**1 Thessalonians 5:19-21**

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**Test The Spirits**

***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 the past two weeks we have examined Paul’s instruction to the individuals within the church with 3 specific commands to ***rejoice always, pray without ceasing,*** and ***in everything give thanks***.
  + Those three commands are directed to the **individual members** of the church.
  + Then, in the next 4 verses Paul issues **5 commands to the church as a whole**.

**The first two commands**

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***1 Thessalonians 5:19-20— 19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances.***

* To begin with, in v. 19-20 Paul gives **2 negative commands** to the Thessalonian church **. . . *do not quench the Spirit*** and ***do not despise prophetic utterances***.
  + The significance of the grammatical construction of these first two commands is that they are **commanding a halt to attitudes and actions that were already present in the Thessalonian church**.
  + In other words, Paul is commanding the Thessalonians to **stop what you are doing . . .**  ***stop quenching the Spirit; stop despising prophetic utterances***.
* But in order to understand what Paul is commanding here, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the commands.
  + Personally, I don’t like the translation of the verbs ***quench*** and ***despise***. I think there are better English words that convey the meaning of the Greek words better.

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* Looking at the first command, Paul uses the command ***do not quench*** . . . or ***quench not the Spirit.***
  + The term ***quench*** (*sbennumi*—#4570) means “to extinguish” or “to put out.” It is a term used to described the **extinguishing of fire**.
  + So, personally, I prefer the word ***extinguish*** over the NASB’s use of ***quench***, but that’s merely personal preference. But I do think that ***extinguish*** is more descriptive of what Paul is commanding.
* And the thing that the Thessalonians are commanded **not to extinguish** in v. 19 is ***the Spirit*** . . . **the Holy Spirit.**
* So, in v. 19, when Paul commands the Thessalonians ***do not extinguish the Holy Spirit***, **Paul is commanding a halt to attitudes and actions that were** ***extinguishing the Holy Spirit*** within their congregation.
* By using the command ***do not*** ***extinguish the Spirit*** Paul is using a very appropriate command. As we read in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came to the church at Pentecost, His power came upon the believers as ***tongues of fire***. We read in Acts 2 . . .

***Acts 2:1-4— 1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.***

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* So, in light of the Holy Spirit’s previous appearance at Pentecost, it is appropriate that Paul would speak of **not extinguishing the fire that the Holy Spirit was pouring out upon the early church.**
* Then, having commanded the Thessalonian church to **stop extinguishing the Holy Spirit within their congregation, in v. 20 Paul then reveals what they were doing to extinguish the Spirit . . . *do not despise prophetic utterances.***

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* Again, I find the NASB term ***despise*** (*exoutheneō*—#1848) a poor choice.
  + The Greek term *exoutheneō* used in v. 20 means “to have no regard for,” or “to have a low opinion of.” The Greek term is used to describe someone who sees something or someone as **inferior** or **of less value**.
  + On the other hand, the English word ***despise*** seems to imply “a hatred of,” which is not what Paul means here.
* Here in v. 20, Paul is commanding the Thessalonians to ***stop your low regard for prophetic utterances***. And it is from this command in v. 20 that we learn the reason for his command in v. 19.
  + In other words, **their lack of regard for prophetic utterances was what the Thessalonians were doing to extinguish the Holy Spirit within their congregation.**

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**What are *prophetic utterances*?**

* But when Paul refers to the Thessalonians **having no regard for prophetic utterances**, what ***prophetic utterances*** is Paul referring to? What are ***prophetic utterances***?
* The answer to the question, **what are *prophetic utterances***, is found in the context of the Holy Spirit’s work in the early church.
  + The term ***prophetic utterances*** (*prophēteia*—#4394) means “teaching emanating from divine inspiration.” In other words, **divine revelation given to men for the purpose of instructing the church.**
  + We have to remember that when Paul was with the Thessalonians and wrote to the Thessalonians, none of the New Testament gospels or epistles were yet written. The New Testament, as we know it, would not exist for another 100 years.
  + So, the early church was guided and taught by **the direct action of the Holy Spirit in giving Christians direct revelation, which they would transmit to the church through the teaching ministry.**
  + While we readily acknowledge and understand that the apostles were the voices of the Holy Spirit in teaching doctrine to the early church, it is also important to understand that God uses individuals within every congregation as vessels through whom He would communicate doctrinal truths to the church. We see this fact . . . that the Holy Spirit gave special revelation to some in the church . . . in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, in which he instructs them on the subject of **spiritual gifts**. In Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul writes of the spiritual gifts to the church . . .

***Ephesians 4:11-12— 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;***

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* + As we can see in Ephesians 4:12, **the purpose of the ministry spiritual gifts was for the purpose of equipping the saints and for building up the body of Christ.**
  + And, as we can see in Ephesians 4:11, the gift and office of ***prophet*** was second only to the gift and office of ***apostle***.
* But in speaking of the gift and office of ***prophet***, we have to understand that while **we generally associate the term “prophet” with future-telling, the function of God’s prophets, in every generation, has been to declare the divine counsel of God.**
  + The role of the prophets of God . . . Old and New Testament . . . has always been to reveal to God’s people those things He wants them to know.
  + Sometimes these revelations are of future events, but more often they are revelations of correction, doctrinal truth and the revelation of His will for His children.
* During the first generation of the church God used the three miraculous spiritual gifts of **speaking in foreign tongues, prophecy, and miraculous healing** for the purpose of **authenticating His true workers and for ministering to the church**.
  + By far, the most common miraculous gifts in the early church were the gifts of **speaking in tongues and of prophecy**.
  + In fact, it appears that the gift of **miraculous healing was a gift possessed only by the apostles, to authenticate them as true apostles.**
* But, of the other two miraculous gifts . . . **speaking in foreign tongues and prophecy** . . . it appears that these two gifts may have been present within every first generation church.
  + And not only were these two miraculous spiritual gifts present in the early churches, but there seems to have been some conflict within various congregations regarding the importance and use of these gifts.
  + For example, in the Corinthian church there was conflict within the church as the exercise of the spiritual gifts was becoming excessive. As a result, Paul has to write to the Corinthians to instruct them regarding the need to restrain their enthusiastic, but excessive displays.
  + On the other hand, it appears the opposite was present in Thessalonica as Paul warns against an undue and undesirable restraint of the moving of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of the Spirit-given gifts within their congregation.

**Are the miraculous spiritual gifts operative today?**

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* One of the controversies within the modern professing church is in regard to the continued operation of the miraculous spiritual gifts. **Are the miraculous gifts still in operation today?**
  + The answer to that question is found in the original purpose of the miraculous gifts. Why did the Holy Spirit give the three miraculous gifts to the church?
  + As I said earlier, the miraculous gifts were given to facilitate the instruction of the early church, to facilitate evangelism and to authenticate the true workers of God.
* With the gift of speaking in tongues the gospel message was taught to people of different languages, without the need of interpreters. With the Holy Spirit working as the miraculous interpreter, the gospel was transmitted to men and women of every known language.
* The gift of prophecy was used by the Holy Spirit to teach doctrine to the early church, prior to the recording of the New Testament. God used men and women, to whom He gave special revelation, to transmit and teach doctrinal truths.
* And, as I said earlier, God used the gift of miraculous healing to authenticate His apostles.
* It is with these things in mind that I then ask, what purpose would it serve to have the miraculous gifts in operation today?
  + The gospel is now being taught in every known language, the New Testament is now complete and God has directly stated that He no longer uses special revelation to communicate to men. And with the end of the apostolic age, the need of miraculous healings to validate them as God’s apostles is no longer needed.
  + The bottom line is, there is no longer a need for the miraculous spiritual gifts. Their purpose has been served, but they are no longer needed.

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**Why were the Thessalonians dismissive of the gift of prophecy in their midst?**

* In light of Paul’s instruction here in v. 19-20, and with the knowledge that the Thessalonian church was good, strong church . . . the question then arises, “why were the Thessalonians being dismissive of the gift of prophecy in their midst?”
  + I believe the answer to this question is found in Paul’s instruction to the Thessalonian church regarding **the coming of the Lord**.
* Back in 4:13-18 Paul taught us regarding **the coming of the Lord**. But, apparently, false teaching had been introduced into the Thessalonian church regarding this doctrine, causing a disturbance and much angst among the brethren. We read of this angst in Paul’s second letter . . .

***2 Thessalonians 2:1-3— 1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,***

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* + Here in 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul acknowledges that false teaching regarding this doctrine had entered the church and that the Thessalonian brethren were, justifiably, upset about it.
  + And, as a result of this false teaching, some of the Thessalonian brethren had become undisciplined by stopping work and becoming a burden upon others for support. To this sinful behavior Paul issues a stern rebuke in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14 . . .

***2 Thessalonians 3:6-14— 6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. 14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.***

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* So, we see from the detail supplied by his second letter to the Thessalonians that Paul knows of the false teaching that had invaded the church. But here at the end of his first letter Paul wants the Thessalonian brethren to know that **even though some false teaching had come into the church in the form of men claiming to have a special revelation from God regarding the coming of the Lord, they should not be so jaded by this experience that they rejected all prophecy from God.**
  + The reaction of the Thessalonians is understandable. If someone within your congregation, whom you knew and trusted, claimed to have a special revelation from God, and it turned out that this was actually false teaching, you would naturally be wary of future prophetic revelations.
  + So, knowing that the Thessalonians were “gun shy” because of this experience with the false teaching about the coming of the Lord, Paul exhorts them to **stop having a low regard for special revelation from God.** And the reason it was important to heed this command from v. 20 is because **if they did not obey this command, they would be in danger of extinguishing the work of the Holy Spirit within their congregation.**

***1 Thessalonians 5:21— But examine everything carefully***

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* So, what were the Thessalonians to do? They had lost confidence in the veracity of some recent teaching in the church. If they were to do as Paul instructs here in this letter, how were they to know if the special revelation someone claimed to have from God was valid?
  + The answer, provided by Paul in v. 21 is . . . ***examine everything carefully***.
* Here in v. 21 Paul gives us a very important command . . . **don’t trust blindly, but carefully examine everything carefully to determine if what you are being taught is truly from God.**
  + Instead of accepting new teaching blindly, Paul instructs us to ***examine everything carefully***.
* The command ***examine*** (*dokimazō*—#1381) is a significant term, found elsewhere in the New Testament. It means “examine with a critical eye to determine the authenticity of something.”
  + For example, when you want to determine the value of a precious metal, such as gold or silver, you take it to a specialist who is able to **examine and test** the metal to determine its authenticity and purity.
  + In the same way, when a Christian is faced with new or innovative teaching, **we** are tasked with doing the same thing . . . **examining and testing the teaching to determine if it is valid or not.**
* In regard to this requirement to ***examine everything carefully***, we find the **exact same instruction** from the apostle John in 1 John 4:1 . . .

***1 John 4:1— Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.***

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* Like Paul, the apostle John clearly warns and commands his friends in his home church in Ephesus that **they, individually, were responsible for testing the veracity of any teaching that enters the church.**

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**How? How are we to “*test the spirits to see whether they are from God*”?**

* The obvious and immediate question that arises when you hear that you are commanded to ***examine everything carefully*** and to ***test the spirits to see whether they are from God*** is, **how? How am supposed to do this?**
  + The answer is found in the process of **examination or testing of gold or silver**.
  + The goldsmith and silversmith uses tools and chemicals to determine the authenticity and purity of the metals they are testing. Sure, they are experts. But without their tools and their chemicals, they could not satisfactorily test the metals.
  + In the same way, Christians also have tools that enable us to determine the authenticity and validity of men who claim to have biblical revelation. Our special tool is the word of God.
  + And our expertise in biblical knowledge is our ability to use the tool that God has given us to determine the validity of new teaching is from God or not.

**Some rules for “testing the spirits”**

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* This morning I want to give you some basic, but reliable ways for you to ***test the spirits to see whether they are from God****.*
  + If someone attempts to teach you some point of doctrine that you have never heard or sounds suspicious, apply the following tests to ***see whether this teaching is from God.***
* **First**, and foremost, when presented with a new biblical teaching, **ask where in the Bible this teaching is found.**
  + It was this “show it to me” attitude that was found so commendable among the Jew in Berea. We read of the Bereans in Acts 17:11 . . .

***Acts 17:11— Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.***

* + While the Bereans were willing to listen and receive Paul’s teaching, they did not accept it blindly. Instead, they compared Paul’s instruction with what they already knew to be true in the word of God. And when Paul’s teaching was confirmed by God’s word, they accepted it.
  + So, when a teacher wants to bring some new teaching to you, **ask where in the Bible this teaching is found**.
* **Second**, if a teacher **is** able to tell you where in Scripture his or her teaching can be found, **search the Scriptures yourself to determine if the teaching is valid.**

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* + This means, examine Scripture to determine if the passage is being manipulated. Remember, **the number one rule in Bible interpretation is, know the context of the passage.**
  + It is not enough to have a Bible verse that supports an innovative doctrine. You must examine the verse to determine if the context supports the interpretation.
* A great example of taking a verse out of context and abusing it is found in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. Now, off the top of your head most of you don’t know what 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 is about. But if mention the title of a popular book from a decade ago . . . *The Prayer of Jabez* . . . many of you will be familiar with it. 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 read . . .

***1 Chronicles 4:9-10— 9 Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him Jabez saying, "Because I bore him with pain." 10 Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!" And God granted him what he requested.***

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* + It is based upon v. 10 that the book, *The Prayer of Jabez*, was written. And within this book we find a classic abuse of Scripture in which the “wealth and prosperity” gospel is preached.
  + The book advocates Christians mimicking Jabez in ***calling on the God of Israel*** to enrich them.It is a despicable manipulation of people and of Scripture.
* So, just because someone can point to a verse or verses in Scripture to support their belief, don’t accept their word for it. Search the Scriptures yourself to see if these things are true.

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* The **third** general rule concern how to **test the spirit to see if they are from God** is to **prayerfully seek God’s leading and instruction as you search for the answer.**
  + Pray that God will guide you to the resources that will show you the truth.
* The **fourth** general rule concerning how to **test the spirits to see whether they are from God is to** **consult the opinion of someone you trust**, whether a friend or a Bible scholar, whose opinion you find trustworthy.
  + But, even though you may consult someone else’s opinion, **do not accept someone else’s opinion blindly**. For an opinion based upon **your own study**.
* There, briefly, are **4 general rules regarding how we can “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.**
  + From these four rules many other more specific tests can be derived to help you discern truth from error.
* In the providence of God, I am grateful that our study has brought us to this passage this morning because there is a controversy that has recently arisen in the church that has quickly grown to a raging fire of anger and accusations of heresy. This modern-day controversy has now pitted long-standing Christian friends against one another, in the name of truth.
  + The controversy I am referring to is known by several titles, but the most prominent title is **“the social gospel.”** Or, as some have entitled it, **“the social justice gospel.”**
  + A recent article in the publication, *Pulpit & Pen*, says of the **social gospel . . .** *The social gospel advances ideas such as racial justice, open borders, and left-wing political ideology that has a facade of Christlikeness, but under the surface, merely replaces the gospel with social activism. The social gospel is an attempt to appease the world and the culture by encouraging Christians to adopt political social justice ideas through the guise of “gospel mandates.”*

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* Some of you may be familiar with this subject, but many are not. But Paul’s instruction to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 to ***examine everything carefully*** is providing me an opportunity to discuss this pernicious new doctrine that is sweeping through the church.
  + Next week, in keeping with Paul’s and John’s commands to ***examine everything carefully*** and to ***test the spirits to see whether they are from God***, I am going to practice what they command and explain what the **social gospel** is and why it is heretical.
  + But, as I explain my views on this subject, I am going to challenge each of your to examine this doctrine for yourself, so that you form your own opinion, based upon **your own** informed beliefs.