

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 5:14-22** . . . We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. [15] See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. [16] Rejoice always; [17] pray without ceasing; [18] in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. [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.

B. Pray

II. Practical Christian living for everyday life and the return of Christ.

A. There is some difficulty in determining exactly how God intends the various statements in **vs 19-22** to be connected.

1. The NASB ties **vs 19** to **vs 20**, “Do not quench the Spirit; [20] do not despise prophetic utterances.” And there are two probable reasons for doing this.
 - a. **First**, because both statements are negative exhortations – telling us what not to do.
 - b. And **second**, because the Holy Spirit is directly involved in both of them.
2. The NASB then ties together the three exhortations in **vs 21-22**. And the probable reason for this is because examining everything carefully ought to result in discerning the good from the bad and acting accordingly.
3. However, I am choosing to tie **vs 20** to **vs 21a**, and treat these two statements as one complete exhortation, “Do not despise prophetic utterances, [21] but examine everything carefully.” And I am doing this for two reasons.
 - a. **First**, because the Greek includes the word “**but**” between **vs 20** and the first half of **vs 21**. The use of the word “**but**” means there is or there may be exceptions to the rule, and the reader is being warned to look for those exceptions.
 - b. The **second** reason I am tying **vs 20** to **vs 21a** is because the OT includes several stories and warning about false prophets

and tells us how to discern the true from the false. In other words, all prophecy is not God speaking. There were exceptions, and there continues to be exceptions today.

4. Having tied **vs 20** to **21a**, I then choose to treat **vs 21b** and **vs 22** as a complete exhortation, “Hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.” My reason for tying these two exhortations together is because Paul makes a similar statement in **Romans 12:9**, “Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.”

B. [20] do not despise prophetic utterances.

1. In the Greek language, **vs 20** is a three word statement. And according to Young’s Literal Translation, **vs 20** says, “prophecyings despise not.” Or as we would say in English, “despise not prophecyings.”
 - a. Now you may be wondering why I am pointing out the literal translation instead of just using the NASB translation.
 - b. The literal translation clearly uses the plural form for the word prophecy whereas the NASB only infers the plural by using the plural form of the word utterance (utterances).
 - c. For me, the plural form of prophecy (prophecyings) more clearly lends support to applying the word to more than predicting the future in its use here. And this is important because the word prophecy is used in the Bible to speak of both **foretelling** and **forth-telling**.
 - d. For example, a quick review of the OT prophets shows that they prophesied what was to come in the future – such as foretelling the birth of Christ. But the majority of their work was forth-telling, that is, warning, exhorting, preaching, teaching, comforting, and telling people how God viewed them and their behavior at that moment.
 - (1) Now you might want to say, but only the foretelling is prophesy. The rest is something other than foretelling.
 - (2) And that is true. But the word prophecy is used in the Bible to refer to more than foretelling. In fact, the NT clearly identifies prophesy as foretelling and forth-telling.
 - e. For example, in writing to the church in Corinth, Paul labels preaching, teaching, warning, exhorting, and comforting as prophecy that edifies or builds up the church.
 - (1) **1 Corinthians 14:1-5**, “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. [2] For

one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. [3] But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. [4] One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. [5] Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

(2) **1 Corinthians 14:31**, “For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted.”

- f. Therefore, here in **vs 20**, it is reasonable to assume that Paul is warning against despising both **foretelling** and **forth-telling**. In other words, he is telling us not to despise warnings, exhorting, preaching, teaching, comforting, and prophetic predictions of what will come in the future.
2. To despise prophecies, then, is to despise foretelling and forth-telling by treating them with disdain, or rejecting them as unimportant, or regarding them as unworthy of our consideration.
 - a. In other words, we are not to allow our theological or denominational biases, or our allegiance to a particular preacher or teacher, or our Bible training, or our pride to cause us to automatically despise prophetic utterances from someone outside our approved selection of speakers.
 - b. The Christians in Corinth did this when they began to argue over who was the right teacher to follow: Paul or Apollos. It is as if they were deciding who was worth listening to and who wasn't worth listening to, and whose teaching should be followed and whose teaching could be ignored or rejected (**1 Corinthians 3:1-7**).
 - c. In addition, these same Christians appear to have done this when they exalted speaking in tongues over the full range of prophesy. In this case, they were acting as if speaking in tongues was spiritually superior to prophesying; or as if speaking in tongues was proof of the Holy Spirit's empowerment and leading while teaching, preaching, and predicting the future wasn't; or as if tongues was a miraculous work of the Spirit while prophesy was just a common work of the Spirit.

- d. In other words, the Corinthian Christians treated foretelling and forth-telling as less important, less spiritual, less proof of the Holy Spirit's empowerment and leading, and less miraculous in nature than speaking in tongues.
3. Returning to the portion we are looking at in **1 Thessalonians**, we don't know exactly why Paul warns against despising prophecies.
 - a. However, one of the reasons may be explained by the fact that Paul spent the end of **chapter 4** and the beginning of **chapter 5** correcting and clarifying the wrong and misleading teaching, and possibly even future predictions related to the end times.
 - b. Another reason Paul may have warned against despising prophetic utterances is found in **5:12**, where Paul exhorts the Thessalonian believers to know those who diligently labor among them so as to be able to discern the quality of their spirituality, Christian maturity, and daily living.
 - (1) As I said when we were studying **5:12**, the purpose for knowing your leaders in this way is to help you decide if they have the qualities of godliness that makes them worthy of being followed.
 - (2) Therefore, it is possible the Thessalonian believers were thinking that if it wasn't Paul or Silvanus or Timothy teaching or preaching, the person wasn't worth listening to or being taken seriously.
4. And how does this apply to us? We should assume that God still speaks – just as He did in the OT and in the early days of the church.
 - a. Therefore, we should not conclude that foretelling no longer exists or that every proclaimed prophecy is a farce.
 - b. And we should not assume that the only teachers and preachers worth listening to are those who are popular, or part of our denomination, or who agree with our statement of faith.
 - c. However, neither are we to take everything as God's truth, because not all foretelling or forth-telling is from God.
 - d. And so Paul continues on to say –

C. **[21a]** but examine everything carefully.

1. In other words, do not blindly or thoughtlessly accept what is taught and what is foretold as if it is authentic and unquestionably from God. However, be careful not to get an attitude, or a mindset, or hold a theological position that treats all **foretelling** and certain

theologically based **forth-telling** with disdain, or rejects them as unimportant, or regards them as unworthy.

- a. The godly way is to carefully, thoughtfully, and without bias analyze and test what is being said or written or sung. Use the word of God to measure its truthfulness and therefore worthiness to be believed, and where appropriate, practiced.
 - b. In other words, the word of God is our one immovable anchor against which we test what anyone says about God, godly living, and the future. This means that whatever is taught or foretold must in some rational, reasonable, and clear way fit into, and agree with, or help clarify, or show us how to apply in practical ways what is in the word of God.
2. We find an example of this in **Acts 17:11**, “Now (*the Bereans who were being taught by Paul and Silas*) were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for [the Bereans] received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily (*basically the OT*) to see whether [the things they were being taught] were so.”
 3. A second example comes from **Acts 20:28-31a**, where Paul warned the elders from Ephesus about misleading and even intentionally bad teaching, “Be on guard for yourselves and for 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] I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be on the alert.”

D. What criteria do we use for examining forth-telling and foretelling?

1. In **Matthew 7:15-18**, Jesus said to examine the fruit or the outcome of the speaker’s ministry. In other words, examine the way their followers live. Why? For at least two reasons.
 - a. **First**, because false teachers and false prophets can look and sound authentic – especially to new or immature believers, and to those who haven’t trained their spiritual and mental senses to discern good and evil according to God’s standard of good and evil (**Hebrews 5:14**).
 - (1) Therefore, to limit the number of Christians being misled, foretelling and forth-telling needs to be carefully examined to see if it adheres to God’s word.

- b. A **second** reason to examine the way a leader's followers live is that the way they behave – in the home, the workplace, the community, and the church – is a clear indication of the leader's character, faith in God, obedience to God, knowledge of God, and spiritual health.
 - (1) Many leaders are able to say the right words, but only those who are spiritually, mentally, and emotionally healthy can lead the people into the reality of God's word and so produce Christians who live according to the truth being taught.
 - (2) Therefore, the size of a foreteller or forth-teller's following, or his popularity within religious circles, or the number of books sold, are insignificant when determining the speaker's worthiness to be taken seriously.
- 2. In **Romans 16:17-18**, Paul adds three more criteria when examining foretelling and forth-telling.
 - a. [17] "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those teachers and leaders who (1) cause dissensions (*disagreements resulting in angry words, strife, damaged relationships, and division*),
 - b. and (2) [who cause] hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned (*i.e., hindering believers from living according to God's word by leading or teaching them in ways contrary to God's word*), and turn away from them.
 - c. [18] (3) For such [teachers and leaders] are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites (*if you look beneath the outward show of ministry you will find that their strongest or their underlying motive for being in ministry is the gratification of self and some selfish-interests in one form or another*); and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."
 - d. In other words, they are in ministry for what Paul calls sordid (*vile, base, covetous*) gain (**Titus 1:11**) and not to be taken seriously.

III. Conclusion

- A. May we be like the Bereans and treat foretelling and forth-telling with respect and an open mind – while also taking the time to appropriately test what we are being told to see if it is true.
- B. May we be like the believers in Ephesus, who God commends for putting to the test those who called themselves apostles, yet weren't, so that we test and turn away from those who are false (**Revelation 2:2**).

- C. May we follow the advice of Thomas à Kempis, who said, “Do not be influenced by the importance of the writer, and whether his learning be great or small, but let the love of [God’s] pure truth draw you to [thoughtfully listen] and read. Do not inquire, “who said this?” but pay attention to what is said. Men pass away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”
- D. In other words, do not allow your theological or denominational biases, or your allegiance to a particular teacher or local church, or your Bible education, or your pride automatically or mindlessly turn you against a forth-teller or foreteller. Instead, listen carefully to what they have to say and then test its worth by comparing it to the word of God.