

Francis Chan Talks About the Holy Spirit

✖ In his

latest DVD release, *Holy Spirit*, part of the *BASIC* series, Francis Chan challenges the church to allow the Holy Spirit to lead. Here he discusses this oftentimes misunderstood and sometimes dividing topic.

Q: You

wrote a book in 2009 on the Holy Spirit called *The Forgotten God*. Now you have a film from the *BASIC* series on the Holy Spirit. Why all of this emphasis on the Holy Spirit?

A: I received a lot

of questions about why I titled the book *The Forgotten God*.

Some thought it was a bit extreme. I

don't think so. From my perspective, the Holy Spirit is tragically neglected

and, for all practical purposes, forgotten. That's why I have a book and a film

on the subject. While no evangelical would

deny His existence, I'm willing to bet there are millions of churchgoers across

America who cannot confidently say they have experienced His presence or action

in their lives over the past year. And many of them do not believe they can.

Perhaps we're

too familiar and comfortable with the current state of the church to feel the

weight of the problem. But what if you grew up on a desert island with nothing

but the Bible to read? Imagine being rescued after 20 years

and then attending
a typical evangelical church. Chances are you'd be shocked
(for a whole lot of
reasons, but that is another story). Having read the
Scriptures outside the
context of contemporary church culture, you would be convinced
that the Holy
Spirit is as essential to a believer's existence as air is to
staying alive.
You would know that the Spirit led the first Christians to do
unexplainable
things, to live lives that didn't make sense to the culture
around them, and
ultimately to spread the story of God's grace around the
world.

There is a big
gap between what we read in Scripture about the Holy Spirit
and how most
believers and churches operate today. In many modern churches,
you would be
stunned by the apparent absence of the Spirit in any manifest
way. And this, I
believe, is the crux of the problem.

**Q: Don't most Christians already know about
the Holy Spirit?**

A: Whole
denominations have been built around specific beliefs about
the Holy Spirit. I
know people who have lost jobs at churches and Christian
colleges because of
their beliefs about the Holy Spirit. I even had a girl break
up with me while I
was in seminary because we believed differently about Him! It
is not one of
those issues that is easy to float over. This is especially

true if you belong
to a particular “camp” with a specific belief or bent.

Which is why I
ask this question: Are you willing to pursue truth in your
journey to know and
be known by the Holy Spirit? Do you have enough humility to be
open to the
possibility that you have been wrong in your understanding of
the Spirit? It’s
easy to get into “defensive mode,” where you quickly disagree
and turn to proof
texts and learned arguments to defend what you’ve always
believed. Rather than
guarding your perspective, consider taking a fresh look at
familiar passages to
make sure you haven’t missed something. You may end up with
the same theology
you’ve always had, but maybe you won’t. Don’t let your views
be determined by a
particular denomination or by what you’ve always been told.
Within the context
of relationship with other believers, seek out what God has
said about His
Spirit. Open up your mind and your life to the leading of the
Spirit,
regardless of what others may think or assume about you.

Q: What does it mean to “quench” the Spirit?

A: You’re
probably familiar with God’s command in 1 Thessalonians 5:19,
“Do not quench
the Spirit.” Do you know what it means? For years I never gave
it much thought.
I didn’t take the time to explore what this meant and how I
could be guilty of
this sin.

I look back now and realize I not only quenched the Spirit, but I also violated the next verse: "Do not treat prophecies with contempt" (1 Thess. 5:20, NIV). I had contempt toward anyone who claimed to have "a word from the Lord." I felt it was a righteous contempt because I'd seen people use the phrase "I have a word from the Lord" to manipulate others for personal gain. Cult leaders use the phrase to secure followers and increase their own authority. How can you disagree or even have a discussion with someone who claims they heard directly from God?

So I was against all of it. I was disturbed by any claim of prophetic speech. Looking back, I believe my concerns were valid but my actions were not. The biblical response would have been to "test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thess. 5:21-22). Rather than rejecting the possibility of God supernaturally speaking through people, I should have tested what I was hearing in the context of faithful community.

On the flip side, if churches that practice prophetic utterances were quicker to reject the false prophets and prophecies by calling them out on their biblical inconsistencies ("avoiding evil"), then maybe the conservative world would be less skeptical about prophecy. Some conservatives may quench the Spirit by ignoring His working, but surely putting unbiblical words into the mouth of God is a form of quenching the Spirit as well. We need the Spirit

in order to live faithfully. But we also need each other as we work out our faith.

Q: How can you tell if a Christian gathering is empowered by the Holy Spirit?

A: Sometimes I leave Christian events wondering if we resemble the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18 more than Elijah. The prophets of Baal had a loud, passionate worship gathering that lasted from morning till evening. When they were done, they had a great time of fellowship (I think you can call it that). But “no one answered; no one paid attention” (1 Kin. 18:29). After all of that, Elijah prayed. God heard his prayer, and fire came down from heaven.

My favorite part of that story comes when it is all over and the prophets of Baal are saying, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!” (1 Kin. 18:39, NIV). They didn’t say, “Elijah is a great speaker” or “Elijah sure knows how to connect with God!” They were stunned by *God*. They were in awe of His power. They knew that what they experienced could not have been manipulated by Elijah. They experienced the power of God.

Is that what happens at the Christian gatherings you attend? Or does it feel more like what the prophets of Baal experienced before Elijah prayed? We can have a great time singing and dancing ourselves into a frenzy. But at the end of it, fire doesn’t come down from heaven. People leave talking about the people who led

rather than the
power of God.

**Q: What if the Holy Spirit calls *me* to radical, bold living?
My Christian friends will think I'm crazy!**

A: My hope
and prayer for you is that church people don't try to
normalize you. What I
mean is that in American churches we often try to calm people
down who are just
too passionate or too sacrificial and radical. I know at times
I have done this
to other people. And I've had it done to me.

Two years ago at a dinner I sat next to a man who runs
a human-trafficking awareness organization. He described how
these children,
most of whom were sold or abducted into the sex trade, are
raped and abused
every single night, again and again, how they have no one to
advocate for them,
and how there is no way out.

That night I lay awake in my bed for hours—literally
hours—and I imagined my own children in this situation. Maybe
that was a stupid
thing to do, but suddenly, vividly, I was sobbing and I
couldn't get the images
out of my mind. I started thinking about what I would do if
this really happened
to my little girl. I know that I wouldn't stop until I had
saved her. I would
mobilize everyone I know through whatever means possible to
get them to help.
Lying there in my bed that night I got more and more
passionate about
everything I would do to save my little girl.

Then something happened. I am not one of those people who often hears God's distinct, clear voice (though I know some people do), but on this night, the Spirit of God said to me: *I want you to love them as your own children.* This was overwhelming to me. After all, if I treated these kids as though they were my own, I wouldn't stop praying for them. I also wouldn't stop passionately begging people to figure out ways to seek them out and rescue them. I literally wept for hours. The thought of these precious children of mine being taken advantage of was unbearable. I was now on a mission. A mission from God.

I remember getting back to Cornerstone Church and "rallying the troops." I was so fired up, and I got others fired up. But, over the course of several months I got distracted. People around me started calming me down about sex trafficking. They said, "Francis, you can't save the world" and "You're already doing so much. Don't be so hard on yourself."

Things like this happen all the time. As a church, we tend to do this to people who are passionate and bold. We mellow them out. Institutionalize them. Deadend them to the work that the Spirit is doing in them. Instead of encouraging people who are doing courageous things for God and joining them in their discernment process of how to be faithful to what God is calling them to, we tell them to slow down and back off.

Don't let other churchgoers dissuade you from your call. May you stand strong as you move toward passionate love and sacrifice!

Q: How has the Holy Spirit called your family to live more boldly?

A: My wife and I recently decided to give all of the royalties from my previous book, *Crazy Love*, to a fund called the Isaiah 58 Fund. All of the money goes to the needy in the world—the starving, sick, impoverished, and to those in the sex slave trade. We reasoned that if we kept all this money, we would end up spending it on things we didn't need. We knew that in the long run (80 years from now), there would be no regrets. But if we bought things that wouldn't last beyond our time on earth, we would end up disappointed and regretful. I was a bit shocked and discouraged by some of the responses we received.

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