**Lesson 9**

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22[[1]](#footnote-1)

**19 Do not quench the Spirit.**

**20 Do not despise prophetic utterances.**

**21 But examine everything carefully.**

**Hold fast to that which is good.**

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

*In any case, it seems to put one into a hermeneutical conundrum to consider the first triplet (vv. 16-18) as proper for all times and places, but to consider this final material (vv. 19-22) as belonging only to the Pauline churches — since Paul himself offers the means for keeping such speech within proper bounds. Fee*

**Verse 19**

Do not quench the Spirit;

1. **What does it mean to “quench the Spirit”? Some have hinted that a baby crying or someone getting up to use the facilities might cause the presence of the Holy Spirit to somehow wane. This is ridiculous, of course.**
   1. ***“Quench” means to extinguish. Wow. Are we capable of extinguishing the work of the Holy Spirit? Apparently so. Is not grace nullified by the addition of law? What might we do that would “extinguish” the Holy Spirit? Here are three probabilities:*** 
      1. **Sidelining the operations of the Holy Spirit as insignificant or not needed**
      2. **Forbidding their use entirely**
      3. **Engaging in false representations of the gifts of the spirit by grandstanding, bringing attention upon oneself for some selfish gain, or manipulating others through flattery while supposedly being “prophetic”, etc.**

*The word for ‘quench’ (sbennumi) was used of extinguishing both lights and fires, although commentators tend to opt for the latter here and translate Do not put out the Spirit’s fire. But the Holy Spirit is light as well as fire and, far from extinguishing him, we must let him both shine and burn within us. Fee*

*Some have argued that the problem in Thessalonica resulted from some disenchantment with these phenomena, in the form either of too much “ecstasy” (usually glossolalia, as in Corinth) or of misguided “ecstasy” (either by the unruly-idle, who are using prophecy to justify their behavior, or by some whose mistaken predictions about the day of the Lord have brought prophecy into disrepute). This is arguably supported by the grammar of the prohibitions themselves. Fee*

*Despite the fact that the ministries of the Spirit can be abused in the Christian community,* ***Paul’s own deep appreciation for the central role of the Spirit in individual and corporate life will not allow for correcting abuse by commanding disuse.*** *Fee*

*The presupposition of the present passage as well as the argument of 1 Corinthians and the matter-of-fact mention of it in Romans 12:6* ***strongly suggest that this was a normal expression of the Spirit’s activity in the early Christian communities****. Fee*

**Verse 20**

Do not despise prophetic utterances.

1. **In order to not despise a prophetic utterance, we must first know what one is as in the church today prophetic utterances are either not present or a false representation of prophecy is in operation. So, let’s take a moment to investigate.**
2. ***Thayer Definition of prophēteuō***

*1) to prophesy, to be a prophet, speak forth by divine inspirations, to predict*

*1a) to prophesy*

*1b) with the idea of foretelling future events pertaining especially to the kingdom of God*

*1c) to utter forth, declare, a thing which can only be known by divine revelation*

*1d) to break forth under sudden impulse in lofty discourse or praise of the divine counsels*

*1d1) under like prompting, to teach, refute, reprove, admonish, comfort others*

*1e) to act as a prophet, discharge the prophetic office*

1. **Have prophecies “failed”?**

***1 Corinthians 13:9-10***

*Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.****9****For we know in part and we prophesy in part.****10****But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.*

**Without going into a lot of detail, some have concluded from this verse that prophecies have failed. They claim that the Bible as we know it is “that which is perfect”. They say that since we now have the Bible, we no longer need prophecy. This is a very flimsy argument for several reasons.**

1. **Consider the example of prophecies given in Acts.** None of them were information available to us in the Bible. The Bible does not tell of a specific world-wide famine. The Bible does not warn a specific person of danger as with Paul. The Bible does not direct us as to who should be called to specific ministries.
2. **The implication is that the true gift of prophecy, a gift given to us by God Himself, is somehow inferior to the written word of God.** Yes, the written word of God is our standard for truth, but even the Bible teaches us of the gift of prophecy.
3. **Verse 10 (above) says, “When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.**” We need to ask ourselves if knowledge has also vanished away. No, of course not.
4. **We should also take into account the context.** Paul is discussing love. He is contrasting the importance of God’s love over prophecy. Clearly, he is saying that one day prophecy, knowledge, and tongues will be replaced with that which is perfect. Love, however, will never be done away with.
5. **When will we no longer need prophecy, knowledge, and tongues?** The answer is in the next verses.

***1 Corinthians 13:11-12***

*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.****12****For now we see in a mirror, dimly,* ***but then*** *face to face. Now I know in part,* ***but then*** *I shall know just as I also am known.*

**“But then” we shall know as we are known. When is that? At what time will we no longer “see dimly” but “face to face”? It is at the coming of our Lord. The majority of commentators and scholars agree.**

*The sense here is, that "in heaven" - a state of absolute perfection - that which is "in part," or which is imperfect, shall be lost in superior brightness. All imperfection will vanish. And all that we here possess that is obscure shall be lost in the superior and perfect glory of that eternal world. All our present unsatisfactory modes of obtaining knowledge shall be unknown. All shall be clear, bright, and eternal.-Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*

*Hope fastens on future happiness, and waits for that; but in heaven, faith will be swallowed up in actual sight, and hope in enjoyment. There is no room to believe and hope, when we see and enjoy. But there, love will be made perfect. There we shall perfectly love God. And there we shall perfectly love one another. Blessed state! how much surpassing the best below! God is love, 1Jo 4:8,16. Where God is to be seen as he is, and face to face, there charity is in its greatest height; there only will it be perfected. –Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary*

*But when that which is perfect is come,... When perfect knowledge of God, of Christ, and of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven shall take place; which will not in this life, but in that which is to come.-Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*

*In* [*1 Corinthians 13:12*](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Co+13%3A12)*, Paul said when that which is perfect is come, we shall see face to face. This is speaking of seeing the Lord face to face, instead of vaguely as though through a dark glass, as it is now. Some might argue that this is speaking in a symbolic sense instead of literally face to face, but the next comparison in that verse says that then (when that which is perfect is come) we shall know all things even as we are also known. There is no other way to interpret that except to be describing when we stand before the Lord after this life. Then we will be face to face and know all things even as also we are known.-Andrew Wommack's Living Commentary.*

1. ***It was prophesied by the prophet Joel that in the last days both men and women would prophesy. Please note: If prophecies have ceased then the “last days” already happened. This makes no sense. “Last days refers to the time period between the resurrection of Jesus until His return.***

***Acts 2:17-18***

***17****‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;****Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,*** *Your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams.****18And on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;  
And they shall prophesy.***

*Second, with the outpouring of the Spirit at the end of the age, the early believers understood the prophecy of Joel 2:28-30 to have been fulfilled, so that “prophecy” not only became a renewed phenomenon but was also potentially available to all, since all now had received the Spirit in fullness. Fee*

***Acts 1:4 4***

*Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

***Acts 1:8 8***

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”*

***Acts 2:16-18 16***

*Bbut this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel, 17 ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams;18 Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy.*

***Acts 2:38-39***

*And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”*

1. ***We see the office of a prophet and the gift of prophecy being used in the early church.***
2. **Prophecy used to warn of a world-wide famine**

[***Acts 11:27***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+11:27&version=NKJV)***-30***

*And in these days* ***prophets*** *came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28****Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar****. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

1. **God’s will concerning ministry: directive prophecy**

[***Acts 13:1***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+13:1&version=NKJV)***-3***

*Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent*them*away.*

***1 Timothy 1:18***

*This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare.*

***1 Timothy 4:14***

*Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.*

1. **Prophecy can foretell, but does not always direct a particular response.**

***Acts 21:8-14***

*On the next day we who were Paul’s companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. 9****Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. 10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”***

*12 Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13****Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.****”*

*14 So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, “The will of the Lord be done.”*

1. **What does Scripture teach us about the purpose and proper use of the gift of prophecy?**
2. ***The purpose of prophecy is to edify the church.***

***1 Corinthians 14:1-5***

*Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.****2****For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.****3But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.******4****He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies* ***edifies the church****.****5****I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets,* ***that the church may receive edification.***

1. ***How is the gift of prophecy administered?***

We have the examples given above of how the gift was administered in the Early Church, but in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul seems to encourage this gift above others by saying, “desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy”.

* **First and foremost, prophecy will NEVER contradict the written word of God.**
* **Secondly, prophesy will NOT contradict what God has already been speaking to your own heart.** The Bible says that the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God, not through personal prophesies.
* **As we see in the example of Paul above, sometimes prophesy is informational and not intended to guide one’s steps.** The prophet foretold that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem. However, Paul obviously believed that God WANTED Him to go to Jerusalem. The prophesy then wasn’t meant to keep Paul from going as his companions begged him not to do, but rather to inform him.
* **We are to judge prophecies. Therefore, they are not infallible.**

***1 Corinthians 14:9***

*Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.*

* **If you are not sure if what you want to say is prophesy, keep it to yourself. If what you have to say is of God, one of the ways you will know it is that you have total faith to say it.**

***Romans 12:6***

*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us,*let us use them: *if prophecy,***let us prophesy*in proportion to our faith****;*

* **Prophesy does not come by way of a trance or loss of control.**

***1 Corinthians 14:31-33***

*For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32****And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets****. 33 For God is not*the author*of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*

1. **Improper uses of the gift of prophecy.**
2. **Prophecy never trumps Scripture.**

*At no point does he assume the prophet to be speaking anything other than an ad hoc word. This is especially evidenced by verses 21 and 22 in the present passage.* ***Thus, there is never any sense in which a prophetic word was to be raised to the level of “inspired text.****” Fee*

1. **Prophecy is not meant as your primary source of hearing from God.** God speaks to all of us equally. We don’t NEED a prophet to hear from God. We should not seek out a prophet for a personal prophesy.
2. **Prophesy isn’t a substitute for communication between each other.** If you think you need to say something to someone, say it. Don’t use the public forum to settle private disputes.
3. **Since the proper use of prophecy is edification, exhortation (encouragement), and comfort, then it is reasonable to conclude that any use to the contrary would be improper; for example, to tear down, to discourage, to distress.**
4. **Prophesy is not meant to expose a fellow believer’s sin.** The Scripture teaches that “love covers a multitude of sins” not that it exposes it.
5. **It is inappropriate for someone to use the gift of prophecy for some purpose of manipulation.** Often a supposed gift of prophesy has the goal of motivating people to do what the person prophesying wants them to do or to bring that person under his/her influence/control. How can one argue with God? “Let one speak and the others judge.”
6. **The gift of prophesy is not an indication of a “greater presence of God”.** God is present when we gather in his name.
7. **Prophesy is not meant for bringing attention upon nor exalting the person prophesying.**

*The awe with which many recent charismatics hold prophecy and “prophets,” which in effect causes them almost never to be “tested,” stands in basic contradiction to this Pauline injunction. Fee*

1. **Prophesy is not spouting out every thought that comes into your head.** Dumb statements are not prophesy. This would seem to be understood, but in circles in which the gift is misused, it is actually quite common. There are those who seem to go into a trance and shake violently or act erratically while prophesying. THIS IS NOT OF GOD. Prophecy should be CLEARY UNDERSTOOD. **Tongues need interpretation, not prophesy.**
2. **We are SUPPOSED to examine prophecy. If someone is speaking a prophesy, judge what they are saying. If you have negative thoughts about someone who is speaking as a prophet, don’t blame yourself with such ideas like, “Why am I being so critical? What is wrong with me? Why am I not getting ‘blessed’ like everyone else?” Perhaps you are discerning that the prophet or prophecy are NOT FROM GOD. Listen to the Holy Spirit, and learn to discern the true from the false.**

**P.S. Sometimes the prophet or prophecy might pass the Scriptural test, but still you will discern it is not of God. Listen!**

***Acts 16:17-18***

*Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.****17****This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.”****18****And this she did for many days.*

*But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour.*

**What does it mean to “despise” prophecy?**

*The English word “despise” was translated from the Greek word “EXOUTHENEO,” and this Greek word means “to make utterly nothing of, i.e. despise” (Strong’s Concordance****). The word not only depicts contempt or hatred but can also mean as little as to ignore****. It was translated “set at naught” three times in the New Testament (Luke 23:11, Acts 4:11, and Romans 14:10). Paul’s admonition is to not hate, dislike, or ignore prophecy. AWMI*

**Verse 21**

But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.

1. **This verse is seldom employed in churches today. We are so worried that we might “quench the Spirit” that we fail to test the spirits. IT IS NOT QUENCHING THE SPIRIT TO TEST THE SPIRITS.**

***1 John 4:1-3***

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

***Acts 20:28-30***

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.****29****For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.****30****Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*

*But also because such utterances come through merely human vessels, they must be tested, which is the point that he now moves on to make. Fee*

*In a context where some of them have been badly shaken by a misrepresentation of his teaching about the day of the Lord, Paul exhorts them to “stand fast and to hold firm the traditions that you were taught, whether through word [= his original preaching of the gospel and the teaching that followed their coming to faith] or through letter [= in this case our 1 Thessalonians].” If this be so, then the first test is the apostolic proclamation of/teaching about Christ. This is a test that has to do with the theological or doctrinal content of the utterance. Fee*

*Second, in 1 Corinthians 14:3 Paul specifically says that the one who prophesies speaks edification, encouragement (or exhortation), and comfort. This is the test of purpose, as well as content, and has to do with its helpfulness to the believing community. Fee*

*The believers in Berea also gave us a good example of how to prove all things. In Acts 17:11, the Scripture says, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” AWMI*

**Verse 22**

Abstain from every form of evil.

1. **This verse, usually taught out of context, must be placed in context. Some commentators take the idea that we should abstain from sin, but other using the contextual interpretation see it differently.**

*Tittmann supports English Version, "from every evil appearance" or "semblance." The context, however, does not refer to evil appearances IN OURSELVES which we ought to abstain from, but to holding ourselves aloof from every evil appearance IN OTHERS; as for instance, in the pretenders to spirit-inspired prophesyings. In many cases the Christian should not abstain from what has the semblance ("appearance") of evil, though really good. Jesus healed on the sabbath, and ate with publicans and sinners, acts which wore the appearance of evil, but which were not to be abstained from on that account, being really good. I agree with Tittmann rather than with Bengel, whom Alford follows. The context favors this sense: However specious be the form or outward appearance of such would-be prophets and their prophesyings, hold yourselves aloof from every such form when it is evil, literally, "Hold yourselves aloof from every evil appearance" or "form."-JFB (Jaimeson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary)*

*Verse 22. - Abstain from all appearance of evil. This verse is connected with the last, and states negatively what is there stated positively. Test the declarations of the prophets; retain the good, and reject the evil.-Pulpit Commentary*

*This in itself strongly suggests that “every evil form” is what he meant by this expression. But so also does the context itself. Fee*

*Paul almost certainly intended that they “avoid” or “keep distant from” every expression of “prophecy” that is not “good,” but rather is an “evil kind.” Fee*

**Holding fast to that which is good would then refer to that which is true and authentic.**

1. Unless stated otherwise, all scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible, **(NASB)**

   Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by [The Lockman Foundation](http://www.lockman.org/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)