

## "Spiritual Discernment" - 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

As Paul approaches the end of his first letter to the Thessalonians, he fires off seven commands, short, terse, to the point. It's like he cut loose with an Uzi of exhortation. It's really important that we pay attention, because as Jesus said:

*"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)*

As Christians, we have a duty to seek out God's will. You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, but if you are truly saved, God has given you a new heart. If you are truly saved, you will have a desire to do what Jesus wants you to do. You will want to be conformed to the image of Christ. It's a long process and there will be many stumbles on the way, *but* God is working in you for your sanctification. You are being set apart for a holy purpose.

God's will is not some mysterious thing He hides from us. God's will is clearly revealed. He made sure it was written down for us. You need to read what He says; you need to get into this Book. And here, in First Thessalonians, we have seven very explicit statements of God's will for your life, seven things He wants you to do, Christian. Do this, do this, do this, don't do that, don't do that, do this, do this.

We covered the first three two weeks ago: Rejoice always. (Verse 16) Pray without ceasing. (Verse 17) In everything give thanks. (Verse 18) And this week, Lord willing, we're going to cover the next four.

Just like the first three are related (and Paul presents them in a single sentence), I believe the final four are closely related as well. They all have to do with our duty to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. He is Almighty God dwelling within every one of you and He is a precious, precious gift. Jesus said:

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:26)*

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, if you have turned your life over to Him by confessing your sinful state and asking for His mercy, if you confess Jesus as Lord and believe God raised Him from the dead, you have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Every true Christian has the Comforter dwelling within. He is conforming you to the image of Christ. You need to recognize Him. You need to cooperate with Him. You need to yield to the truth only He delivers. You need Him in order to develop spiritual discernment in your life.

So let's look at our text now:

*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22)*

The first command tells us that we must not quench the Spirit and I believe it is key to understanding the following three commands as well. What does it mean to quench the Spirit? Let me start by telling you what it doesn't mean. Quenching the Spirit is not the same as blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

I find a lot of Christians are terrified of blaspheming the Holy Spirit and that's certainly understandable. Jesus said:

*"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who*

*speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matthew 12:31-32)*

Blasphemy against the Spirit is the one and only unpardonable sin, so it's no wonder that Christians don't want to go there. But the only way you blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to utterly reject salvation.

You need to understand the context in which Jesus was speaking. Jesus was condemning those who said that He cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. In other words, they had gone so far as to attribute the work of God to Satan. They had totally rejected the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God and you don't come back from that ... ever.

*... they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:10)*

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is sufficient to cover every sin you have ever committed, every sin you will commit in the future. All you have to do is believe that, confess your sins, and Jesus will cleanse you of all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) It is the Holy Spirit who convinces you of sin so you can confess. But if you reject the Holy Spirit's ministry, you have no avenue left to be reconciled to God.

*And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12)*

So, if you are worried about blaspheming the Holy Spirit, that's strong evidence that you have not done so. And that is not what Paul means by quenching the Spirit.

In Ephesians, Paul tells us that we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit.

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4:30)*

That's not the same thing as quenching the Spirit, either, but it is closely related. Grief is an emotion, and Ephesians 4:30 speaks about how the Spirit feels, something He does. Quenching the Spirit is something we do and when we quench the Spirit, it causes Him to grieve. That's why I say they are related, but not exactly the same.

The Greek word translated "quench" literally means to extinguish. It carries the connotation of pouring water on a fire. We tend to use fire as a metaphor for God the Spirit. Remember the tongues of fire that fell on the believers at Pentecost? Christians often speak of Holy Fire ... and they are talking about the Holy Spirit. So, Paul is telling us that we should do nothing that would serve to extinguish the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

As if we could ... in any real or permanent sense. You see, if you are truly a Christian, if you are truly one of God's kids, He is going to finish the work of salvation in you. We can be confident of this very thing ...

*... that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; (Philippians 1:6)*

You cannot thwart God's will, but you can make it harder on yourself. As a Christian, you can either cooperate with the Spirit's work, or you can come along kicking and screaming. (I find that it is a much nicer trip if you just say "yes" to what Jesus wants you to do.) To quench the Spirit is to do anything contrary to the work of sanctification.

One way you quench the Spirit is to try to manipulate Him. Too often, Christians equate the presence of the Holy Spirit with an overwhelming emotional experience. And so, we try to stimulate overwhelming emotional experiences. I really think that's why so many church services look an awful lot like stadium rock and roll shows today. Flashing lights. Spectacular multi-media. Smoke machines ... really! Music that has a great beat and a memorable melody, but is almost completely devoid of any meaningful doctrine. Gifted musicians leading people to repeat short, catchy phrases over and over and over and over. And pretty soon, people begin to have what they think is an existential experience.

That's not of God.

Folks have the same sort of experience at a Kenney Chesney concert or a Bruce Springsteen concert.

You don't manipulate the Holy Spirit; He is Almighty God. When you try to do so, you only quench the Spirit.

There are many other ways you quench the Holy Spirit. Some people quench Him by not going to church at all or by not reading the Bible, failing to renew their minds. Listen folks, you have been given the greatest life coach ever! You need to listen to Him.

*He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that [Jesus] said to you. (In this Bible.)*

The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible. The Holy Spirit serves to interpret the Bible. The Holy Spirit works in the believer to bring these things to your remembrance.

That brings us to verse 20: *Do not despise prophecies. (1 Thessalonians 5:20)* To prophesy is to speak forth the word of God. That is the definition. It could involve for-telling ... or delivering the message of God about the future, and that's what we typically think prophecy is. But that's only part of it. It includes everything about what God has revealed.

When Paul wrote this letter, the canon of scripture had not yet been completed. The word of God was often delivered by speech, by preaching. God had ordained certain people to speak for Him. That's still true today, but in a different sense.

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, (Ephesians 4:11)*

Now, we have a completed Bible. God's message is in here. So, if I am to prophesy, or speak for God, what I need to do is deliver what is written in this Book. I need to read it distinctly, to give the sense and to help you understand the meaning. (Nehemiah 8:8)

To despise prophecy is to despise the teaching of this Book because this Book is the work of the Holy Spirit.

*... knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)*

Scripture is *Theopneustos* – God breathed and to despise the Bible will grieve the Holy Spirit. You despise prophecy when you refuse to take the Bible seriously, when you let dust gather on its cover, when you don't have time to listen to Biblically accurate expository preaching.

Another way to despise prophecy is to claim to speak for God, yet contradict what is written in this Book or to listen to those who do.

*For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24)*

God never contradicts Himself, so don't be deceived by anyone who mishandles the word of Truth.

And that brings me to verse 21: *Test all things; hold fast what is good. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)* Folks, it is so important that you know what you believe and why you believe it. You certainly don't want to despise prophecy, but you need to test it. If someone claims to be preaching God's truth, you still need to check Him out. I guess what I am saying is, trust your preacher, but cut the cards.

Last week, Tanner used the excellent illustration of how you learn to recognize counterfeit currency. It's not by studying counterfeit money. It is by studying the real thing. The more you learn about God's truth, the less likely it is that you will be deceived by false teachers. You will know when something doesn't sound right and you will return to God's truth to test that teaching.

Reject falsehood!

Reject heresy!

But cling to what is good. This Bible is good! It's really good.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, [theopneustos – God breathed] and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

Cling to God's word. Cling to the truth of the Bible.

Finally, we are to *Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:22)* Christians are saved by faith in Jesus alone. There is nothing we can do, no work we can perform that will add anything to the finished work of Jesus Christ. He paid for all your sins when He hung on that tree. The sentence for your sins was death, and Jesus died in your place. That should promote an attitude of profound gratitude in every believer. There is no way you could ever pay Jesus back for what He has done for you. The only logical response to God's grace is to do everything you can to live in a manner that brings honor to your Savior. Evil is completely antithetical to everything God is. The prophet Habakkuk tells God:

*You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. (Habakkuk 1:13)*

It is no wonder that we are told "Don't go there!" Our natural tendency is to gravitate toward evil but in Jesus Christ, you have been liberated from evil's slavery. You don't have to go there anymore. If you let the Holy Spirit do His work by not quenching Him, if you educate yourself by embracing God's word instead of despising prophecy, if you test all things and embrace what is good, you will inevitably abstain from evil. Good and evil are polar opposites. I don't need to tell you that; you know it's true.

If you are a Christian, it is because of the grace and mercy of Almighty God. He has redeemed you. He has made you members of His own family. He has taken up residence inside you by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You need to act like it.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

***For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,  
which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.  
(Ephesians 2:8-10)***

Let us live our lives in cooperation with God the Holy Spirit. Let us walk in the good works God has prepared for us beforehand.