

Interview with John Piper: Am I Quenching the Holy Spirit?

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Audio Transcript

Pastor John, another common question that we get in the inbox is how the Holy Spirit works in our lives and how our lives are influenced by the Holy Spirit in our relationship to him, which raises all sorts of questions in the practices of what we should do and not do. Mick from Arizona writes in to ask this: "Pastor John, I was recently just struck after reading [1 Thessalonians 5:19](#) which instructs us to not quench the Spirit. What does this phrase mean, 'do not quench the Spirit'? And what are some ways that we may do this in our daily lives?"

Let's get the specific text in front of us and a little bit of its context. Here is [1 Thessalonians 5:16-22](#). "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in 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."

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Now, let's get one thing really clear at the outset; namely, that being able to quench the Spirit of God does not mean that we are sovereign and he is not. It does not mean that we have final or decisive control over the omnipotent Spirit of God. It means that God, for wise and holy and good reasons, often allows us to resist the Holy Spirit — allows us, permits us or, as the old word, suffers us to resist the Holy Spirit. It is plain that God can overrule our resistance and quenching and bring us to repentance whenever he pleases. And I get that from [2 Timothy 2:25](#) where it says, "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth." Repentance from resisting the Spirit of God is a gift of God. So, let's keep out of our minds any thought here that our ability to quench the Spirit means we have decisive control over the Spirit in our lives. We don't. He is sovereign and lets us, for his purposes, sometimes quench him.

So, what does it mean? What are we to do when we quench the Spirit? Here are four quick answers.

First, quenching the Spirit is to despise the supernatural work of the Spirit and treat it with contempt. Right there in the context: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not *despise* prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:19–21). Evidently, some in the church at Thessalonica despised the gift of prophecy. Now, why would they do that? Well, evidently the gift was being misused in some way. I have seen it done. I have been tempted to despise it myself. So often that's the case. But Paul's response to that is very realistic. He says: Yes, that happens. So, test everything. Hold fast to what is good. Throw away the chaff. Keep the good. So, don't despise God's gift. That would be the first way that we quench the Spirit: having an attitude of contempt towards God's supernatural gifting.

Second, quenching the Spirit means neglecting the gift we have. Here is where I get that: 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6. Compare these two. "Do not neglect [Timothy] the gift you have, which was given you by prophesy when the council of elders laid their hands on you." And then 2 Timothy 1:6, "I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands." So, in Paul's mind, neglecting the gift was virtually the opposite of fanning it into flame or quenching it. He could have said: Timothy, don't quench the Spirit. Stir up his gifts into flame. So, if you have a gift from God, you are quenching the Spirit if you don't fan it into flame. That is number two.

"Neglecting your gift — or quenching the Spirit — is virtually the opposite of fanning it into flame."

Third, quenching the Spirit means shutting down your emotions when joyful, spiritual expressions are called for. I get that from Ephesians 5:18–19, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." So, the vibrant fullness of the Spirit overflows in appropriate

expressions like singing and making melody from the heart to the Lord. And if you don't like those expressions and you resist it, fold your arms — "I am not going to do that sort of thing; I am not going to sing" — you are quenching the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, and finally, quenching the Spirit means resisting the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the gracious behaviors that come from the Spirit. I get that from [Ephesians 4:30](#) where it talks about grieving the Spirit — and I think grieving the Spirit and quenching the Spirit are very close to each other. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you" ([Ephesians 4:29-31](#)). So, in front of the command not to grieve the Spirit, behind the command not to grieve the Spirit, we have these exhortations to be kind and gracious to other people. In other words, live out the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

So, my answer to Mick's question about this quenching of the Spirit is, first, that when we quench him, we are not sovereign. He is sovereign. And then it means four things: 1. despising some gift of the Holy Spirit, 2. neglecting some gift that we have, 3. shutting down our emotions and refusing to give expression to them, and 4. resisting the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

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