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A1117 – May 1, 2011 – 1 Thessalonians 5:19-28
Vestigial Gifts Are Fully Functional

Last time we worked with 1 Thess 5:12-18, what I called command central because in these verses Paul gives 15 commands in just 10 verses, one of the most compact command sections in the whole Scripture. What we want to do is conclude this section of commands that deals with the issue of quenching the Holy Spirit and then look at the benediction where Paul closes out his first letter to the Thessalonians.

One of the things that we recall in command central is that commands relate to the doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification basically as a word means “to be set apart” for some person or some purpose. It’s from the same word as holy and the idea is the same, something that is holy is something that has been “set apart” for a special purpose. And so we’re talking about being set apart. And there are three phases to being set apart. Paul is going to talk about phase two and three in the final verses of this letter, phase one is presupposed, it has to be because to even get the ball rolling down in phase two and three you have to have phase one complete. So let’s review the three phases of our being set apart. Phase 1 is our position, it’s in the past tense, and we have been sanctified, meaning we have been set apart from the world system. This occurs at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone. At that moment of faith our faith was credited as the righteousness of Christ and this gives us a new position or standing. We are no longer under the penalty of sin which is eternal condemnation separated from God. Phase 2 is our experience, it’s in the present tense. We are being sanctified, we are being set apart from the world system. The means is by law and grace. Law is the standard God expects us to live by, it’s expressed by the commands in Scripture and grace. Grace is the enablement to live up to the standard, to obey the commands. So always Law and Grace are involved in phase 2. And so we have to learn what God’s standards are, what are His commands for my

life, and once we know that then we recognize that it's God's grace in the person and work of the Holy Spirit that enables us to obey the commands, to reach His standard and the product or end result is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Christ's life is lived through us in our experience. We have a new experience where we are set apart from the power of sin in our lives. Sin causes an experience of death or temporal separation from God, the breaking of fellowship and not enjoying all that we are newly created to enjoy. But faith causes an experience of life or fellowship with God where we enjoy the new life that we possess. Phase 3 is ultimate sanctification; it's in the future tense. We will be sanctified entirely, that is we will be set apart from the world system altogether when we are taken out of it and separated into a new created order. This is our ultimate sanctification when we are complete and our experience conforms entirely to our position.

Today, we will see Phase 2 and Phase 3 in the text of Thessalonians. So in vv 19-22 where we see five commands, that's God's standard, that's God's Law, that's how God wants you to live, but we can't do it in our flesh, we can't work it up and so God extends Grace to us in the Holy Spirit so that He enables us so we can meet the standards of God's Law. So vv 19-22 all relate to Phase 2, our experience. Then in v 23 we see discussion of entire sanctification and that is Phase 3, our ultimate sanctification when we are resurrected at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our sanctification is as complete as it ever will be.

So let's start with Phase 2 and finish command central, starting in v 19, **Do not quench the Spirit.** Now **quench** is the command, *sbennumi*, and it means to extinguish something, like a flame, don't put out the flame of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is often associated with fire so it's a good association being made here between the Holy Spirit's work and fire. And Paul is saying don't extinguish the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now usually this is taken in a general sense as just don't get in the way of His work in your life, don't sin because sin stops the Holy Spirit's work in your life and that will stunt your growth. And that may be true and if that's what he's saying then it's similar to what is being said in Eph 4. So let's look at Eph 4:30. The context here is walking in holiness. If you study the book of Ephesians you see that Paul defines our new position in chapters 1-3 and then he describes our new walk in chapters 4-6. If you have a new position, if

you are a new person in Christ then you ought to have a new way of living, a new way of walking. And so in verse 17 he's talking about how you should walk, "do not walk as the Gentiles," verse 20, "you did not learn Christ this way," he's saying don't walk like that old person, that's not who you are any more, and then he gives some illustrations. Walk this way, do not walk that way and here's why, always a motivation is tagged on to why we ought to walk a new way. And in the middle of all of this in verse 30 he says "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Do not *lupeo*, do not grieve Him and it's clear in this context he means don't sin because the Holy Spirit who is the seal of our redemption, who has sealed us in Christ, is grieved by that sort of thing, it irritates Him that here you are this new person in Christ and He's sealed you in Christ and you're living like that old person. So do not grieve the Holy Spirit in Eph 4:30 is the general idea of don't sin because it bothers the Holy Spirit that you would continue to live as you no longer are, as that old person that you are no longer identified as.

But is that what do not quench the Holy Spirit means in 1 Thess 5:19? Does Paul simply mean don't sin because that quenches the Holy Spirit or does he have something more specific in mind. Notice verse 19 isn't the end of the sentence, the sentence goes on to verse 20 and in the Greek it keeps going on all the way through verse 22. So that means vv 19-22 are a complete sentence. So let's read the whole sentence and see if Paul doesn't mean something a little more specific by quench not the Spirit than, don't sin.

Verse 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.** That's one sentence.

And if you know what a sentence is you know that it's a grammatical unit of words that has a single basic idea, one major idea. And therefore what Paul is saying is that you quench the Spirit by despising the gift of prophecy.

Apparently the Thessalonians despised the gift of prophecy that was going on at the time and Paul is saying when you despise the gift of prophecy you're quenching the Spirit, you're hindering His work. So quench not the Spirit is not just the general principle of don't sin, obviously don't sin, but it's more specific than that and it basically has to do with the Holy Spirit and His role in spiritual gifts.

We have this little thing in the church age called spiritual gifts. So let's turn to 1 Cor 12 and put together a few things about spiritual gifts. 1 Cor 12-14 is the most extensive section on spiritual gifts in the NT. And it had to be written because the Corinthians had a lot of flare, they were the fad people in the ancient world and whatever the wild new fad was, they started it and everyone tried to one up them, so anything that was catchy they did it to the nth degree for awhile and so they had latched on to tongues; tongues speaking was their big thing. And in verse 1 Paul says, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware." They were obviously pretty stupid about spiritual gifts so Paul is going to straighten them out. Verse 3, "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." In other words what Paul is doing here is he is giving a summary of the tests from the Old Testament by which you can distinguish the true word of God from the false. These little expressions, "Jesus is accursed" and "Jesus is Lord" are summations of Deut 13 and Deut 18, the two tests given that go on into the NT so we can distinguish true from false. Verse 4, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons." In other words what he's doing here is he saying there is unity and diversity in the body of Christ. And he's basing that unity and diversity on the unity and diversity in the Godhead. Because in verse 4 he mentions the Spirit, in verse 5 he mentions the Lord which is Christ and in verse 6 he mentions God, who is the Father. So there is unity and diversity in the Godhead and therefore what do we find in the Church? Unity and diversity.

Then he begins to outline spiritual gifts. Verse 7, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." In other words, they are not for your own personal private use. They are for service in the body of Christ, for the common good. Same thing is taught in Eph 4. Verse 8, "For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit 10 and another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and do another the interpretation of tongues." So you can see there all the diversity, the diversity of the spiritual gift, but verse 11, "but one and the same Spirit

works all these things," there is unity behind the diversity. "Distributing to each one individually just as he wills." And so you can see that the Holy Spirit is involved in the distribution of spiritual gifts to believers, you can't choose which one you want, it's not your choice, it's His choice. Then he goes on to describe by illustration in verse 12, "for even as the body is one and yet has the numbers and all the members of the body, though they are many are one body so also is Christ." He's arguing for the unity and verse 13 shows us how this unity came about, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made strength of one Spirit." That is, there is a unity to the body of Christ and that unity is attained through the fact that all members of the body of Christ were baptized into it by the Holy Spirit. So there is one body and one baptism and now in verse 14 he goes on to proclaim that the body is composed of many different members. So now he's moving to diversity inside the body and he's arguing that all the parts are necessary. "For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot says, "because I'm not hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body 16 and if the ear says, "because I'm not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?" He's arguing that all the gifts are necessary for proper functioning in the body of Christ. And he's linking, he's taking the spiritual gift and linking it to an anatomical part of the body to illustrate. So, verse 21, "the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 on the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary;" And so Paul is making a big point that each part needs every other part, there are no vestigial parts to the body of Christ. That's a thing they argue for in biology class on the university campus, our bodies they say have vestigial organs like your appendix or your tonsils and they're saying they're vestiges, vestiges of a prior evolution when we needed those parts but now we've evolved to where we don't need those parts anymore so we can just cut those out. Around 1900 they had 180 of these organs that you could just cut out. Okay, fine, you go first and we'll see what happens. Now today it is almost unanimously agreed that most of them have at least one function in our bodies. But it doesn't change anything, they still use this on the campus to try and argue for evolution.

And what that means, so far as practical knowledge is concerned, for example, is that almost everyone thinks that the appendix is unnecessary, that it serves no functional purpose of the human body other than to cause appendicitis. However, in Bergman and Howe's fantastic little book *"Vestigial Organs" Are Fully Functional* they write, this from the medical literature of the late 1960's so there is no excuse for professors and the medical community using it to argue for evolution. "Bierman...concluded that the appendix may be an immunologic organ whose premature removal during its functional period permits leukemia and other related forms of cancer to begin their development. Bierman and his coworkers realized that lymphoid tissue located on the walls of the appendix may secrete antibodies which protect the body against various viral agents. In 1968 Bierman noted that persons without an appendix were significantly more likely than those having an appendix to develop neoplastic diseases as a whole, including lymphoma, leukemia, and Hodgkin's disease." So it appears that the appendix does serve both immunological and endocrine functions. It is a highly functional part of the human body, especially during early childhood, an important observation. Some of the supposed vestigial organs function during specific times in our life and during those times they are very important. And we could go on and show other examples, such as the tonsils the nictitating membrane of the human eye, eyebrows and eyelashes, wisdom teeth, the coccyx, et al.... All of which have been shown to be functional, necessary parts of the human body.

So when Paul makes an analogy between spiritual gifts and body parts that analogy he's saying that just as every part of your body is important so every spiritual gift is important if not all the time, then during some stage of development but there are no vestigial spiritual gifts.

Now let's take this over and apply it to the body of Christ. If that is our human body then the same things ought to apply by analogy over to the spiritual body of Christ. The first point is simply that all the spiritual gifts are necessary. You can't say just because some are more important than others, and they are, there's a rank given over in 1 Cor 12, but just because some are more important than others does not imply that the others aren't necessary. They are all necessary. However, the second point is that there are some spiritual gifts that only function for a period of time just like the appendix or the tonsils. And some spiritual gifts had their function only in the foundational stage of the church. Now that they're function has been

fulfilled they are no longer necessary; things like apostle, tongues, prophet, word of knowledge. These gifts gradually phased out and the word of God indicates their gradual phasing out, passages like 1 Cor 13:8-10 predict it and passages like Heb 2:3-4 indicate that indeed they were phasing out. So the point here is that while all the gifts are necessary to the Church, some are necessary only during the foundation phase of the Church and as that came to a close they fulfilled their function and phased out.

The fact is when the Church formed in Acts 2 and all during the early years the Church had living apostles, and while the apostles were with the Church, all during the Book of Acts, you had the apostles doing miracle after miracle after miracle after miracle. But as the Book of Acts go on these miracles thin out and become weaker, so that at the end of Paul's life he no longer can walk by people with handkerchiefs, as Peter did, and get people automatically cured; it's not happening. He can't just wave his hand over Timothy and fix his stomach, he says, go drink some wine. So that's why we say there's a cessation. By cessation we don't mean a cessation that God can't heal people today, or God can't do a miracle today, we're not saying that.

Cessation has to do with the fact that these special gifts of apostle and prophet with this special authenticating miracles, that has ceased. And if you aren't a cessationist then you don't have a closed canon of Scripture. It's precisely the cessation of these gifts that shuts down the NT. That's why in the book of Revelation there's a curse on anyone that adds to the NT, and that goes for Joseph Smith or anybody else that tries to come up with an addition to the Bible. There are no more additions to the Bible because there are no more apostles and there are no more prophets; the gifts have ceased.

On the other hand, if the gifts are really genuinely continuing, let's look around for Revelation 23, we ought to start looking for it, somebody should be writing it if we have prophets. If these gifts are continuing where is the Scripture? Where are the perfect prophecies? There are tests of a genuine prophet in the OT. Where is a living prophet who infallibly prophesies, who meets the condition of Deut 13 and Deut 18, those are the two tests. A genuine prophet has to meet Deut 13 and Deut 18. What are they basically? One is a negative test and the other is a positive test. The positive test is Deut 13, he does a miracle. And people say, well, that means he's the genuine prophet and so they go after him. I saw him do a great thing. But that's not

the end of the test. He does a miracle, great, then what? Listen to what he says. If he preaches false doctrine then do not go after him. So what's the emphasis in Scripture? On whether a person can do miracles or not? No. It's on their theology. Are they orthodox. The negative test is Deut 18, he predicts something and it fails. He's the false guy. Oh really? but he predicted something correctly last week. Yeah, so did the weatherman. The point of this test is are they 100%; if they make 500 predictions they have to have 500 fulfillments, not 499. 499 out of 500 is not good enough. Why's that? Because if God is behind the person then they will be 500 for 500, that's why. So are there infallible perfect prophets today? I don't think so. If there are they better start writing Rev 23. Well, I do not really believe in infallible prophecy today. Well what other kind of prophecy do you believe in? It's either infallible or it's not prophecy, Scripturally.

And so on one hand what Paul is saying to the Thessalonians is don't despise the gift of prophecy. That was a gift that was fully functioning in that period, it was necessary, and they were shutting it down prematurely. On the other hand Paul is saying, instead of shutting it down test it, pull out the tests of Deut 13 and 18 and run the proclaimed prophets through. That's what he's saying in verse 21, **examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.** Go ahead, test it, there were true prophets out there at the time, there were also a lot of false guys around. And the false guys were slick, they'd forge letters, they'd do anything to get authority behind what they're claiming and so you had to be on your toes. But don't despise it altogether; you can't do that, that quenches the Holy Spirit's fire, that puts out His genuine work of revelation. So test it, see if it holds water and **hold fast to that which is good**, toss the rest, but hold on to the true revelation.

Then he says in verse 22, **abstain from every form of evil**, it could be **form** in the sense of kind, abstain from every kind of evil but that would probably be too obvious. Of course there aren't certain kinds of evil that are okay and others that aren't, a two minute old Christian could tell you that. What Paul is getting at here is every appearance of evil. If something even looks evil, don't do it. Why? That kills your testimony. It may even be a thing that there's nothing wrong with, but just don't do it if it *could* look evil. And there's application galore here. There are perfectly good things a Christian can do but there are times when they should not do them because in the context they do them it would appear evil. And it's better just to abstain for

the time being than to cause a brother to stumble or to leave a poor testimony with an unbeliever.

Now let's close the letter out, v 23 begins the benediction. **Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Obviously referring to what? Phase 3 sanctification, ultimate sanctification when we get our resurrection body and he's simply praying for them that God will sanctify them entirely, completely, he prays two words that indicate completion there. God complete your job of sanctification. Well, why pray that Paul? He's going to do it anyway so why are you praying for Him to do it. Always pray Scripture. It's the best thing you can pray because you know it will be answered. So if you don't know what to pray for pray for something in the word of God to come to pass. Then you'll have your prayer answered. So he's praying for their ultimate sanctification.

And he's not giving a dissertation on trichotomy here; this is a benediction, not a theological dissertation. And people have tried to make this a proof text of trichotomy. Paul says man is spirit, soul and body, therefore man is trichotomous, that means basically man is three parts. The problem is that we're in a benediction and you don't develop big hairy doctrines in benedictions. The other problem is that in other places man is two parts and in other passages he's four parts, so which is it. Basically the church has come down to two positions; dichotomy which just says man has two parts, an immaterial part and a material part, the other position is trichotomy and this means man has three parts, a body, spirit and soul. I'm not convinced either one of them is totally right, I think both of them say some things that are right but I hold to a hybrid view.

But in any case, this verse doesn't have anything to do with developing a theological dissertation on the constitution of man, it's just saying the whole man, the entire man, and he's praying that God would sanctify the entire man, that he would keep man intact. And it's a prayer God will most certainly answer because look at verse 24, **Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.** So there it is. God is going to sanctify you entirely. He is going to do it because He is **Faithful**, it doesn't have anything to do with who you are, it doesn't have anything to do with you're

community service, it doesn't have anything to do with what side you part your hair on, it has to do with who He is. He is **Faithful**. When He starts something He finishes it. He doesn't start projects and leave them 10% done, He always completes His projects and you're one of His projects.

He called you, and that's the doctrine of election, it reminds us of chapter 1. It means God initiates, He called out to you through the gospel and He convicted you by His Spirit and that's how you came to know Him. He called you, you didn't call Him, and if He called you then He's Faithful to complete you, that's the point and that's why Paul puts that in there. He calls you is basically the beginning, He started this whole thing and He's going to finish it. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes for His church, and that's what He's saying at the end of verse 23, when He comes for His church you will be resurrected, completed, He will bring it to pass, He's going to finish what He started.

Verse 25, **Brethren, pray for us**. He has prayed for them over and over, even in this letter, so he's been an example of prayer and he's commanded them to pray without ceasing, and now he requests them to pray for he, Silas and Timothy. They need prayer, we all need prayer, no one is without the need of prayer because no one is self-sufficient.

Verse 26, and this one I wouldn't advise, **Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss**. I remember Charles Ryrie telling about how he was invited by a different kind of group one time to speak. When he arrived it was some hippies, some flower children, and apparently someone in the group had been effected by his ministry so they had him come speak and when he got out of the bus they all lined up to greet him and he went to each one of them and they greeted him with a holy kiss, 1 Thess 5:26 and Rom 16, and so he had to go through the whole line and he took it graciously, did his talk, had a wonderful time of Christian fellowship and then went to get back on the bus and they all lined up again. So be wary if you get off the bus and everyone lines up, that's the moral of the story. But the point here is that this was a common greeting, like shaking hands and they all did it, men with men, women with women, men with women, nothing sexual to it, kiss on the cheek.

Verse 27, **I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren**. Paul wanted it read to the whole assembly, it would be handed off

to the leadership, but they were to read it to everyone, that might be hard because there were some problem believers in this group so Paul took the pressure off the leadership, he said, read it to everybody, I don't care if they don't like the two or three parts that are aimed at them, read it. It's for the whole church and I don't want parts being hidden because that's not how problems get addressed and that certainly isn't how they get solved.

Verse 28, **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.** And this is just praying that the Lord Jesus will enable them to live the Christian life. Grace is often enablement and it's an admission that we can't produce the Christian life, we can't do that by operation boot strap, we need the enablement of Christ so that His life is lived through ours, so that His fruit is produced and not ours. So it's a closing reminder, yeah, we have 15 commands to close out the letter but you can't follow them without God's grace. So don't try. Trust, trust in Him, yield to His word and He'll live the life.

[Back To The Top](#)

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