

*1 Thessalonians 5:19-22***PREFACE**

Last week we focused on the important first verse—v19—of this last section regarding our conduct within the body of Christ. This week we look at the whole paragraph.

v19: DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT

Beyond the very personal, intimate way we considered this verse last week, there are two ways to approach this.

The Holy Spirit Himself

Related to what we discussed in our last session, we are to acknowledge and respect the ministry of the Holy Spirit in every gathering of believers. He is here among us, and within each individual. He has work to do in our corporate worship, and we are to let Him do it.

What does this look like? Sometimes an example in the negative is the best illustration. Just moments before he was stoned to death, Stephen spoke to this, addressing those about to have him killed.

Read Acts 7:51.

Note, the ones he said this to were the highest religious leaders of the day: the high priest and the Sanhedrin. They were so preoccupied with the minutia of the law and the traditions they had layered upon it, they were not permitting the Spirit of God to work in their midst.

But now look at the flip-side. If the Jewish Council of the day is our negative example, Stephen is the positive.

Read vv54-56.

There is the vision of someone permitting the Spirit to work in his life: heaven is opened to him even as he remains on the soil of earth.

Our Spiritual Gifts

The second approach—the second way to “quench the Spirit”—is to repress, either corporately or within ourselves, the *gifts* of the Spirit. In three chapters of 1 Corinthians (12-14), the apostle Paul gives detailed counsel about how the gifts of the Spirit are to be incorporated into corporate worship in an orderly manner.

There several different lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible, but we find most in 1 Corinthians 12. In v7 Paul makes it clear that with the Spirit Himself, every believer is given at least one spiritual gift to be used in building up the body of Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:7.

Paul then adds what we might term, from a human, fleshly perspective, some of the flashier gifts.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:8-11.

Further down in the chapter Paul adds more of these gifts.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-28.

In his first epistle, Peter reminds us that not only are we to use these gifts in the church, but he reminds us *why*.

Read 1 Peter 4:10-11.

First, in His grace, God has shared some of Himself with each of us, and we are to be good stewards of those gifts. Second, with these gifts we are to serve one another, to build up—to edify, rather than tear down—the body. Third, we are to give ourselves over to God working through us by these gifts so that both the Father and Son are glorified.

v20

Do not despise prophetic utterances

Although we will look at the next three verses individually, they are of a piece. *The Message* paraphrases it,

...don't stifle those who have a word from the Master. On the other hand, don't be gullible. Check out everything, and keep only what's good. Throw out anything tainted with evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22)

The word translated “despise” means considering something so contemptible that it counts for naught, good for nothing. Paul says don't do that.

Some commentators take the position that the word “prophecies,” here, refers to *forth*-telling—not *fore*-telling; that is, not telling your future (“You will meet a tall dark stranger tomorrow.”) but telling forth a special word from God. But that is not the only position. Others point out that in Paul's time, during the formation of the church, when the canon of Scripture was not yet closed, both *forth*-telling and *fore*-telling were occurring. The best conclusion seems to be that Paul was including *both* in his command not to despise prophecy.

Note: The subject of prophecy in the church—whether first-century or modern—is too deep and controversial to cover in less than thirty minutes, and is ultimately outside the scope of this study. Our purpose should be to determine

- what Paul was saying to the Thessalonian church, and
- what application that has for us today.

Prophecy as “forth-telling”

If we trace the prophetic gift from the OT to today, we see that it has moved from the specific and rare, to the general and more common. And, of course, there are differing positions: some claim there are still prophets in the OT mold, while others say no.

- Prophets in the OT spoke *ex cathedra*: they could say “Thus says the Lord,” and what followed were the very words of God. These prophets were rare, but one disregarded them at one's peril.

By NT times, the word “prophet” had a broader range of meanings—less, “one who speaks God's very words,” to more “one who speaks on the basis of some external (typically spiritual) influence.” (This would not exclude the OT type of prophet.)

- In the NT this office was renamed, by Christ Jesus, to “apostles.” Those who spoke and wrote words that would be included in the canon of God’s word were not called prophets, but apostles.
- Today we believe the apostolic age has drawn to a close, since Scripture is now complete. But Paul speaks of someone in the worship service having a spontaneous “revelation” [1 Corinthians 14:30] that they would share with everyone. The idea is God might send something of a special nature that He wishes to be revealed to the body of Christ. But this would be in no way authoritative.

Some have concluded that what we refer to as “teaching” and “preaching” could be called prophesying, since both are telling forth the truth of God. But Wayne Grudem reminds us that prophecy and/or revelation is spontaneous, unexpected, unplanned.

Prophecy has less authority than “teaching,” and prophecies in the church are always to be subject to the authoritative teaching of Scripture. Timothy was not told to *prophesy* Paul’s instruction in the church; he was to *teach* them (1 Timothy 4:11; 6:2). The Thessalonians were not told to hold firm in the traditions that were “prophesied” to them but to the traditions that they were taught by Paul (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

If a message is the result of conscious reflection on the text of Scripture, containing interpretation of the text and application to life, then it is (in NT terms) a teaching. But if a message is the report of something God brings suddenly to mind, then it is a prophecy.

Prophecy as “foretelling”

Was this still taking place in the first-century church? The evidence is clear that the Thessalonian church had been receiving some spurious *foretelling* prophecy—specifically regarding the end times, and Paul felt the need to set them straight. Let’s quickly trace this.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13. (uninformed = ignorant = “not to know”)

In the first half of Chapter Five one can hear Paul reminding the Thessalonians of who and what they are in Christ, and that they need not fear “the day of the Lord.”

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5, 9-10.

Just the tone of that tells us that he didn’t just pull this subject out of thin air; they *needed* to hear it. Finally, the best evidence is found in his second letter.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a, 5.

So there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the Thessalonians had been recipients of some bad foretelling “prophecy.” Even so, Paul tells them not to despise prophetic utterances. But in the next verse Paul tells them and us that we are not to believe *anything* without close examination.

v21

But examine everything carefully;

We have an example of this in the account of Paul's travels from Thessalonica to Berea.

Read Acts 17:10-11.

The Berean situation was one of practical common sense. When they heard a teaching, as eager as they were to hear it, they made sure it squared with Scripture. How much more, then, should *we*, who have the completed canon, verify what we hear with God's word. Whether from the pulpit, from a Sunday School teacher, or a spontaneous "revelation" from someone in the congregation, we are always to check it against God's written word. And when we hear some preacher on TV declare that the Rapture will occur on Wednesday at 5:00 in the morning, we can, on the authority of Scripture, call the man a fool. [Matthew 25: 13]

This area was so important that one of the gifts given by the Holy Spirit was one of "distinguishing [or discerning] of spirits." I'd be willing to bet that you, like I, missed that when we were reading portions from 1 Corinthians 12.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:10 again.

The Holy Spirit endows some individuals with the gift of discernment in knowing who is sending the "revelation" through the one endowed with the gift of prophecy! The wrong spirit could be sending the message, so it was vitally important to distinguish between them.

Read 1 John 4:1-3.

hold fast to that which is good;

good = *kalos* = of uncertain affinity; properly **beautiful**, but chiefly (figurative) good (literal or moral), **i.e. valuable or virtuous** (for appearance or use, and thus **distinguished from <G18> (agathos), which is properly intrinsic**) :- × better, fair, good (-ly), honest, meet, well, **worthy**.

In this context, this means that we are to hold onto that which is of value to the church, that which builds up [edifies] rather than tears down (v22).

v22

abstain from every form of evil.

abstain = *apechesthe* = from <G575> (apo) and <G2192> (echo); (active) to have out, i.e. receive in full; (intransitive) **to keep (oneself) away, i.e. be distant** (literal or figurative) :- be, have, receive.

The KJV uses "appearance" instead of "form" or "kind"—which is a fairly literal translation, but easy to misinterpret. It does *not* mean abstain from that which appears to be evil, but abstain from evil which can be seen (Morris).

CONCLUSION

In Chapter Fourteen of 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul puts all this in order for us. As I read this, don't be sidetracked by issues about prophecy or tongues, but note how everything is to be orderly and profitable. Note, as well, how none of the components of the assembly are considered beyond verification; none are considered to be spoken *ex cathedra*, but are to always be interpreted and evaluated for their worthiness.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-33.