

Why We Must Stop Quenching the Spirit's Fire

The first Pentecost was an abrupt heavenly invasion. It wasn't planned in a staff meeting; it came "suddenly," according to Acts 2:2. The noise of wind was not on the program; neither were flames of holy fire.

No one in that prayer meeting in the upper room in Jerusalem expected to speak in a supernatural language. Certainly Peter didn't expect to give his unrehearsed sermon; I'm sure he was surprised when 3,000 people were converted. The church was born in a moment of unearthly, unimagined strangeness.

How would we respond today if God wanted to repeat the miracle of Pentecost in one of our carefully scripted Sunday meetings? I wonder if we would embrace the wildness of that Acts 2 moment. Would we welcome the holy chaos? Or would we tell the Spirit to sit down and behave Himself?

We will celebrate Pentecost this year on June 5. If God wants to do this miracle again, would we make room for it? I fear we have enacted so many human controls that the Spirit is totally left out of our Sunday experience. If we don't give Him free rein, worship can become a man-made ritual that is stripped of God's power.

The apostle Paul warned us not to "quench" the Spirit in 1 Thessalonians 5:19. "Quench" means to extinguish a fire. Many of our churches today have been equipped with state-of-the-art fire extinguishers that do a professional job of eliminating any risk of a holy outbreak. Let's be mindful of the most common ways that we quench the Holy Spirit:

We ignore the Holy Spirit. Many churches today make no mention of the Spirit. He is, as author Francis Chan says, the "forgotten God." We play it safe by focusing on Jesus and

salvation—yet we forget that Jesus talked repeatedly about the Spirit. And it was Jesus who told His followers that they must be “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49b). We are not being faithful to Christ if we don’t take people into the deeper waters of the Spirit that He Himself promised.

We limit the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are thousands of churches in this country that teach that the gifts of the Spirit no longer function. Even though the apostle Paul said, “Do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39, MEV) and “Do not despise prophecies” (1 Thess. 5:20), speaking in tongues and prophecy are off-limits—along with healing and miracles.

It was a lack of faith that created the doctrine known as “cessationism.” Respected Bible teachers have convinced whole sectors of the church that God no longer operates supernaturally. Christianity has been reduced to an intellectual argument, devoid of power. And even in churches that wear the Pentecostal label, we have created such tight controls on our meetings that the gifts can’t function.

We misuse or abuse the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We Pentecostals and charismatics have sometimes quenched the Spirit more than evangelicals who deny His power. We have whacked people to the floor to prove our “anointing,” manipulated audiences with mood music, used fancy titles to fake apostolic authority and manufactured counterfeit miracles to con people to give in offerings.

God forgive us. We cannot use the Spirit or His gifts to achieve our selfish agenda. Either we submit to His plan, or He withdraws and lets us play our silly games.

We misrepresent the Holy Spirit. How often have we heard, “Thus says the Lord,” or “God told me this,” when the Spirit had nothing to do with the message we cooked up on our own. When we give the Spirit credit for messages that did not

originate from Him, we take the Lord's name in vain. We have allowed polished, unbroken preachers to mislead us with flattery, manipulation, exotic visions and promises of wealth.

We divide the Holy Spirit. When the apostle Paul corrected the Corinthians for quenching the Spirit, he addressed sexual sin and the abuse of spiritual gifts. But first He challenged them on the way they were treating each other. "Has Christ been divided?" he asked in 1 Corinthians 1:13a (NASB 1995). We grieve the Spirit when we judge each other, build walls, divide ourselves racially, follow personalities or create camps according to our pet doctrines.

The secret of Pentecost is found in Acts 2:1b (KJV): "They were all with one accord in one place." Can that be said of us today? We are divided between Black and white, white and Hispanic, Republican and Democrat, Protestant and Catholic, denominational and nondenominational, evangelical and Pentecostal. We are fragmented and weak. We have quenched the Spirit with our disunity.

Please join me over the next 10 days to pray for a new Pentecost. Let's throw away our fire extinguishers and invite a fresh heavenly flame to engulf the church. {eo}

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