

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Imperatives for Soundness"

1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22

Introduction

1. Like a man with a burdened heart, Paul provides short pithy expressions at the end of his letter. He has many things of which to remind the Thessalonians. He tells them to rejoice (v. 16), to pray (v. 17), to give thanks (v. 18), to give the Holy Spirit freedom (v. 19), and to allow prophecy (v. 20).

2. Because the Holy Spirit is to be free and because the prophetic gift is to be exercised, carefulness must be given to preserve the truth. Therefore, in this context, here are three imperatives aimed at keeping believers on target.

1. CHRISTIAN EXAMINATION v. 21.

a. Stated. The verb "prove" is never used of Satan nor in a bad sense. It was used to approve metals. Another Greek verb is used of Satan and often generally of temptation (Matt. 4:1; Heb. 2:18; 4:15). Both words are used in 2 Corinthians 13:5. The verb used in our text views trial so that what is genuine in faith may produce patience and issue in perfecting Christian character (James 1:3, 4; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7). So the use of this verb urges the Thessalonians to be sure that what they approve will be beneficial. Spiritual perception of this sort, however, like Spiritual power, depends on the spiritual walk of the believer. The slothful and evildoers are blind (2 Pet. 1:9).

b. Applied. The phrase "all things" is anarthrous in Greek. Its scope is wide. Contextually the major concern relates to professed Spirit work and prophecy. Before the completed canon of Scripture, the promised guidance of the Spirit was so important (John 16:13). In fact, those who did "prove" are commended (Acts 17:11). This makes clear the "proving" of prophets (1 John 4:1). The "all things" can surely be extended to other issues: deacons (1 Tim. 3:10), love (2 Cor. 8:8), excellent things (Phil. 1:10), and God's will (Rom. 12:2).

2. CHRISTIAN CONVICTION v. 21.

a. Stated. Here is another present imperative, hence to be translated "keep holding fast." This compound verb is used variously in the New Testament (Luke 8:15; Rom. 1:18; 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Cor. 6:10; 2 Thess. 2:6, 7). The preposition in the verb is perfective in force. It certainly provides some of the firmness so lacking among Christians today. Almost no one holds anything. It is the day of everyone

believing what is right in his own eyes (cf. Judges 21:25).

b. Detailed. The article is employed with the adjective good, hence, "the good." This adjective means intrinsically good, as opposed to what is beneficially good (v. 15). Both words occur in Luke 8:15 and Romans 7:18. In the former, the word here is "honest" and in the latter it is the performance of "good." Right in our context, the opposite word for "good" is used (v. 15). But here quality is in view and the word for admirable or intrinsic goodness is found. Among the good to hold fast are these: the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:2), traditions, i.e. oral teachings of apostles (1 Cor. 11:2), hope (Heb. 3:6), confidence (Heb. 3:14), confession (Heb. 10:23).

3. CHRISTIAN SEPARATION v. 22.

a. Stated. Certainly the context for this admonition is the matter of God's revelation. Therefore, if after testing, the matters are shown to be disapproved (v. 20), then abstinence is required. A decisive position is to be taken. Honesty to the truth is of prime importance. This moral commitment is so removed from current behavior which often seeks for approval of men (cf. Gal. 1:10). The verb is found in a number of passages which suggests the verb is not to be limited to evil teaching, but to evil practices too (4:3; Acts 15:20, 29; 1 Tim. 4:3; 1 Pet. 2:11).

b. Explained. "All appearance" literally means "that which can be seen." It is translated "idols" (1:9). The word is used of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22), of Christ (Luke 9:29), and of the Father (John 5:37). It is related to a term for malignant evil, hence bad in influence and effect. It is used of Satan and demons (Matt. 5:37; Luke 7:21). The phrase here is a strong one and means to abstain from every sort or kind of evil. God is simple: the good (v. 21). Satan is complex. There is no question but that sound teaching is intimately associated with holy living (Tit. 1:13; 2:1; 2 Pet. 3:11). Paul noted this (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9). Therefore, to give heed to that which cannot be approved when tested by the Scriptures, the sole repository of divine revelation, is to submit to any number of influences that most assuredly will ultimately lower the tone of spiritual life and affect for evil the conduct of the believer.

Conclusion Purity in both doctrine and practice is evidently Paul's great concern for the Thessalonians. This should be the objective of every believer. May it please God to make it so for His glory solely.