

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Two Spiritual Negatives"

1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20

Introduction

1. The local church is expected to be a place of blessing. This is why Paul insists the Thessalonians view leadership correctly (vv. 12-14). Accepting each leader in this special role eliminates the sin of retaliation (v. 15).
2. The apostle commands (imperatives) the believers to rejoice, pray, and be thankful to fulfill the will of God (vv. 16-18). May those assemblies increase which enjoy the experience of these activities.
3. Now Paul pursues his pointed instructions. They are negatives. It is senseless to plead that the Scriptures only promote positives. What is indicated here is in line with God's standard of behavior.

1. CHRISTIAN POWER

a. Residence of Holy Spirit

1) Individually The Holy Spirit comes to be in the believer at the moment of salvation (Rom. 8:9). While sin is not condoned, sinning believers are counseled against sin because of His presence in them (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

2) Corporately The Spirit resides in the church or body of Christ as a temple (1 Cor. 3:16). The change from plural verbs here to a singular pronoun is dramatic.

b. Presidence of Holy Spirit

It is to the assembly that Paul enjoins the filling with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The plural verb takes care of that. But no assembly is filled unless the individuals experience His control in their lives, hence for specific believers as for the body, the truth is patent.

c. Decadence of Holy Spirit

1) Stated The present active imperative used with the negative means: "desist from quenching the Holy Spirit." Apparently at Thessalonica there were continuous attempts to withhold the exercise of the Spirit's power in the assembly. This is categorically to be stopped. Simply put: "Stop obstructing the manifestations of the Holy Spirit."

2) Explained Regretfully, there are two extremes: frigid indifference to the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit and utter wild and uncontrolled excess. Neither is right. God has given gifts (spiritualities) to the body of Christ (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 28-30; Eph. 4:7-11). No exercise of these gifts is to be hindered. However, certain gifts were temporary (e.g. tongues, prophecy, healing) and with the apostolic era they ceased (1 Cor. 13:10; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:1-4). The permanent gifts are to be exercised. Furthermore, there is always room for the Spirit's fruit (Gal. 5:22-23).

2. CHRISTIAN PROPHECY

a. Despised

The present active imperative should be translated: "Stop setting down as of no account" (cf. Luke 18:9). Hence, like the previous negative, God commands through Paul to desist in an evil attitude toward a gift of the Spirit. To side step and count as nothing a spiritual activity was to be stopped.

b. Defined

It is true that the term "prophecy" may have reference to "forth-telling" (Matt. 26:68) and not necessarily fore-telling (cf. Deut. 18:18). In the New Testament, however, prophets are placed after apostles (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20) to show they are not Old Testament prophets but Spirit-gifted men for the body (Eph. 4:8, 11). In the New Testament epistles, nothing is said about the predictive nature of a New Testament prophet (cf. Acts 11:27, 28; 21:10, 11). Their ministry is rather to edify, comfort, and encourage (1 Cor. 14:3). His ministry was equally effective for non-believers (1 Cor. 14:24, 25). Since the completion of the canon, Scripture prophecy has passed away (1 Cor. 13:8-10). Thessalonians may have feared false prophets so greatly that they despised any prophecy (Acts 13:6; 1 John 4:1). For them prophecy, however, was acceptance because the canon was incomplete; today prophecy is no longer required nor practiced (Rev. 22:18, 19).

Conclusion The early church was as concerned about Scriptural spirituality as any local body of believers today. There is need for sound discernment now as then. May the Spirit of the Lord have full liberty to control (Eph. 5:18) and exercise His gifts to the glory of our thrice Holy God (1 Cor. 14:25c).