

To Avoid Charismatic Excesses, These Pastors Actually Quenched the Spirit

As I stated in a recent post, I, like many Christians, tend to be “safely” conservative when considering the power of the Holy Spirit. However, Scripture clearly supports the miraculous work of the Spirit today.

I’m open but cautious. We need sound doctrine and the power of the Holy Spirit. But it is possible to be “Bible taught,” but not “Spirit led”—straight as a gun barrel theologically, but just as empty. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (see 2 Cor. 3:6).

Don’t get me wrong, theological and expositional teachings are essential to Christian living, but how often are theology students encouraged to fast and pray as well as study? How often are they taught brokenness and repentance in addition to translating the Greek language? We can sometimes be more concerned about a master’s degree than a degree from the Master.

The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures and empowered Jesus and the Apostles. We are desperately remiss if we fail to recognize His vital role in our lives. I agree with Leonard Ravenhill, “We need to close every church in the land for one Sunday and cease listening to a man so we can hear the groan of the Spirit which we in our lush pews have forgotten.”

Sadly, we often pray on the run and scurry through a 5-minute devotional, yet we devote hours to television, movies and the Internet, and we wonder why we know little of the power of the Spirit. R.A. Torrey (friend of D.L. Moody) said, “We must spend much time on our knees before God if we are to continue in the power of the Holy Spirit.” The only thing holding many

churches together today is social activity, not the activity of the Spirit.

I knew a pastor who instructed his worship leader to remove most of the songs that mentioned the Holy Spirit, or that were “too emotional,” and another pastor who removed songs about the blood of Christ. How sad ... in their zeal to avoid charismatic excesses and offensive truths, these pastors actually quenched and grieved the Spirit.

A.W. Tozer insightfully said, “If the Lord’s people were only half as eager to be filled with the Spirit as they are to prove that they cannot be filled, the church would be crowded out.” I sincerely believe that the greatest need in the church today is to confess our sins, obey the Word, and to be filled with the Spirit.

Christians can embrace one of two extremes concerning the Holy Spirit. At one extreme are those who embrace pure emotionalism and hysteria—“if it’s odd, it’s God”—all weird behavior is excused. The other extreme lacks a living, vibrant spiritual life. The church feels dead, cold and lifeless. Talk of reviving the things of God (revival) is either dismissed or ridiculed. Both extremes can hinder the work of the Holy Spirit and genuine Christian growth.

I will primarily address the first extreme where I have viewed videos of people supposedly “getting high,” “toking” and “drunk” on the Holy Ghost. This is not the same as being filled with the Spirit of God (cf. Eph. 5:18). And I have seen video footage of people being led around like dogs on a leash and acting like animals. Yes, I’m serious ... bizarre and grossly unbiblical manifestations are not reflective of one filled with the Spirit. Those truly filled with the Spirit seek to reflect the nature of God.

When questioned about extremes in this type of odd behavior, there are no answers that find support in Scripture. Common

responses are, "I know it seems bizarre, but" Or "I know it's weird, but" Or "You're quenching and grieving the Spirit by not being open." These are not biblically sound responses for such bizarre manifestations.

The Holy Spirit is not quenched when we honor God's Word and "test the spirits, whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). He is quenched and grieved when we do not test and discern—when we allow the Holy Spirit to be misrepresented. The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:15, said that we are to judge, or discern, all things.

Scriptures are often used in an attempt to support very odd behavior. For example, Acts 2:15 states, "For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day," and John 18:6 records that men "drew back and fell to the ground" when Jesus surrendered Himself shortly before His death. These Scriptures, when used to validate wild, ranting fanaticism, are incorrect and misleading.

Granted, we cannot dismiss the truly miraculous works of God that happen daily, nor can we minimize the incredible power of God to radically change lives through the power of the Spirit. However, in our zeal and excitement we often minimize the need for discernment.

A discerning person considers supernatural experiences in light of God's Word, nature and character. They ask, "Is there genuine fruit? Does the experience align with God's Word? Is the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5 present: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?"

A true, genuine experience with the Holy Spirit will produce godly fruit and obedience to God. It seeks to promote those things that are pure and/or righteous. A word of caution here: Even those in the New Age movement experience powerful feelings of love and euphoria, but it doesn't draw them closer

to Christ or lead to repentance or surrender to the true God.

Although sincere, we can be sincerely wrong and seriously misled. Having an experience or being enlightened can create “feel good” emotions, but it does not necessarily mean that it is right. Even though there is flexibility and freedom, our experiences must align with the Scriptures and the character of God. “We should not interpret Scripture in the light of our experiences, but rather, interpret our experiences in the penetrating light of Scripture” (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

For part one of this series, click here.

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Watch my sermon on Youtube, *A Pastor’s Thoughts on John MacArthur’s Strange Fire Conference*, here.

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