

EXPOSITION OF I THESSALONIANS

Message #14

I Thessalonians 5:16-28

Every Sunday in thousands upon thousands of churches people gather together for what they call “worship.” But as one commentator said, many of the churches do not really offer true worship. What they offer is a form of religious entertainment that is designed to cater to the appetites of the congregation.

What are the things that truly form a church worship service that honors God? We would encourage you to analyze Texas Corners Bible Church in light of this text and see if we meet God’s criteria as a church that is moving the direction God wants.

IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT JESUS CHRIST IS GOING TO RETURN TO GET US WE NEED TO BE SURE THAT OUR INDIVIDUAL CHURCH WORSHIP IS DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PREREQUISITES GOD HAS ESTABLISHED IN HIS WORD AND IF WE DO THAT WE WILL BE BLAMELESS WHEN HE RETURNS.

Now how do we know that this is referring to corporate worship? The answer is simple- **all the verbs are plural, not singular.** So this section is not so much about individual. The emphasis here is on the corporate worship, not the private worship. Although certainly what we do in private will affect what we do in corporate.

INGREDIENT #1- Blameless worshippers will be joyful. **5:16**

This is actually the shortest verse in the Bible. If you ask most people what is the shortest verse in the Bible they will say John 11:35 which says “Jesus wept” (εδακρυσεν ο Ιησους), which is actually 16 letters and 3 words. However the words “rejoice always” (παντοτε χαιρετε) is only 14 letters and 2 words. But just because this is the shortest verse in the Bible, does not mean it is an insignificant verse.

The basic meaning of the words “rejoice always” is be of good cheer and be glad and joyful in the context of the character and quality of all things and all times. Whenever we gather together for worship, we should do our best to be upbeat and glad that we get to gather together to hear God’s word. We should be happy it is Sunday. We should be glad to see each other.

There are people in every church who will do whatever they can to zap the joy out of going to church and out of worship. They will zap the joy away from you if you let them. There is, as Warren Wiersbe said, always some “Gloomy Gus” in every church family (**Be Ready**, p.123). You see them walking down the hall and you don’t want to talk with them because they are so negative. Years ago there was someone back in the fellowship hall who was so negative, someone told me, I had to get away from the table they were at because it was affecting my worship. We have been commanded by God to “Be joyful” and to “rejoice.”

Now you cannot command someone who is sad for legitimate reasons to be joyful. God does not expect that. But the present tense verb means the continual attitude of a person worshipping God should not be one of doom and gloom, but of joy. Every time we gather to worship God and learn about God, it ought to be a joyful experience.

INGREDIENT #2- Blameless worshippers will be prayerful. **5:17-18**

Prayer was very important to God and to Paul and to the early church and it should be important to our church, which is exactly why we place such a heavy emphasis on prayer in this church. Churches are losing sight of this key point. They are replacing prayer meetings with other meetings. God demands that a worshipful church be a praying church.

Now there are two aspects of prayer that are brought out here.

First, the word “pray” (προσευχομαι) is a word that literally means to pray with the idea that we are moving toward God. Prayer is to be considered to be very sacred. When we pray we actually move toward God and we are to do this always, all the time (G. Abbott-Smith, Greek Lexicon, p.382).

Now the concept of praying always or praying without ceasing is the concept of never permitting any thing to cause your prayer to stop. We should be in an attitude of prayer at all times and we should constantly reflect this attitude of prayer. We should never give up on our praying.

Frankly, as I prepared this message a while back, I was at the point of almost giving up on something I had been praying about. This text changed my mind.

Second, we are to pray always with an attitude of thanksgiving in all things, realizing we have this great privilege of going to God corporately as a church in prayer.

When a church is on track, there will be a focus on prayer and there will be a continual thankful spirit. We are not to be thankful just one time a year in November at thanksgiving time; we are to be thankful at all times. What a privilege it is to be able to pray to Almighty God.

Now after giving this command to the church Paul says you need to know this about prayer- “this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.” In other words, the will of God for those who have believed on Jesus Christ is to continually pray. It is the will of God that we never stop praying.

I knew of someone who was visiting a church that was very impressive from an architectural perspective. It was so large that you had to take a shuttle bus from the parking lot to get to the church. When you walked into the lobby, there was an overhead listing of various things that looked like the departure and arrival board of an airport. The bulletin was professionally done. There was a list of activities of all kinds of things happening at church that week that featured all kinds of social opportunities. As my friend examined the bulletin, he noticed two things were missing. There was no focus on any prayer meetings and no focus any systematic teaching of the word of God.

My friend said, “I instantly knew this church is not doing the will of God.” From an external perspective it was impressive, from God’s perspective, it was bankrupt. If the church does not pray; if the leaders and people do not pray; it is not doing the will of God, I don’t care what the numbers are. Because the will of God for the church is that it be a praying church.

Why do you think we have a prayer chain; a Wednesday prayer meeting; a women’s prayer meeting; a men’s prayer meeting? Why? This is the will of God.

INGREDIENT #3- Blameless worshippers will not quench God’s Spirit. **5:19**

Now the verb “quench” is present/imperative which means this is a continual command. The word literally means to quench or put out the fire of the Spirit’s work. It is possible to extinguish the flame and fire of God’s working in our lives and in the church. It has been observed that the Spirit of God is quenched when a person says “no” to something to which God wants us to say “yes.”

Floyd Barackman writes: “To “quench” the Holy Spirit is not to extinguish Him as one puts out a fire, for He indwells us perpetually. It is to stifle Him, to limit or hinder His activity in our life by refusing to cooperate with Him. We do this when we oppose or resist His control and give ourself to sin. We can correct this by dealing with our rebellious attitude and by giving ourself to the Spirit’s direction and enablement. We yield to His control by heart decision and prayer. Isaiah said ‘Here am I.’ (Is.6:8).” (Practical Christian Theology, p.217)

There is a very real presence of the Holy Spirit at a gathering of God’s people at church. Do not miss this fact. When you come to church there should be a real sense of reverence for God that is produced by the Holy Spirit.

What God’s people need to realize is that they can quench that Spirit by not yielding to what the Spirit prompts one to do. When the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives and in the church, there will be a sweet blending and a harmony between our will and God’s will.

When God’s word is preached, it is possible to quench the fire power of the Holy Spirit, by saying no to God’s word and no to God’s revealed will. When we step away from the word and will of God, there will be an immediate quenching.

This is why there seems to be a deadness to many denominational churches. There are believers in those churches but they have departed from an accurate teaching and application of God’s word and the Holy Spirit has been quenched and they are dead. You have a lot of religious action with a lot of religious people; but there is no real Holy Spirit dynamic there because the Spirit has been quenched.

INGREDIENT #4- Blameless worshippers will not despise true prophecy. **5:20**

There are some people (probably most people) who go to church and they want emotion or commotion, but they do not want a deep feeding of God’s word. Prophecy is one of those doctrines that is not for the shallow or surface level believer. It is a meatier doctrine and apparently some “despised” it.

Now the word “despise” means to treat something with utter contempt (Ibid., p.161). It is clear as we have gone through Thessalonians that prophecy was a well taught church doctrine that Paul clearly addressed. In fact, it is clear from I & II Thessalonians that some were confused about prophetic things.

Now when Paul wrote I Thessalonians, the gift of prophecy was fully operative because the Scriptures were not yet completed. Paul predicted that the time would come when this gift would pass away, which today it has (I Cor.13:8). With the completion of the book of Revelation we have the completion of all prophetic data. There is no longer a need for this gift, what is needed today is an accurate understanding of the prophetic books that have been written.

However, when this gift was operating, certain people received direct revelatory prophetic information to teach at church. That information pertaining to this gift of prophecy revealed all true prophetic data that is now revealed in the written Word of God. **So basically what this gift of prophecy actually did was to reveal prophetic truth through the spoken word that we now have in the written word.**

Apparently what was happening in Thessalonica, was that some were actually beginning to despise the instruction about prophecy. It is very possible that at one service, someone revealed the same kinds of prophetic truth found in the books of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. Plus probably this gift also revealed some of the specific details of the book of Revelation.

Some people were not happy with that focus and not only were getting tired of hearing it, they were despising it. Some people wanted the “rah rah”; “happy clappy” experience. They wanted more emotional stuff and Paul says, no. You never despise the word of God.

This does reveal that there needs to be a very serious focus on God and His word at church. This was a very early church and its focus was to be on teaching God’s word. Prophecy was the ability to accurately communicate God’s word. At church there should be a major emphasis on accurately teaching God’s word.

INGREDIENT #5- Blameless worshippers will examine everything. **5:21a**

I love that word “examine.” The word “examine” (δοκιμαζω) means to test things, try, things and prove things (Ibid., p.120). Notice what we are to examine in the church “everything.”

God does not want His church to be a bunch of gullible simpletons who believe any thing and every thing. He wants us to carefully examine things in light of the word of God.

I love what Dr. J. Vernon McGee said, God’s people should not be a bunch of suckers who are taken in and misled by some deceiver. Just because someone shows you a pathetic picture of some orphan or tells some emotional story that may or may not be true, you should never buy into it. We need to be people who investigate everything in light of truth.

This is one of the great benefits of having God's written word and knowing it. We can test everything in light of Scripture. Someone comes up with some novel view and we can examine it in light of Scripture. Some legalist or denominationalist comes up with their opinion and we can examine it in view of Scripture. Some one comes up with an idea and we can examine it in light of Scripture. God wants His people developing sound faith, not insane faith.

INGREDIENT #6- Blameless worshippers will hold fast to what is good. **5:21b**

That verb "hold fast" means to get hold of something and hold it tight (*Ibid.*, p.241). We are to do that with what is good. The specific word "good" (καλος) refers to every thing that is excellent of good form by classification of God (*Ibid.*, p.228). So a God honoring church will examine every thing and when it is established that this is true and good, they will hold fast to it.

It will hold fast to good doctrine and good teaching. It will hold fast to good people. People who are truthful and genuine, who are the real deal, are people to hold fast to and emulate. It will hold fast good things. Any thing good a church right with God will be drawn to and will hold fast to.

INGREDIENT #7- Blameless worshippers will abstain from all forms of evil. **5:22**

Here is a simple grace age principle that we may apply to any questionable thing- if it appears to be evil stay away from it. The word "abstain" means to hold yourself back from something.

Now the noun "form" (ειδος) is a noun that refers to something that is seen in external form (*Ibid.*, p.131). We could understand this way, you look at something or see something that in its external visible form appears to be evil. The specific word "evil" (πονηρος) refers to things that are seen as bad or worthless. This is just the opposite of things good (*Ibid.*, p.372).

So Paul says when we spot things that we know are bad things and evil things, we need to hold ourselves back from those things. By using the adjective "all", it covers every aspect of life.

Notice how **verse 23** begins, "now." This conjunction gives a grammatical connection to the preceding verses and what this means is **if we do these things, God Himself, will sanctify us entirely, in our spirit, soul and body and we will be blameless when Christ returns. That word "blameless" means without fault when we face the Lord.**

Our body which has the world consciousness will be blameless. Our spirit which has our self consciousness will be blameless and our soul which has our God consciousness will also be blameless. If we apply these things to our lives, when Christ comes back to get us, we will be "without blame."

When Christ comes back to get us, we want to be an honorable church and we want to be an honorable individual. This demands a complete sanctification of body, soul and spirit. We are to be blameless physically, psychologically and spiritually.

Verse 24 is very clear to point out that God is capable of doing this work in each and every one of us. We don't have the power to do this but He does. God is a faithful God and if we want to finish as a sanctified and blameless church; He certainly is capable of doing that.

Paul ends this remarkable letter to the Thessalonians with four final thoughts:

Final Thought #1- Paul requests that God's people pray for him and his ministry team. **5:25**

Paul does not solicit prayers from all the churches about his personal struggles, but he always wanted churches to pray that God would bless and use him and those with him in ministry.

Final Thought #2- Paul requests that all of God's people are greeted with a holy kiss. **5:26**

There was someone one time who got mad because he did not want to shake hands with people at church. In the first century, he would have never gone to the church where the command was give each other a holy kiss.

Final Thought #3- Paul requests that this written letter be read and taught to all believers. **5:27**

I find this fascinating because what this teaches us is that God's written word is to be taught systematically to every body. This book of I Thessalonians was to be read and taught to all. Apparently they did not have some special story time and snack time for the children. The children went to church to hear the same exposition as the adults. There was no such thing as "Junior church."

Final Thought #4- Paul states that God's grace is with God's people. **5:28**

The fact is without God's grace, we are nothing. Without God's grace, we accomplish nothing. Paul wanted these Thessalonians to realize that even when they had low moments, God's grace was with them.

Jesus Christ is coming back to get us and it is all due to God's grace.