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QUENCHING THE SPIRIT
By E. W. Black

A Sane Development of
A Much Neglected Topic

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QUENCHING THE SPIRIT
The Roads to Formalism and Fanaticism

Text: "Quench not the Spirit." I Thess. 5:19

This text is a much neglected one, yet it is one of the great texts of the Bible. Few
Christians comprehend it. If the church of Jesus Christ would grasp the full significance of this text
and walk accordingly she would be what God intended her to be, a triumphant, victorious church.
But let us come closer home. If the holiness people (the true holiness people) would walk
according to this text we would not only save ourselves from drifting into cold dead formalism, but
we would also save ourselves from hurtful destructive fanaticism.

There are two things I want you to think on with me. First what leads to formalism. Second
what leads to fanaticism. First let us consider formalism.

What leads to formalism? One of the things, and I shall say one of the principal things that leads to formalism, is that people disregard the solemn warning of my text; they "quench" the Spirit.

Moffat in his translation renders the text, "Quench not the fire of the Spirit." In other words "do not smother or put out the fire of the Spirit." That is exactly what God means when He says, "Quench not the Spirit."

In the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as Fire. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all speak of the believer being baptized with Holy Ghost Fire. Matt. 3:11, 12; Mark 1:7, 8; Luke 3:16, 17. And this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The Word says that "cloven tongues like as of fire sat upon each of them." Acts 2:3. Now the text is an earnest plea not to quench or smother that holy fire.

I fear that some of you have already quenched that flame. Once your heart burned with a passion for the lost, but you have lost that passion. There was a day when you wept over the lost, but now you manifest little or no concern. Hear me, this didn't happen over night. But little by little the flame died down. There are faces that once shone with a glow that was akin to heaven. Now, they are more like a cold, wet evening in December. Instead of gladness there is sadness.

I am speaking frankly, but you are an honest people, and know I speak the truth. Someone says, "Yes, that is my sad state. But how did it happen? What did I do?" You did just what God said Not to do. You "quenched" the Spirit.

You remember you felt in your heart an inward urge to say Amen! Now to say Amen!, is more than a mere custom. It is Scriptural. We read that "All of the people said Amen!" According to the Gospels Christ himself used that term nearly one hundred times. It does not appear in our English translations, but in the original the language that Christ spoke.

Now as I started to say, the Spirit prompted you to say Amen! But you refrained. In that same service, or some other, you felt that same inward urge, but you were fearful what someone else would think, or say, and you refused to do it. You quenched the Spirit. Another time you felt that you should go to your closet and pray. But you were busy, and said to yourself, "I will go after awhile." You kept on working and waited longer than you had intended. Then when you did go, there was no spirit of prayer, again You had quenched the Spirit. If you keep repeating things like that after awhile you will no longer feel those holy impulses -- those divine promptings.

I knew a minister, a leader in his denomination. He opposed the doctrine of holiness as taught by John Wesley. He was to preach at a certain church one evening. The pastor was a holiness man. He was fearful that the Doctor might speak some word against holiness and hinder the work of the Lord. The pastor was deeply spiritual and a man who was mighty in prayer. He invited a brother preacher to join him in prayer to the end that the work of the Lord would not be hindered. They gave themselves to earnest prayer, -- and prevailed. They prayed clear through and received the witness that God would not suffer His cause to be defeated. Oh, for more pastors like that

The hour for service arrived. When it came time for the sermon, the Doctor arose and requested that they sing another hymn, stating that the message that he had intended to bring had vanished. For that reason he wanted a little more time to think and pray.

After another hymn or two he arose to speak. And he spake with unusual power and unction. In fact he was so moved upon that at the close of his message he made the following confession. "Brethren," he said "I have felt a moving of the Spirit in my heart tonight that I have not felt in twenty years. About twenty years ago as I entered my pulpit one evening the Spirit of God rested upon me, and upon the meeting in great power. I was almost overcome with joy. I felt that I should raise my hand and praise God aloud, but I refused to do it. And I have not felt like that from then until now."

It is no marvel. He had so quenched the Spirit until he no longer felt His promptings. Then he could speak against holiness and not feel badly about it. And that is the reason a lot of other folk can do and say things that are sinful, and feel little or no compunction of conscience.

O my friends how careful we ought to be, to always respond to the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit. Never quenching, and never restraining His divine impulses. To do so, means spiritual dearth and deadness.

What should we care, what the devil and cold dead professors think? We could well afford to take Amanda Smith as our example on this point. Amanda, you remember was the colored washerwoman. She heard the great John Inskip preaching on holiness, telling how believers could be baptized with the Holy Ghost, thus receiving a clean heart. Amanda believed and began seeking, and she never let up until God gave her a mighty baptism of the Spirit. The result was, God took her from the wash tub and sent her around the world as a mighty evangel of Bible holiness. She preached to all classes, including kings and queens.

Amanda tells us that on one occasion she was in a great city church, filled with white people. The Spirit prompted her to lift her hand in praise to God. Suddenly the impression came, "Amanda, nobody wants to see your old black hands." "Devil," she said, "just for that I will lift up both of them." She did, and the power of God fell upon the meeting. Hallelujah! The secret of the power of God upon any meeting is prompt, whole-hearted obedience. Therefore I plead with you in God's name, don't quench the Spirit. When you do it means defeat, when you obey it means victory. Which do you want?

God knows as a church we want victory.

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PART TWO

We come now to the negative side of this text, namely, steps which lead to fanaticism. There are many but we will mention only two.

The first is to disregard the checks of the Spirit. There are those who are ready to respond to the promptings of the Spirit, who are not willing to give heed to His checks. This leads to ruin. For though we may start in the Spirit, if we disregard His checks, we will end in the flesh.

There are many thousands of well meaning people; who are following their own whimsical, fanatical notions. Yet they believe they are following the blessed Holy Ghost. And why this delusion? What ever else may be the cause; one thing is certain, they have failed to heed the checks of the Spirit. You know them and I know them.

A second step to fanaticism is to seek to imitate the leadings and promptings of the Holy Spirit. This is a common error. With shame I confess that it is among some of the people who believe in and teach John Wesley Holiness.

To illustrate: Some years ago I heard a minister deliver an address to a large congregation of religious leaders. The Brother said many good things, but he also said some very foolish things. For example he said, "When we go to a place to put on a revival meeting, we always get results. If we cannot put it over one way, we will put it over another way. We will climb upon a chair, run the back of a bench, or jump upon the pulpit -- we will do something to put it over." That was a shocking statement, and extremely fanatical.

In substance, he said that if God did not come to their help and give them a demonstration of His Spirit; that they would put on some kind of a demonstration.

It is not necessary for me to tell you that this man was not in the Spirit, but in the flesh. Unwillingly, he admitted that he was.

There are many good people who would not think of going to such extremes as expressed by this man, who nevertheless seek to imitate the impulses and promptings of the Spirit.

They do this not because they desire to be hypocritical; far from it. But because they have a false notion concerning the work of the Spirit. They have a notion that the work of the Spirit is always cyclonic. By cyclonic I mean, storm, fire, and earthquake.

If the meeting therefore does not run on that order; they feel that it is up to them to see that it does. Have you not seen a minister stand to preach, or a singer sing, or perhaps a layman to testify, and there was no special demonstration, and they proceeded to work up one of some kind? And if they failed to get a response, they were keenly disappointed, and felt that the meeting was all a failure?

Now these good people don't need scolding, at least most of them don't. Help is what they need.

They need to understand that the work of the Spirit is not always cyclonic. And the thing for them to do is to obey the leadings and promptings of the Spirit. And if so, they will always have a profitable service; regardless of its nature.

And it will be just the kind of a service the Lord wants them to have. If the Lord wants to manifest himself in a cyclonic manner, rejoice in it, and "Quench not the Spirit." God knows I revel in such divine manifestations. And we all should.

But if the Lord sees fit to make His presence felt in some other way, then let's not hinder His operations by mere human manifestations or manifestations.

When we do, we quench the Spirit. That God never intended for all meetings to run in a groove, or be cyclonic in nature is clear from the Scriptures.

I am fully aware that the day of Pentecost was cyclonic -- exceedingly so and so were many other meetings, and they are to this very day, when the Holy Ghost can have His way.

But as I have said, not all New Testament meetings were such. I give you a few simple examples from the ministry of Christ, and from the Apostle Paul.

It was no uncommon thing for Christ to sit down while teaching and preaching. This itself is very suggestive. Matthew tells us that when Christ preached "the sermon on the mount," He was sitting) not standing. Luke tells us that Jesus returned from the mount of temptation "in the power of the Spirit;) and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read". But when he had finished reading "he closed the book, and gave it again to the minister, and sat down." Although he stood to read, he preached while sitting down.

The same writer tells us that when Christ was at Lake Gennesaret "the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God," and he entered into a ship, and thrust out a little from the land, "and sat down, and taught the people out of the ship."

John tells us that when Jesus came "into the temple, and all of the people came unto Him: He sat down and taught them."

We know that the great Apostle Paul, St. Luke and others often followed the example of Jesus and sat down while teaching and preaching.

The Acts, Chapter sixteen, Luke tells us about a service held down by the riverside. He informs us that when Paul and others brought the message of the hour, they "sat down and spake unto the women which resorted thither."

The whole context shows that it was one of those quiet worshipful, restful services. Yet it was a Holy Ghost service in every sense of the word. For it was in that meeting that Lydia, the first convert in Europe was converted. And the influence of that meeting is felt in all of Europe and America to this good hour.

Paul was preaching one night at Macedonia. The house was filled and the service was quite lengthy. A young fellow by the name of Eutychus, was sitting in an open window and fell asleep. The result was that he fell from the third story and was taken up dead. Certainly the

Some may argue that there was a lack of Pentecostal power in the meeting, or he would not have gone to sleep. Well, there was enough power there to raise the dead, for Paul restored him to life again. But the power was not cyclonic.

Friends, it is a sad and serious mistake to think that in order to have helpful and effective meetings that there must always be a spiritual cyclone, or some strong emotion of some kind.

One of the most effective altar services of my ministry was in a morning service in one of our great camps. I had spoken at some length; perhaps forty-five minutes. All was quiet and serene. When suddenly I was overcome with a spirit of melting and tenderness so that I could not speak without weeping. I had not said a word about coming forward for prayer, when a man jumped to his feet, saying, "I am going to the altar." It is safe to say that two hundred and fifty or three hundred people followed him. It was an hour to be remembered. Such weeping and crying for mercy one seldom hears.

We would do well to remember the lesson that God taught His servant Elijah the Prophet. This stern old Prophet was cyclonic both in his nature and in his ministry. And it may be that he got the notion that it was about the only way his Jehovah God worked. But the Lord would not have His devoted servant labor under that delusion. Humanly speaking the Lord took great pains to teach him differently.

You recall that the weary, but faithful old prophet had gone to Mount Horeb for a much needed rest. While there his dwelling was a cave in the side of the mountain. The Lord appeared to him and asked him what he was doing there. He told the Lord how Israel had forsaken His covenants, and had thrown down His altars, and killed His prophets with the sword. And that he had been very jealous for His name and that they were now seeking his life, to take it away also.

"Go forth," said God, "and stand upon the mount before the Lord." He did: and a great storm, or cyclone swept down and rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks." Elijah searched for his God but in vain. For we are told that "The Lord was not in the wind." This I think was a great surprise to the stormy old prophet. For he was quite certain that the Lord was in it.

Then there was an earthquake, again he looked for God, but God was not in the earthquake. Then after the earthquake a fire, but God was not in the fire.

Then Elijah left "the mount" where he had been standing "before the Lord," and went back to his cave. As he sat there meditating, he doubtless wondered what it all could mean anyway. For the only explanation he had received was, the Lord was not in it. Then why had God sent the storm, the fire, and the earthquake? What was it for? What did it all mean? Hush; Listen' the prophet hears a gentle soft whisper, "a still small voice." He wraps his face in his mantle and goes to the mouth of his cave and listens. Again the "still small voice" spoke saying, "What doest thou here Elijah?" Behold it is God. Now he understands the meaning of the fire, the storm and the earthquake, for God had taught him the lesson of the still small voice.

Suppose Elijah had missed that all important lesson. Look what he himself would have missed. Then look what the world or at least two kingdoms would have missed. For it was in the "still small voice;" not out of the fire, the storm, or the earthquake that God commissioned him to go and "anoint Hazael to be King over Syria: and Jehu King over Israel: and Elisha to be prophet in his own room."

Oh my friends, what if we fail to learn the lesson of the "still small voice"? God alone can compute the loss to ourselves and to those about us.

Mark well what I say. When we seek to duplicate a pattern, to run all of our meetings on the same order, we are either on the road to formalism, or fanaticism, one or the other.

If we seek to have them all quiet and serene, we choke and stifle the workings of the Spirit in our midst, and we are doomed to formalism. On the other hand, if we try to make them all cyclonic, we will get out of the Spirit, into the flesh. Then we are on the highway to fanaticism.

The one great lesson we need to learn is; "Quench Not the Spirit." Here and here alone is our security. Follow this rule and our meetings will be rich with the fragrance of His Presence.

Does the blessed Holy Spirit move deeply upon your emotions? Then "Quench Not" His Spirit. For He who inspires Christian emotions will also tone it, and limit it. Yes He will regulate it and keep it in wise bounds -- Scriptural bounds. Therefore, never quench the Spirit.

While I beg of you not to quench the Spirit, I solemnly warn you, never imitate the Spirit.

Those who seek to imitate the impulses of the Spirit commit a positive Sin. This sin is three-fold.

First, they sin against themselves. Such a course is nothing less than a form of hypocrisy, and no one can be hypocritical without first sinning against themselves. One step leads to another, and they are all downward. It is both surprising and shocking to see how far some have already gone in this shameful and sinful practice.

To illustrate: In a camp meeting a certain preacher was preaching. When he reached a given point in his message he began to sink down to the floor of the platform, as if he were overpowered by the Spirit's presence. He asked his co-worker to give him support. Two brothers went to his side. But slowly he sank down, and stretched himself out on the platform. His co-worker stepped out on the altar rail and asked if anyone wanted to seek God. Several came forward for prayer.

At the close of the service a good woman came forward and said to the co-worker, "Brother Z____, I have heard Brother X____ preach that same sermon three different times, and every time he gets to a certain point in the message, he does as he has done tonight.

Such shocking hypocrisy should be chased out of every pulpit in the land, and everything

It is well nigh blasphemy. Those who feign such things are not in shouting distance of truth and sincerity, to say nothing of Christianity.

Second: such religious juggling is a sin against the people to whom it is being perpetrated. It is no light thing to deceive and mislead those to whom we minister.

It is a sad fact that in some places there has been so much of the human and so little of the divine, that many good sincere people fail to distinguish between human manipulations and divine manifestations. This is enough to make angels weep.

Oh, that God would send us a mighty out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. Such an outpouring as to cause us to distinguish between the imitation and the real, between the counterfeit and the genuine. Between getting blessed of God, and being tickled. Heaven knows that in some places it is greatly needed.

Third: It is a sin against God.

All sham, all pretense in religion, is nauseating to the Lord. It is like "strange incense," it is an abomination to His nostrils. Especially is this true when it comes to imitating the work of His Spirit.

As I have already suggested such a course not only grieves the Spirit, but it will quench, smother, and hinder the operations of the Spirit.

Many well meaning people defeat the very purpose that their hearts are longing to see, namely, an outpouring of the Spirit.

In the good providence of God I have experienced and witnessed some mighty manifestations of the Holy Spirit. But I have yet to see God pour out His Spirit when there was an effort to produce it by human manipulations.

I have seen what some people would call an outpouring of the Spirit. But it was like the storm that Elijah witnessed, God wasn't in it. The Holy Spirit just doesn't work in that channel. Perhaps the greatest demonstration of the Spirit ever given was on the day of Pentecost. And it came while the hundred and twenty were sitting in their seats. It was not worked up, but poured out.

Another great demonstration of the Spirit was the Gentile Pentecost, at the house of Cornelius. They too were sitting, listening to Peter explain the way of salvation, when the Spirit came. We read that "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell upon them.

I know that you want to see the power and glory of God rest upon our services. But if we have it as we would like to see it, we must walk with a holy carefulness; responding always to His promptings and leadings. Never imitating, and never, never quenching and never restraining His

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THE END