

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Do Not Despise Prophetic Utterances

1 Thessalonians 5:20-22

Part 1

We are continuing to examine the last section of 1 Thessalonians. This section of scripture which begins in **V. 16** and extends through **V. 22** contains a series of principles or commands dealing with holy living. The principles that are listed for us in this section fall into two groups. **VV. 16-18** deals with principles of the inner life; **VV. 19-22** deals with principles for the corporate life of the church. And stresses the responsibility of the readers toward the workings of the Spirit in their assembly.

This latter section began with the command in **V. 19** “**Do not quench the Spirit.**” And we have been looking at various ways we might be guilty of doing this. And we have been looking at various ways that the church in general might be guilty of doing this.

Knowing that it is the Word of God that the Spirit of God uses to do the work of God we have been looking at ways that we, as well as the church in general can quench the Spirit by distracting people from considering and responding to the Word of God. We are not abandoning this theme. We are not abandoning this theme because Paul does not abandon this theme.

Paul has given the Thessalonian church the command “**Do not quench the Spirit.**” He now moves to another negative command that he wanted the Thessalonians to obey. “**Do not despise prophetic utterances.**” This should not be thought to be a totally new thought without any connection to what has preceded. In fact Paul is continuing the theme. But here he is giving a specific application to what he has just said. How can we quench the Spirit? We can quench the Spirit by “**despising prophetic utterances.**” We have already touched on how we can do this. We have already touched on how the church can do this in general. But we have not finished this important subject.

People today are being inundated by all kinds of people saying all kinds of things and representing what they are saying as God’s message to us. We hear them speaking on the radio, on television, in magazines, in books, and from pulpits such as I am doing this morning. What do they mean when they say that they they are speaking a message from God? How are we to respond? Hopefully as we read **1 Thess. 5:20-22** we will have answers to these questions.

WHAT DOES DESPISING PROPHETIC UTTERANCES MEAN?

First of all we need to understand what “prophetic utterances” mean. A prophetic utterance is simply a communication directly from God to a person or persons through the medium of a prophet. A prophet acts as a mouthpiece for God, receiving a message from Him and proclaiming it in accordance with His commands. I am not guessing about this definition. This is exactly what the Bible itself says. In **Ex. 4:10-16** after Moses declared that his lack of eloquence would make it impossible for him to act as God’s representative before Pharaoh we find God appointing Aaron as Moses’ mouthpiece. In **Ex. 4:16** we read, “**... he shall speak for you to the people; and it shall come about that he shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be as God to him.**” In other words Aaron as the mouthpiece of Moses would be his prophet.

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God reinforces this same thought in **Ex. 7:1**, “**Then the Lord said to Moses, “See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your What? prophet.”** A prophetic utterance is simply a communication directly from God to a person or persons through the medium of a prophet.

This morning I am giving you a message that I have prayerfully prepared. I am giving you a message that I believe is true. I am giving you a message that I believe that you need to carefully consider. I am giving you a message that I believe is based on God’s Word. In fact I am giving you a message that I believe is from God. And therefore I believe you need to pay close attention to what I am saying. But I am not a prophet. And what I am sharing with you is not a prophetic utterance. Why? Because this message did not come from God to me and then to you. This message has come from God to the apostles and prophets and now to you. I am not a prophet but a teacher. A prophet receives God’s message directly from God and a teacher receives God’s message indirectly from Him as he prayerfully studies the writings of the apostles and the prophets as contained in our Bible.

In the time that this epistle was written the apostles and prophets were still very active in the Church. Why did they have such a prominent role within the church? The early church did not have a completed Bible as we do. Therefore the Holy Spirit gave the gift of prophecy to certain members of the church and would speak God’s message through them.

Certainly for this Thessalonian congregation “**prophetic utterances**” would be extremely important. When was this epistle written? It was written most likely in the summer of 51 AD. This means that the only other NT books that were even being circulated amongst the churches at that time were the book of Galatians and the book of James. And they may not have had even these two books. Can you see how important it would be for the Lord to raise up gifted men among them who had the gift of prophecy?!!!

The gift of prophecy today is unnecessary. Why? Because God’s revelation to His church is complete. In **Eph. 2:19-20** Paul looking forward to the completed canon of Scripture said, “**So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household (20) having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.....**” I believe that we can reasonably assume that the work of the apostles and prophets, as those who have laid the foundation for the church, is over. We are therefore no longer dependent upon Prophets to give us truth. All the truth that we need has been once for all delivered to us and is contained in this book that we call the Bible. It behooves us therefore to seek to accurately interpret what has been written by the apostles and prophets through our own personal study as well as considering the study of others.

But though we are blessed with this body of truth that we call the Bible certainly the Thessalonians were not. And the Lord raised up prophets among them. And these Thessalonians were expecting that these individuals would be among them. And as a result therefore there were people standing up in their gathering and saying, “I have a message from God” Or they were saying something like this “Thus saith the Lord hear ye Him” And with these individuals doing this Paul was concerned that their prophetic utterances might be what? “**despised.**”

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The word “**despise**” (EXOUTHENEIO) means “to treat with contempt.” Paul is commanding these Thessalonian believers when someone stood up among them and said “I have a message from God,” not to despise them.

How might the Thessalonians in fact do this? I believe that they would be guilty of treating prophetic utterances with contempt when they would not examine the so-called communications from God carefully. Let us now add **V. 21** to what we have already looked at. “**Do not despise prophetic utterances (21) but examine everything carefully.**” People who would listen to people who were speaking in the name of the Lord and reject what they had to say without examining everything carefully would be guilty of “despising prophetic utterances” or conversely people would listen to people who were speaking in the name of the Lord and embrace what they had to say without examining everything carefully would be guilty of “despising prophetic utterances.”

What does Paul mean when he calls the Thessalonians to examine these prophetic utterances carefully? He does not explain what he means in this verse. But there are other passages in the Scripture that help us answer this question. Certainly what I will be sharing with you would have been of great importance to the Thessalonians. But it is still of great importance to us. There are still people today who are representing themselves as prophets who believe they have a message from God. And though we do not expect such things to be taking place, it still would behoove us to understand how we can examine or test these so-called prophets and their prophetic utterances.

When the Lord was using prophets to communicate to His people it would sometimes be a challenge to know who was a true prophet and who was a deceiver. **Jeremiah 28** describes a situation in which Godly people might have been greatly puzzled. Jeremiah had just declared that it was God’s intention to permit the king of Babylon to conquer Israel and to take its people into exile. Hananiah, the son of Azur, publicly rebuked Jeremiah and gave a message similar to that which Isaiah had given about 100 years before, declaring that God would marvelously protect Jerusalem and would not allow it to be taken. After Hananiah gave this purported message, Jeremiah withdrew (**V. 11**). Who were the people to believe? These kind of situations made it very important for people to understand who the prophets were.

A true prophet must speak with confidence when he speaks in the name of the Lord - (Deut. 18:20) “**But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak** that prophet shall die.” To presume something means to “take for granted, assume, or suppose.” There are people who truly want to think that somehow they have a direct link-up to God, in a sense that He is communicating directly with them. And these people might want to think that God is somehow communicating with them. If a person thinks or supposes that God is communicating with them then we can be assured that this person is not a true prophet. A true prophet of God who is speaking in the name of the Lord doesn’t think or suppose he is speaking in the name of the Lord. He knows that he is speaking in the name of the Lord. How was this accomplished?

It might be through an external voice. You will remember that Eli had called him, when it was really God who spoke (1 Sam. 3:3-9). This strongly suggests an audible voice that could have been understood by anyone in the vicinity.

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This may have been the way many of the prophetic messages were received. If you actually heard what you believed to be God audibly telling you to do something or to say something I think you would have to take it pretty seriously.

It might have been an internal voice. In some instances, a prophet received a sudden direct message from God, but no audible divine voice was heard by others near the prophet. Thus 1 Kings 13 describes a situation where a prophet standing by the altar suddenly cried out to his companion, “Thus says the Lord,” and then proceeded to rebuke him (VV. 18-22); but there is no indication that God’s voice was heard by any other than this prophet..... I am not talking about a random thought or a passing feeling I am talking about hearing a real voice, but it is a voice that others are not able to hear.

It might be the opening of the prophet’s eyes. A divine enabling to see realities that were invisible to ordinary eyes. For example, after an angel of the Lord had forced Balaam’s ass to step out of the road, the Lord opened Balaam’s eyes so that he could see what had previously been invisible to him, though visible to the ass (Num. 22:31).

It might be from a vision or dream. Ezek 37 describes a vision in which the prophet saw dry bones coming together and being covered with sinews and flesh, but not having life. Then the Lord told him to prophecy, commanding the wind to give life to the dead bodies. In the vision Ezekiel saw that “they lived, and stood upon their feet, and exceedingly great host” (v. 10). This and other visions gave Ezekiel specific revelations in pictorial form, which he could pass onto his listeners.

Prophets did not suppose or think that they were speaking for God. They knew they were speaking for God. I may represent to you that I feel God is leading me to this thing or that thing on the basis of my knowledge of God’s Word, but this does not make me a prophet. I am just like every other believer who is seeking to be obedient to the Lord and to do the right thing. Hopefully none of us here this morning who are professing believers would say or do anything that we did not feel was what the Lord would want us to do or say but this does not make us a prophet.

It is important for us to understand that prophets were not perfect people. Nor was everything they did perfect. Nor everything they said perfect. In his human capacity he made mistakes. God ordered Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of Jesse’s sons who would eventually replace Saul as king (1 Sam. 16). As the prophet looked at Jesse’s oldest son Eliab, he felt sure that the Lord’s anointed was before him, but the Lord told him that he was incorrect. Only after David was called in from the sheep pasture did Samuel know that the right son stood before him. How did he know this? God spoke to him. When God speaks to his prophet through a audible voice, and inward voice, illuminated eyesight, dreams or visions the prophet knows. I am not a prophet. The only truth that God has communicated to me is the truth that is found and flows from this book but this is not so with a true prophet of God they can stand in the midst of the people that God has called them to and say apart from the medium of the Scriptures “Thus saith the Lord hear ye Him” And they know that they are the very mouthpiece of God.”

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A true prophet must represent his prophesy as coming from the God of the Bible - (Deut. 18:20
“But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.” It would be impossible for any individual today to be taken seriously as a prophet of God if he in any way did not represent God as he is revealed in the scriptures. Certainly this would include every religion outside of Christianity and even the cults within “Christianity.”

Nearly everyone has a belief in a God of some kind. Certainly this was true of the various people groups that were alive when Moses was writing the book of Deuteronomy. It is not enough to believe in a spiritual entity or even a supreme spiritual entity. But we must believe in God as he has revealed himself through his apostles and prophets. Anyone who represents themselves as a prophet and who rejects the God of the Bible is false.

Consider Mohammed. He came and represented himself as a prophet. Was He? Did he believe in God as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures? And the answer would be no! Mohammed totally rejected the idea of the Trinity. There was no room in His theology for a Godhead that consisted of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Even though this is what the Scriptures clearly taught. What does the Scripture teach? **John 1:1** said, **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”** And who is the Word that John is referring to? He is Jesus, later in **V. 14** it says **“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** Mohammed was not a prophet of the God of the Scriptures. He was a prophet of another “God.” He therefore should have not been embraced as a prophet.

For us today there are still various religious leaders who are coming forward who represent themselves as prophets and who in their prophecies are seeking to undermine the biblical definition of God as we find in the Scripture. And these prophets also should be shunned as false prophets in the very same way that we should shun Mohammed.

CONCLUSION

The church at Thessalonica was without a written revelation. And they were without Paul. But the Lord apparently had been faithful to raise up prophets. And Paul is calling them not to abandon the benefit of these various people by “despising their prophetic utterances.”

They were being called to examine what they had to say. And we have begun to consider a part of that examination. Did they speak with authority? Did they know that they were speaking the very words of God. The God they were speaking for was it the God of the Bible?