

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Do Not Quench The Spirit 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Part 4

We are considering the command found in **1 Thess. 5:19** “**Do not quench the Spirit.**” Several weeks ago we considered various ways that we can in fact do this. And now we have begun to consider various movements within the Church of Christ that also can in fact do the very same thing.

How can these movements be identified? They can be identified by whether or not they in fact distract professing believers from honestly considering and responding to the truth of God’s Word. We can use this criteria because it is the Word of God that the Spirit of God uses to do the work of God. Therefore if professing believers are distracted from honestly considering and responding to the truth of God’s Word then the Spirit of God will be limited in respect to what He can do and therefore is quenched.

In the last two weeks we have identified two movements that are potentially guilty of this very thing.

Two weeks ago we considered the Charismatic movement. Though we can rejoice in the fact that the gospel is being proclaimed and people are being saved we must also acknowledge the fact that professing believers within this movement are being distracted from honestly considering and responding to the truth of God’s Word. How does this happen? This happens when so-called supernatural manifestations of the Spirit becomes more important than the careful examination and application of Biblical truth. It happens when the “experiential” side of Christianity takes precedent over “truth.”

Last week we considered the psychological movement. Though we can rejoice in the fact that certain individuals are in fact being encouraged through this current phenomenon we must also acknowledge the fact that professing believers within this movement are being distracted from honestly considering and responding to the truth of God’s Word. How does this happen? It happens when professing believers are distracted from honestly considering and responding to the truth of God’s Word by the subtle and sometimes not so subtle inference that the Scriptures are not sufficient in addressing the deepest needs of the human heart.

This morning we will be considering the last movement within the church of Christ that we believe is potentially capable of quenching the Spirit and that is the “Church Growth Movement.” Certainly this is a very hot topic in evangelical circles today.

The church growth movement, as it has come to be known, emerged in North America some 25 years ago from the writings of the late Donald McGavern. For 30 years a missionary in India. McGavern had wondered why some mission churches grew and others did not. His first conclusions, published in the 1950’s became well known in mission circles. But it wasn’t until his book “Understanding Church Growth” was published in 1970 that the topic began to attract the attention of North American churches.

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I have no reason to believe that McGavern's research had only the most noble motivations in mind. I have no reason to believe that he had any other desire than to see the church of Jesus Christ expand and to do so with the greatest possible effectiveness. And I am sure that insights that he himself brought to the attention of the churches here in north America have in fact proven useful but the emphasis upon numerical growth I believe opens up the door for the quenching of the Spirit. This morning I will outline for you how I believe that this actually happens.

The first step

It begins when the emphasis on numerical growth changes our measure of what constitutes "success." Once the measure of what constitutes success changes then an environment is established which can diminish the centrality of Scriptures in the life of the church.

Let me ask you a question. How do you measure your success as a follower of Christ? This is not a difficult question to answer. The reason why it is not difficult is because the scriptures themselves tell us. In **1 Cor. 4:1-2** it says, **"Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. (2) In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy."** The responsibility of a steward is to be faithful to his master. The same thing is true in respect to a church. The measure of a particular church in the sight of God is not how big it is or small it is. The measure of a particular church in the sight of God is not how fast, or slow it is growing. The measure of success in regards to a particular church in the sight of God is how faithful that church has been in seeking to be all that the Lord has called them to be and to do. (1 Cor. 4:1-2).

If Christ had been measured on the basis of numbers we would have to consider His earthly ministry a failure. But if you measure His earthly ministry on the basis of faithfulness you would have to conclude that He was a great success.

But someone may say but shouldn't we expect that if we are faithful to be and to do what Christ has called us to be and do that we should expect church growth? And the answer would be, Yes! Though numerical growth should not be a measure of success it should be expected (Mt. 16:18). But expecting people to respond to the gospel message is quite different than measuring our success as a steward of God on the basis of how many respond.

We can expect growth because of the Words of Christ. Certainly we would have to expect growth on the basis of Christ's promise to His disciples in **Mt. 16:18** that He would **"build His church."** And this is certainly what we see in the Book of Acts. In **Acts 2** after the birth of the church we see Peter giving the first Gospel invitation recorded for us in the New Testament **V. 41** says, **"So then, those who had received His Word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls."** Certainly this account by Luke was clear testimony to Peter and to all the disciples of the faithfulness of Christ to fulfill His promise that He would build His church. We should expect that as we are faithful in the presentation of the Gospel that people will come to know Jesus. But we cannot in any way measure our success as a steward on this basis. Why? Because the growth which occurs in respect to its timing or degree has nothing to do with us (1 Cor. 3:5-7).

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Let us consider **1 Cor. 3:5-7**. Divisions had begun to occur in the Church of Corinth and those divisions apparently had begun to occur as various Corinthian believers were beginning to compare various ministers and ministries on the basis of their perceived fruitfulness. These verses contain the response of Paul to these Corinthians **“What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. (6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. (7) So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.”** Notice the emphasis on who causes growth. It is God!!

What does this mean? It means that we individually or corporately have no control over the results of our labor. We therefore ultimately have no control over how Christ chooses to build His Church.

Let me ask you a question. Would Peter have been successful if only 2,000 people had put their faith in Christ? And the answer would have to be, yes! Would Peter have been successful if only a 1,000 people had put their faith in Christ? And the answer would have to be, yes! But what would have happened if only 100 had put their faith in Christ? He still would have been successful. What about only 1? There is no difference. Even if no one had responded to his message he still would have been successful because, as a servant of Christ, he would have been faithful to what Christ had called him to be and do. The numerical growth of Christ’s Church is not our responsibility it is Christ’s. Our responsibility is to be faithful in regards to all that Christ has called us to be and to do in His Word.

And yet even though this apparently is clearly taught in the Scripture the Church Growth Movement can lead churches to believe that they have much more control than they in fact do and as a result many churches have established mission statements that reflect this kind of thinking.

What is the potential first step in the church growth movement quenching the Spirit? The first step in quenching the Spirit is taken if the analysis of church growth principles leads a church to define success in terms of the number of people attending rather than wholehearted obedience to the Word of God. This change of definition provides the environment by which the Word of God can be diminished and therefore the Spirit of God quenched.

The Second Step

Once a numerical goal is established and is used to measure the success of the church in respect to its mission the church then is very vulnerable compromising it’s commitment to teach the whole counsel of the Word of God (John 6) It does not take a rocket scientist to understand that there are certain Scriptures that people like to have taught and there are other Scriptures that they don’t.

Remember the experience of Jesus. In **John 6** we read about the miraculous feeding of the 5000 with five loaves and two fishes. What was the result of this miracle. We read in **V. 15** that the people wanted to make them their king. This is a great idea to have a king that would be able to make food appear. But as we know Jesus did not cooperate with this idea and left with his disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. But the Scripture tells us that the multitudes followed. Why did they follow Jesus.

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They followed Him for what they could get from him. But rather than continuing to minister to their felt needs he shared with them “hard sayings” and what was the result. It says in **V. 66**, **“As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore.”** If Jesus' measure of success was getting more and more people to follow Him then this was certainly not very successful, but if His goal was to be faithful to proclaim the whole counsel of the Word of God he had great success.

What does the Scriptures indicate to us will be the tendency in our day and age? Will people be so hungry for the truth that they will want to listen to even the truths which may be hard to understand or apply or will they be very much like those who were following Jesus? The Scriptures does not leave us in the dark in respect to these things. People will flock to those teachers who will tell them what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:1-3). In **2 Tim. 4:1-3**, Paul gave the following instruction to Timothy **“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom (2) Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.”** Certainly we see this very present in the church today. There are churches today that would never consider sharing the things that I have been sharing with you the past several weeks. My wife said to me after my message on the Charismatic Movement two weeks ago said well this is not the way to build a large church. But this is OK because our measure of success is not how large we might be or not be but rather how faithful have we been to teach the word.

Churches must move away from the present emphasis upon filling their buildings with people and seek rather to fill their buildings with disciples. Filling buildings with people is relatively easy. All you really need to do is develop a good marketing strategy and when the people come be sure to give them what they want to hear in a format that is somewhat entertaining. But if this approach is followed it will only distract professing believers from considering and responding to the clear teachings of the Word of God and therefore the Spirit will be quenched.

An example of this I believe would be Willow Creek Church in Illinois. Certainly they have recognized how easy it is to fill buildings using the approach I have described. They have in fact attempted to build it into their evangelistic strategy. They have turned their weekend services into what they call “seeker services.” They are heavily marketed and when the people come they hear messages that are very much tailored to what people want to hear and it is all done in a format that is professionally designed to be entertaining. Within that format they seek to introduce the gospel and hope that the people will respond. In order to provide more in-depth teaching of the truth they provide a midweek service for those that attend their church which are Christians. It looks good on paper but it has been very difficult to make it work.

Establishing “Seeker services” seems to be a great strategy but ultimately it is a very dangerous strategy (1 Cor. 5:6). You now have the world in the church. Some people would say that this is not true. But the facts do not support this view. On a typical weekend service at Willow Creek there are 14,000 people. Ideally the according to their model the vast majority of the people would be unsaved. But according to a well researched book by a man named G. A Prichard the numbers are closer to 10 to 20 percent.

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This means that the vast majority of the people who are listening to a service that is designed to give the people what they want to hear is largely Christian. This does not bode well for righteousness.

Bringing so many of the world into such proximity with the church in terms of their only formal gathering as believers is extremely dangerous. What does the scriptures teach us. Paul in **1 Cor. 5:6** warns the church that a **“little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.”** This truth would be particularly true of a fellowship whose greatest input of biblical instruction would be coming from a seeker service designed to give them what they want to hear.

CONCLUSION

When a particular movement potentially can distract professing believers from considering and responding to the teachings of God’s word it can quench the Spirit of God. I believe that the church growth movement contains this potential. It provides the environment for this to take place by focusing on growth and therefore can distract churches from focusing on obedience as the measure of their success. This danger is compounded when churches begin to consciously or unconsciously abandon the commitment to teach the whole counsel of the Word of God in order to obtain their growth goals.

Hopefully we at Valley Bible understanding that our success will not be measured by how many people we can get to attend our church but rather on the basis our obedience, by our commitment to obey the Lord with our whole heart , mind and soul.

We at Valley Bible are not against numerical growth. In fact we expect it because of the promise of Christ. As we take the light of the gospel into our neighborhoods, into our families and into our workplaces we believe that the Lord will be faithful to His promise.

And if those in the world do not immediately respond to that message it does not mean that they cannot come into the church. Certainly if they have an interest in spiritual things and feel a spiritual void in their lives let them come. But the services in the New Testament certainly were not designed for the unsaved in the world. They were designed around lives of the faithful who had come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.