression. The difficulty is that we are too hard for God to use. We do not know the mellowing, softening power of the Spirit of God.

A splendid illustration of the fact that fire softens is found in the steel mills. There the cold, hard iron is plunged into the fiery furnace, from which it runs out as a molten stream, and then the moulder can shape his metal as he desires. He can divert the molten stream into various channels and make all kinds of things. So, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to break up all that is hard in these natures of ours, and shape us as He desires.

6. Fire purifies.

"He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." Malachi 3:3. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire." I Peter 1:7. How does the Holy Spirit purify? He purifies by separation. That is how the refiner purifies his metal. How does the refiner know that his metal is ready for him to use? Well, he tempers the fire and then as the hard silver is made liquid and the fire operates, and the dross gradually comes to the surface, he keeps on separating the dross from the silver; skims the surface as the dross is forced out of the metal through the action of the fire. He skims the surface, removes the dross, and when ultimately he sees his face reflected in the molten metal, he knows that it is ready. The Holy Spirit keeps on separating the dross from the metal in our lives, and He will keep on with that work until He can see the face of Christ Whom He loves to magnify and to glorify.

In writing to the Thessalonian Christians, Paul exhorted them, saying, "Quench not the Spirit." The thought expressed in this verse seems to have been that of putting out a fire. A fire may be quenched or extinguished by various methods.

- (1) By putting too much green wood on it.
- (2) By failure to add any fuel to it.
- (3) By dousing it with water.
- (4) By smothering it.
- (5) By separating the various pieces in it.

How may we quench the Holy Spirit?

1. By doing what the Spirit has forbidden.
2. By lack of proper attention to Him.

When the Spirit is denied the necessary fuel, in the form of prayer and meditation on the Word of God, He is quenched.

3. By attempting service without waiting upon Him.
4. By rejecting the light that is given us.

We are responsible for receiving and obeying the light which He gives.

5. By refusing to do His bidding.
 - (1) Failing to respond to His calls for service.
 - (2) Failing to enter a door which He has opened.

Upon each of us Christians devolves the solemn responsibility of seeing that this heavenly fire shall not be quenched by any act of ours. The manifestation of the Spirit in the church or in the individual, whether it be in praise, in prayer, or in preaching, must not be quenched. Some older people by unsympathetic criticism greatly discourage some young people who are trying their best to serve the Lord faithfully. One devoted young man gave a stumbling testimony for Christ, and a fault-finding older person said to him, "You should be ashamed of yourself." He kindly replied, "I am ashamed of myself, but I am not ashamed of my Lord." May we never be guilty of discouraging others in the service of the Lord.