



How the Seeker Sensitive Movement Quenches the Holy Spirit

By Bob DeWaay

“Do not quench the Spirit;” (1Thessalonians 5:19)

In 1986 we had Dave Hunt speak at our church on the topic of his book, *The Seduction of Christianity*. After this event some members left our church. One of them was asked why and answered, “Because you have quenched the Holy Spirit.” In her estimation, holding a conference to warn people about serious false teachings was something that was a hindrance to the working of the Holy Spirit. She believed that the Holy Spirit worked through unity and that the best way to have unity was to give a hearing to any and every teaching without correcting what is false.

Others think that quenching the Spirit means putting restraints on spontaneous outbursts, actions, or utterances that some might attribute to the Holy Spirit. Their idea is this: open a free style church meeting; allow everyone to act or speak according to their subjective impressions; and assume all activities are from the Spirit. This, according to them, is the best way to insure that a damper is not put on the work of the Holy Spirit (the term “quench” here means literally to put out a fire and figuratively to suppress or stifle).

I propose a radical approach. Rather than guess what “quench” means, I propose that we first consult the Scriptures to determine the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit. Here is a list of some of His works that I compiled:

To cause us to be born again (John 3:6, 7)

To empower believers to overcome sin (Romans 8:13)

To carry the true children of God along from death to life; and ultimately to glory (Romans 8:11-14)

To intercede through and for believers (Romans 8:26, 27)

To testify of Christ (John 15:26)

To teach and guide us into the truth as taught by Christ (John 14:26; 16:13)

To convict the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7, 8)

To empower believers to testify about the truth of the Gospel of Christ (Acts 1:8; 4:33)

To give gifts to members of the church so that they may serve one another (Romans 12:4-25)

This list is not exhaustive, but it certainly contains many important descriptions of the work of the Holy Spirit. Given these activities of the Holy Spirit, whatever we would do to suppress or stifle them would be a failure to obey the directive of 1 Thessalonians 5:19. So we have our marching orders—we know what He does and what we are to do.

Studying this list and contemplating its significance, it occurred to me that the typical seeker-sensitive church service quenches the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit bears witness to Him. In a gospel-centric church service, our hymns and other music reflect our emphasis on the person and work of Christ. We sing about the blood atonement, God's mercy through the cross, God's grace, Christ's resurrection, the attributes of God, and other themes steeped in Biblical doctrine. The seeker church, on the other hand, lays aside these themes and emphasizes entertaining and uplifting music (according to their definition of "uplifting") about positive themes of life that the "unchurched" can relate to. Since the Holy Spirit testifies about Christ and leads us into truth, worship music that contains themes about the person of Christ and Biblical truth are also in accord with the work of God's Spirit. Those who are born again will rejoice in this because they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and their hearts are encouraged and empowered by His work.

Consider another practice of most seeker-oriented churches: the replacement of the study of the Bible with man-centered programs and discussion groups—often fine-tuned according to demographics. There may be a group for single mothers, a group for divorced men, or groups based on personal problems people may have in common, or groups based on other factors distinctive to some segment of people. Having gathered according to factors that have nothing to do with having been adopted into the family of God (another work of the Holy Spirit – see Romans 8:15, 16), people discuss their situations according to a broad religious point of view. This amounts to principles of Christian living based on quasi-biblical ideas, applied to one and all whether or not they are born of the Holy Spirit.

Conversely, when the Bible is studied by one and all, regardless of their age, gender, or personal demographic, the Holy Spirit inspired Scriptures nurture, convict, encourage, and transform the minds of those who can receive and believe the things of the Spirit because He has opened their hearts and minds (see 1 Corinthians 2:1-15). The Holy Spirit graciously speaks to us through the truths He has inspired and progressively changes the redeemed into the image of Christ. To remove the direct and careful study and discussion of the Bible and to replace it with discussion groups that ask, “what do you think and how do you feel” rather than, “what has God said,” is to quench the Holy Spirit.

Most of the processes and programs of the typical seeker church have nothing to do with the work of the Holy Spirit. This includes the definitions and qualifications of leadership. Many modern churches choose elders not based on the qualifications revealed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1; but based on their business management skills. For example, Titus 1:9 says that the overseer must be, “. . . holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” These activities are directly related to the work of the Holy Spirit who leads us into truth and away from error. The business management professionals who may still be called “elders” in various churches often have no Spirit enabled abilities to do the most important jobs that the Bible gives elders the charge to do.

The shocking thing is that, having stripped the church of nearly every activity that is directly related to the work of the Holy Spirit, many are calling this “revival.” Quenching the Holy Spirit at every turn by making a church that will work just fine populated by the unregenerate is not revival—it is apostasy. The unity of the Spirit which we are to preserve, according to Paul in Ephesians 4:3, is not preserved by allowing wolves and false teachers into the church and neglecting the true work of the Holy Spirit that comes through the unadulterated gospel and the inerrant Word of God.

Rather than justifying each and every activity of the church vis-à-vis the corporate mission statement as the Church Growth experts advocate, we need to justify our activities by comparing them to the clear descriptions of the work of the Holy Spirit given in the Bible. Will this activity convict the world of sin, encourage the faithful

Christian, lead us into all truth, empower believers to overcome sin, empower believers to preach the gospel, and cause us to worship God in spirit and in truth? If these matters became the criteria, we would see true revival in our churches not just a lot of human activity, devoid of the Spirit, that we call “revival.”

To listen to a message on the matter of the work of the Holy Spirit and true prophetic utterances go [here](#) and choose the July 9th sermon on 1Thessalonians 5:16-22.

Published by Twin City Fellowship

Critical Issues Commentary

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St Louis Park MN 55426

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www.cicministry.org

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