

The Word of the Lord

An Exposition of I & II Thessalonians

I Thessalonians 5:20-28

Scriptures

<i>I Thessalonians 5:20</i>	<i>John 3:20</i>	<i>I Thessalonians 5:25</i>
<i>I Corinthians 14:1</i>	<i>Isaiah 5:20</i>	<i>I Thessalonians 5:26</i>
<i>I Corinthians 14:24-25</i>	<i>Proverbs 8:13</i>	<i>Luke 7:45</i>
<i>I Thessalonians 5:21</i>	<i>I Thessalonians 5:23</i>	<i>I Thessalonians 5:27</i>
<i>Proverbs 14:15</i>	<i>Romans 12:1</i>	<i>I John 3:2-3</i>
<i>I John 4:1</i>	<i>I Thessalonians 5:24</i>	<i>Exodus 34:29</i>
<i>Romans 10:9-10</i>	<i>I Corinthians 1:9</i>	<i>II Corinthians 3:18</i>
<i>I Thessalonians 5:22</i>	<i>Philippians 1:6</i>	<i>I Thessalonians 5:28</i>

I Thessalonians 5:20 Despise not prophesyings.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, I Thess. 5:20

Despise not prophesyings.—The highest outward or charismatic manifestation of this inward fire was the gift of “prophecy” (1Corinthians 12:28; 1Corinthians 14:1; 1Corinthians 14:5; 1Corinthians 14:39), which was an inspired and inspiring preaching. The despondency of the Thessalonians led them not only to quench the fervour of the Holy Ghost in their own bosoms, but to turn a cold and disparaging ear to the sanguine “prophets” who preached to them, the effect of which insensibility was to “quench the Spirit” by degrees in the prophets also. It is because of this double effect of gloominess, inward upon themselves, and outward upon others, that the command, “Quench not,” occurs between the exhortation to thanksgiving and the warning not to despise prophecy.

The Greek word for *prophesyings* is #4394 *prophēteia*. According to *Strong's Concordance*, it means:

prophecy, prophesying; the gift of communicating and enforcing revealed truth.” HELPS Word-Studies defines *prophēteia* as “(from 4396 *prophētēs*, ‘prophet,’ derived from 4253 *prō*, ‘before’ and 5346 *phēmí*, ‘make clear, assert as a priority’) – properly, what is clarified beforehand; prophecy which involves divinely-empowered forthtelling (asserting the mind of God) or foretelling (prediction).

Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines *prophēteia* as:

discourse emanating from divine inspiration and declaring the purposes of God, whether by reproving and admonishing the wicked, or comforting the afflicted, or revealing things hidden; especially by foretelling future events.

These definitions reveal that prophecy deals with the unseen and invisible.

It is prophecy that the scriptures reveal should be greatly desired to be brought forth in Christ' Church.

I Corinthians 14:1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

Hence, in the church, that which should be the most highly esteemed, together with divine love, is the speaking forth of prophetic truth. And just as love should be hot, and not lukewarm, no preaching or teaching should be spiritually engaged in, unless men are both inspired and led by the powers and influences of God's Holy Spirit.

HELPS Word-studies #1848

The Greek word for *despise* in this verse is *eksouthenéo*, "(from 1537 *ek*, 'completely out from,' which intensifies *outheneo*, 'bring to naught, reduce to nothing') – properly, cast out as nothing; set at naught; 'to count as nothing, to treat with utter contempt.'"

Strong's Concordance defines the word as "to despise, treat with contempt," with its usage as "I set at naught, ignore, despise."

The very specific word of God that the Lord sends to inspire faith and correct sin in His people can be set at naught, pushed aside, and ultimately treated with contempt by many who claim to believe in God.

When actual inspiration of the Spirit is present in any assembly, those who are unbelievers or unlearned, will recognize the presence of God, and come to realize for themselves, that God is among them. It is also inspired prophecy which lends itself as a strong catalyst for prompting sincere religious worship.

Corinthians 14:24-25 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Cor. 14:25

And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest - Made manifest to himself in a surprising and remarkable manner. He shall be led to see the "real" designs and motives of his heart. His conscience would be awakened; he would recall his former course of life; he would see that it was evil; and the present state of his heart would be made known to himself. It is possible that he would suppose that the speaker was aiming directly at him, and "revealing" his feelings to others; for such an effect is often produced. The convicted sinner often supposes that the preacher particularly intends "him," and wonders that he has such an acquaintance with his feelings and his life; and often supposes that he is designing to disclose his feelings to the congregation. It is possible that Paul here may mean that the prophets, by inspiration, would be able to reveal some secret facts in regard to the stranger; or to state the ill design which he might have had in coming into the assembly; or to state some things in regard to him which could be known only to himself; as was the case with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1, seq.); but perhaps it is better to understand this in a more general sense, as describing the proper and more common effect of truth, when it is applied by a man's own conscience. Such effects are often witnessed now; and such effects show the truth of religion; its adaptedness to people; the omniscience and the power of God; the design of the conscience, and its use in the conversion of sinners.

And so falling down on his face - The usual posture of worship or reverence in eastern countries. It was performed by sinking on the knees and hands, and then placing the face on the ground. This might be done publicly; or the apostle may mean to say that it would lead him to do it in private.

He will worship God - He will be converted, and become a Christian.

I Thessalonians 5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

All things in the church must be examined to see if they are truly of God and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, discerning of spirits is necessary to ensure that nothing that does not have its source in God is allowed into His church.

The simple believe every word, and because they have no fixed doctrines or truths to be governed by, they will often embrace and seek to spread many things not inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Proverbs 14:15 The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.

Benson Commentary, Prov. 14:15

A foolish man; believeth every word — Is easily deceived with the smooth words and fair pretences of false and deceitful men;

There is not one thing, nor one spirit—nor one man who professes to walk by the Spirit—that should be considered as the Lord's without careful biblical scrutiny.

I John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Benson Commentary, I John 4:1

Believe not every spirit — By which any teacher is, or professes to be, actuated: or, believe not every teacher who pretends to be inspired by the Spirit of God; *but try the spirits* — Namely, *whether they are of God* — By the rule which God hath given. We are to try all spirits by the written word: *To the law and to the testimony!* If any man speak not according to these, the spirit which actuates him is not of God. *Because many false prophets* — Or false teachers; *are gone forth into the world* — With an intention to draw disciples after them.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I John 4:1

The true and the false teachers of religion alike claimed to be under the influence of the Spirit of God, and it was of importance that all such pretensions should be examined. It was not to be admitted because anyone claimed to have been sent from God that therefore he was sent. Every such claim should be subjected to the proper proof before it was conceded. All pretensions to divine inspiration, or to being authorised teachers of religion, were to be examined by the proper tests, because there were many false and delusive teachers who set up such claims in the world.

The means by which Christians should test those who claim to come in God's name is, first, by the Word of God and, second, by the Spirit, Christ sends to the saved. Assuredly, if Christ's lordship is not stressed or obedience to His word not demanded, though a man may use the name of the Lord and claim to speak through being influenced by the Spirit of God, he has no real relationship with Christ at all.

For there are none sent by the Lord who do not stress and embrace Christ's lordship over their own lives and revere the high spiritual position given the Son over all men.

Practically speaking, a faithful response to Jesus Christ and His words reveals those ultimately called by Christ and those who are not.

Romans 10:9-10 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.¹⁰ For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession

is made unto salvation.

To confess Christ is to confess Him as Lord.

HELPS Word-studies

The Greek word for *confess* is #3670 “*homologéō* (from 3674 /*homoí*, ‘together’ and 3004 /*légō*, ‘speak to a conclusion’) – properly, *to voice the same conclusion*, i.e. *agree* (‘confess’); to profess (confess) because in full agreement; to align with (endorse).”

When a man properly confesses Jesus as his Lord, he is in full agreement with Christ’s lordship over his life and will both inwardly and outwardly, willingly consent to any demand the Son of God places upon him. True Christians, therefore, are not hesitant to embrace the spiritual rank that asserts Jesus as their Lord, nor will they stumble at Jesus’s exalted position among men or the heavenly commandments given by Christ to men.

Determining whether something has its real source in God can be easily done by examining how men react to Christ’s lordship over their own lives and how joyfully they receive the Word of God brought through Him. Simply because, if a man loves God, he will obey the Son of God. By this we can know those who are truly saved by the Lord Jesus and those who merely utter His name.

Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers, 1 Thess. 5:21

Prove all things.—The right reading inserts a “but”:—“I bid you pay all reverence to the cheering utterances of your prophets (comp. Acts 15:32); but take care! put everything to the test.” That the warning was needed, or would be needed soon, is shown by 2Thessalonians 2:2. It is couched in general terms (all things), but, of course, has special reference to all things purporting to be manifestations of the Spirit. And how were these revelations to be tested? If they were not in accordance (1) with the original tradition (2Thessalonians 2:2), (2) with the supernatural inspirations of the other prophets who sat as judges (1Corinthians 14:29), (3) with enlightened common sense (1John 4:1), they could not be “good.” The word “good” here is not vague and general good in the moral sense—not the same Greek word as in 1Thessalonians 5:15—but “good” in the sense of “genuine,”

1 Thessalonians 5:22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

If a man is led by the Holy Spirit and has a strong foundation of apostolic doctrine, he will avoid not only doing evil but any other thing that might have the appearance of it.

Evil is the work of the devil, and fallen man. This world also, because it is under the influence of Satan, attempts to lead people away from the goodness of God and towards doing the evil of himself.

John 3:20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

Hate is a strong word, yet that is exactly what exists in those who, because they abide in darkness, inwardly despise and are repulsed by God’s light.

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance

The Greek word for *hate* is #3404 *miseó*. “From a primary *misos* (hatred); to detest (especially to persecute); by extension, to love less — hate(-ful).”

Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers, John 3:20

Not only does the man that doeth evil love darkness rather than light, but he hates the light. (Comp. Note on John 7:7.) Its presence makes manifest and reproves his works,

which he would hide even from himself. It illumines the dark and secret chambers of the heart, and reveals thoughts and deeds which conscience, seeing in this light, trembles at, and turns away to darkness that it may hide itself from its own gaze.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, John 3:20

that men by nature "hate" the gospel. No man who is a sinner loves it; and no man by nature is disposed to come to it, any more than an adulterer or thief is disposed to come to the daylight, and do his deeds of wickedness there.

3. The reason why the gospel, is hated is that men are sinners. "Christ is hated because sin is loved."

When a nation or generation forsakes God and chooses sin, it will also try and change the definition of what God considers divinely good.

Isaiah 5:20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

It is not enough for evil men to depart from the light; since they will also attempt to pervert what true light really is. Therefore sinners, after apostatizing from the truth, will regularly assert that sin is righteousness and righteousness is sin. Not content with merely breaking God's commandments themselves. Those who enjoy sin will seek to deceive other as to what truth really is.

Benson Commentary, Isa. 5:20

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil — That endeavour to confound both the names and the natures of virtue and vice, of piety and impiety; commend and applaud what is evil, and disparage and discountenance what is good; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness, &c. — Ignorance and error, for knowledge and truth: in other words, who subvert, or pervert, all the great principles of truth, wisdom, and of righteousness. A most corrupt condition of a church and state is that indeed, "in which men, accustomed to vices, begin, with the things themselves, to lose also the names of them, and to draw a veil, as it were, over their impieties, by sanctifying their crimes with the names of virtues."

To fear the Lord is to hate evil, and all who possess this reverence for God will share this sentiment.

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, Prov. 8:13

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.—Because there can never be any truce between the kingdoms of light and darkness (Matthew 6:24), so if we are the friend of one, we must be the enemy of the other.

I Thessalonians 5:23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle knew that for the Thessalonians believers' bodies, souls, and spirits to be accepted at Christ's coming, God would have to sanctify them.

What is true of sanctification is also true of being found blameless. Hence, only God can so cleanse a man that he will be found blameless in God's sight.

The Word of the Lord

Man's sin is such that it takes divine power to cleanse him. No man, therefore, has the ability to cleanse himself of that which defiles his soul and causes pain in his life. This work is solely the Son of God's, and without Him, men could never be redeemed from their fallen and ruined fleshly state.

The Greek word for *blameless* is #3648 *holokléros*. Strong's defines it as "complete, entire." Its usage is "complete in every part, sound, perfect, entire." What *blameless* indicates is that every part of the Christian, his body, soul, and spirit, will be preserved blameless by the Lord Jesus.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, I Thess. 5:23

Sanctify you wholly.—Rather, *sanctify you whole*. The idea is rather that of leaving no part unsanctified,

Benson Commentary, I Cor. 5:23

sanctify you wholly — ... The word *ολοτελεις*, here rendered *wholly*, signifies *every part of you*, and every part *perfectly*; implying that every faculty of their souls, and every sense and member of their bodies, should be completely purified, and devoted to the service of God.

God saves the entire Christian, so all that the Christian both is and has should be used in service to the Lord. Because all that man is will be saved at Christ's second coming, the entire man should be yielded to God for His service in preparation for that day.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

I Thessalonians 5:24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

Since it is God Who calls, it will be God Who does.

Thankfully, all weight and responsibility for the believer being found fit for heaven rests on the One Who has called him to heaven. The faithfulness of God thus demands that what God has started, He will finish.

I Corinthians 1:9 God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, I Cor. 1:9

God is faithful - That is, God is true, and constant, and will adhere to his promises. He will not deceive. He will not promise, and then fail to perform; he will not commence anything which he will not perfect and finish. The object of Paul in introducing the idea of the faithfulness of God here, is to show the reason for believing that the Christians at Corinth would be kept unto everlasting life. The evidence that they will persevere depends on the fidelity of God; and the argument of the apostle is, that as they had been called by Him into the fellowship of his Son, his faithfulness of character would render it certain that they would be kept to eternal life.

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Phil. 1:6

Paul affirms here that that work was begun by God. It was not by their own agency or will; compare the notes on John 1:13. It was on the fact that it was begun by God, that he based his firm conviction that it would be permanent. Had it been the agency of man, he would

have had no such conviction, for nothing that man does today can lay the foundation of a certain conviction that he will do the same thing tomorrow. If the perseverance of the Christian depended wholly on himself, therefore, there could be no sure evidence that he would ever reach heaven.

It is important to note, that the call of God has its source in God and not man.

The work of salvation has always been the Lord's work, and because of this, it is also through His own power that He shall complete it.

Matthew Poole's Commentary, I Thess. 5:24

It is an act of grace and mercy to call men; but when called, God's faithfulness is engaged to preserve them, and perfect the work begun:

I Thessalonians 5:25 Brethren, pray for us.

Not only did Paul realize that God was the source of his strength, but also that other believers' prayers were necessary to ensure his future welfare and continued ministerial success.

There is also no doubt that if believers pray for those sent to preach Christ, such prayers will not go either unheeded or unanswered.

I Thessalonians 5:26 Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

All God's people are to be greeted in a spiritual and holy manner.

The Jews demonstrated this respect and affection by sharing a *holy kiss* on the cheek, hand, or head, just as the woman kissing Jesus's feet was an act of great respect and love for God's Son. It was for neglecting this proper respect that Jesus corrected Peter for.

Luke 7:45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

This teaches us that, at times, there is no greater way to show love and affection for our brothers and sisters in Christ than by greeting them with a holy kiss.

I Thessalonians 5:27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

We have here not only Paul's charge to the Thessalonians but also his charge to all of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as well, that the epistle penned to the Thessalonians should be read by all the holy brethren.

Strong's Concordance

The Greek for *charge* is #1775a *enorkizō*. It means "to adjure." Its word origin is #3726 *horkizō*, which means "to make (one) swear, to adjure." The usage is "I adjure by, charge solemnly by."

Benson Commentary, I Thess. 5:27

I charge you — Greek, ορκίζω υμᾶς, *I adjure you*, that is, I lay you under the obligation of an oath; *that this epistle* — The first he wrote; *be read to all the holy brethren* — Namely, of your church. ... This epistle was doubtless sent to the presidents and pastors of the Thessalonian church, and the command, that the epistle should be read, was delivered to them. "The same course, we may suppose, the apostle followed with respect to all his

other inspired epistles. They were sent by him to the elders of the churches, for whose use they were principally designed, with a direction that they should be read publicly by some of their number to the brethren in their assemblies for worship; and that not once or twice, but frequently, that all might have the benefit of the instructions contained in them.

That which is a charge should not be compromised. Thus, in every Christian assembly, it is imperative, even today, that Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians should be both read and preached in Christ's church. By doing so, the return of the Son of God can maintain and hold the proper place it is purposed to have in believers' hearts.

What also caused the Thessalonians to sound out the Word of the Lord, which evidenced a great evangelical spirit being present within them, was their sincere and genuine belief in Christ's second coming.

Ultimately, hope in Christ's second coming is the mark of a true Christian. Simply because only those who expectantly and longingly wait for Christ's return, will be those saved by Him.

1 John 3:2-3 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Barnes Commentary, 1 John 3:3

This hope of seeing the Saviour, and of being made like him; that is, every true Christian. On the nature and influence of hope, see the notes at Romans 8:24-25.

Purifieth himself - Makes himself holy. That is, under the influence of this hope of being like the Saviour, he puts forth those efforts in struggling against sin, and in overcoming his evil propensities, which are necessary to make him pure. The apostle would not deny that for the success of these efforts we are dependent on divine aid; but he brings into view, as is often done in the sacred writings, the agency of man himself as essentially connected with success. Compare Philippians 2:12. The particular thought here is, that the hope of being like Christ, and of being permitted to dwell with him, will lead a man to earnest efforts to become holy, and will be actually followed by such a result.

What a man navigates by, forms his character. Consequently, when men set their eyes on holy things they, similar to Moses when he beheld the glory of the Lord on Mt. Sinai, can also be changed in the process.

Exodus 34:29 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.

Exod. 34:29, Benson Commentary

At this time of his being in the mount, he heard only the same he had heard before. But he saw more of the glory of God, which having with open face beheld, he was, in some measure, changed into the same image. This was a great honour done to Moses, that the people might never again question his mission, or think or speak slightly of him. He carried his credentials in his very countenance; some think, as long as he lived he retained some remainders of this glory, which perhaps contributed to the vigour of his old age; that eye could not wax dim which had seen God, nor that face wrinkle which had shone with his glory.

II Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Practically speaking, as men behold the glory of the Lord, they are simultaneously changed into Christ's image. Hence, one of the great keys to spiritual transformation, is by *beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord*.

This principle for true spiritual transformation is so much greater than when men seek to change themselves through a very unhealthy preoccupation with self. Teaching us that it is not by beholding ourselves that men are changed, but only by their beholding the glory of One, greater than themselves.

I Thessalonians 5:28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Appropriately, the apostle closes his epistle to the Thessalonians the same way he began it (I Thessalonians 1:1) reminding all the Thessalonians that it was by the grace of God that they were saved.

This leaves us with the simple truth that Christianity, at its core, is a religion of grace, the only form of religion also that sinners like ourselves could remain faithful to.

Thankfully, this grace comes to us as a gift from God, a grace we must also possess, if we are to be received by the Lord Jesus, at His glorious return. Amen.