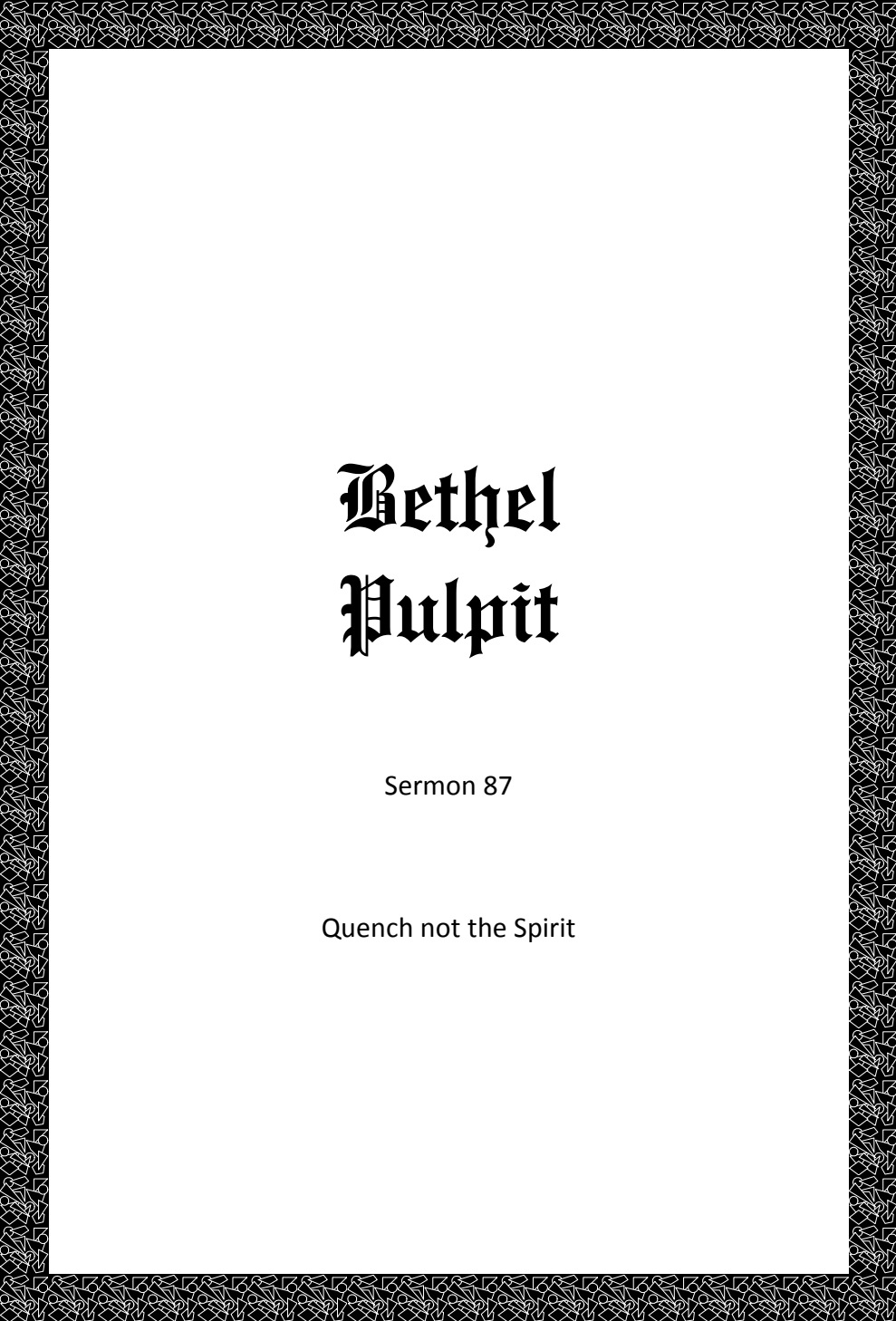




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 87

Quench not the Spirit

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning 3rd November, 1991**

Text: "*Quench not the Spirit*" (1 Thessalonians 5. 19).

The Person and work of the Holy Spirit are two of the vital themes of Scripture. First of all the Person of the Spirit: He is a Person, He is a divine Person, He is God. He is the third Person in the blessed Trinity, co-equal, co-eternal with the Father and the Son, not created, not begotten, but proceeding from the Father and the Son. The Person of the Holy Spirit. Then His work. Really, there are three great works of the Holy Spirit. The greatest of all is the mysterious incarnation of the Son of God, born of a virgin. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." The second great work, the inspiration of Scripture. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And the third work, the work of grace in a sinner's heart in the new birth, quickening into life, maintaining life, graciously teaching, glorifying Christ, revealing Him. So we have this as one of the foremost themes of Scripture, the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, who He is and what He does.

When we come to this very short, simple, exceedingly solemn word, at first it almost startles us, and it should. We have this solemn exhortation, this solemn commandment, not to quench the Holy Spirit. If any mere man of himself had written that, he would almost be accused of blasphemy! But God Himself has written it. We have no ability whatsoever to control the Spirit, to influence the Spirit, to command the Spirit. But we have an awful, solemn, terrible power to quench the Spirit. Sin in all its workings, its various workings, will quench the Spirit. I take it here that one thing is self-evident, yet it is very important. That is, when we speak of quenching the Spirit, it must mean the sacred influences of the Spirit. Because if we think of the Holy Spirit as true almighty God, you and I as puny creatures of the day can never quench Him in any way. So I take it when we are solemnly told, solemnly warned, not to quench the Spirit, that this is in His sacred workings and His gracious influences.

Here the Spirit is compared to fire as so often in Scripture. The work of the Holy Spirit is compared to fire, warming, softening, melting, burning. And just as water poured on fire will quench that fire, so we have that awful ability through sin to quench the workings of the Holy Spirit. If ever there was a day in the professing church of God when the Spirit has been quenched, it is today, both in our churches, and in our midst, and in our hearts. I mean, we speak so much of the withholding of the Spirit's work. Why? Why does the blessed Spirit withhold His work, withhold His sacred influence? Because God's people are guilty of this great and grievous sin of quenching the Spirit.

Let us be clear, each one of us in greater or less measure at different times in our life is guilty of it and we have to plead guilty. We quench the Spirit. Sin in any shape or form in our lives and thoughts, sin in all its workings, sin will quench the Holy Spirit. Sin will quench the spirit of prayer. Sin will quench the spirit of faith. Sin will quench the spirit of holy zeal. Above all, sin will quench the spirit of love. We meet together in a day where there is this terrible, awful quenching of the Spirit. And you and I are not guiltless.

So I want to bring this exceedingly close and solemn and heart-searching word in love before you this morning. We are bidden by God Himself: "Quench not the Spirit." As we look at this word, we need to ponder over the various ways in which it is possible for us to quench the Spirit. With God's help, I want to speak this morning of many of these different ways in which we do quench the Spirit, so that we might be warned against them, so that we might pray against them, so that we might seek deliverance from them, so that we might seek forgiveness for them.

One of the chief and most awful ways in which we quench the Spirit is by our unbelief. Unbelief will always quench the Spirit. We need to watch it in our soul's experience. Perhaps the Lord speaks to us, and unbelief immediately begins to doubt it, and think it was not God. Perhaps we have a good hearing time in the house of God, and unbelief begins to call it all into question. Or perhaps we receive a blessing, and unbelief begins to reject it. Satan will tell you that you must be sure you are right, that you are discerning your own spirit. John Bunyan wrote very forcibly about the white devil of unbelief. Mind you, that does not mean you will receive anything and receive everything. Of course it does not. O but

beware of the white devil of unbelief, that mock humility that Satan works in your heart. And beware of quenching the Spirit whenever He touches your heart, whenever He leads you forth in prayer, whenever He gives you a word in season, whenever He gives you a good hearing, whenever He gives you a blessing. Faith will hold it fast; unbelief will not. Unbelief rising up in your heart will reject it, cast it from you, despise it, and you will quench the Spirit. Perhaps some of you say, Why does the Lord not come? Why does the Lord not speak? Why does He not bring the blessing? Well, has there been a quenching of the Spirit? What did we sing in our first hymn this morning?

“So gentle sometimes is the flame,
That, if we take not heed,
We may unkindly quench the same,
We may, my friends, indeed.”

As Joseph Hart underlines that last line, so, sadly, we have to underline it. *“We may, my friends, indeed.”* “Quench not the Spirit.” Beware of blind unbelief. Pray against it, fight against it, seek to be delivered from it. It always dishonours God.

“Quench not the Spirit.” Now another way in which we quench the Spirit is unconfessed sin. Have you any unconfessed sin in your life? It may be you have been guilty of something. It may be that no longer you walk in that way; but have you ever been brought from a full and honest heart to confess that sin, and mourn over it, and grieve over it, and seek the Lord’s forgiveness? Unconfessed sin is one of the ways in which we may quench the Spirit. We cannot cease from sin. We shall never be free from sin this side of the grave. But seek to have short accounts with God, short dealings with God. Seek that there may not be any unconfessed sins in your life, any sins of which you have not repented in your life. Now unconfessed sin, that quenches the Spirit.

Something that goes hand in hand with it is continuing in some known sin. That will quench the Spirit. There may be something wrong in your life. You go on with it. You do not put it right. Now that will quench the Spirit. It may be that you roll that sin like a sweet morsel under your tongue when you are alone. Perhaps no one knows anything about it, but you do, and the Lord does, and if you go on with that thing in your life which is wrong, and you know it is wrong in the sight of God,

then you will quench the Spirit. That means we need to pray fervently that the Lord will search our hearts and show us if there are any wrong things in our lives and perhaps we are ignorant of them. These things are quenching the Spirit. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

“Quench not the Spirit.” Sometimes we quench the Spirit by a wrong move in providence. O how many people there have been who have brought death and darkness and bondage in their souls by taking a wrong move in providence! There has not been sufficient prayer, sufficient gracious exercise, sufficient humility, sufficient seeking to know and do the Lord’s will. That decision has been taken in the flesh, and that change has been made in the flesh, and that move in providence has been made in the flesh, and it all seemed right and seemed straightforward. It seemed common sense. It seemed the only thing to do. But how many of God’s people have brought the rod upon themselves! How many of them have smarted in old age because of a wrong step taken in providence! It was not taken for the honour and glory of God. It was not taken for the welfare of His people. It was to satisfy earthly ambition, or to make more money, or to gain more comfort, more influence. It was not taken in the fear of God, not depending on His grace, not seeking His holy will, but in the flesh, and there is a quenching of the Spirit. Perhaps everything will go well with you in providence. You will prosper, everything will seem to smile upon you, and things will go well, but there is the quenching of the Spirit in your innermost soul in the life of faith. Sooner or later, when there is that quenching of the Spirit, it will bring the rod. If we walk contrary to God’s will and quench the Spirit, it will bring the rod. “Not in anger, but in His dear covenant love.” But it will bring the rod.

“Quench not the Spirit.” It may be one of you this morning is in a special exercise of soul and you are praying. I do not know the exercise; your best friends do not know the exercise. You know it, and the Lord knows it. There is the inward prompting of the Spirit, the inward leading of the Spirit, the gentle voice of the Spirit. Perhaps you are turning a deaf ear to it. O never, never turn a deaf ear to the inward prompting of the Spirit. That will quench the Spirit. If there are those gentle leadings of the Spirit in your heart, then watch them, listen to them, heed them, never trample on them, never quench them. It may be there is the inward

whisper of the Spirit in some heart showing you where you are wrong, rebuking you, reproofing you, chastising you. Never quench the Spirit. If the Spirit gently whispers in your heart, showing you your sin, where you are wrong; if you turn a deaf ear, He will answer you with terrible things in righteousness. O beware of quenching the Spirit.

“Quench not the Spirit.” Another thing is carelessness in the things of God. It is very easy for us to become careless in the things of God. If we become careless, then the Spirit is quenched. You say, Why do I not feel the same love? Why not the same zeal? Why not the same blessing? Why not the same delight? There is that carelessness in divine things, and carelessness in divine things will always quench the Spirit. We can become careless in our Christian walk, careless in our behaviour, careless in our profession, careless concerning keeping the Sabbath day, careless concerning our attitude to the house of God, careless concerning the means of grace, careless concerning the prayer meeting. We can become careless concerning God’s holy Word. We can become careless concerning prayer, careless concerning the throne of grace. Then there is a quenching of the Spirit, and the Lord is grieved, and His name dishonoured. Where the Spirit is quenched, there is a withholding of His gracious influences.

“Quench not the Spirit.” We need to beware of quenching the Spirit in this. Perhaps you have read in old books or old obituaries how a young person in the tender fear of God, with a tender conscience, has tried to speak to some older saint, and such a rough and unkind and ungracious answer was received. There has been a quenching of the Spirit. Perhaps that young person never dare speak again for ten or twenty years to any person concerning the Spirit’s work within. That does not mean that God’s people are to receive anything and everything. Why, almost the very next verse says: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” But the Lord will never break a bruised reed, never quench the smoking flax, and we should seek to walk out the same. If you read those old, discerning writers – I think especially of people like Bernard Gilpin and James Bourne – in their letters they demolish everything of the flesh. Whether it is religious flesh or carnal flesh, whatever it is, they completely demolish it, but they are so discerning for the tenderest, weakest spark of grace. They seek to encourage it, to fan it into a flame.

There is another way in which we can quench the Spirit in this: in our young people, in our children, in seeking, longing souls; that is, by an inconsistent walk. Our children, our young people, those outside know whether we are real; they know whether in reality the things of God take first place in our life. They can discern any sign of hypocrisy. They can immediately pick out any inconsistency. That will quench the Spirit. Beloved friends, may we be very burdened, solemnly exercised concerning quenching the Spirit in ourselves, but may we also be very burdened about quenching the Spirit in others. I remember in my early days at Haslingden; we had some good days, the working of the Spirit. But there was one of the younger people who was abundantly blessed. She went to a dear old saint and said, "I do love that hymn," and pointed to hymn 720, "Endless blessings on the Lamb." But that dear old saint said, "What about that one on the opposite page, 'What am I, and where am I?'" It was a godly woman who said that, but it was not grace working in her reply. It was a quenching of the Spirit. We need to be very careful that we do not quench the Spirit in our own hearts, and that we do not quench the Spirit in other people.

"Quench not the Spirit." Worldliness, worldly conformity, carnality, will always quench the Spirit. The Lord says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Those things which are above are like oil to the flame, especially if they sweetly flow down from heaven into your heart. You have to seek those things which will fan the flame and which will be as oil to the flame, and you have to avoid everything that will damp the flame, everything that will put it out. Just a word aside here to parents in your families with your children: you have to seek to stamp out and avoid everything that will have an evil influence on your children, because they have enough of that in the world. You need to seek to bring into your home those things which will have an influence for good, an influence for grace. But worldly conformity, carnal things, the flesh, these will quench the Spirit in your hearts and lives and in the church of God. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above" – they will not quench the Spirit – "where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." They will quench the Spirit. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in

God.” It comes to mind what John Newton says about the power of God in the soul.

“Preserve the power of faith alive
In those who love Thy name;
For sin and Satan daily strive
To quench the sacred flame.”

“Your life is hid with Christ in God.” But sometimes that life burns low in your heart. We need to avoid those things that will quench it. Lawful things, if we are too carried away with them, too taken up with them, they can quench that holy flame, quench the life of God in our soul. There may be a person who has something completely lawful. But if he is swallowed up with it, it can quench the sacred, tender flame. So can sorrow. Sorrow comes in our lives. If we are completely swallowed up with sorrow, or with care, or with our burdens, this will quench the Spirit. We need to “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” These will not quench the Spirit; these will be as oil to the flame.

“His grace shall to the end,
Stronger and brighter shine.”

“He giveth more grace.” He has it to give. His grace never quenches the Spirit. But do avoid the world, and the spirit of the world, and carnal things. Then avoid being swallowed up, completely swallowed up even with lawful things, even with sorrows, even with cares. “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.”

“Quench not the Spirit.” Now a spirit of pride and self-righteousness will quench the Spirit. O how easy it is for us to become self-righteous, and how easy it is for pride to creep in! Doesn’t our hymn writer speak of pride creeping in, even to our most holy things, our sacred things – a child of God even being proud of his religion, proud of his graces? Where pride begins to creep in, where self-righteousness begins to creep in, there is always a quenching of the Spirit. For self-righteousness and pride are abhorrent to the Spirit of God, so contrary to His gracious workings, which always humble you at the Saviour’s feet.

“Quench not the Spirit.” We do need to be kept from this quenching of the Spirit. We cannot control the Spirit, command the Spirit,

but we can quench the Spirit in our hearts. There will not be the fruitfulness. There will not be the blessing. Perhaps above everything else, a wrong spirit will quench the Spirit of God. We need to pray daily, hourly, “Lord, give me more of Thy Spirit, and less of my own.” But beware of a wrong spirit. We can easily be in a wrong spirit without realising it, and there is a quenching of the Spirit. James and John were two godly men. One was beheaded; one became the apostle of love. But on one occasion, they got into a wrong spirit, and did not know it. They asked the Lord Jesus to call down fire from heaven and consume those who opposed. They were proud of their zeal. But the Lord Jesus rebuked them and said, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” How we need to pray that prayer daily, hourly, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with my spirit, to give me a right spirit, and to deliver me from my own spirit, and to save me from a wrong spirit!” If we are in a wrong spirit, there will be a quenching of the Holy Spirit in His sacred influences.

There are many warnings in Scripture against an unforgiving spirit. That is a very solemn, close word which follows what is commonly known as the Lord’s prayer. “If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” “Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” We need to be kept from an unforgiving spirit. We need to be kept from a hard spirit, from a spirit of death. We need to be kept from a spirit of unbelief, an unkind spirit, an ungracious spirit, a spirit which does not honour God. We need to pray that prayer: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” Why, “renew a right spirit within me”? Because so often I have a wrong spirit. But I can do a right thing in a wrong way. I can preach what might be a good sermon, but with a wrong spirit; contend for something which is right, yet do it in a wrong way. We do need to be preserved in our spirit. We need the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need the spirit of love, the spirit to walk before Him humbly in His holy fear. We do need to be kept from quenching the Holy Spirit because of our own spirit, because of a wrong spirit.

“Quench not the Spirit.” Now discord, disputing, will quench the Spirit. There must be a contending for the truth in love. There must be a walking in His holy fear. But as Dr. Watts sings:

“The peaceful Spirit like a dove
Does from the realms of strife depart” –

in a home, in a family, among two friends, in the church of God.

“Quench not the Spirit.” Then there is another thing. That is disobedience. When we walk in disobedience to the Lord, there will be a quenching of the Spirit. I wonder if there is anyone here this morning, and you are walking in disobedience to the Lord; you are disobeying His voice, disobeying His commandments. He says, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” He says, “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” If you walk in disobedience, then there is a quenching of the Spirit, a withdrawing of His sacred, gracious influences, because the Holy Spirit is grieved by His people’s disobedience.

“Quench not the Spirit.” But we do need more of the love of Christ, more of His love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. We need more of His blessing. We need more conformity to the image of God’s dear Son. O beloved friends, may we as a congregation, as a church, as a denomination, as families, personally, may we be kept from quenching the Spirit. Because if ever there were a day of the withholding of the Spirit of God, it is today. And the reason there is the withholding of the Spirit of God is because so often by sin in its various workings we grieve the Spirit of God whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption. We quench the Spirit. O beloved friends, “Suffer the word of exhortation.” May we each fall beneath it. May we constantly cry that we might be kept from quenching the Spirit. May we see the danger, the awfulness of it. May we see that it will bring the rod. May we pray for more grace, pray that we might walk in the Spirit and not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. O to be kept from this solemn thing, quenching the Spirit.

“Quench not the Spirit.” With a church, if the Spirit is constantly quenched, there comes a time when the Holy Spirit withdraws. There are many churches which were eminently godly where the Spirit of God has withdrawn and never returned. So we need to pray, “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us.” How solemn when Ichabod is written over the door, and the Spirit of God has departed! What about these godly churches like the church at Ephesus or even the Thessalonians here? On the other hand, with a child of God, when the Holy Spirit begins to work and take up His abode, He never finally departs. Yet He does withdraw His gracious

influence. So we need to pray against quenching the Spirit. We need to pray to be kept. And where we have quenched the Spirit, and where we do, we need to pray for forgiveness, for mercy. And we need to implore the gracious return of the Spirit in power, in His sacred influence to our hearts and to our churches.

“Return, O holy Dove! return,
Sweet Messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
And drove Thee from my breast.”

Well beloved friends, may it be a word in season to each of us of solemn warning, of gracious reproof, a clear New Testament commandment to the honour and glory of God that the Lord Jesus might be glorified. “Quench not the Spirit.”