

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

Duties of Believers – Don't Quench the Spirit

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Introduction

Many churches have minimized the importance of the Holy Spirit and God's Word in the spiritual lives of believers. It is therefore guilty of the same kind of error Paul rebuked the Galatians for: "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:3). The Holy Spirit's ministry and the Word's power has become secondary to the worldly teachings and the social agenda. Truth does not lie in man's reason or the consensus of society. Only God knows all things and therefore can declare truth. One of the Holy Spirit's roles is to guide us into that truth!

This passage directs believers toward their true responsibilities: to not quench the Spirit, to respond to God's Word, and to be discerning in all things.

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Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies. ²¹ Test all things; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil.

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This passage has been misused by some charismatic churches. The theory is that the church was forbidding the use of charismatic gifts, so Paul is warning them not to stifle the exercise of those gifts within the assembly. It argues that prophecies refer to “prophetic utterances” (v. 20) and are supernatural prophesyings that must be examined carefully to make sure they are good rather than evil (vv. 21–22). This view concludes that Paul’s attempt to correct the Thessalonians’ underestimation of the miraculous gifts, is equivalent to an affirmation of the gifts’ use in the church today.

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However, such arguments are not convincing for several reasons.

First, There is no compelling reason in the text to make these exhortations as anything other than separate statements of general exhortation. Readers ought to see them as principles for the Christian life and not read anything more into the text.

Second, if the charismatic gifts were an issue in the Thessalonian church, Paul would have admonished the Thessalonians in detail, as he did the Corinthians.

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To understand this command's true application and view it in its proper perspective, one must remember the Holy Spirit's role in believers' lives. **By His sovereign power** (cf. John 1:12–13; 6:37, 44; Acts 13:48; 16:14) **God through the Spirit regenerates sinners** (John 3:6, 8; Eph. 2:1, 5; Titus 3:5; cf. Ezek. 37:11–14), **thereby effecting a complete transformation of their spiritual affections** (Titus 3:5; cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:27; Rom. 2:29; 2 Cor. 5:17). **The Spirit frees them from slavery to habitual sin** (Rom. 8:3–9), **places them into the body of Christ** (Rom. 8:15–17), **takes up permanent residence within each new believer** (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9, 11, 14; 1 Cor. 3:16; 1 John 2:27; 4:13; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19), **pours the love of God into their hearts** (Rom. 5:5; 2 Thess. 3:5; cf. 1 John 2:5), **gifts them for spiritual service** (1 Cor. 12:4–10, 28; cf. Rom. 12:4–13; 1 Cor. 2:12–13; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6), **seals them for eternity** (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30), and **sanctifies them** (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 10:14–15; 1 Peter 1:2).

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It is this **process of growth and sanctification** by the Spirit that Paul warned the Thessalonians **not to quench**. The metaphor **quench** means “to extinguish, stifle, or impeded” the power or energy of something (cf. Matt. 25:8; Mark 9:48). Sometimes Scripture represents the presence of **the Spirit** as a fire (Acts 2:2–4; cf. Ex. 13:21; Mal. 3:2–3); Paul warned the Thessalonians not to smother the Holy Spirit’s work within them, comparing such quenching to extinguishing a fire (cf. Isa. 63:10; Acts 5:3–4; 7:51; Eph. 4:30; 2 Tim. 1:6).

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That Jesus promised to send all believers the Holy Spirit—as **a Helper to assist them in ministry and progressively sanctify them** (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7; Acts 1:4–5; cf. Prov. 1:23)—is another crucial reason **not to quench** Him.

And that sanctification process comprises a variety of Spirit-initiated works.

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First, the Holy Spirit illuminates the Word of God. (1 Cor. 2:10; cf. vv. 12–13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21; 1 John 2:27). **Believers grow spiritually only as they feed on the Word,** when they “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2; cf. Ps. 19:7–14; Matt. 4:4).

Believers can quench this aspect of the Spirit’s work by **failing to study** Scripture or **misinterpreting it** (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15), by **not receiving it with humility and applying it to their lives** (cf. James 1:21–25), by **failing to hide it in their hearts** (cf. Ps. 119:11), by not **searching it diligently** (cf. John 5:39; 8:31–32), and by **not letting it dwell richly within them** (cf. Col. 3:16).

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Second, the Holy Spirit brings believers into intimacy with God. We can boldly come into His presence as His dear children (Rom. 8:15–16; Gal. 4:6). The Spirit also prompts believers to **pray for divine resources** (cf. Ps. 116:2; Matt. 6:33; 1 Cor. 14:15; Phil. 4:6; Heb. 4:16). As the Spirit grows believers in their sanctification, they will have an **increasingly deeper and more intimate knowledge of God** (cf. Ps. 9:10; 25:4; 1 Cor. 2:2; Eph. 3:19; Phil. 3:10; 1 John 2:3).

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Believers can, however, quench that Spirit-prompted, intimate knowledge by not accepting God's purpose in life's difficulties (cf. Rom. 5:3; James 1:2–3, 12), by **not being prayerful and worshipful** (cf. John 4:24; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17), by **not casting their cares upon God** (cf. 1 Peter 5:7), by **operating in their own flesh** rather than trusting God's strength (cf. Prov. 3:5–6), by **not trusting God's supply** (2 Cor. 9:8; Phil. 4:19), and by **not trusting God's love** (cf. Eph. 2:4–5; 1 John 3:1; 4:19).

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Third, the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ to believers and transforms us into Jesus' image. “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18; cf. John 16:14–15; Gal. 4:19). As believers **look into Scripture, the Spirit helps see the glory of Christ** (cf. Isa. 40:5; John 5:39). **Genuine Christians affirm Christ's lordship and glorify His name** (1 Cor. 12:3; cf. 1 John 2:6).

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But believers also can quench the Spirit's efforts to make them more Christlike by neglecting the reading and studying of Scripture (cf. Ps. 119:130; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15), or by merely **reading the Bible for information** rather than allowing it to reveal Christ to them. Or they can proudly refuse to admit that they need to see His glory and become more like Him (cf. James 1:22–25).

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Fourth, the Holy Spirit helps believers know God's will (cf. Eph. 5:17; James 1:5; 1 John 5:14–15). He ensures, **first, that they know and obey the scripturally revealed will of God**. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ezek. 36:27; cf. Isa. 28:29; Jer. 10:23; John 10:4). **Second, the Spirit leads believers more subjectively into God's will concerning issues that are not specifically revealed in Scripture**. The Spirit provides believers with a level path of guidance (Ps. 143:10) as He operates through providence and helps them make decisions in accord with the Father's will (cf. Ps. 37:5; Prov. 16:3; James 4:15).

Believers can quench this element of the Spirit's work in sanctification through self-will, stubbornness, pride, indifference, and insensitivity regarding God's will (cf. Prov. 26:12; Dan. 5:20; Luke 18:11–12; Rom. 12:3; Rev. 2:4; 3:16–17).

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Fifth, the Holy Spirit grants believers inward strength to help them stay on the path of sanctification. Paul prayed for the Ephesians “that [God] would grant [them], according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16; cf. Zech. 4:6; 2 Cor. 12:9). **In no respect can Christians walk obediently with Christ unless they rely on the Holy Spirit’s strength** (Gal. 5:16; cf. Eph. 5:8–10; Rom. 8:5, 13; Gal. 3:3; 6:8). Unless they have the Spirit’s power, believers **cannot witness effectively** (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 8:26–29).

The work of the Spirit can also be quenched through pride and overconfidence in human ability, both of which deny the believer’s need to rely on the Spirit.

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So What ...

Living in a way that pleases God is difficult. It is like a blind man place in an unfamiliar area filled with dangers and pitfalls. God wants the best for your life so He has given us His Word so that we may know truth. It allows us to see the dangers and opportunities that surround us. He has given us a guide in the Holy Spirit to walk with us and help us in this journey.

Let us not neglect to spend time studying our Bibles and let the Spirit guide us into a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Do not Quench the Spirit!

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