

# (Power From on High) 18. the Holy Spirit in Thessalonians

by A.B. Simpson

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*The Holy Spirit's power, joy, and sanctification are essential for our salvation and spiritual growth, and we must be careful not to quench His Spirit through disobedience and sin.*

**Scripture:** John 14:26, Acts 1:8, Romans 15:13, 1 Corinthians 12:7, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:19

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "The Work of the Holy Spirit"

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## Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the transformative power of the Holy Spirit as depicted in Thessalonians, highlighting three key aspects: the Spirit's power, joy, and sanctification. He explains that the Holy Spirit's power is essential for true conversion and the spreading of the Gospel, while the joy of the Holy Spirit transcends circumstances, providing strength even in affliction. Simpson warns against quenching the Spirit, urging believers to embrace the Spirit's leading and to avoid disobedience that could hinder their spiritual growth and the work of God in their lives. He calls for a full surrender to the Holy Spirit, recognizing that sanctification is a divine work that requires our cooperation and commitment. Ultimately, the sermon serves as a reminder of the importance of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life and the collective life of the Church.

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## Transcript

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost." 1 Thess. 1: 5.

"Having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost." 1Thess. 1: 6.

"God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." 1 Thess. 2: 13.

"Quench not the Spirit." 1 Thess. 5: 19.

The first three of these four passages present to us three aspects of the work of the Holy Ghost; as the Spirit of power, of joy, and of holiness, and the last passage presents the practical side of the question and the solemn danger of our quenching the Holy Ghost.

I. THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT.

The apostle attributes the conversion of the Thessalonian Christians to the power of the Holy Ghost. His work among them was accompanied with extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit's convicting and converting power. Speaking of it again, the apostle says, "Yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain; when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

So wonderful was their awakening and turning to God, that he could say of them: "From you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

These wonderful results the apostle attributes entirely to the power of the Holy Ghost, accompanying the word of God, and giving it such authority that they received it, not as the word of man, but as a direct message from the living God.

This is the first element in the power of the Spirit, that it takes the worker and the speaker quite out of view, and brings the hearer face to face with the authority of God.

This is what Paul means, when he says that his word came to them with much assurance. This means, literally, much boldness. He spoke to them as a messenger direct from heaven, and they so received him. His message was not with wisdom of words, nor studied rhetoric, but with divine authority. How much of our preaching is with words only -- logical words, rhetorical words, well-uttered words, perhaps pathetic words, words that move to tears or to enthusiasm, but only words!

The Holy Spirit's power leads men beyond all forms of expression, to the substance of God's great message of repentance and salvation, and the necessity of immediate decision and obedience. It makes people do something, and do it at once and forever.

The word for power here is dynamite. It is the kind of power that breaks up things. It breaks up the conscience and convicts it of sin. It breaks up the heart and melts it to repentance. It breaks the will into surrender and choice. It breaks the fetters of sin, the habits of life, and the bonds of Satan.

Not only does it speak to men in much assurance, but it produces in them the same assurance. It makes them to know that God is speaking, to know that they are sinners, to know that they are lost, and then to know that they are saved.

Beloved, have we felt this convicting, converting, transforming power? Fellow-workers, is this our reliance, our supreme and sole dependence for the salvation of men, and the service of our King?

## II. THE JOY OF THE SPIRIT.

One of the first results of the conversion of the Thessalonians was the spirit of joy. "Ye received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost."

The spirit of gladness is one of the immediate fruits of the Holy Ghost. The new life is essentially a joy-life, banishing the very elements of sorrow and gloom, and bringing us into the light of an everlasting sunshine.

The joy of the Holy Ghost is not a natural emotion and it is not dependent upon favorable circumstances or pleasant surroundings. In the present case, their joy is in an immediate contact and contrast with much affliction. They had everything to try them -- persecution, the loss of friends, the danger of even death itself; but the very extremity of their affliction only developed a deeper and diviner joy.

So it ever is. Christian life is an everlasting paradox; sorrowful yet always rejoicing; poor yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

It is an inexplicable mystery. The world cannot understand it; the world cannot give it, and, thank God, the world cannot take it away. We cannot understand it ourselves. It is a song in the night, that gives no other reason for its singing than that the song is there. It is a fountain in the desert, that flows from no visible source, and empties into no earthly outlet, and runs according to no prescribed channel. It is an artesian well that bursts from the rocky depths, and flows on without the mechanism of pumps, or endless chains, or human buckets, or hands. It is glad, just because there is a gladness there that came from heaven and belongs to heaven and lives in heaven forever.

It is a blessed heritage. It is a fortune to its possessor, even amid the depths of penury. It is an antidote to temptation and sin. It lifts us above the power of evil and holds us in the impregnable heights of peace and victory. It is a balm for sickness and pain, and a holy elixir for nerve and brain and every outward ill. It is an inspiration for service, and gives an irresistible emphasis to our appeals to the sin-sick and sorrowing world; it is vain to call the lost and weary to the gates of mercy, when the telltale countenance, the tired manner, and the sepulchral tone assure them, that they are happier than we. The joy of the Lord is our strength, not only for holiness, but for health, and happiness, and holy influence on other hearts and lives, and in all our work for God and man.

Beloved, open your heart and receive the joy of the Spirit.

### III. THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT.

The first thing that strongly impresses an ordinary and candid reader of this verse is the strong and universal language in which sanctification is here spoken of as an essential part of our salvation.

It is stated in the most unambiguous language that we are "chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." We are not chosen to salvation irrespective of our spiritual condition, but we are chosen to those conditions; and one of the essential conditions is sanctification of the Spirit.

How any man or woman can expect salvation, and yet be indifferent to his sanctification, is very hard to understand. The salvation consists largely in the sanctification itself, for thus, and thus alone are we saved from the virulent and soul destroying power of sin.

Sanctification is here attributed to the Holy Spirit. It is His work, not ours; it is as much a part of the free gift of God in Christ as our justification and forgiveness. In the previous epistle, fifth chapter, twenty-third verse, its nature is very fully expressed in the apostle's prayer: "The very God of peace, or the God of peace Himself, sanctify you through and through; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." God Himself must do this work, and He does it through the blessed Holy Ghost.

The word, sanctify, has three specific meanings; namely, to separate from, dedicate to, and fill with.

First, we must lay off, and separate from, the old life of self and sin. There are some things we cannot consecrate to God, but we must lay them down. The old sin-offering could not be laid on the altar -- it was unclean, because the sin of the people had been transferred to it; it must be carried outside the camp and there burned with fire in the place of judgment. And so we cannot consecrate our sin and our sinfulness to God. We must renounce it; we must lay it off; we must die to it; we must be separated from it.

Then, secondly, comes the dedication to God. This is the place for consecration. This is the place for the burnt-offering. That was laid on the altar and accepted as a sweet-smelling savor. And so when we have separated from our sinful self, we offer our new life in Christ to God in entire dedication, and He accepts it as a sweet savor. But even then it is nothing but a consecrated will, a mere possibility, an empty vessel, clean, but empty still, and the very power to make the consecration worth anything to God, must come from God Himself. He has the vessel, but He must fill it and keep it full. And so this is the third meaning of sanctification. It is the filling of the Holy Ghost, who takes our consecrated will, our clean and empty vessel and all the possibilities of our new and yielded life, and so unites them to Jesus, and fills them with the very life of Jesus, that we just live out the life of Christ from day to day, and we shed forth the fullness which the Holy Ghost supplies within.

Our life is not our own, but "of His fullness have we received, even grace for grace."

Now this is the sanctification of the Spirit. It is His peculiar province thus to sanctify the souls that have been justified through the grace and the blood of Christ.

First, He shows the soul its need of sanctification, its inherent and hopeless sinfulness, and its utter inability to bring a clean thing out of an unclean, or live a holy life, with an unholy heart. Next, He shows us God's provision for our sanctification in the free gift of Christ, the efficacy of His atonement for the death of our old self, the power of His blood, and the willingness of the Holy Spirit to undertake this work, to cleanse our heart, and to dwell within it. Then He leads us to the next step -- a glad and full surrender and committal of our soul to Him for this blessed work, an unreserved separation from all evil, and an equally unreserved dedication of our all to God, and to His perfect will.

Then He accepts us, and makes real the transaction into which we have entered; by full surrender and appropriating faith, He puts to death our old life of self and sin and He enters and dwells within our consecrated heart, uniting us to Jesus, filling us with His own all-sufficient grace and presence, and leading us henceforth moment by moment, in constant dependence upon His glorious grace.

In one sense, this work is instantaneous; it has a definite beginning and a moment in which we count it all eternally settled. In another sense, it is progressive, as He leads us on from step to step, from strength to strength, from grace to grace, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

As each new revelation of light comes, He calls for new obedience and new advances; yet while we walk in the light, we are fully accepted according to the light we have, and counted holy and well-pleasing in His sight.

It is after we receive His sanctification and enter into perfect union with Him, that our real growth begins; and the church of Christ has yet to learn the depths and heights and lengths and breadths of the fullness of life in the Spirit, as the providence of God makes new situations for the obedient disciple from day to day, and the Holy Ghost fits us into them by His all-sufficient grace.

#### IV. THE PRACTICAL APPEAL.

"Quench not the Spirit."

In view of these three blessed aspects of the Spirit's work, how tender and solemn the appeal: "Quench not the Spirit"! While this primarily refers to the Church collectively, it may also be true of the believer individually.

It is possible for us, as private Christians, so to misunderstand, hinder, and disobey the loving leadings of the gentle Holy Ghost, that we shall quench His holy fires and disappoint His great purposes of love.

I do not say that a soul that truly believes in Jesus Christ will be lost at last, but, beloved, it may lose very much of what salvation ought to mean. It is one thing to be lost; it is another thing to lose our crown, and our Father's highest will; the Scriptures are full of loving warnings against the danger of coming short of our full inheritance, and losing aught of our full reward.

The Holy Ghost is like a sensitive lover. A woman's heart is not won by a violent assault, but by the gentle approaches of respectful, sensitive, and considerate love; and, at any point along the way, she can check and chill the advances of the heart that woos her, until, at last, she quenches the love that would have laid all at her feet. And so the Holy Ghost comes to us, with respectful and gentle monitions. He will accept no sacrifice which is not freely given, He will require no obedience that is not gladly rendered. But He does ask us for sacrifice and obedience as the proof of our love, and He does place us in situations of perplexity and trial, through which alone we can receive the training which His love designs for us.

Now here it is that disobedience and refusal may come in. We may shrink from His gentle leading; we may refuse the trial through which He would bring us to some glorious victory; we may choose the easier path, and shun the dreaded cross; but, in so doing, we grieve the Holy Ghost; we arrest our own progress; we compel our God to wait until we are ready to go forward with Him, and after a while we may so wear out His patient love, that He shall find us unfit to receive the blessing He designed for us, and while we may not lose our soul, we shall be rejected from our crown.

There are souls that have lost something out of their life forever, and, perhaps, have become so hardened that they do not even know what they have lost.

It is possible to take a piece of iron, red-hot, and then plunge it into the water and cool it, and do this so many times, that, at last, the very metal scales off like ashes, and the temper and substance of the iron is corroded and destroyed.

It is possible to wear out our hearts by disobedience and repeated chills of divine love, until, at last, there is nothing left but dross.

Oh, let us be careful how we play with the voice of God, and the infinite, everlasting gentleness and love of the mother heart of the Holy Ghost! "Quench not the Spirit."

You may do it by disobedience; you may do it by distrust; you may do it by self-indulgence and cowardly softness; you may do it by yielding to temptation; you may do it by going into the world and selling your birthright for a mess of pottage; you may do it by petulance, irritation, an angry look, a hasty word; you may do it by impatience and rebellion against the hand of God. Let us be careful. Resist not the Spirit. Grieve not the Spirit. Quench not the Spirit.

And, finally, we may quench the Spirit in others. We may hinder the work of God in human souls. We may hold back the Church of Christ from victory. We may paralyze the whole body by keeping one or two members in a state of chronic disease.

So Moses, Joshua, and Caleb were kept back for forty years by Israel's unbelief. So the Church is kept back today from the fullness of Pentecostal power, by the weakness of so large a part of the body of Christ. And so, many a soul is cramped, or chilled, or even seduced from God's high purpose and the Spirit's holy calling by the mistaken love, or the thoughtless and unholy influence of some one that called himself a friend.

God saves us from the fearful guilt of not only sinning, but causing others to sin. God help us to fan the flame of divine life and power in our own and other hearts, until it shall burn, not only with the light of Pentecost, but as the beacon watch fire of the Advent Morning.

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