

Do Not Quench The Spirit

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[0 : 00] We'll turn back then to the passage that we read, the first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 5.

And we can read again at verse 12. We ask you brothers to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Be at peace among yourselves and we urge you brothers admonish the idol, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

For joys always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God and Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil.

Particularly the words in verse 19 that we have there, do not quench the spirit. Again we need to put this in context in the chapter, in the letter.

[1 : 18] This is a letter written very early on in Paul's career, career, that's the long word, but in his time as an apostle.

There are many who think that it's the very first letter he wrote, but the letter to the Galatians may be earlier, but it's very probable that this is the first letter that Paul has written.

And it's written, again there's a dispute about this, where it's written from. The majority think it's written from Corinth in the year 51 AD, but some think it's written from Athens.

And you remember the background to this in Acts 17, you can go and read that again yourself at home. When Paul comes from Philippi to Thessalonica, and you remember that he's chased out of there, he goes to Berea, and he's chased again from there, and then he comes to Athens, and from Athens he moves on to Corinth.

And then we see that even in this epistle in chapter 3 in verse 1, he says, therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone.

[2 : 31] And we sent Timothy, and Timothy is then sent to Thessalonica, and then in verse 6 in that chapter we're told, now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love, and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, etc, etc, etc.

So when we put it in context there, we see also that Timothy has brought back a number of questions with him, that the congregation in Thessalonica seem to have been a bit upset about.

What were these questions? Well we see them particularly in chapter 4, and again remember of course that there were no chapter divisions in the original letter, the beginning, the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5 when he is speaking about the second coming of Jesus.

And it seems that the converts in Thessalonica were particularly worried about the fact that since Paul had been there and some had been converted, that some had died.

He says that those who are asleep, in verse 13 and chapter 4, we do not want you to be uninformed brothers about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

[3 : 57] And it seems that they were worried that those who had died, had died before Christ return again. And again you have got to put that into context.

Here we are 2000 years later and Christ still has not come back. But in the early church and especially in the churches in Europe there was a belief and you see it even early on after Pentecost in Acts 2 when the brethren are all together and they sell things etc and are living together almost commune style, hippie style as it was in the 60s etc and so on and they have all things in common.

And it seems that the reason for that was that they expected Christ to come again very, very quickly. And the Thessalonians are very worried that those who have died before Christ's coming are not going to be raised again with them in the same way, it is as if they were expecting everyone to remain alive until Jesus came again, until Christ came again.

And Paul then goes on to explain to them a little bit about the second coming and in chapter 4 you get of course words which are so badly misinterpreted by many people nowadays particularly in verse 15 and 16 and chapter 4.

This we declare to you by a word from the Lord that we who are alive who are left until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel with the sound of the trumpet in God and the dead in Christ will rise first.

[5 : 47] Then we who are alive who are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will always be with the Lord therefore encourage one another with these words.

Now that is the passage that is known nowadays in many modern churches as the rapture passage. And again you have to be very careful of the misinterpretations that go on with that.

I am not going to go into that in great detail, I am sure you are familiar with it. But the rapture theology is quite quite wrong and if you study this in conjunction with what Jesus himself says about the second coming you can see clearly the errors that are made there.

And Paul then says to them at the beginning of chapter 5 concerning the times and the season brothers you have no need to have anything written to you but you are aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Now it would be very easy, very easy from one point of view to go into a sermon on the second coming of Christ but that is not my intention this evening at all.

[7 : 02] The second coming of Christ is an extremely difficult subject to interpret. This is what is called eschatology the study of the end times and when you take into account both the Old Testament and the New Testament especially the things that are said in Revelation what Jesus himself says and so on then people tie and interpret and make all kinds of misinterpretations about the second coming of Christ.

The only thing that we can say for sure about the second coming of Christ is that it will happen. When you remember that Jesus says that even he himself didn't know that in one sense that it was only the Father who knew that and of course some question there was how can be Jesus be God if he doesn't know the second coming.

But again that's a very complex point and it brings in the humanity and the divinity of Christ in his humanity he didn't know and his divinity he does know and he speaks himself in Matthew 24 particularly about the signs of the end times and so on and again I don't want to drift off into that because that's not really my intention this evening.

And what Paul does then is at the end of the chapter he gives a series of instructions to encourage the church in Thessalonica and to particularly help them in resolving many of these things and so you get all these instructions and they are wonderful instructions and if you and I as a church here were able to uphold every one of these instructions that Paul gives the church in Thessalonica what a different church we would have.

From verse 12 onwards we ask you brothers to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

[9 : 06] Now it would be very easy to comment on that for a while but again I'll leave that with you. Be at peace among yourselves that also could be opened up in great detail and we urge you brothers admonish the idol encourage the faint hearted help the weak be patient with them all see that no one repays anyone evil for evil but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

What a different church we would have what a different world it would be if that was the philosophy that everyone had. And then a series of short instructions rejoice always pray without ceasing give thanks in all circumstances and you notice it's all circumstances whatever the circumstances are for this is the will of God and Christ Jesus for you and then we come to do not quench the spirit do not despise prophecies prophecies there is usually interpreted as teaching rather than prophesying the future but test everything hold fast what is good abstain from every form of evil.

Now that is almost like a creed for the behaviour of the church that's how you and I should behave but as you and I well know we fail constantly in doing that.

But I want to concentrate particularly on the version verse 19 do not quench the spirit or as it is in the Greek the spirit quench not the emphasis is on the spirit the spirit quench not and you notice depending again on the version of scripture that you're using that it is spirit or it should be spirit with a capital S it's the Holy Spirit you see again in verse 23 just below that the word spirit is used differently may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So we have to be very clear that we are referring here to the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit quench not. Now again it would be very easy to drift off here into a sermon on the Holy Spirit what is the Holy Spirit and it perhaps would be useful just to refresh our minds a little bit about some of the qualities of the Holy Spirit who is the Holy Spirit again you'll be familiar of course from the shorter catechism those of you who remember the shorter catechism still it's gone out of fashion nowadays and the Westminster Confession states very clearly that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead the third person of the Godhead and that of course leads to a very common error that so many people have and you and I are guilty of it as well because it goes on to say that they are equal in power and glory but the concept that many people have is of God the Father up here the Son just a little perhaps below in the Holy Spirit somewhere down here and that is completely wrong.

[12 : 40] We are shown so clearly through our scripture that the three persons are one and that they are equal in power and glory and it's very difficult for people sometimes to get their head round the idea of how can three persons be one God.

The term trinity is not used in scripture doesn't appear anywhere in scripture at all but this is what we're speaking of we are speaking of the trinity Father Son and Holy Spirit or as it sometimes referred to as the Holy Ghost Jesus refers to him as another comforter and if you look at John 14 when he's speaking to the disciples after the supper and telling them that he must go away but he will send another comforter to them that's the term that he uses and he will teach you all things.

So what is the trinity how does the trinity actually work well again I'm sure you remember Thomas going into this in great detail and many and over various sermons but if you have trouble with the idea of the trinity try and think of it this way here's an easy way you may well have heard this before.

You're all familiar with the laws of mathematics at least I assume you're familiar with the laws of mathematics. So add one plus one plus one and what do you get three and in most places nobody will answer because they're secured it's a trick question and they'll get it wrong but it is it's not a trick question the answer is three.

Now I'm sure at school you were also taught that an easy way or a fast way of adding things together is to multiply now multiply one times one times one and the answer is one not three but one and there you have a simple analogy of one god three persons there are many other ways we can see it as well remember reading a story of Talamotsana I don't think any of you knew him personally as far as I'm aware but Talamotsana used to illustrate it in this way he used to make a he would lift his leg and he would make three folds in his trouser and he would say look there's three folds but still one trouser still one trouser and sometimes these explanations they may seem right but nevertheless they allow us to get a glimpse into the mystery of what is the Trinity because it is a mystery there are things that we don't understand things that are very difficult to understand but we have to be very clear that the spirit is not only important but an equally important part of the Godhead where do we see the spirit in action we see it from the very beginning in

[15 : 55] Genesis you remember the spirit moving on the face of the water you remember that later on in Genesis that God says to Noah that my spirit will not always strive with man my spirit will not always strive with man and that becomes important when we come into look at the meaning of the word quench we see the spirit sort of has it where being taken away after the fall but then it seems to come and go and appear again and again throughout the Old Testament you remember in Samson's case that the spirit came and the spirit went and the same with Saul and various other figures and it doesn't seem to have been a constant presence in the way that it is in the New Testament but nevertheless in the Old Testament it was constantly predicted that a time would come when God would pour out his spirit in Jeremiah what do we find we find in Jeremiah 31 this is the covenants that I will make with the house of Israel after these days declare the Lord I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people and no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying no the Lord or they shall all know me and the least of them to the greatest declares the Lord for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more how would it be written on their hearts it could not be written in the way that it was written on the tables of stone it is written in a different way it is written by the presence of the spirit and there are many other passages throughout the Old Testament that would lead us to see that as well but particularly in

Joel we find the passage that Peter quotes in his first sermon in the first real New Testament sermon after the day of Pentecost we Peter quotes this passage it shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh your sons and your daughters shall prophesy your old men shall dream dreams your young men shall see visions even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my spirit and this is exactly the passage that Peter quotes when the spirit is poured out on the day of Pentecost now you can read Peter's sermon in Acts 2 and go back and look at that when you go home again I don't have time to go into that in detail but what we see particularly here is the pouring out of the spirit and that brings us then to the word quench do not quench the spirit what was the idea that went here well the the old meaning of the word quench was to put out a fire we normally now think of the word quench with the idea when you're thirsty like I was a second ago you quench your thirst by having a drink of some kind but its original meaning was to put out a noil lamp or a candle or something like that where you actually extinguish the flame by putting something over it to stop the oxygen the air getting to it and so behind the word quench is the idea of putting something out putting a fire out so we could rephrase this as do not put out the fire of the spirit and there are many passages that refer to that in the Old Testament as well I don't think we've got it on screen in Malachi 3 and 2 he speaks about it being like a refiner's fire with the idea of the spirit working as producing this sort of fire of passion in the individual about the things of God and that is what Paul is referring to do not allow the fire of the passion the zeal of the spirit to be put out the word seal in its original and the Greek again its root also comes from a word meaning fire so you have the idea of zeal fire passion now be produced by the spirit but being quenched that's what you see on the day of Pentecost you remember how the spirit descended it came on each believer like tongues of clothing fire is what the scripture says exactly what that must have looked at it's difficult to imagine but it must have been quite an amazing sign something like the shekinah glory that sat over the tabernacle in the Old Testament the pillar of fire by night that made the presence of the Lord visible to everyone round about and it reflects the presence of the Lord in exactly the same way here so we've been giving a warning not to quench not to put out the fire of the spirit I'm sure many of you like myself you'll remember back to the days when you were first converted when everything was so fresh and new and it seemed as if you were on fire for the gospel and how often did we use that expression

of some ministers that they were on fire for the gospel and as you get more mature and older perhaps as a Christian believer that fire seems to die down a little bit you don't have the passion and the zeal that you had years before why not are you quenching the spirit and we need to look and see as to how the spirit is being quenched or can be quenched by each of us and our daily witness and unfortunately the first place where the spirit is being quenched nowadays in the church is in the pulpit that might seem to some of you like an awful thing to say but I'm not referring to this pulpit on any particular pulpit in the island but in general terms how many churches can you go to in various places I don't know if any of the churches in our island are guilty of this or not but certainly on the mainland that's the case and throughout the wider world where the word of God is hardly referred to in the sermon where the message that is preached as a social gospel perhaps even a prosperity gospel but the spirit of the word of God is not present the spirit is being quenched the message is not a message to stir up those who are hearing into faith or into acts of faith but another message that will keep people happy and keep people comfortable and many times have we told or you shouldn't preach about things like that you'll upset the congregation I've been told that after a particular sermon that I preached about hell a number of years ago somewhere somebody said to me says don't preach things like that you put people off they don't like it you frighten them that's exactly what it's meant to do if hell doesn't frighten you then there's something wrong with the message that is coming there and the message that comes from the pulpit should be spirit filled now it's easy to say that everyone who stands up here my brother elders know it very well that without without the presence of the spirit you wouldn't dare stand up here you wouldn't be able to stand up here I wouldn't dare to go into a pulpit unless I was sure that the spirit had guided me to the particular text that I was preaching on and that is something that is not easy sometimes you struggle to find that text or shall I preach on and sometimes it seems that you don't get an answer to that and you just don't know what to do before you come into the pulpit but it's there that the guidance of the spirit is absolutely vital isn't that what Jesus said he said without me you can do nothing without me you can do nothing and you remember how he illustrates that with the idea of the vine and the branches and how the branches very often need pruning and trimming etc and Paul opens up that later on when he talks about the new Israel being grafted in in Romans as a vine as part onto the old vine of Israel the new Israel that is the new church the present day church so the first place very often where the spirit is quenched is in the pulpit and if that were

to be reversed what a difference it would make throughout our land perhaps even throughout our country maybe even throughout our island but certainly throughout the world if the things of the spirit of God were to be preached faithfully every Sabbath morning and evening what a difference it would make but it may be also that you and I are quenching the spirit in our daily walk we know that it is the spirit that has brought us to life George Smeaton and his famous book on the Holy Spirit says this he says the spirit is Christ's instrument in guiding the believer and the church and this instrumental in regeneration nobody comes to faith without the work of the spirit it is the spirit that quickens the flesh prophet to nothing now again I'm not going to go into in great detail the activities of the spirit but how we actually quench the spirit every believer everyone here this evening you are the temple of the spirit that's how Paul puts it you have the spirit of God present in your heart or as some people prefer to say nowadays in your brain in your conscience because your heart is simply a muscle but again let's not go into that debate you are the temple of the spirit but do you really pay attention to what the spirit is saying to you do you listen to the spirit how does the spirit actually speak to you and a good number of years ago I was debating this point with a class this was overseas a class of 16 17 year olds where we were ethics and philosophy class and we were dealing with the existence of God as to whether God existed or not and they knew that I was a believer at that point so they started asking me questions about does God actually talk to you and I said yes sometimes and you sort of saw high brouselistic how I said well sometimes through the word when I'm reading the scriptures sometimes in prayer sometimes in meditation but especially by the presence of the spirit the Holy Spirit now they had no problem with that because of course father son and Holy Spirit is big stuff in Latin American Christianity and Roman Catholicism so they were quite familiar with the concept and they said how does the spirit talk to you and to cut along the story short I said eventually well I said it sometimes as if you have a little voice in your head that's speaking to you that sometimes brings a text into your head that sometimes points you in a specific direction in prayer that when you're meditating on the word of God suddenly gives you an insight into what it means in a way that you hadn't realized before and one of them was looking sort of kind of puzzled at me and he said you actually hear voices in your head and I said yes sometimes

I said you're nuts you are you're nuts because of course the concept was completely alien to him he couldn't imagine that particular idea but that's the way it is for the believer sometimes you hear this still small voice speaking to you and it's what it says and what it says sometimes that you and I quench the spirit how often have you heard the spirit saying to you go and visit someone go and visit so and so you know that impulse that comes into your head you should go and visit or phone them or something can't be bothered too tired don't want to part of that is such a difficult person I don't want to go near him and argue with him again and you put it off and you put it off and you put it off how many times do we quench the prompting of the spirit in our dealings with others it's there all the time it's like that little voice of conscience that's in our head all the time pushing us in certain directions and yet so often we resist it and sometimes it comes even to things like I don't want to go to the evening service I was out in the morning that's enough that's enough but I don't want to go to the prayer meeting I'm too tired and sometimes you get even when the communion season is on I'd like to go to the Friday evening service somewhere and listen to so and so just can't be bothered just can't be bothered going up to Kalanish what have they argue going to Shormost what are they arguing for the feet and that passion that zeal that we had before where we would perhaps drive miles to hear a sound it's gone as we get older our zeal dyes down and it's probably because you and I are quenching the spirit and it may well be Douglas Macmillan had I was listening to Douglas Macmillan the other night I don't know how many of you have cottoned on to the new legacy website the free church website where there are there's over a thousand or more sermons by figures from the past of the free church my own father is on Mordwaleck there's a lot on Milshaw is on and I was listening to some of them are hard to listen to the quality is not very good but I was listening to Douglas Macmillan and he said this do you ever stop he said to listen to God to listen to God instead of pray and you talking which is fine occasionally stop and listen to what God has to say to me and it really struck me and I said my throat can I stopped the tape and I said I'm going to listen and every sort of thought came into my head for about 10 12 15 minutes whenever

[33 : 14] I tried to be absolutely empty in my mind to listen I was getting bombarded from outside in my own mind by all sorts of not evil things coming up but bits of scripture questions I had things I wanted to say to God but it was so difficult to listen so difficult to listen and perhaps that's a discipline that we need to develop listening to the spirit listening to what the spirit has to say to us because if we don't listen if we don't carry out the spirits instructions then we can get to the stage where we are openly resisting the spirit now there was a time when you and I resisted the spirit and we resisted it pretty strongly in some some of our cases for maybe four years before the spirit we were able to listen to the spirit and we were converted and that is what happens very often here on

Sunday morning Sunday evening how many people are sitting there resisting the spirit resisting what the world is saying to them they don't want it to change anything in their lives because of course that's what the spirit should do the spirit when it comes into your life you are a new creature the heart of stone is taken away and you are given a new heart and you should then be alive on with the zeal of the spirit of God maybe you remember what that was like maybe for some of you it's not so long ago and you still have that seal for others perhaps that seal has died down and it may well be that it's because we are resisting not listening to not spending time allowing the spirit to speak to us remember someone arguing and saying but but God speaks to me I said how do you distinguish between

God speaking to you and the spirit speaking to you and yet no answer to that because God of course speaks through the spirit it is the spirit whenever we hear God the Lord Jesus Christ it is through the instrumentality of the spirit that it speaks to us how often do you and I reject the instructions that the spirit gives to us that we don't spend time with the spirit and with the pace of life nowadays I mean I know you're going to say it's easy for you you're retired now you've got nothing else to do you can listen to the spirit all day I wish it's not like that you have so many other things to do but with the rush of today's modern life especially for younger people it becomes so difficult to find and to make time to sit down and spend time with spirit of God perhaps it gets easier as you get older as you get more time to do these things but when the daily rush of those of us who have retired when that rush has seemingly passed by we suddenly find that we're far more busy than we ever were but in totally different things we can make time for this that and the next thing but do we make time to spend with the word of God how much time today did you spend with the word of God before you came here the old custom family worship has disappeared properly in most homes we're all too busy we come in at different times we go out at different times we very rarely sit down together as a family around the word of God and we are just as guilty of that as anyone else as the custom of grace grace before meals grace after meals as it disappeared as the custom of reading your Bible before you go out in the morning well I'll do it in the evening when I come back a lot more time and yet what a difference it makes when you start the day with the word of God when you start the day with a time of prayer and you see people say then but look at what Paul says here he says rejoice always pray without ceasing how can you rejoice always when there's so many other things to do and sometimes things go really badly but what are you rejoicing for you're rejoicing for your salvation and Christ Jesus you're rejoicing that Jesus came into the world to seek and to save sinners pray without ceasing how can you pray without ceasing I wouldn't have time for anything else that's not what it means it's the spirit of prayer do you have the spirit of prayer when you're showering in the morning that may seem like a very strange question to most people but what are you meditating on as you shower in the morning perhaps you're not meditating on anything you're busy scrubbing the fungus out from between your toes etc and so on but there are so many places in our daily activities when we drive to work you can pray it's the spirit of prayer doesn't mean to be on your knees all the time it is the attitude that we have in the things that we do that's what makes the difference give thanks in all how can you give thanks in all circumstances will Paul explain because this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you and sometimes that will is extremely difficult to put up with especially when it involves

personal difficulties or tragedies or sacrifices or suffering of any kind but that is the will of God because the will of God is to teach you things and sometimes learning things can be an extremely painful process that takes again into the topic of the purpose of suffering and believe that but do not quench the spirit the spirit quench not and yet that's something that we're so guilty of most of the time do not despise prophecies prophecies here the teaching but test everything hold fast what is good abstain from every form of evil how can I possibly do that how can I abstain from every form of evil because sometimes there are things that come upon me that I don't realize that they're evil until after I've got my emotions get the better of me my anger etc and so on abstain from any form of evil how difficult sometimes the teaching of the word of God is to us and yet we remember of course that we sin and thought weren't indeed every single day but do not quench the spirit because the spirit is the one who comforts you the spirit the one is the one and John 16:8 who says he will when he comes he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment that's already been your experience now the experience of the spirit is different it's the spirit who gives you peace it's the spirit who gives you courage it's the spirit who gives you joy in the things of God and it's the spirit who makes you aware of the presence of God perhaps as Douglas said we should set aside maybe five ten minutes every day to listen to God and that may seem like an easy exercise believe me it is not it is an extremely difficult exercise just to listen to God may the Lord bless to us peace thoughts the senior minister our father in heaven we thank you for the presence of your spirit we thank you that you remind us that without you we can do nothing so often we think that we are the authors of all things that need to be done but you show us that it is only through the presence and the guidance of your spirit that we can do anything we thank you all that we can serve you teaches to be servants in meekness and in humility and guidance in all things through the presence of your spirit in our lives