



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### Church Relationships, Part 11

Many a child has been fascinated at the work of fireman. When a fire breaks out the trucks roll in. Each fireman takes his position. Some are spotters and survey the situations. Others unload the hoses. Yet another connects the hoses to the hydrants. About this time policeman arrive to keep spectators away. A short while later the fire is generally put out.

Children often think all this is “cool.” Yet it is not so “cool” in the kingdom of God! Did you know in Scripture that the Spirit’s presence is symbolized by fire? When Luke wrote about Pentecost and the many who became Christians that day he said:

Acts 2:3-4, “And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...”

Luke 3:16, "John answered and said to them all, 'As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'"

2 Timothy 1:6, "And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

Fire from the Lord, the Holy Spirit, works in the following realms:

- Conviction of sin, John 16:8-11.
- Comfort, John 14.
- Guidance, John 16:13.
- Teaching, John 14:26.
- Illumination, John 16:13.
- The Application of Salvation, Titus 3:5.
- Spiritual Gifts, Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4.
- And much, much more!

It is in regard to the Spirit's workings, specifically as He engifts the church, that "firefighting" occurs in the kingdom of God. When it comes to our relationship with the Spirit of God, notice the exhortation Paul gives in 1 Thessalonians 5.

1 Thessalonians 5:19, "Do not quench [as a present imperative the idea is, 'Stop quenching...'] Clearly this is what some in Thessalonica were doing!] the Spirit."

This is an interesting command. The word for "quench" is σβέννυμι (*sbennumi*) and means "to put out" or "to extinguish." It was almost universally used in connection with "fire."

Jeremiah 4:4, "...lest My wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it..."<sup>1</sup>

Matthew 25:8, "And the foolish [bridesmaids] said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'"

Speaking of hell, Christ said that there:

Mark 9:48, "...the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

So the idea behind "quench[ing] the Spirit" is squelching His work. In Ephesians 4:30, the same exhortation is essentially given in reference to Christians living in sin. Yet in our passage, the focus is on the Spirit's engifting of people for ministry. In Thessalonica evidently there were some who were opposing and so discouraging the exercise of the gifts which the Spirit gave to the body! *And in my experience, such abuse continues today in Christ's church!*

Accordingly, how do we avoid “quenching the Spirit”? How do we maintain a healthy relationship with the Spirit of God and His workings? 1 Thessalonians answers this by giving one example, specifically as it related to the gift of preaching. Let’s look at Paul’s teaching here. Paul exhorts us that when it comes to the working of the Spirit of God, we must look with humility upon all apparent workings of the Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:20, “do not despise prophetic utterances: ἐξουθενέω (*exoutheneō*).”

The word for “despise” is a strong one, meaning “to make absolutely nothing of,” “to regard as nothing,” “to despise utterly,” or “to treat with contempt.” It is what is behind the idea of “vanity” in the Bible.

- When Solomon said, “All is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2).
- When we are exhorted in 2nd Commandment not to take the character of God lightly- “in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

The idea is that of treating something as if it were nothing. Or better, it is giving limited or no response to that which demands a response. Furthermore, the word carries with it a sense of arrogance and pride. “Despising” something flows from a false sense of superiority- as when:

- Herod brought Jesus before his judgment seat *so that the king might be entertained by a miracle (Luke 23:8)! The abuse came to head in v. 11.*
- Luke 23:11: “And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.”- *Hey, if Christ won’t entertain us with a miracle, we’ll find something entertaining to do with Him!*
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians and exhorted them NOT to look down upon the ministry of Timothy if he should make it to them. 1 Corinthians 16:10a, 11a:, “Now if Timothy comes... let no one therefore despise him...”- that is, “Do not look down upon him or treat him with contempt.”

Accordingly, “to despise” carries the idea of looking down upon something such that you treat it as if it were nothing. The basis for this “despising” is oft-times a false sense of superiority/confidence! Now, what is it here that we are called “not to despise”?

1 Thessalonians 5:20, “do not despise prophetic utterances.”

The word is προφητεία (*prophēteia*) which is a compound of two words: πρό (*pro*) which is translated as “forth” or “ahead” and φημί (*phēmi*) which means “to speak.” Thus, it is translated as “to speak forth.”

In the Bible, “prophecy” has a two-fold connotation. It can refer to FORE-telling and so what we tend to think of when we think of prophecy- telling something that is going to happen beforehand (cf. Micah 5:2; John 11:51). The other emphasis of this word is FORTH-telling, which in Bible times involved either interpreting Scripture or proclaiming it.

1 Corinthians 14:3, “One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.”

The “prophesying” referenced here speaks NOT of predicting the future, BUT proclaiming the word of God... preaching! The primary use when it comes to this word in the Bible is that of FORTH-telling- which clearly is the idea in our text.

And so to “despise prophetic utterances” is to place yourself above the preacher and his message such that you look down upon him or the message. It is to take the pulpit lightly; which is exactly what some in Thessalonica were doing.

- From 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 we know that there were some in Thessalonica who had a problem with the leadership.
- Our text indicates that that problem included the pulpit!
- From 2 Thessalonians 2:2 we know that there were some in Thessalonica teaching that the Second Coming of Christ had already occurred!
- Lastly when Paul arrived in Thessalonica his preaching obviously was accompanied with much power as many in Thessalonica, “...turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:11b)!

The result was a cart-blanche rejection when it came to any who claimed a calling from the Lord when it came to preaching (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12).<sup>2</sup> William Hendriksen wrote this:

Wherever God plants wheat, Satan sows his tares. Wherever God establishes a church, the devil erects a chapel. And so, too, wherever the Holy Spirit enables certain men to perform miracles of healing, the evil one distributes his ‘lying wonders.’ And wherever the Paraclete brings a true prophet upon the scene, the deceiver presents his false prophet. The easiest- but not the wisest- reaction to this state of affairs is to despise all prophesying. Add to this the fact that the fanatics, the meddlers, and the loafers at Thessalonica may not have appreciated some of the utterances of the true prophets, and it is readily understood why by some in the congregation prophetic utterances had fallen into disfavor. (Hendricksen, 1972, p. 140)

And so when a preacher entered into the pulpit, one they weren’t familiar with or one they did not like, the response of some in Thessalonica was that of disdain such that when the real gift occurred, some in Thessalonica rejected both the man and the message. And in so doing they were guilty of “despising prophetic utterances”! This is a serious sin!

Recall, the office of “preaching” arose in the covenant community on that day when God brought His people to Mount Sinai to organize them into a nation. Yet God’s presence was terrifying.

Exodus 20:18, “And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and

the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance.”

It truly is a “terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31)! So what did the people do?

Exodus 20:19, “Then they said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.’”

Here we see the awesome manifestations of God’s glorious presence amongst His people being replaced by the still small voice of the prophet. And so yes, preaching is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:21, 23), and yes, it is performed by sinful men who are “bozos” in so many ways, but when the preaching starts, the fool becomes a Reverend on account of his function, and what amounts to a mystery, the spoken word of God literally feeds the soul of the sinner! From this we conclude that behind every pulpit is the terrifying presence of a God so glorious that His voice shakes entire mountains! In this regard, to reject a pulpit for any other reason than false teaching is to reject the God who shakes mountains, which no doubt is why Paul wrote literally in the text, “The Spirit do not quench!”

Now, preaching/the pulpit is but one of many examples Paul could have given when it comes to the working of the Spirit of God in our midst. Accordingly, the exhortation here is a call for humility and grace when it comes to the Spirit’s ministry in the body of Christ. That is the heart of the issue. Paul instructed the Roman church regarding the body-life of the church:

Romans 12:3, “For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”

And so when it comes to the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and His engifting, we must understand that we are on holy ground! Kingdom service is NOT about us, how we feel, or how others may feel in relation to us! It is about God’s work brought to fruition through the ministrations of God’s people as they:

- Serve in the nursery.
- Endeavor to encourage another in Christ.
- Teach.
- Speak in a fellowship gathering.
- Wash the feet of the saints.
- And much, much more.

In and through all of these moments we must realize that God is bringing about His purpose. As Paul said elsewhere, it is through “the proper working of each individual part” that God brings about “the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

As such, as we gaze upon the people of God serving according to the will of God, we are standing on holy ground! Let us therefore be careful that “the Spirit of God we do not quench” on account of a person, their personality, or our pride!<sup>3</sup>

This is not to say that we ought NOT to look upon a work or a worker with discernment; as we’ll see with Paul’s next point. Rather, the focus is on our attitude and so our mindset. We must approach the ministry of God’s people with humility and grace! With this, notice Paul’s second exhortation that we must diligently examine all apparent workings of the Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:21, “but [in contrast to a mindless, dismissive arrogance when it comes to the ministry of God in the lives of others, we are called to...] examine everything *carefully*.”

The word for “examine” is δοκιμάζω (*dokimazō*). This refers to a test that is performed to ascertain and/or determine the worth, value, or true identity of someone or something. For example, Paul speaking of the persecution associated with the Final Judgment wrote:

1 Corinthians 3:13, “Each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is *to be* revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality [that is, “prove the quality”] of each man’s work.”

When the test has been rendered and the object tested has passed, we say it has been “approved.” That is the word here! Paul further calls all in the body of Christ to examine themselves:

2 Corinthians 13:5, “Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you- unless indeed you fail the test?”

The idea is that we put our faith on the line and test it... is it genuine... is it real? That is the idea behind this word- a test to determine the worth of something. Paul further says that the super-apostles were:

2 Corinthians 13:3, “...seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me...”

In other words, they invited Paul to demonstrate, via a test, that he had the authority he claimed. That is the idea behind this word. Again, it involves a test which reveals and so determines the quality/the metal of a person or thing.

Now when it comes to this testing, no one and no ministry is exempt. We are called to test “everything” as it relates to the working of the Spirit of God in the body of Christ. D. M. Martin wrote:

'Everything' (a neuter plural) is broad enough to include more than just prophecy and may allude to all the various charismatic ministries operative in the church. (Martin, 1995, p. 185)

And so speaking of each and every minister and ministry in the body, there has and always will be FALSE manifestations of the working of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ. Speaking of the false leaders who were ravishing the church, Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 11:14b-15a, "...Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness..."

Acts 20:29-31a, "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert..."

Peter writing about the Old Testament people of God gave this warning:

2 Peter 2:1a, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies..."

2 John 7a, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world..."

In fact, Christ sounded the warning during His earthly ministry:

Matthew 24:5, 24, "...For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many... For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect."

Truly, false ministers and false ministries have and will continue to arise amongst the people of God. And we must understand that the call "Not to quench the work of the Spirit of God" is NOT a call to check our minds at the door and so blindly accept any and all who claim that they minister in the name of the lord. RATHER, we are called to test the minister and his ministry! In the words of Paul here, "But examine everything carefully!"

So while we must not evaluate an apparent working of God's Spirit with a judgmental ATTITUDE (one which places self above another, etc...), we are always to TEST the minister and his ministry!

Now we might think that *THE IDEA* of critiquing an apparent manifestation of the working of God's Spirit is judgmental and therefore ungodly. Yet you must see that far from being "unholy," this action is of great importance! There should never be a ministry or a minister in the kingdom of God that is untested!

1 Corinthians 14:29, "And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass

judgment.”

1 John 4:1a, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God...”

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.”

2 John 10-11, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.”

Romans 16:17, “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.”

From these and many more passages we are called to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God”!

Yet how do we do this? First in keeping with Paul’s first point, it must NOT be done with arrogance or judgmentally (that is, with a sense of superiority). That having been said, secondly Scripture indicates that every minister/ministry ought to be held to the following standard at all times:

- Their Character: which involves their motives, standards, loyalties, and attitude. Paul speaking of the false minister wrote:

1 Timothy 4:2b, “...seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.”

Peter speaks of the motive that ought to be behind all service in the kingdom of God, it ought not be for

1 Peter 5:2, “...sordid gain”

That is, for any inappropriate or impure desire.

David was very clear when it came to those qualified to minister in the body of Christ. He said this:

Psalms 101:6b, “...He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me.”

Accordingly, just because someone claims a calling or a ministry does NOT mean they are from



God. Are they men and women of God? Do they love the Lord? Are they grieved by their sin? Are they men/women of character? It has been said, "Don't follow a man because he doesn't sin. Follow a man on account of how he deals with his sin!" That is the idea here! Is the one ministering a man/woman of God? If they are NOT, they must be rejected!

- Their Content- what is taught or preached?

Christ speaking to the wicked leaders of His generations said:

Matthew 12:34-35, "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of *his* good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of *his* evil treasure brings forth what is evil."

Isaiah gave this standard for his countrymen to use in evaluating a preacher:

Isaiah 8:20, "...If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn."

If a supposed servant of Christ advocates a false doctrine, they have not been called by God and so must be rejected!

1 Corinthians 12:3, "Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

Clearly, the content/teaching of an individual or ministry must also be examined. If it is heterodox, the teacher/teaching must be rejected... period!

Now this doesn't mean that a true teacher won't make mistakes from time to time; they are sinners! But the question is: (1) What is the mistake? What doctrine was contradicted? (2) How does he respond when corrected? If there is a repeated contradicting of truth and/or defensiveness when confronted, that person ought not to be in ministry!

- The Consequences/Fruit of their Ministry...

Hebrews 13:7: "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."

Christ gave this standard when it comes to those qualified for service in the kingdom of God:

Matthew 7:15-17, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes*, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good

tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit.”

James 3:13-18, “Who among you is wise and understanding? [who among you is a genuine minister in God’s Kingdom?] Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart [if that is the fruit of the ministry in the life of the false servant], do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom [which is nothing less than the teaching or the servant that leads to conflict and discord in the body of Christ] is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above [and so the minister or ministry in which the Spirit of God genuinely is at work] is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (cf. also 1 Corinthians 14:3)

Another important measurement is the impact of a minister/servant when it comes to God’s people. Is the net effect of their ministry over time godliness, humility, peace, purity, devotion? Or is their path strewn with bodies- spiritual defection, discord, conflict, acrimony, and the like?

- Their Converts- the impact of the teaching of God in their lives.

2 Peter 2:2, “And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.”

2 Timothy 4:3, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.”

If you are interested in knowing about the genuineness of a minister in God’s kingdom, look at their followers. While this isn’t the only test, nevertheless oft-times the nature of the false servant will be manifested in the lives of those in their ministry. Are they kind, gracious, caring? Or are they consumers who bite and devour?

When J. C. Ryle was attacked by the followers of the Keswick movement with heated words, threats, slander, and lies, he responded with, “Truth needs no such weapon!” And so it is in all ministry!

## References

- Hendricksen, W. (1972). *New Testament Commentary, i & II Thessalonians*. Carlisle: Banner of Truth .
- Martin, D. M. (1995). *1, 2 Thessalonians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy*

## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> See also 21:12.

<sup>2</sup> D. M. Martin wrote, “The incomplete canon of Scripture, the ambiguities of charismatic revelation, and the activity of itinerant teachers created in the early church a setting conducive to conflict. The church struggled to know which leader to follow (1 Corinthians 1:12; Gal 1:6–7), which prophet was true, and which was false (Matthew 7:15–23; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:6–9). Disagreements over doctrine and ethics seemed inevitable. Some theological controversies impacted the entire church and affected the understanding of the gospel itself (Acts 15; Galatians 2). Other disagreements were more local in their impact (1 Corinthians 1:10–17; 3 John), affecting a single congregation. ¶ In such a setting, how was a congregation to respond to the many and diverse voices that claimed to be the voice of God?” (*1, 2 Thessalonians*, NAC, p. 183)

<sup>3</sup> G. L. Green wrote, “Some Thessalonians appear to have attempted to prohibit manifestations of the Spirit in their church. Since the presence of the Holy Spirit in the community is compared with fire (Jeremiah 20:9; Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; Acts 2:3; 18:25; Romans 12:11; 2 Timothy 1:6; and John 5:35), the verb “to quench” would aptly describe the attempts to eliminate these manifestations.” (*The letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, p. 261)