

# Out of Step with the Spirit

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, we're going to continue in our theme. We've got a little bit of time before the end of this series on the Holy Spirit, and we've looked at the person of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit in different ways and our responses to the Holy Spirit and their need to walk and step with the Spirit. So this evening for a little while we're going to look at the other side of that, the maybe not so pleasant side of the reality, but the great challenge and the great encouragement for us. And I'm going to do something I don't normally, I haven't done for a long time, is just really pick a couple of words to look at, but in the theme of the Holy Spirit and how we relate to Him as believers.

So we find these words, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 19, and this list of final encouragements, challenges to the church in Thessalonica and verse 19, it says, do not quench the spirit. That's all it says, do not quench the spirit. And it's surrounded by different encouragements and different challenges that we are to recognize and know, both the church in Thessalonica and the church throughout the New Testament and the church in all ages.

And I think it's important for us to remember on a Sunday evening or a Sunday morning or whenever we come together that every time we open the word, whether it is in a church context or whether it's in a private context when we read the word ourselves, that we are coming face to face with the living God. We come face to face with the living God every time that we come to His word. And it's easy for us to forget that. It's easy to forget that when we read Scripture that we are listening to God speaking. And especially as He works in our hearts as believers, He speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit is in us as believers. He knows us, and He is committed to us. He's committed to our lives, and He's committed to our growth as believers. He loves you, and He loves me as believers, and He is therefore God in our hearts and in our lives. And so when the word is read or the word is preached and preaching is a significant part of that, even a very simple sermon like this evening is going to be.

It's important for us to just recognize that, well, God knows our hearts this evening. God knows our needs. God knows who we are. And as believers, we're His children, and He loves us. And He wants us to hear and learn from His word for our situation this evening, whatever that might be. Because as a Christian, if you're a Christian this evening, you're committed to a relationship with God. You've entrusted your heart and your life to God. It might have been a long time ago. It might have been recently. But you're committed to being in relationship with the living God.

[ 3 : 04 ] And Christ has been the doorway to that relationship. You came through trusting in Jesus Christ, and you were born in you. You might not remember when that was, but you were born in you in the presence, into the presence and into the company of God. And you've done that, and I've done that by faith and not by sight. And so we have, through the Spirit in who dwells as new Christians, or as Christians, new or old, we're indwelt by God, God our Creator and our Lord. And we remember that He's never wrong. He's never unfair. He doesn't cheat on us. He always tells us the truth in this spiritual relationship. And it's important then to build on that relationship and recognize who He is and what He does. John the Baptist, when he was preaching about the coming of Jesus, said that he baptized, Jesus, John baptized with water, but Jesus would come and he would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And fire actually is used quite a lot in the Bible to describe God or to help us understand about the character of God. And when we think of God as fire, we can think about Him as fire and then how that, how we relate to Him as believers.

Because Paul, he, they speak into the church in Thessalonica, and he has this image of fire in mind when he's speaking about the Holy Spirit in the lives of, in their lives and in their hearts.

And he said, he says, do not quench the spirit. You could easily translate that. Do not put out the spirit's fire. And that's a challenge for every Christian. It's a challenge that comes to us this evening. And we have that responsibility. You, so you have that responsibility. I have that responsibility. It's

not someone else's responsibility. It's ours. That we have an ongoing responsibility not to put out the fire of the spirit, the life of the spirit in our hearts. So that's both our duty, but also our privilege. And as we think about who the spirit is for a few moments, and with this description of fire, then we'll think, secondly, a little bit about how we can quench that in our lives, how we can spoil that relationship, how we can do things which put out a spirit's fire. Now, I said that the Bible often uses the Holy, this picture of God, or maybe particularly the Holy Spirit as fire. You'll remember some of the Old Testament pictures of the burning bush would be a characterization of God as fire. There's the pillar of fire, of course, coming out of Egypt. There's Mount Carmel where there was fire sent down by God and showed his living power. There's the vision of God in Ezekiel. There's the fire that was using the sacrifice at the temple. And then we come to the New Testament and we have the great event of the

New Testament, the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost came with tongues of fire. And that great description of the character of the Holy Spirit in this way with tongues of fire. Now, I just want to think of three ways in which the Holy Spirit is fire, or is described as fire, what that means for his character and for his person. And I think the first would be that fire, using him as an image of fire, is because of his living presence. Jesus, when he speaks about the coming of the Spirit in John 14.6 says, I will ask of the Father, He will give you another advocate. We've looked at this before, the Spirit of truth, the world can't accept him because it neither knows him or sees him, but you know him for he lives in you and will be with you. And there's this sense of living presence.

And you know, fires like that, isn't it? We talk about it, you get adverts on the television for living fires. There's something kind of a life about them. You know, an open fire in an empty room is like, there's a presence about it. It's companionship, even when you're alone. An empty fireplace is a kind of cold and miserable thing. But when you set coal in it and wood in it and set it alight, a real company there, a real fellowship, fellowship of the fire. It's another, it's the next one of the Lord of the Rings. You just can't ignore a fire. It's something living, something to be enjoyed and respected and attended to in a fire. There's presence there.

[ 8 : 22 ] And God through the Holy Spirit is always present in our hearts. You know, in 1 Corinthians 3 16, we're called the temple of the Holy Spirit. That means His presence is with us in all the time. So in the spirit of God, we can know whoever we are, wherever we are as believers, He is with us. He is present with us. He's never of duty. God never leaves us. He's the living God who's chosen to make His home in our hearts and in our minds. So whatever this evening or in your life you choose to let your minds drift, whatever you choose to say or do or how to spend your time or where you go, God is a believer. God in you is always in you and with you as a believer.

He's an ever present in our lives. He is with us, Jesus reminds us, until the end of the age.

And He's there to bless us. God is there in your life and my life to do as good, to bless whoever the temptations, whoever the opposition or the circumstances we find ourselves in.

And so you this evening and I are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, we have His presence in our lives and we're called to remember that and to be challenged by that. And even in preparing the sermon, it just made me think having done so. It just reminded me of whatever I was doing, I was doing post-preparation that God was with me, you know, and it challenges my thoughts, my decisions, my choices in knowing that God is with me in my heart. So that's one thing that Fire is illustrative of. I think the second thing that Fire is illustrative of is power and passion. We know that in the Pentecost story that we're told that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth. And Fire is a hugely awesome power in life. There's great energy that comes from Fire. Tremendous warmth comes from a fire and a cold night outside will huddle around a fire, feeding its energy and its warmth. And it has also unbelievable destructive power. We see that that very little can stand in the way of a raging forest fire as it moves through the land. Unbelievably powerful and awesome energy in fire. And I'm sure that is part of the picture and the illustration of that Fire is used to describe God. And it helps us understand a little bit of the intention and of the work of the

Holy Spirit in our hearts. He is there to empower us and to impassion us, made up word, just so that we know and understand God better in our lives. He encourages us into a warmer and intimate relationship with the living God, close yet worshipful. And He provides us in an ongoing way with the energy and the power to do the impossible. To love your neighbor, to love your God. The things we just can't do in the way that He would love us to do it. But He empowers us so to do. He empowers us to follow Him and serve Him and love Him. He's the fire that ignites our heart as a

living sacrifice.

[ 12 : 38 ] You know Romans 12 talks about us being living sacrifices. Well, He's the kind of fire behind that sacrificial spirit, that ability to witness to Him, the power that's spoken of in Pentecost.

And that's important. Is that me? That's the power. Let's go in. It's the power of the Spirit just working with this electricity. But you know for us when we're struggling, I'm sure you're probably struggling, maybe you're struggling to stay awake, struggling with a sense of weakness, overwhelmed, isolated, anything but passion in your spiritual life.

I can't take my jack off because it's pinned to it. Sorry. Anyway, you're now awake. Okay. Any of these things, we are to channel it and channel our weaknesses through the power of the Spirit at work in our lives. Power and passion is a reflection of this picture of fire. And of course the third and maybe the most obvious biblical application of God as fire or the Holy Spirit as fire is purity. 1 Peter 1 says, obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in Ignanus, but just as He who called you as holy, so be holy in all you do, for it's written be holy because I am holy. And fire is so often used in the Bible to describe the whole, to help us understand the holiness of God and maybe even more so the judgment of God against darkness and against evil. Hell is often spoken of as a place of unquenchable fire where His judgment is meted out eternally. We see Him working to refine us as believers, purifying us. You know, Malachi 3 speaks about the refiner's fire or the launderer's soap, the fuller's soap. And we see and know that picture of God as in our lives as Christians, the Holy Spirit as fire is purifying us, is dealing with that sin which separates us from understanding and knowing and experiencing and enjoying His love. So that this pure picture, this picture of purity, reminds us of His own hatred of evil and darkness because He sees its destructiveness, He sees its damaging effects in the world. We undoubtedly underestimate the seriousness of sin and His character in being light seeking to fend off the darkness.

We underestimate the cost of the cross and underestimate the light that was extinguished on the cross in order to set us free from our sins. So His work is a purifying work in an ongoing way in our lives as Christians. And I think now, this may not be theologically correct, and there's some theologians here who might want to correct me on this, because we know that the burning bush in the Old Testament speaks of the character and the nature of God. I think it also alludes at least to the fact that the Holy Spirit in Christians enables us to know His burning energy without being consumed. And so in a sense, the bush may represent the people of God because in every way, the holiness and the justice and the judgment of God should consume and should destroy us. But because of Christ, we have this impossible miracle happening that His holiness and His perfection and His beauty in our hearts and our lives doesn't just consume us because of the work of Jesus Christ. He's already dealt with sin and judged sin in our hearts.

And now He simply disciplines us because He recognizes the remaining sin in us is damaging to our love and to our relationships with Him and with others. It cheapens the value of His work in our hearts, and it deadens our effectiveness as Christians because His work is to make us like Christ and our sinful choices separate us from Him. So briefly, having thought just for a minute about some of the ways in which fire is representative of the Holy Spirit, we're told here, don't quench the Holy Spirit in our lives. Don't resist the Spirit for you and for me. Don't put a massive dampener on the spiritual life that He has given you by the way you live and by misunderstanding Him and by treating sin lightly and insignificantly.

[ 18 : 23 ] Now what it's not saying, it's not saying that God can be extinguished in your heart as a believer. It's not saying that we can lose our salvation. What it's saying is, we have a responsibility for knowing Him and enjoying Him and not turning our backs on Him.

Because when we do, when we do that, it's damaging and destructive to us, and we lose the blessings that He wants to give us, and we are miserable Christians. There's a deep, a deep dark atheist is better than a miserable Christian because a miserable Christian just hasn't lost sight of the privileges and the joys and the glory of belonging to Jesus.

So how do we quench the Spirit? Well, let's just recap the three areas. We quench the Spirit and His presence by our absence. Okay, by our absence. And so when as Christians we ignore God, when we deny His presence, when we close the Bible, when we don't pray at all, when we're only self-conscious and not God-conscious, when we're careless about church and the means of grace that He gives us, about worship, about prayer, about the sacraments, when we have no time for His people as if He's not there. If there's no go areas in our lives, we convince ourselves that He's absent. Oh, God's far away. He's abandoned me. He's moved away. He's left home. But it's our

absence. This is the root cause of that feeling that we have. We're called to live by faith in belief that He is always with us, ever present. That's the promise that He gives us.

It's a non-negotiable reality. It doesn't come and go. He doesn't leave us when we're disobedient and come closer when we're obedient. He's always in our hearts and lives. But when we act as if He is absent against all that He says and promises, we're putting out the Spirit's fire. We are quenching the Spirit. We're losing the joy and the comfort and the hope He wants us to have. The Spirit can't quench the Spirit. God can't quench the Spirit. Others can't quench the Spirit. Only you and I in our Christian lives can quench the Spirit by our absence.

But I think also by our self-reliance, we looked at the Spirit of fire, the Spirit of power and passion. When we as Christians become self-reliant, and it's a carry on from the last one really, isn't it? When we do things in our own wisdom and strength, and when we start believing the memes that talk about going it alone, you don't find the willpower you created.

[ 21 : 29 ] Let's have more of these memes. Self-congratulatory, self-significant, self-making all about us. Just if you've got the willpower, you can do it. Come on.

When we conclude as Christians and take that kind of philosophy and saying that God doesn't care, God isn't powerful for you. God doesn't answer your prayers. Have you ever considered, have I ever considered that when He doesn't answer our prayers, it's because we're asking Him for the wrong things?

You know, if we knew everything that God knew about us, our prayers would be very different. We fared that before, haven't we? But we give up on Him and we look to obey in our own strength as if it's possible. We try and be Christians in our own strength. That is utterly miserable. There's nothing more miserable than trying to be a Christian in our own strength and in our own power.

We miss out on His presence and His energy and His warmth and His impossible virtue for us. We quench Him when we just try and go it alone. And then we find there's no spiritual fire in our belly. There's no warmth and there's no passion and there's no enjoyment. And so we look for meaning and passion and strength and enjoyment away from Him because we think that's more significant.

[ 22 : 54 ] In other areas of life and achievements and in success, and we derive the teaching about the love of God, we quench His Spirit and we move away from finding that passion, power, presence, and love of God in our lives. So by our absence, by our self-reliance, and then lastly, by our disobedience, we spoke about His purity and what that means, His hatred of sin and all that sin stands for. When we make light of sin in our lives, you know, when you don't really care about what God thinks. I'm not really a much more concerned about what other people think. When sin for us doesn't become offensive, it becomes something we just, we shrug our shoulders and live with.

We kind of shrug our shoulders at the lists of the lusts in the Bible and we are content with another philosophy which says just, well to err is human.

We're no worse than that. In fact, we're actually much better than some other people. And that'll do. Am I a better Christian than other people? That'll keep me going.

We're dabbling in sin here, we're dabbling in disobedience there. It's okay. As long as I'm keeping up with the crowd, we enjoy a bit of lust, we enjoy a bit of greed and self-centeredness.

It doesn't really harm anyone. Other Christians are doing it. But in so doing, we're losing sight of His purity and of His holiness and of His power and of His presence in our hearts.

[ 24 : 39 ] Agape certainly doesn't make sense, loving the way God loves and loving the way God enables us to live. So it's significant that we quench the Spirit when we think like that and we lose the sense of His presence and the blessings and joy that comes from Him because we're choosing to turn our backs. So the command here goes out for you and for me, for every Christian, don't quench the Spirit. And if you're not a Christian, the great invitation has come to know God through Christ and enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit eternally. So He's holy. He's the Holy Spirit and He calls us to be holy. But if you're consistently, and if I'm consistently making sinful choices, we're quenching the work of the Spirit. We're damaging our own soul. We're distancing ourselves from the one who wants to make you whole, who wants to enable you to love Him and live in His peace, finding true fulfillment and identity. So we have this great divine responsibility to be led by the Spirit and to walk in the Spirit, to bear the fruit of the

Spirit, not put out the Spirit's fire, not quench the Spirit. I can barely do it for myself. I can't do it for anyone else. You can't do it for anyone else. Your responsibility and mine alone, ultimately before the living God. And it may be that we all need to speak to God about that. Let's pray.

Father God, help us to love you and understand the way of your word. We often find other things more weighty, more significant to respond to in our lives. We sometimes grasp a very quick verse or two of Scripture in our day without really maybe considering its implications.

And we can often easily run towards things that you don't want us to and you hate. Forgive us, we pray. But how we rejoice this evening, that you don't hold our sin against us, that you simply want us to be in your presence, to enjoy your power and the passion of knowing the living God and to know the purity that is not a kind of pietistical thing that makes us judgmental of others in any way or better than others, but is wholesome and is becoming what we were created to be in Jesus, the people you made us to be, unbroken and unfettered by the damage that sin does. We look forward to that sanctifying process in our lives, help us to cooperate with you in it and help us to hear your voice, drawing us back.

Maybe some of us have not prayed to you for a long time or read your word with any sense of relational significance. Bring us back, we pray, and help us to resist, not to resist the Spirit or quench the Spirit or put out the Spirit's fire, but Lord, maybe cooperate with you and know the beauty of all that is involved in that. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.