

Sunday 22nd November 2020

1 Thessalonians 5: 19-28 (Hold onto the good)

Talk by Ian Baldwin, Prayers by Margaret Davies

Hello, and welcome to our service. My name is Ian and today we will be thinking about how Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to hold onto the good teaching. Our bible reading is from 1 Thessalonians ch5v19-28

Let me pray as we start.

Lord thank you that we can meet as your people and to take this time to focus on you. Help us to set aside all the business and worries of the week so we might listen to you and learn more about your love for us. Amen.

Now Margaret will lead us in our intercessions then I will read from the bible.

Prayers

Last week we heard verses from Philippians and Thessalonians reminding us to rejoice, not be anxious and in everything to pray with thanksgiving in all circumstances. Let us do just those things now.

But, we let God down, so let's confess.

My God, for love of you, I desire to hate and forsake all sins by which I have ever displeased you; I resolve by the help of your grace to commit them no more; and to avoid all opportunities of sin. Help me to do this, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God, in His love for us has forgiven us. Thank you, Lord.

Almighty God, we rejoice that you are creator of this world. You give us many blessings, which are your will for us. Above all we thank you for your gift of Jesus who saves us and The Holy Spirit to sustain us as our help and comforter.

Father God, we thank and praise you for answering prayers. You have healed the sick and wounded who we prayed for. You have worked with the medical researchers and vaccinations are being tested and will eventually be distributed to control the virus. Now, Lord we give our world to you - changed beyond recognition by this pandemic. We pray, in Jesus' name for communities struggling to recover economically, where mental health is fragile and lives are disrupted, for your peace, your renewal and your new beginnings, your healing and comfort, knowing that you are faithful.

Lord, we lift to you all the countries where there is civil war, hatred and terror, famine and persecution. We pray for understanding where there is confusion; resolution where there is conflict; forgiveness where there is bitterness; provision where there is lack and hope where there is despair. Strengthen all those agencies, missions, churches and authorities working to restore these nations.

Heavenly Father, we thank and praise you for the worldwide church working to spread the gospel. We pray especially for Jason and Tracey Day, mission partners in Chiang Mai In Thailand, working to support other partners in South East Asia and locally with families and safeguarding, witnessing to you in a very Buddhist country.

Thank you, Lord for our church fellowship, our support of each other, contacts and outreach. We pray for the food bank helping families in need, for Christians Against Poverty assisting so many in debt and other struggles. Bless each one and Rachel. Lin, Gareth and Ian. Give them your Spirit with strength, energy and time, knowing they work for you, Lord. We pray too for Cherry contacting families through Amaze Penge.

We pray this also for our new Church Council. Bless their meeting on Thursday this week. Thank you for and bless Ian, Steve, Sue, Andrew and all our leaders.

We pray especially for the appointment of the right new vicar to lead us and Holy Trinity. May your Spirit be leading and guiding the merger into one parish to your praise and glory and witness in our community.

Our Lord God we bring to you now all those in need or suffering. We pray for people who are bereaved, please comfort them, heal the ill and depressed, give shelter to the homeless, work to the unemployed and strength and courage to the frail and elderly. Give people determination to live carefully and control the virus from spreading. Bless all specially known to us:- Audrey, Val, Anthony, Zak [Yvette's son], Keith and Barbara, Lorraine, Eva, Kate, Mick and family and Tony. Also, pray for anyone you know personally.

Lord Jesus, you tell us that whatever we ask for in prayer, believe that we have received it and it will be ours. Thank you: Lord. Help us this week to listen to your word and be challenged by your Holy Spirit.

Almighty God, we ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord and Saviour.
Amen.

Reading

1 Thessalonians 5: 19-28

¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil.

²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

²⁵ Brothers and sisters, pray for us. ²⁶ Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. ²⁷ I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Talk

Today we come to the last of our studies of 1 Thessalonians and I hope they have been an encouragement during these difficult times. There is lots to think about in our relationship with God. How we live as individuals and as a community of believers under the love of God. I wonder what this letter would be like if Paul was writing to St John's in the 21st century? My guess is that it would not be very different because the issues and challenges are pretty much the same.

Our passage this week is a continuation from last week in that v19 is a link between v16-18 that Russ spoke about last week and v20-21 in this week's reading because they are one series of instructions.

So we begin with "Do not put out the Spirit's fire". This is the same spirit which came upon the disciples at Pentecost like tongues of fire. That blessing continues - maybe not as dramatically - but as Christians we are baptized with the Holy Spirit which is to say we receive from God his free gift when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. The spirit is like a fire bringing God's light to our lives and enlivening and purifying our souls.

The Holy spirit also gives freedom in our lives but also freedom in our worship and we must learn to enjoy the spirit's presence as he gives us peace and guidance.

Paul is effectively saying "let the spirit speak to you and listen to him" and also let the spirit move you to respond to God in prayer, praise and thanksgiving.

So, as we draw near to God let us be like the men on the road to Emmaus and let our hearts burn within us as we hear God's word bring truth to our lives.

That is all well and good but how do we put out or quench the fire?

Well, a fire is put out by removing the fuel, by pouring water on it or by covering it in earth. Christians do this by indulging the desires of the body, thinking as the world thinks and desiring what the world desires. This begins to distance us from God as we look to the world for our fulfilment and satisfaction rather than find it in God.

By not allowing the spirit to guide our hearts and minds we hinder our growth in God's grace. Elsewhere Paul gives commands regarding the Holy spirit and I am going to mention them here because by following them we will develop our life with the Holy Spirit rather than quench it.

Eph 5v18 "Be filled with the Holy Spirit"
Gal 5v16 "Walk by the Spirit"
Eph 6v18 "Pray in the Spirit"
Eph 4v30 "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit"
1Thes 5v19 "Do not quench the Holy Spirit"

I will not explain them here as each one is a sermon in its own right!

We can see that Paul is so concerned for them that he is not giving a simple warning but a command not to do it. Do not put out the Spirit's fire.

V20 is an instruction is to listen to whatever message and in whatever form God chooses to speak. Prophecy is and always will be controversial. There are no new prophets like those in the OT. because there is no adding to the gospel or Gods plan for salvation as laid out in the bible.

However, there are individuals who seem to have words from God often pertaining to a local situation or individual or group of people.

These are prophetic gifts and are not the same as a God called prophets in the bible who declared "Thus says the Lord".

So, prophecy here is not foretelling the future but rather exhortation to live, work and worship as God's people– a word applied to our lives which could come via preaching, prayer or bible study.

Having said that the Spirit mostly prompts us, directly or through an individual, to stop doing something that is wrong or to start doing something that is right. How often have we ignored that prompting at our peril?

However, the correct response is to listen to the message and not dismiss out of hand or treat it contemptuously.

What we should do as v21 points out is to compare any prophecy to the bible. We should include preaching and teaching as well. Ask ourselves does it ring true?

We are to test gifts and prophecies. The word test means "to sift" to "weigh carefully" like testing metal to find if it is genuine or counterfeit. We are to be mature and wise and avoid being gullible.

Paul writes about being mature Christians in Eph 4v14 saying "we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming"

So how do we test prophecy and teaching?

Well here are five ways we can do this as individuals and as a church.

Test 1 Test them against the plain truth of the bible. Examine scripture to check if it is in line with the bibles teaching.

Test 2 Test the spirit of what is said against Jesus actions and words.

Do they acknowledge Jesus, his life and teaching?

1 John4: 1-3. States:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Test 3. Does it affirm or change the gospel message of God's free and saving grace?

That is, does it try to add to or take away from the gospel?

Test 4. What is the character of the messenger?

Jesus said in Matt7v15-16a “watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognise them”

Test 5. Does the message build and strengthen the church? It may condemn sin, but it also needs to bring hope.

When these tests have been applied and worked through and prayed about then we will be able to hold on to what is good.

Having done the testing it seems obvious that v22 should say avoid every kind of evil. However, we know from painful experience that we don't always do this. The simple idea of “if it looks or feels wrong it probably is” our conscience may tell us this, but we need to listen to the spirit. Paul is warning about false apostles in 2 Cor 11v13 “For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness”.

Remember Satan also tempted Jesus using scripture. We see Mat 4v6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

These are some examples from scripture, and it is why the church and each individual within it should hear the bible read and taught. Preferably read the bible for themselves. Paul warns us that we should not assume we are exempt from or stronger than temptation. We know as children that if we play with fire sooner or later, we will get burnt. But now we are grown-ups and Paul simply says to us “avoid every kind of evil”.

That is be separated from sin. This may mean difficult choices for us. We may have to change our speaking or habits or places we visit or what we read or listen to or even things about our relationships. This can be hard and that is why God sent the Holy Spirit to our counsellor and comforter.

This is why Paul calls us to love the Spirit and to love each other for he knows we need the love and support and honesty of Christian friends. Paul needed it and so do we.

So as we come to the end of our studies in 1 Thessalonian Paul closes the letter with what is essentially a blessing for the young Thessalonian church but it still applies to us.

This prayer is affirming the completeness of our sanctification, that is our being made holy, as nothing is left out as our body, our mind and our spirit are changed and drawn closer to God. Paul emphasises the important fact that when we meet God we will be blameless because of Jesus.

For it is God who works this out by his grace and mercy as he promised. Paul reminds us that God is faithful to his word and that we can rely on God to complete his work of love in us.

Now having given all this instruction and then prayed for them Paul asks for their prayer support for himself. This is a simple thing but a great reminder to us that we should never be too proud or ashamed to ask for prayer.

Finally, Paul reminds them to greet all Christians, not just our friends, so that all feel welcome and included. Again, this shows the love of God at work amongst us.

He also asks them to make sure everyone gets a chance to hear God's word. Don't keep it to ourselves or a certain group in the church otherwise how are they going to know? How can they test?

As is often the case Paul begins and ends the letter by wanting God's grace to be upon them for the grace of God is at the heart of the gospel.

So God has left us with all the instructions to live for him and he has also given us the gifts and tools to do the job he has called us to. Most of all he has sent his Holy Spirit to give us the power to live the life he has called us to. God has called us by his love to respond to him in love and to love each other.

So may the grace of God be with us all.

Amen

A closing prayer from 1 Thes ch5v23-24

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

Amen

Thank you for listening and may God bless you this coming week