

If you want to avoid becoming an old wineskin, make sure to keep these five hindrances out of your life.

I got some funny looks 11 years ago when I told people that I planned to be ordained in a mainline Pentecostal denomination. Most of my friends were supportive when I explained that I made this decision because I was looking for accountability and spiritual mentors. But critics told me I was aligning myself with “an old wineskin.” In their opinion, any church group that is more than 30 years old has outlived its usefulness and become a religious fossil.

I chose to reject the fossil argument—mainly because (1) I know God has the power to renew His people no matter how old their group is, and (2) even young organizations can become religious and ineffective, regardless of how trendy and culturally relevant they pretend to be.

“I pray you will stir up the Holy Ghost’s flame and purge yourself of anything that hinders His miraculous work in you. And I pray that every church and denomination in this country will invite the One who baptizes in fire to burn up our dross.”

This week the group that ordained me, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC), celebrated the 100th anniversary of their formation in the tiny town of Falcon, NC. Leaders from around the world gathered there to honor the past and envision the future—and to solemnly commit to remain faithful to God by signing a covenant declaration.

That might sound hokey to people who weren’t there, but I wept through most of Monday’s service, especially when we sang an old hymn from the early Pentecostal era (“Old Time Power”) and reflected on the sacrifices made by the brave men and women who preached holy fire down from heaven on the United States in the early years of the 20th century. I feel honored to carry on their legacy—and challenged to match their fervor.

On Tuesday I called contemporary leaders of the IPHC to carry the fire of the Spirit into the 21st century. There is always the danger that we could become old wineskins. But I believe the same Holy Spirit who ignited the fires of Azusa Street and other early Pentecostal revivals can certainly stir up those flames again and make them white hot. Our job is to heed the words of

Paul to the Thessalonians: “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19).

I warned my brothers and sisters of these five specific forces that are quenching the Holy Spirit today in the American church. I offer this same warning to everyone, regardless of what denomination (or non-denominational church) you are aligned with:

Legalism and religiosity. Every generation of Christians is prone to persecuting the next move of God. We do this by requiring people to abide by certain regulations (dress codes, music styles, etc.) that have no scriptural basis but are enforced with all the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. No church—and no individual Christian—can survive when encumbered by a religious spirit. It kills all life!

Racism. God’s ultimate call on our lives is to take His gospel to every person everywhere—regardless of whether they are black, brown or white; whether they have dreadlocks or tattoos; whether they are legal or illegal; whether they are veiled in *burq*
as or wearing biker helmets; or whether they speak Spanish, Arabic, Chinese or Hindi. When we close our hearts to people because of racial, cultural or language differences, we constrict the flow of His love and become rusty pipes full of poisonous water.

Denominationalism. A movement that loses momentum becomes a monument. There is nothing wrong with denominations as long as their leaders stay in step with the Spirit’s direction. But as soon as we replace the genuine apostolic anointing with programs and religious busy-work, we become like those derelicts Paul describes in 2 Timothy 3:5: “Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power (NASB).”

Unforgiveness and division. In a recent survey of people who left the Christian faith, the large majority said they gave up on church not because of doctrine but because of a lack of real community in the congregation. Nothing diffuses the power of the Holy Spirit quicker than the absence of love. When love vanishes, spiritual gifts become noisy gongs and mountain-moving faith becomes meaningless chaff. We must not only keep our hearts free from bitterness; we must announce from the pulpit that the One who gave His life for us demands that we walk in forgiveness. We must live love and preach love.

Egotism. God has called us to build people of character, not celebrities. Just as He opposed the Tower of Babel and scattered its builders, He resists big egos. No wonder He is scattering the charismatic movement today! Somewhere along the way we forgot that the Holy Spirit empowered us so we would take the gospel to the world. We traded genuine revival for a cheap substitute and figured out how to sell it to gullible people with itching ears. We elevated people in true Babylonian style, forgetting that the only way up in God's kingdom is down the path of true humility.

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