

On Quenching the Spirit

by Charles Finney

Quenching the Spirit means to extinguish the light and heat that the Spirit gives to the mind, leading to serious consequences such as judicial blindness, dark atheistic state, and strong delusion.

Scripture: Psalm 51:11, Matthew 12:31-32, John 14:26, Acts 7:51, Romans 8:9, Galatians 5:16-17, Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Hebrews 10:29, James 4:7

Topics: "Obedience to God", "Quenching the Spirit"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the critical importance of not quenching the Holy Spirit, explaining that the Spirit provides both illumination and warmth to the believer's heart. He outlines various ways individuals can extinguish this divine influence, including disobedience, procrastination, yielding to temptation, and harboring negative emotions. Finney warns that quenching the Spirit leads to severe consequences, such as spiritual blindness and a hardened heart, ultimately resulting in a loss of connection with God. He urges listeners to recognize the urgency of responding to the Spirit's call and to seek God's guidance fervently. The sermon serves as a powerful reminder of the necessity of obedience and the dangers of neglecting the Spirit's work in our lives.

Transcript

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

In treating the subject presented in this passage, I shall,

I. Show what it is to quench the Spirit;

II. How it is done;

III. Some of the consequences of doing it.

I. The Bible represents the Spirit as giving to the mind both light and heat. It both illumines and impresses; both reveals the truth, and makes it seem real, and hence makes it effective as truth, upon the mind. Hence the fitness of the figure which on the day of Pentecost, presented the descending Spirit under the symbol of "cloven tongues like as of fire." Hence also the figure implied in our text--"Quench not"--as if it were a candle flame,--a fire, which might be extinguished. It is the office-work of the Spirit to enlighten the intellect, and at the same time to warm the sensibilities. This is indeed a most remarkable fact, that when the Spirit of God reveals light, it is done in a manner which always warms the sensibility. The mind is quite

as conscious of the latter influence upon the sensibilities as of the former upon the intellect. Beyond question, Christians are sometimes conscious of new views of truth, which they rightly attribute to the teaching of the Spirit; but not less clearly are they sometimes conscious of the animating and quickening influences of the Spirit, deeply rousing their sensibilities. Hence no figure can be more apposite than this. To quench this light and heat by counteracting and repelling the Spirit is the thing against which the text exhorts us.

II. But we must give a more minute attention to this question as to the manner in which the Spirit may be quenched.

I have said the Spirit causes the mind both to see and to feel. He convinces of sin. He strongly enforces obligation. The degree of impression made by the Spirit on the mind of course varies indefinitely, from the very slightest up to the broad and blazing sun-light which almost overwhelms the outward man.

The Spirit may be quenched in many ways.

1. By disregarding his teachings. When the Spirit reveals truth and urges duty upon the mind, then if the man turns away and refuses to obey, he quenches the Spirit. Often in pressing home truth upon the mind, the Spirit makes the sinner so uneasy, that he says, "I cannot endure this; I am not ready to yield now, and I cannot bear the perpetual urging. I must resist it." It often happens that students are so unhappy under the convicting influence of the Spirit that they declare they will not attend to the subject, but will harden their hearts against this disturbing and annoying influence. Perhaps to help on their purpose of diverting their attention, they will carry their study books into religious meetings, to occupy their minds in something else besides religious truth. Cases of this sort have occurred among us;--students have found their studies hindered by intruding thoughts of God and their soul's salvation, and have determined they would not have it so, and consequently have ruled the whole subject out of their mind. Others besides students may do the same thing perhaps for similar reasons;--the subject interferes with some cherished pursuit, and they would sooner risk the loss of heaven than bear the interruption of cherished sinful pleasures.

2. The Spirit is quenched often by the sinner's refusing obedience when the will of God is distinctly known. They see that if they would please God, they must do some particular duty, impressed on their mind so strongly they cannot doubt as to the divine will; but they refuse to do it. Thus they quench the Spirit, for it seems a fixed rule in God's spiritual administration that He does not strive by his Spirit long, in the face of direct and determined disobedience.

I must also say here that men may quench the Spirit when the mind is by no means definitely and consciously committed to disobedience. Perhaps the man is only conscious that he cares very little about obedience. He would not wish to insult God, but he cares so little about pleasing him that his mind settles down into a chronic stupidity. Under the influence of this, he sees God's demands only with great indistinctness and with the utmost unconcern. I need not say that such a state of mind repels the Holy Spirit, and quenches its sacred fire.

The cases are fearfully numerous in which men see with great clearness what God requires, and see that God has brought before them the distinct issue of eternal destiny, as hanging upon their present decision. Yet they reject God's counsel and rush on their own damnation. I have often seen cases of this kind in which persons have told me that they saw the dreadful issue, yet made the fearful plunge.

3. The Spirit is quenched by procrastination.

It is not their design to put the matter off forever, nor perhaps very long; but they have some selfish reason, for doing so, just at this time. Alas who knoweth what shall be on the morrow? This is one of the fatal ways to quench the Spirit.

4. By yielding to some temptation, the Spirit is often quenched. The temptation will often come in just that form which is, of all, most adapted to quench the Spirit. It may be the very object of the tempter to seduce you to do just the thing that will most surely and fatally repel the Divine Spirit forever from your heart. True to his genius and character, he will present it in a very seductive form. It will make its warm appeal to some long cherished indulgence. Then if you parley with the temptation instead of instantly repelling it, you are gone. If you allow yourself to linger in presence of the tempting good, and let your sensibilities to that good become excited, and do not try to hold strongly before your mind the great things of God, you have nothing to expect but a fearful fall before its power.

A distinction should be made, as to the matter of guilt, between being hurried suddenly into temptation before you can think and so yielding, and on the other hand, looking long and thoughtfully at the subject and then giving way deliberately to its influence. In the latter case the results must be terribly fearful.

Often men give way to some worldly motive, and thereby so fundamentally decide the question as between their own souls and God, that the Spirit is quenched, and withdraws in despair of success. I could name cases where men have yielded to political motives, and other cases where they have yielded to business motives. They were sufficiently enlightened in their duty; they saw the will of God revealed plainly enough, but the temptation came, and they yielded. Some very striking cases have come under my personal observation, and I have lived to mark the results. I have lived to see that these men, giving way to the temptation of some strong political or business motive, have turned away from God fatally and forever, and God has withdrawn from them--to return no more. "Woe unto them--saith the Most High, when I depart from them."

In some cases sinners give way to the fear of man. It may happen that some other sinner has great influence over him; the latter dare not displease his companion;--indeed would sooner displease God than this poor sinner under whose influence he has suffered himself to fall. Some issue will be made by the Spirit of God; the Spirit will present and press the claims of the gospel, and then there is no alternative but to sacrifice the favor of this wicked friend or the favor of God. Such issues are often made as between the claims of God and the influence of some individual. The simple question is--Whom will you serve? Will you serve God, or God's enemy?

You may remark in such cases the truth which has ten thousand illustrations in the moral world--that the Spirit of God never shuns, but rather seeks fundamental issues--issues of such a sort as decide the main question pending between God and the sinner. It is his business to bring this great question to a decision as between God and the sinner. Hence, he does not shrink from pressing his claims because the question may bring on a fundamental issue. You have often found it so. The question comes up in your mind--Shall the fear of God or the fear of man, control me? An issue, made in this form, is in its own nature fundamental and decisive. Whoever dishonors God by preferring man's honor before his, cuts his acquaintance, to use a familiar phrase; he cuts the friendship of the Almighty and casts him off. Insulting as he does the majesty of God, how can it be otherwise? Shall the great God submit to have others, such as sinning and mean men, preferred before Himself, and this too in the vital respect of honor and obedience? If He were to submit to such an insult, what would become of his kingdom?

5. Men quench the Spirit by self-indulgence. Men are often brought to see that their self-indulgent habits are displeasing to God. When this is the case, they come into a fearful trial. Shall they yield to the demands of self-indulgence, or resisting these demands, shall they yield to God? This becomes oftentimes the great crisis of their lives.

Some of you recollect the case of a young man once a student here, who under the influences of the Spirit, became greatly agonized on the question of using tobacco. At one time he tried to laugh it off; at another tried to justify himself by pleading the example of many good man; but when all these pleas availed not, he yielded at last, and said he would do God's will, cost what it might. He afterwards said to me, most emphatically, "I have no doubt I should have gone to hell, if I had held on and resisted God through that struggle. It was the crisis of my destiny."

I have in mind another case of a man who visited me. He said as he entered,--"I have a particular errand in making this call upon you, and yet I have scarcely strength to tell you my case. The dreadful conflict in my soul has almost crushed me." He spent some days with me. When he came to be able to relate his story, he said in substance,--"I have been in the habit of using tobacco a long time. At length I saw an article in some paper, which set forth the evils and the sin of the practice. I was convicted. I saw those evils developing themselves in my own system. I felt convicted of the sin of this mischievous and sensual indulgence, and resolved to discontinue it. But ere long temptation came; I yielded, and returned to my guilty self-indulgence. What was the result? I fell to the very depths of moral impotence; I seemed to have lost all power to resist not only this temptation, but every other form of temptation. In fact the Spirit of God seems to have utterly departed from me."

Some of you may be disposed to sneer at this as a trifling thing; but mark! it can be no trifle to decide a great fundamental question as between yourself and God!

Suppose a child takes issue with his father. It may be about the merest trifle; but no matter how small the thing in controversy may be; the question of obedience or disobedience is always great. When a child rebels against parental authority and takes issue on the question of authority, the results are momentous. Do you estimate the sin to be small because the indulgence promised in the temptation is insignificant and trifling? Will you yield to a temptation to displease God, and think it no harm because the temptation is so very small? Will you infer that God does not care how much you insult and disobey him, provided your temptation to do so is quite trifling! To think so is to mistake absurdity for argument. The smaller the temptation and the indulgence, the greater the guilt and the insult towards God when you prefer contemptibly small things to his favor, and to himself.

6. Persons quench the Spirit by indulging in hard thoughts and revengeful feelings. Let any man go down upon his knees in prayer to God, and while in this attitude and in these attempts, let him indulge in revengeful purposes. Can he pray any more? Certainly not, until he breaks down and repents. If one allows himself to brood over his fancied wrongs and cherish a revengeful feeling and purpose, it is vain for him to suppose that the Spirit of God can dwell in his bosom. The antipathy may fasten on some individual, or on bodies of men, or on some of the great reforms of the age; it is all the same as to the result--it must quench the Spirit of God. How strongly do some men speak and act in some things, showing that they are under the dominion of their prejudices. With such, the Spirit of God cannot dwell.

So also the indulgence of envious feeling quenches the Spirit. You see this sometimes among students. A few years since, there was a young man here who had a rare talent for public speaking, and some other

respectable talents besides. There were at that time several students here who allowed themselves to indulge in feelings of envy towards him. I had occasion to know that not one of them enjoyed the presence of God so long as they indulged this envious spirit.

A selfish ambition must have the same result. When a student is determined to rise in the world for purely selfish ends, he will surely quench the light of God in his soul.

When persons allow themselves in a censorious and contemptuous spirit, and give scope to their tongues to speak censoriously, they quench the light of God from their own souls. They can not have the Spirit of the Lord dwelling within.

When persons having done wrong refuse to make confession, and when satisfied of their own wrong, are yet too proud to confess, it cannot be otherwise than that they quench the Spirit. They may think God will overlook such sin as theirs, but they know not God if they think so.

Some do not directly refuse to make restitution, but put it off a long time. I know one man who has wronged his neighbor, and has refused to make restitution so far as I know up to this hour. I am certain he has not had any of the Spirit's presence since he perpetrated that foul wrong. Even if he should say he enjoyed the Spirit and should make his oath of it, I would not believe him. He might deceive himself, but he cannot deceive God; nor can he induce God to look with any favor upon his iniquity.

Again, men often quench the Spirit thus. A great public object comes before them, demanding pecuniary aid--as for example, raising the salary of a minister and some people dodge away and grieve the spirit of God.

In their public relations, men often quench the Spirit by political dishonesty. It is striking to observe how much room there is for this since the great social and moral reforms have come up to throw their influence and their demands into political life. Truly may it be said, these reforms are "set for the fall and rise of many in Israel." How searchingly do they put to the test the consciences of political men! And how fearfully do they harden many consciences--presenting moral claims which selfish men find it convenient to resist! You, young men, might go and preach to such seared consciences till you die, and never bring the first man of them to repentance. If from similar motives they do what they know is wrong;--if for party purposes they give way to political dishonesty--where are they?

Persons may commit themselves to the wrong side and thus throw themselves under an influence which is utterly adverse to their being led by the Spirit of God. --Men associate themselves together into parties, and by and by, their party takes a morally wrong position; then the whole strength of the party bond goes to bind them to wrong-doing and to harden their conscience against all appeals to do right. Suppose a minister should preach on political duties before such a body of men, and any one of them should see his own dreadful error and should begin to think seriously of turning from his evil way. Some one accosts him, saying--Will you be influenced in politics by the preacher? At once his pride is up; the party ties draw; he returns again to his iniquities.

Some men are influenced by what they call prudence, which is real unbelief. The amount of it is they judge merely after men and according to human views, and as if there were no God, or at least no reliance to be placed on what he has said. Must not such a course quench the Spirit?

Sometimes men trample down their religious feelings and put an extinguisher upon their emotions, and thus put out the light of God in their souls. If it be true, as I have said, that the Spirit gives heat as well as light; quickens the emotions as well as enlightens the understanding, then most clearly those who resolutely repress all religious emotions must quench the Spirit.

Yet again, men will quench the Spirit when they resist conviction of any question of duty. No matter how these impressions of duty may be made, whether immediately by the Spirit, or mediately by external providences, yet if they are resisted, the Spirit is driven away.

And finally some quench the Spirit by resenting reproof when they really need and deserve it.

In such ways as these men quench God's Spirit.

III. We must now consider some of the consequences.

1. Judicial blindness of the intellect is a natural result. The intellect becomes more dark and blind than ever before, even doubting and perhaps denying things which were clear before. It is most remarkable that truths, never before doubted are doubted now. Such persons lose confidence in the Bible and even in the very existence of God; declare that they have no confidence in anybody's piety, and even deny that there is anything as sincere benevolence. Such a state proves itself to be a judgment from God--for no mind in its normal, rational state can take such views as these. It is a dark atheistic state. God has given such men up to strong delusion that they may believe a lie. The reason why He has done so is that they would not receive the truth in love that they might be saved. They resisted and quenched the Spirit. They set at naught all the agencies God could wisely employ to save them--distorted all the truth He revealed to bless them; and now it only remains that their example of dark delusion and full damnation should be a beacon of warning to save other souls from that way of death.

It is only right and just that God should send strong delusion on such as will not obey the truth, and such as will neither honor nor cherish the work of his Spirit in their hearts. He has an unquestionable right to deliver them up as he did Ahab. Ahab, you recollect, would have his own way, although God told him he must not go and would lose his life if he did. Still he wanted to go--would go--went and was killed. You may recollect the circumstances. Ahab had years before been at war with Syria; there had now been a three years' suspension of hostilities. A certain city, called Ramoth Gilead, belonging of right to Ahab, had been during this armistice, in possession of Syria. Jehoshaphat of Judah makes Ahab a friendly visit. While there, it occurs to Ahab to propose to him to go up with him to help him recapture Ramoth Gilead, and he replies favorably. But in those days no king went to war without consulting his gods. Hence Jehoshaphat inquires if there are not some prophets of the Lord by whom they may consult the true God. Ahab replies--I have a host of prophets of Baal and of the groves; let them all be convened and questioned on this great matter. But, says Jehoshaphat, have you not some prophet of the Lord whom we may consult? "There is one," says Ahab, "but I hate him, for he never prophesies good for me, but only evil." Nay, says Jehoshaphat, but let him come also, and let us hear what he shall say from the Lord.

With one voice Baal's prophets said, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." Jehoshaphat, still unsatisfied, calls for the answer from the one adhering prophet of Jehovah. Micaiah knew how the case stood. Aware that Ahab had sold himself to do wickedly and that God was giving him up to his chosen delusions, he answered at first ironically--"Go and prosper"--as the false prophets had said. It is plain there was something in his tone and manner that showed Ahab that his words meant what they did not say, and therefore he replies--"How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing

but that which is true in the name of the Lord?" Then Micaiah, under the awful solemnity of his position, revealed to Ahab his true character and his impending doom. "Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord; I saw the Lord sitting on his throne and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left." I need not repeat what is written of the imagery of this scene; suffice it to say God suffered a lying spirit to go forth to lead Ahab on in his own cherished and chosen course. Yet even so, Ahab rejects this solemn warning from the Lord; though warned, he still persisted in his plan and met his death as God had said. So men are sometimes given up to judicial hardness and speedy ruin. They lose all sense of guilt; they seem desperately infatuated;--afloat on a sea of doubt and darkness, they speedily near the awful brink of death; you look for them, and they are gone!

In our days, the methods of delusion are slightly modified as compared with those which obtained in the days of Ahab. Yet you may distinctly trace the same law of the divine administration--the same abandonment to deep, absurd and damning delusions--the same dark ocean of doubts and absurdities. Now, mesmerism, biology, the most foolish things that can be gotten up, will seem to them more like truth than the teachings of God's Spirit. They will even believe the revelations of Andrew Jackson Davis [sic.] more than those of Isaiah, and will give up all belief in the Bible if some rapping spirit tells them to do so. From all I can learn, I regard these delusions as the legitimate result of the manner in which the Holy Ghost was treated in those revivals which have overspread the land since my remembrance. The dread results are before us--delusions deep, dark and damning, hastening on the righteous doom of those who knew their duty but who did it not;--who were visited with the light of God's Spirit, but having quenched that light, are left to judicial blindness and strong delusion.

Again, let me say, if persons quench the Holy Ghost they will wax worse and worse. By no methods of their own will they deliver their own souls. Abandoned of God,--their own intelligence strangely perverted by deep depravity of heart, there is no redeeming power to save them. The most palpable lies they seem to have lost all power to discriminate from the truth, or to deliver their souls from the power thereof. If they attempt to pray, they cannot realize that they are praying to God at all. Nothing to support,--nothing to guide them; no Holy Ghost to enlighten them,--no power from above to warm their souls into life; oh, how languid are their efforts at self-recovery; how feeble and how futile! If at any time one of this class becomes a little alarmed, and feeling some sensibility on religious subjects, falls on his knees to pray, almost before he begins, his mind wanders, he thinks of something else, and this is the end of his prayer.

Are any of you in this state? If any one should listen at your closet door, would he hear a feeble whisper and be impressed that your spiritual efforts are only of the very feeblest sort? What are your prayers? Is all earnestness dropped out? Is everything dark and dead round about your soul and within it, when you essay to draw near to God? Do you go and lie on your knees, almost ashamed of yourself that you think of praying at all? What is your state? Are you honestly afraid that the light of heaven has gone out? One of the most talented young men I ever knew came under the powerful influences of the Spirit, but resisted them finally and fatally. He had so much worldly political ambition, he could not possibly have God. His death-bed scene hastened on apace after he had fatally repelled the Spirit of God. Why should God spare him to live longer? The death scene came on. Darkness gathered thick upon his soul, so thick that it seemed to him the very room was all dark as the pit of despair. Lifting up his voice to its highest note, he cried, "Bring in a light, --bring in a light!" Alas, how could he see light, after he had quenched all the light of God! How affecting the contrast between his case and that of the dying saint who melts away into the light of heaven!

Will you suffer yourself to pass on, rejecting God? Then no mercy or hope can ever beam upon you.

But if there be still a ray of light and some earnest thought of God; if your soul yet longs and trembles, O, seize the precious moment while yet it lingers; say--"I will never quench the Spirit of God again! May the Lord enlighten me into all his blessed will!" This is the only safe course; the only course that can result in salvation. What do you say? Will you come and gather round the altar of God, to pour out your heart in mighty prayer? "Behold now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation."

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