

1 Thes 5:19-28

**19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. 25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.**

You and I need the Holy Spirit to be working freely **in us** and **among us**. Isn't that what **we want**? Do our hearts yearn for God to do a great work **in our own hearts** and in **the lives of others**? I think most of us would answer "**yes**". I want to be a better follower of Christ. I want to be **full of joy**. I want to be **useful** in Christ's kingdom. I want to **be like Jesus** because Jesus is **worthy** of every effort.

This process of becoming like Jesus is called sanctification, being more and more set apart for His use.

Well, there is a difference between sanctification, **growth** in the Christian life, and **justification**, the **being put in right relationship** with Christ through the **work** of Christ.

No one can quench God's work in **justification**, because it is **he alone** that does **all the work**. **Justification** is monergistic- a **single force** doing the work.

But **sanctification**, that is another matter. That requires our willing participation. **Sanctification is Synergistic**. That means more than one force is working together. God works and we work.

So we choose every moment either to abide in Christ, which is what the Holy Spirit is promoting. Or we **quench** the spirit and we **resist** God's will. We live by **rejoicing always, giving thanks** and **living in constant communication** with God, or we **stray from that path**, from that mindset.

Paul knows this all too well. And Paul gives us a warning this morning.

**19 Do not quench the Spirit.**

This word is used for extinguishing a fire. It is taking action that stops the fire from doing what a fire does.

What this tells us is that even if **we are believers**, we can **limit** the Holy Spirit's influence on our lives. Our lives can slip into a life lived primarily focusing on **the world's stuff**. All the time we are choosing to be **full of the Spirit** or **not**. Our condition is the result of our decisions that we make **all the time**. God is always **willing** that we **live** full of the Spirit. He enables it. So the problem is never on **His end**. If the Spirit is not working in our hearts and in our body, it is due to our decisions.

So he is telling his new Thessalonian friends, do not do the things that will stop the Spirit's work in you. Because that is possible to do. It is a danger. Now in context I think Paul has a specific issue in mind, even though quenching the Spirit applies to all of life. Look what Paul says next.

**20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good.**

Now that is an odd thing to say. But maybe it is not so odd.

There probably were some at Thessalonica that actually **WERE** despising prophecies. Despise means to treat as **absolutely nothing**. Something that has **no value**.

We need to remember that the new church did not have many **written scriptures**. It only had the **Old Testament** and maybe a few letters from Apostles. During this time of church history, the **gift of prophecy** had to provide **that which was missing** for these new churches. So God gave those gifts. We see how they were to be exercised in 1 Corinthians.

Paul is saying, do not put out the fire of God's Holy Spirit by despising God's truth that God is revealing through his prophets.

In our day the equivalent of **prophecies** would be **properly presented teachings** from scripture.

Now why would they despise prophecies?

Well it usually comes down to two things. Either rejecting the validity of the **speaker**, or rejecting the authority of the **message**.

Over the years I have often been surprised at how easy it is for people to believe their own **strongly held opinions** even in the face of glaring opposing **facts**. It is as if, if our opinion is **so strong**, if I feel something **so strongly**, it **must be true**. That is a big obstacle to overcome in our lives. The spirit led life is one where the **truth of God's word** always has to overcome that impulse we have to **trust ourselves**. We really have to love truth, even when the truth hurts.

I think of a small example. I know a friend of mine visited our church many years ago. After the service he was highly disturbed that Mike did not come shake his hand. He had **an opinion** about how church had to be. There was **no scripture** to base it on. But his opinion was all that he needed to **pronounce judgment** on how a church should be run. And when I talked to him about it, it was clear that no scripture was necessary. That is just how you do things.

I have pastor friends at some churches share with me about the struggles they have with people who resist them at every point. And the resistance does not come from scripture. It comes from **opinions**. And the opinions are **so hardened** in their minds that they are treated like they **are** scripture. So some in the Thessalonian church were quenching the Spirit by despising the prophetic message. And the church was paying a price.

Why am I convinced of that. Look at verse 27.

**27 I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.**

Why would Paul hold them so strongly to this step? It is probably because there are people at Thessalonica who **think they know better than Paul** and the **prophets**. They trust their own opinions. They trust their own reason. Whatever it is, Paul says **force them** to hear this truth. They are **required** to hear it. It is for them.

Now

Who is more **unruly**, more **out of step**, than a person who rejects truth?

Who causes **more trouble** than the person who does not orient and adjust to what the truth is?

What can you **appeal to** when a person is not committed to knowing and submitting to the truth?

What we see here is clear.

If you want to **quench the spirit**, refuse to **apply scripture to your life**. Don't let it have absolute authority in your life. Trust your **perceptions** and **feelings** and **intuitions**. Let them rule you. Let them tell you how to live. If you want to quench the spirit, reject those things that are preached that **you don't like** without doing the study to **test them**. That is what **these people** were doing. It is one thing to hear something said in a sermon that doesn't ring true to you. And you go home and study it until you have clarity. Maybe you find out the **sermon** was not correct. Maybe you find out that **you** were not correct. But in the end, you **submit to truth**.

It is completely another thing when you listen to a sermon and you reject something in it outright because you think it is wrong, but you never do anything to find out. It is our job **to test** before we reject or accept. We are to be the testers. It is our obligation in the body of Christ.

These people were **blowing off prophecies** without doing the **work of discerning**. That is all they were doing. And what does God say about it? They are **putting out the fire of the Spirit's work**.

Are we guilty of doing the same thing? I certainly do not claim the infallibility of those who were actually prophesying. But if I, or any speaker for that matter, am portraying the word accurately, it needs to be received **by testing it**. Not by disregarding it because **Jon said it** and **Jon has been wrong** in the past. It is easy to think that you **know me** and you **know my flaws**. And they are **many**. So you might think you do not need to take what I say seriously. But if I am representing God's word **accurately**, even as inadequate of a person as I am, if you do not take the word of God presented seriously, you are quenching the Holy Spirit. And that will rob you of something God wants you to have. But the only way you will know is if you do the work of **testing**. Our focus, when listening, should be to test everything with what we know. And if there is a **glaring error**, please come to **me** or **whoever said it**. But our focus, when listening, if there **IS** no error discovered should be- **how does God want me to keep this?** The mental exercise of thinking about how it could be taken too far, and how it does not apply to everything, and how it could be misapplied, is a useful exercise. But it should not take the place of **hearing God's marching orders from His word for you for the week**. If God is speaking through God's word, we better approach it as more than an intellectual curiosity. If we approach it wrongly, we will surely **quench the Spirit of God** and, even worse, we will **feel good** about doing it.

**21 but test everything; hold fast what is good.**

The word for test means to test it for authenticity. Basically, is this what God says? Does it line up with the rest of scripture?

We need to see this all in its context. God's **truth** was being **spoken** by the prophets. The Thessalonians were responding by treating it like it meant **nothing** for them to apply, for whatever reason. They were told by Paul, don't do that. Don't treat it like it is irrelevant to you. But don't blindly follow either. Do the work of testing it. But don't let that work be the **only** thing you do. The testing we do is not **the last step**. It is **A** step. But it is not the **last step**. We test **SO THAT** we can **hold fast** what is good.

The word for Hold Fast means to **take possession of**. Make it your own. Apply it deeply in your life.

We need to be careful that we do not deceive ourselves. Being someone who is **good at testing** is not actually helpful if it does not **add the last step**. What good is it to discern good from bad if we do not intend to act upon it, if we do not intend to **fully apply** what is good? Good doctrine is a **means** to an end, not the **end itself**. We should never congratulate ourselves if we intellectually **believe well** if we do not **live well**. If the truth does not change us, we are actually in a more dangerous condition than we would be if we did not know it. Because we can puff ourselves up **with pride** by **our knowledge** but know very little of what it means to thoroughly love God and men, to never know what it means to be full of the Spirit.

May we become like little children and take what God says **more seriously**, more **to the heart**. God's truth when accurately conveyed should move us to **greater obedience** and **greater trust** of God. Any mental activity that **skirts that step** in our hearts should be met with skepticism. If our **thinking** about the Word does not drive us to **trust God more** and **obey him more**, we are somehow deceiving ourselves. We need to use **our intellects**, but we must not **trust our motives**. They too need tested. They too need examined. If we test something and it is good, it needs embraced and absorbed. It needs to become part of us.

But if we test something and it is bad, we should

## **22 Abstain from every form of evil.**

There will be false teachers. And there will be true teachers who make mistakes. And sometimes those mistakes can go very bad places. So when we test what is said, and something fails the test, we should abstain from those teachings, which means we should hold one's self away from them. We should avoid all evil teaching and behavior.

John MacArthur says this:

**Paul's exhortation was a general call for believers to discern truth from error, good from evil, righteousness from sin, and a command to shun any of the negative teachings, influences, or behaviors that would displease God.**

*John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 & 2 Thessalonians, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 200.*

Use your imagination here for a minute. Imagine that for **your whole life** you had abstained from **everything you believe was**, or even **might be** evil? How different would your life be? Do you have memories that are too painful to

think about due to your regret for what you have done? They would be **gone**. You could think about everything in a peaceful state. Are there consequences to sin that you face? They would **also** be **gone**. Our peace and joy would be full. How slow we are to learn. Toying with evil will only cause us harm. No **pleasure** that **evil can give us** is worth the **price tag** it **comes with**. When Paul tells us to abstain from every form of evil, he is giving us some of the **most loving advice** we will ever receive.

**23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely,**

This is one of those concepts that can cause us some trouble. May **God sanctify you completely**. Wait a minute. I thought I had to cooperate with God's sanctification. Well, yes. That is true. God does not sanctify us against our will. But God has a way of stacking up our circumstances to where we **come to our senses**. So while **we** are not always faithful **to God**, **God** is always faithful **to us**. God will **get us there**. How painful the process is, is up to us.

Notice too that it is God who is **the source** of our sanctification. If not for God, we would **not be sanctified**. How many times has God had to give us painful lessons to get us back on track. Oh, He is so good to His children. He has saved us **from ourselves** so many times. I think back on my life and cringe at how many times I could have made horrendous mistakes that God rescued me from. I figure much of that is because I had people praying for me. But God is good. He will **see to it** that **we are sanctified**, the easy way or the hard way.

And Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith. He will get it all perfect eventually, when we see Him. Christ does all things well. He will complete our sanctification.

**and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Some have made this scripture say that a human being has three parts, a body a spirit and a soul. But that is not what it has to mean. Spirit and soul are used interchangeably in scripture.

The point is really that God's sanctification involves every single part of you. There is no area left out.

What should you do with your body? Use it for God.

What should you do with your spirit? Use it for God.

What should you do with your soul? Use it for God

That is the point.

Our whole self is being sanctified. Every bit of it. So everything in our lives matters. God is out to change **all of us**. The whole shebang. So we need **every bit of truth** that **God reveals to us** into **every inmost place**. There is no room for ignoring or despising prophecies, or in our case, the word of God. God will use the **revelation of His will** in the process of **keeping us blameless** at the coming of Christ.

And the goal is that it is **all kept blameless**. That is, that no charge can be held against it. This is the **goal** of sanctification. It is not **sinless perfection**. But it is that this person is **not living in sin**. They are not knowingly and continually and habitually **choosing** to sin. They live in a way that they cannot be **accused of that**. They are not choosing those sins that affect the body or the soul or the spirit. They are living in a way that is holy. Never perfectly, but substantially.

It is interesting that archeologists have discovered that Christian tombs in Thessalonica often had the Greek words for **“without blame”** on them. This signified that they were Christians.

And that is the state Paul is essentially praying that the Thessalonians will be in when Christ returns.

#### **24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.**

Oh, there are some days when this is the most precious promise to us. Our sanctification is not left in **our own incompetent hands**. We are not left to depend upon **our own weaknesses** to **complete** our sanctification. If God called us, He will **complete** our sanctification. Now again, this may take trials that **change our wills**. But God is so very good at arranging our circumstances to wean us from this world.

(Phil. 1:6) says **“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus”**

Brothers and sisters, you do not need to be confident of your abilities. You can be confident of **the ability of Christ** to perfect you. Oh what a sweet relief. On those days when our weaknesses and failures loom large, it is sweet to remember that we are in the **competent hands of Jesus**, who does all things well.

Now Paul moves on from the Thessalonians to himself.

#### **25 Brothers, pray for us.**

Paul knew that he and his team always stood **in the need** of prayer. That is a very good realization. We probably ought to have this tattooed to our foreheads. Brothers pray for us. We have no idea what difference our prayers

make. But I am certain I am here before you because of prayers that were offered for me. My grandmother often prayed that one of her grandchildren would be a preacher. As far as I can tell, I am the only one who is. And I didn't even really **chose it**. God arranged the circumstances.

We are always **loving** our brothers and sisters **well** when **we pray for them**. We get no credit from any other human when we secretly do it. But it is highly effective for their good.

### **26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.**

When Paul says greet, he is speaking of a **friendly and righteous gesture** as opposed to a **formal reserved acknowledgment**. When we say **hello** to each other, it should be different than when we say **hello** to someone off the street. There should be a **warmth of connection**.

The holy kiss was a personal display of affection in that culture. And it was often used when two believers ran into each other. Over time there is record of the early church fathers laying down rules about this. Men were to great men and women were to great women. Evidently it was being abused, or they were afraid it would be abused.

In our culture kisses would cause more confusion and suspicion than would be helpful. So we shake hands or hug on occasion. But it is this kind of thing that Paul was telling them to do.

And who does he tell them to do it to? Their favorites? Those they are closest with? No. Everyone. And who does this include? The **unruly**, the **faint hearted**, the **fearful**. It includes those who are **easy to love** and those who **take more work**.

I think Paul is saying, don't let distance grow because of your **differences** or **relational difficulties**. **Keep that communication open**. Don't let walls be built between you. If we are to greet everyone with affection, that means there must be affection that exists. And if we find we are very hesitant to greet that person as Paul instructs, we know there is a problem we should work on.

### **27 I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.**

We spoke of this earlier. Paul said this, probably because he **had** to say it. And that is a **little sad**. There are already people who are **resisting truth**. There are already people who trusted their opinions over the God revealed words. And Paul won't stand for it.

Now it is interesting to note that Paul puts them under an oath. And Jesus in Matthew 5:34–35 (ESV) says



**34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.**

I think this is another good example of why we should not **universalize** the teachings of Jesus in the sermon on the mount. His words were primarily to address how the teachings of the Pharisees were wrong. He was speaking in a context that limits the application.

By Paul putting them **under an oath** before the Lord, he is letting them know that God is watching this and this thing must be done. He is essentially saying I am making you swear by God that you will read this to **every single believer** at Thessalonica. After reading this I feel a little better about the elder's requiring everyone to listen to the sermons we will begin next week about **Church Membership**. It seems like Paul had no problem requiring that everyone heard his letter read.

**28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.**

Paul ends here with one of his favorite endings.

Leon Morris says this.

**Grace fundamentally means “that which causes joy,” a shade of meaning we may still discern when we speak of a graceful action or the social graces. It comes to mean “favor,” “kindness,” and then especially God’s kindness to man in providing for his spiritual needs in Christ. Thence it comes to signify what is due to grace, namely, God’s good gifts to men, and finally the attitude of thankfulness which all this awakes within the Christian. As used in greetings it is the free gift of God that is meant, but the word necessarily evokes memories of the free gift on Calvary.... It is the grace of the Lord which lingers in the Apostle’s thoughts [as he closes his letters], just as it is the grace of the Lord with which he begins his**

**letters.** (*The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 49, 187*)

Paul’s closing remarks capture what all leaders who **love God** and **love their people** most want. They want their people to **pray for them**. They want their people to be **lovingly affectionate to them and to each other**. And they want their people to be **receptive to God’s word** being applied to their lives by the Holy Spirit.

Beginning next week, Lord willing, we will study Church Membership. After that we will continue in 2 Thess.

I think a good application for this week ties in well with our application for last week.

We need to look at, what is **hindering** the **Spirit's work in my life**.

As I am making an intentional effort to

Do good to others

**16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances**

What happens?

What veers me off course?

Where do I not want to do this? And why?

Then we should look at the truths. Are there any **we are rejecting**? Are there any we **disregard** but don't take the time to **test them**? Might the answer to our problems lie in the **truths we refuse to apply**?

Maybe we should pray- Lord, **show me how I am quenching your Holy Spirit**.

That is a prayer the Lord will answer.