

A Proper Response to God Himself

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22
Preached on: Sunday, May 1, 2016

Will you take your Bibles and turn to 1 Thessalonians 5. We will be examining verses 16 through 22 today. Once again, a very practical passage of Scripture. You will recall that here at the end of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonian church he gives a series of exhortations to help us understand how we are to function in the church, in the fellowship. We have already examined what he had to say with respect to a proper response to church leaders, and then, secondly, a proper response to problem members that we looked at last week, and now he tells us how our inner attitudes that are necessary for a proper response to those first two categories should manifest themselves with respect to how we worship God. So this morning we will be looking at a proper response to God himself and I pray that you are not merely auditing these expositions of God's word but that you're truly taking them to heart. Certainly, each of us will find ourselves deficient in some of these areas, that's always the case, we are fallen creatures, but certainly we do not want to be ignorant of what the word has to say and with knowledge comes responsibility as James tells us, "Therefore to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do them, to him it is sin." So you will know more fully after this morning what the Lord would have you do and too often, Christians rob themselves of blessing because they allow the word to go in one ear and out the other. They just kind of audit what God is telling them from his servant in the pulpit and as a result, they rob themselves, their families and their church of divine blessings. In fact, James tells us, "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does." And Jesus said in Luke 11, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

So with that in mind, let's look at these wonderful very closely related admonitions beginning in verse 16 of 1 Thessalonians 5,

16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 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.

And this morning, I will simply use each verse for an outline. So let's look first at the exhortation to "rejoice always." Now, we must remember that the Thessalonians were struggling with some severe hardship. They were enduring persecution. You will recall that the Apostle Paul tells us that they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and wait for his Son from heaven. And as a result of their faith in Christ, some of them have now lost their jobs; they lost their families; they lost their friends. It

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was a very serious thing unlike it is in our culture. Moreover, they were baby Christians and like all infants, joy is typically determined by circumstances, right? If things go well, I'm happy. If things don't go well, I'm sad. Joy is not a result of transcendent truth within the heart so Paul was afraid that the joy of their new found faith in Christ was in danger of disappearing so he admonishes the, "Rejoice always."

Now, bear in mind that you simply cannot do this apart from a work of the indwelling Spirit. You cannot just muster up joy. It is a fruit of the Spirit. It's a genuine heart attitude of high and holy elation that is based on one's understanding of who God really is and what he is up to in their life. It's also based upon a history of experience where they have seen over and over how God has proven himself powerful on their behalf. And happy is the man who not only hears the joyful sound of the Gospel but who has had its truths written upon their heart; who is living them out. Christian joy literally must flow from a spring of truth. It's because a man has a real reason for rejoicing that he will rejoice regardless of circumstances.

Beloved, you must understand that true joy is really a celebration of undeserved mercy and saving grace, realities that occupy the mind and animate praise within the soul. Paul said it so well, he says, "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things of this earth." In other words, regardless of the situation, be preoccupied with God's purposes, his plan, his power, his provisions. "Ah, but pastor, you don't understand. My spouse hates me and my life is miserable." Well then, dear friend, you must transcend your legitimate sorrows by focusing on the character of God who loves you with an infinite love. You must rejoice because he has forgiven your sins. You must celebrate the fact that he has made you a new creature in Christ; that he has given you promises; that he is causing all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose, and even now, he is conforming you into that purpose which is the image of Christ. David testified to this great promise when he said, "All the paths of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies."

"Yes, but pastor, I have lost my income and my health is failing. How can I possibly rejoice always?" Dear friend, you must understand that in the midst of your trial, you can plead for God's strength and his all sufficient grace but know this, that God is in it; that the spirit of God will help you. He is faithful. He is a wise and an active Comforter and he never attempts that which he cannot accomplish so use your pain to find an even grater intimacy with the lover of your soul. Rejoice knowing that Christ has accomplished your redemption; that you have a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

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dead to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

"But, oh pastor, I have just lost my spouse, the love of my life." Oh, dear friend, know that God is in it and that he sympathizes with your pain. Learn afresh the lesson that there is absolutely nothing on this earth that can bring lasting joy; that your only joy is ultimately in Christ. Remember that sorrow is for the night but joy comes in the morning. And be like Job who in the midst of unimaginable suffering learned well the lesson of God's sovereignty; learned well the lesson that God is infinitely wise and powerful and celebrate those things. Be like Paul who said of himself in 2 Corinthians 6:10, "Be sorrowful yet always rejoicing." Be like the Psalmist who declared in Psalm 28:7, "The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart exults, And with my song I shall thank Him." Beloved, these are the Spirit-induced attitudes of a believer who will be able to rejoice even in the midst of great sorrow and calamity.

Secondly, he says, "pray without ceasing." Now, bear in mind that a rejoicing heart will be a praying heart. It always goes together. And here Paul uses the most comprehensive term for prayer, one that encompasses the full spectrum of God-ordained communion, everything from petition to praise, from confession to intercession. You see, prayer is a part of our spiritual discipline. Remember in Romans 12:12, Paul said, "be devoted to prayer." Now, we can be devoted to lots of things in our lives, right? It's real easy to be devoted to the television set; to the internet; to Facebook; to hobbies; to our favorite team; to all of those types of things. But, folks, all of those things are eternally inconsequential. Yes, God gives us lots of things to enjoy but do not forget that he has commanded you to be devoted to prayer. I have learned over the years that it's easy to spot a person who is so devoted because when a man or a woman is devoted to prayer, he is also devoted to Christ and therefore his speech and his whole demeanor will really give off the sweet aroma of Christ. Their life exemplifies Paul's admonition in Philippians 4:6, "be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

Now, the phrase that Paul uses here, "pray with ceasing," is best understood as living in constant communion with God and this is something that every mature believer is going to want to do. This is not something that is onerous. In Ephesians 6, beginning in verse 18, Paul said, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel."

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Now, please know that living in constant prayer in that constant attitude of being in communion with God is really a mark of Christ-likeness. You realize that Jesus did this and he is our supreme example. Scripture records how that he persevered in prayer. He prayed passionately and boldly and persistently. In fact, Luke tells us that the reason the Lord gave the parable of the persistent widow, you remember that in Luke 18? It was to teach his disciples that "they should always pray and not give up." And of course, one that prays in such a way has at the very core of his or her being a confidence that God is a loving Father that desires the very best for his children. For the most part, this was the habit of the early saints beginning at Pentecost. We read in Acts 1:14, "These all," referring to the apostles, "with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." Likewise in Acts 12:5, we read, "Peter was kept in the prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church."

Now, habitual prayer, meaning living in communion in that state of communion with the living God is evidence, really, of genuine saving faith. Unbelievers know nothing of this. They have no desire for this type of thing. In fact, unbelievers will typically only pray in times of great desperation but, sadly, their prayers fall on deaf ears. Many times, I've been in hospital waiting rooms where I've heard people who have wanted absolutely nothing to do with God suddenly cry out to him to save their loved one but he does not hear them. During a time of terror and distress, God says in Proverbs 1:28, "they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me." But not so children of the heavenly Father. He always hears and answers according to his perfect plan. What father wouldn't, right? What father would turn a deaf ear to his own child that he loves? And friends, what a privilege to come boldly before the throne of grace in time of need. How much more we should live there in times where we really have no need, per se, but we live there because we love the Lord and we want to praise and worship him. Imagine what your life, what your marriage, what your family, what your church would be like if you really got serious about prayer, being devoted to prayer. Pray without ceasing.

The third exhortation really ties together this trio of admonitions. He says in verse 18, "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." In other words, regardless of the circumstances, give thanks. You see, gratitude is at the very heart of worship, isn't it? I remember so vividly the 29 pastors I trained in Kenya. Most of them had walked at least a week, some two weeks, and several of them had walked for three weeks. Some were sitting in the classroom without a pen or a pencil and I remember I had just thrown in some extras and I gave them all pens and pencils and you would have thought it was Christmas. Most were hungry. Most were sick with worms. Three or four of them were shaking violently with malaria. One of them was our brother Elijah A. But

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do you know what? They did not complain. They did not clamor for medical attention. They did not cry out for food. They cried out for the word of God. They were absolutely starved for the glory and the greatness of God and his word. I had the privilege of training them for several weeks to help them understand the doctrine of salvation. Their hearts were filled with joy and thanksgiving. Jack, you were there. You remember. And oh, you should hear them sing and you should hear them pray. I remember in one of our testimony times at the end of the day, one man half my age stood up to give his testimony and like all of them, tears of joy streamed down his cheeks and he said, "Few of us will ever live to be old men." By the way, anything over about 50 would be old for them. But he says this, "How wonderful it is to know that we will not have to wait long to see Jesus." Folks, that's the type of joy that's in the heart of the redeemed and it's this type of joy that animates constant praise and, you know, without a thankful heart for all that God is, all that he has done, all that he is doing, all that he is going to do, regardless of your circumstances, without that kind of a heart, your petitions are like the shrill sound of a spoiled brat demanding of a father rather than the cries of a humble child in need.

So Paul says "rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks." I ask you, do these virtues characterize your life? I hope they do because Paul says, "for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Often, people will ask me to help them discern God's will for their life. "Pastor, I'm struggling to discern God's will for my life. Can you help me?" And many times this is one of several passages I will take them to because this is the will of God right here. Certainly if we look at Scripture, it's his will that we be saved, that we be sanctified, that we be Spirit-controlled, that we be submissive, that we suffer, but here he gives even more specific clarity. It is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything so let's start there, okay? And beloved, may I also add that what Paul is saying here are not optional suggestions that are somehow secondary to our Christian walk; that aren't really that important. No, as we look at this, we see that these are divine imperatives that stand at the very core of God's plan for your life and your ministry. These virtues should define the character of every believer so we simply must take them seriously.

Now, as Paul moves on, he gives five final exhortations that really pertain more specifically to the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. Notice he says first in verse 19, "Do not quench the Spirit." By the way, if you're not rejoicing always, praying without ceasing and you're not giving thanks in everything, you're going to quench the Spirit, but he's going to go on to add to this, alright? "Do not quench the Spirit," which literally means, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire in your life. Do not retard his work in your life." Dear Christian, don't miss this because many do. First, I must remind you of some of the profound ministries of the Holy Spirit lest we forget. You will recall that Jesus said that he would ask the Father to send the Comforter, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, and that he

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would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. He did that in my life. He has done that in yours and he continues to do that. In fact, Jesus said it's the Spirit who gives life. He is responsible for the great work of regeneration, that supernatural, instantaneous impartation of spiritual life to the spiritually dead. He is the one that causes us to be born again and then he causes us to grow into the likeness of Christ. He is the one that gives us discernment and strength to be able to live out our journey of this life, the journey of progressive sanctification. In fact, Paul prayed for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:16 that God "would grant them, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." Beloved, don't forget that our ability to love God is the work of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, our ability to subjectively experience the love of God for us is a work of the Holy Spirit. Paul says in Romans 8:16, "The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are," what? "Children of God."

He performs so many ministries in our lives. Scripture says he strengthens; he is our source of unity; he is our access to the mind of God. He intercedes for us in prayer. He works with our conscience. He is our teacher; our source of illumination, liberty, strength and power; our source of fellowship and spiritual fruit. He is the one who bestows upon us spiritual gifts to serve Christ and one another. He is our source of true worship, our strength and guide for walking in this life. He is our guard of the truth, the seal or the guarantee of our inheritance. He is the one who restrains our sin and leads us away from it. He is our source of witness concerning Christ; the source of Scripture, our spiritual food. Beloved, do not quench these magnificent, supernatural works of the Spirit in your life. Don't put out the fire with your rebellion and your hypocrisy and your apathy and your sin. Instead, stoke the fire by being filled with the Spirit which literally means to be Spirit controlled, to be controlled by the Spirit through obedience to his word. Remember in Galatians 5, "If we walk by the Spirit, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh." The converse is therefore true, if you do not walk, if you refuse to be controlled by the Spirit as he has revealed himself in his word, you will carry out the desires of the flesh, you will not bear the fruits of the Spirit and therefore you will put out the fire in your life.

I wish to give you a list and it's not a comprehensive list, an exhaustive list, but there are some things that perhaps will be helpful to you, things that I've seen over the years in my life and in the lives of thousands that I have ministered to over the years, things that will quench the Spirit in your life, that will make you spiritually, morally, theologically weak, undiscerning, ineffective, discouraged and so forth.

The first thing is stubborn pride and self-will. Now, because of pride and self-will, we typically cannot see it in our life, right? So let me give you some symptoms of stubborn pride and self-will that will quench the Spirit in your life. You will be indifferent and

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insensitive to the word and the will of God. An exposition on Sunday morning such as this will be boring to you. You won't really take it seriously. You won't apply it to your life. You really have no appetite for reading the word of God, meditating upon it, hiding it in your heart, searching the Scriptures diligently. And when you do read your Bible, you'll only do so for information rather than seeking to know more of the unsearchable riches of Christ and how you can become more like him.

And this will lead to a second category of fire retardant in your spiritual life and that is an unwillingness to deal biblically with life dominating sins. You see, again, when you fail to walk by the Spirit, you're going to carry out the desires of the flesh and then you will justify your selfishness, your lack of love, your outbursts of anger, your bitterness, your gossip, your immorality. Well, you name it. You're going to justify all of those things with a myriad of ridiculous excuses, all the while being blind to how your life is destroying your marriage, your children, every key relationship.

A third category is idolatry. Now, idolatry is far more than worshiping images made with hands. It includes worshiping substitutes for God that we have erected in our hearts. Fundamentally, idols of the heart include anything that we desire and find satisfaction in more than God. Perhaps to say it a little bit differently, we become idolaters when our greatest joy is found in something other than God. Surely, the will put out the Spirit's fire in your life.

A fourth category is discontentment and resentment, the two tend to go together. It's when our heart is filled with reasons to complain rather than rejoice. We are sour and sullen and whiny and we refuse, therefore, to accept God's purposes and plan for our life. When difficulties arise, we begin to suddenly doubt God's goodness; we begin to think that he's unfair; and we begin to operate more and more in the flesh rather than choosing to trust in God's provisions and his strength and in his power. And of course, this is the opposite of what God would have us do. We are told in James 1:2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." I remember one lady saying, "I hate that verse!" And sometimes that's how we feel but we don't say it. He goes on to say, "and let endurance have its perfect work so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all generously and without reproach and it will be given to him."

A fifth category that will quench the Spirit is bad theology and some of you have brought some very bad theology into your life and your marriage. You see, false teaching is not of the Spirit, it's of the father of lies. The Spirit sanctifies us according to the truth and believing lies will greatly inhibit that work.

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A sixth category is failure to use your spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. I mean, think about it, the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church by empowering every saint with at least one or multiple gifts so that they can serve in some unique capacity in the church to bring glory to Christ and to minister to the body. So failure to use your gift is an insult to his grace and it will render you unfulfilled and ineffective. I can't imagine what it would be like if every member of Calvary Bible Church got serious about that one issue.

A seventh category is an undisciplined spiritual life. You merely live for yourself with no commitment, no plan, not desire to, as Paul said, discipline yourself for the sake of godliness. No personal pursuit of holiness. There is nothing in your schedule where you say, "This is reserved for my time with God, my time of prayer and meditation." No decisive determination to really serve Christ. No burden for the lost. It all goes together, doesn't it? No hatred of sin. No determined effort to kill it. No desire to be more like Jesus. You become nothing more than what I would call a spiritual sluggard, an entitlement Christian. You want reward without responsibility.

Beloved, if these things describe you, there is no fire in the furnace. You've quenched the Spirit's work in your life. You are stifling or suppressing what the Spirit wants to do and, sadly, this is basically what we see in evangelicalism today in the church. Most churches lack doctrinal clarity and conviction. In fact, it's even considered unloving to be dogmatic. People are more concerned about offending sinners than they are offending a holy God and therefore they simply will not deal with members who persist in sin and error; church discipline is scoffed at, and no wonder the church today is so ineffective. As I said I think last week, it's kind of like a cruise ship, undiscerning, popular with the world because the fire of the Spirit's been extinguished. John MacArthur said, quote, "The self-absorbed church preoccupied with attaining personal comfort, success, and achieving man-centered solutions to life's problems possesses a superficial faith that cannot discern between good and evil or truth and error." Oh, dear Christian, if this is you, please hear me. Repent of these things and beg the Spirit to reignite the fire of his presence and his power in your life for the glory of Christ and for the joy of your heart.

He goes on with the next exhortation and says in verse 20, "do not despise prophetic utterances." Now, bear in mind these early saints did not have a closed Canon as we do today. The Canon of Scripture was incomplete; they only had the Old Testament Scriptures, not the New Testament and so God would speak through his apostles and their associates; he inspired them to complete his written word, the revelation of God in Scripture. And during that time, New Testament prophets would occasionally be inspired to God to deliver new revelation but most of the time they simply proclaimed things that

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were already recorded and so Paul's concern here with the Thessalonians is that they might lose their respect for God's revelation to them in Scripture both written and spoken.

"Do not despise prophetic utterances." The term "despise" implies "dismissive disdain; it implies contempt; to regard with contempt." And "prophetic utterances" refers to "the Spirit-endowed gift of publicly preaching or expositing the word of God and never deviating from it." In fact, a prophetes, not the feminine of prophet but in the Greek a prophet is prophetes and it comes from a compound word "pro" which means "forth" and "phemi" which means "to speak" and so a prophet was one who speaks forth; he would be one that would openly declare the mind and the will of God. So a prophet refers to a forth-teller, not necessarily a fore-teller as we would think of it in our English minds. In fact, the term "prophecy" often refers to God's written word. In 2 Peter 1:20 Peter says, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." And you might recall how Paul urged the saints in Corinth to desire the prophetic gift because it was the Holy Spirit's method of strengthening, encouragement and comfort. You read about that in 1 Corinthians 14:1-3.

Now, evidently some of the Thessalonians despised prophetic utterances. They did not like the prophetic proclamation of the word. And some of them may have had reason to do so because they were highly suspicious of some of the wacko itinerant philosophers and preachers that kept coming through the town and all of the towns, false teachers that were constantly plying their trade in their city, the same type of stuff you can turn on your television almost any time and you can see these guys and gals. And remember, they had already been deceived by some wolf in sheep's clothing with respect to the day of the Lord, remember? And Paul had to straighten them out on all of that. And to be sure, whenever God builds a church, Satan builds a cathedral. Whenever God calls his man, Satan will crown his. Wherever God plants wheat, Satan sows his tares. So we need to be discerning but you can carry it too far. Remember, for example, in Ephesians 4:11, Paul says, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists," referring to church planners, missionaries, "and some as pastors and teachers." That's what God has called me to do. Why? "For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." So in other words, we don't want to despise what God has put into his plan.

"Do not despise prophetic utterances." By the way, to do so would quench the Spirit because, again, remember, it's the Spirit of God who is the author of Scripture and Scripture is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, all-sufficient word of the living God and as believers we cannot know and enjoy God's truth without it. We cannot gain victory over Satan and sin without it. We cannot grow in faith and obedience without it.

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We cannot worship God in spirit and truth without it. So do not despise prophetic utterances but, notice verse 21, "examine," or literally test, "everything carefully." So he's saying, "Don't be naïve here. Don't be gullible. Learn to distinguish truth from error." In other words, be like good Bereans. Remember in Acts 17:11? There we read that "they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

We can also use the test that Jesus used to determine whether or not a man was a false teacher. Remember in Matthew 7? "You will know them by their fruits." So you look at their life, you look at their message and I'm thankful that so many of you will call me or email me. I get them all the time and I really rejoice in that. Sometimes I probably write too much. I think some of the elders had teased me about writing epistles to people in answering their questions, but I love to do that because I want you to know the truth and this is what we need to do, especially in light of the massive amount of information that's out there today on television, on radio, on the internet. I mean, there are so many opportunities for error to be disseminated and I would also add, be especially careful about what you pick up in the Christian bookstore. I know firsthand that they are driven much more by dollars than they are by truth and error sells much better than truth.

So Paul says, "examine everything carefully," and then he adds another exhortation, "hold fast to that which is good." "Hold fast to," it's interesting in the original language, it means "remember; it means retain; possess; embrace with all of your heart that which is good; allow that to shape your life in Christ." This was so important for those early saints. They had to be discerning with all these nut-jobs that kept coming through the town and even were coming into the church each claiming some special message, some unique revelation from God. Paul warned the church at Colossae about this, remember in Colossians 2:18 he warned, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God."

Now, you are all aware there are people today that believe that God continues to give special revelation to some special people, revelation apart from Scripture. I run across it all the time and the only way you can authenticate their claim is through experience. The problem is, experience is not authoritative, nor is it self-validating. I get emails from listeners and some of them are, you know, "God has given me a word about your ministry," and then they go off on some nebulous ethereal gobbledygook about things that almost make no sense. Or they confront me on how dreadfully wrong I am in how I've

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interpreted some passage and they will give some bizarre interpretation of a passage of Scripture.

I remember one time years ago, a man came in the door right as I was getting ready to preach. I remember, I'll never forget the guy. He looked like Colonel Sanders. He had on a white suit and the white hair and all the stuff and he was ecstatic and he said, "Oh, I've received a vision from God. Where's the pastor?" So they bring me out and he tells me, "Yes, I've received a vision of God and he has told me to come here and give it to your people." And I thought, "Oh, boy." And so I asked him to tell me a little bit about the vision and somehow in the midst of that, I said, "Oh, oh, I'm sorry. You've got the wrong church. You're in the wrong church." And I sent him to another church over in Pleasantview. By the way, I'm not saying that was the most noble thing to do, it's just the only thing that...it seemed like the right thing to do at the time.

But the point is, you're always going to have people and some of them, I mean, they may even be delusional or they may have heard something legitimately but it wasn't from God, it was from something else. So we have to be discerning but I might add that Scripture is clear that the Canon is now closed. There are so many passages. You know, Jude 3 tells us that we are, "to contend earnestly for the once for all delivered to the saints faith," referring to the word of God. We are clearly told that God's revelation is not to be amended after it is written. Remember, Revelation 22:18-19 and so forth. But regardless of the preacher, regardless of the teacher, regardless of the author, regardless of the lyrics of the song, we need to examine everything carefully and hold fast to that which is good.

And then, fifth, he says, "abstain from every form of evil." You know, abstinence is something that people don't like today, right? It's kind of a bad word. We want to have freedom to do everything but we're told here to abstain. It literally means "to avoid; to hold yourself away from; keep your distance from every form of evil." And the term "form" translates a word in the original language that refers to the outward appearance of something that reflects an inward reality. In other words, when you see or hear something that doesn't seem right, you may not even fully know what it is but be aware of it and hold yourself away from it, especially if you know that it is evil, which refers to that which is wicked; that which is morally perverted; that which is malignant; which is toxic. Anything that is reprehensible to a holy God and harmful to you, stay away from it.

Now, given the context here regarding prophetic utterances, no doubt he was especially thinking about the "inspired revelation" that these preachers were giving them. Be careful with that because that doesn't originate from the Holy Spirit. It's toxic. Stay away from it. Sometimes people will say, "Hey, have you read this book?" I'll say, "Don't touch it. It's toxic. It's poison. You don't even need to know what's in there." But certainly this would

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A Proper Response to God Himself

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

Preached on: Sunday, May 1, 2016

include any wicked temptation. Remember in 1 Peter 2:11, Peter says, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to," here's the word again, "abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." Dear Christian, let it be said of you what was said of Job. You remember in Job 1:1, we read this, "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man," I love this, "that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil." Isn't that great? That's how we need to be.

So, dear friends, again, here in this final section of Paul's first epistle we learn the proper response to God, especially the Holy Spirit. And I want to challenge you this morning in closing: will you quench the Spirit in your life today by despising the prophetic utterances that you have just heard? By letting them go in one ear and out the other, not really caring about what God has said through his servant? Or will you fan the burning embers of your lethargy into a blazing, roaring fire of spiritual power? Oh, how I hope you will. Will you ask the Spirit to set your life ablaze for the glory of Christ and strengthen you to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil. My, how this would transform our lives, our marriages, our families, and our church.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for the clarity of your word and for the conviction that it brings to those who truly know you. Lord, for those who have heard what was said today and it really makes no difference to them, they experience no conviction, no sorrow over their sin, no hungering and thirsting for righteousness, Lord, that is such an indication that they do not know you and I pray that by your power and by your grace, you will consume them with the judgment that awaits them lest they repent. And Lord, would you be pleased to bring conviction to them today? That today they would place their faith in the living Christ as the only hope of their salvation; that today would be the day they would experience the miracle of the new birth? And Lord, for those of us who know and love you, we want to know and love you all the more. So cause these great exhortations to bear much fruit in our hearts for it is in Christ's name that I pray. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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