

1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-22 Prophecy Part 1

1TH 5:19-22 "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt. 21 Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil."

Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians closes his letter with a number of reminders and commands which he wants them to put into practice if they're not already doing so, which we touched on last week.

1 Thessalonians 5:15-17 ¹⁵ See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. ¹⁶ Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing;

According to the Greek construction of these verses, it's not necessarily true that they were, in fact, repaying one another evil for evil as we see in verse 15, or that they weren't rejoicing always in the Lord or being in an attitude of constant prayer, or that they weren't giving thanks to God in everything.

They may have been deficient in some of these areas, but they may have just needed more encouragement to continue in these areas where they may have been tempted to stray.

It reminds me of when I'm about to leave the house and certain things need to get done. I might remind my son to cut the grass, or for my wife to make certain phone calls for me and for my daughter to do the wash.

Now, they may have had every intention of doing these things and may not have needed a reminder to do them. But, you just feel you need to make sure they don't forget what they already know.

And this may very well be the sense of Paul's warning to the church in Thessalonica, knowing that some of these Christians may need to be on their toes when it comes to things like rejoicing always, praying without ceasing and so forth.

But, Paul also exhorts these believers not to quench the Spirit or as the NIV puts it, "Do not put out the Spirit's fire;"

In the context of this warning Paul is referring to the gift of prophecy. This morning and next week we are going to look at what prophecy is, and what it is not.

Some questions we need to ask: Is the gift of prophecy exactly like the prophecy we see in the O.T. for example, or has the gift of prophecy ceased for today's church?

If prophecy is still valid, then how is it to be used and how do we really know if someone has the gift of prophecy? Does prophecy always have to do with telling future events?

But before we get into prophecy I just want to touch on the idea of quenching the Spirit. Throughout the N.T. the Holy Spirit is seen as the person of the Godhead who is personally involved in the lives of the saints as He regenerates them, indwells them and empowers them.

The connection of fire to the Holy Spirit speaks of that which burns bright, something which can cleanse as it burns off the dross, and the heat of godly passion to seek after the things of God.

John the Baptist says in MAT 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Or when Jesus said in LUK 12:49 "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to empower the church as we read in Acts.

ACT 2:1-4 "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of FIRE that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

The Spirit of God should be a fire whose heat of joy, love and service radiates to the world through us. And this is the idea of what Paul conveys to us when writing to the Romans.

ROM 12:11 "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

To neglect any area of spiritual growth is, in a sense, quenching the Spirit for us individually, and it will affect the rest of the church as our love for God grows cold or our service for Him wanes.

The Spirit of God wants us to grow and become mature and be able to minister to the rest of the body. Don't quench the Spirit by neglecting that means of growth which includes reading and meditating on the word of God, praying to the Lord often, fellowshiping in the Lord, and maturing in the gifts he has given you and then using them for ministering to the saints.

If we quench the Spirit in any of these areas we may in turn find ourselves grieving the Spirit as we move from burning with zeal for the Lord to growing cold to the things of the Lord and burning more for the things of this world.

This is why Paul warns in EPH 4:30-32 "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

If we're going to be passionate about anything in life we should be passionate in wanting to please and love and serve our living God who has given us life eternal and has given us the privilege and responsibility of being His representative and witness here on earth.

Part of what God desires is to convey His love and encouragement to us through the N.T. gift of prophecy. There are two basic positions which many in the church take today concerning prophecy.

- 1) The first group are known as Cessationists. These include evangelical Christians who believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as prophecy, have ceased with the death of the last apostle and are no longer valid for the church today. They would refer to these types of supernatural gifts as Apostolic gifts.
- 2) The other group falls into the broad classifications of Charismatics and Pentecostals. These Christians believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the gift of prophecy, never ceased and are designed for the edification of the church today, and are thus referred to as non-cessationists or continualists.

Within this second group, (Charismatics; Pentecostals), are varying views as to what these supernatural gifts are and how they are to be utilized within the Body of Christ.

Today and next week we'll look at what the Bible teaches concerning prophecy. Some of what the scriptures say may surprise you and may even challenge what you've held to as it pertains to this most important subject of prophecy.

The gift of prophecy is a gift from God which has been sorely misunderstood in the church and as a result it has created a variety of false doctrines and misapplications, together with an often times, fleshly approach to a spiritual gift. Much of this abuse is found in certain quarters of the church where the experience of particular gifts takes precedence over the written word of God which comes from the same Holy Spirit who gives us these gifts.

However, as we shall see, the word of God is the final authority when it comes to the use of any gift. But even more than that there is another aspect of the use of the gifts which entails God's command to use them in love.

1Co 13:1-3 "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

For anyone to use a gift in the Body of Christ with the motive of showing everyone how spiritual they are or to use it to place ourselves above others, while at the same time slighting those who may not have the same gift or gifts, is not love.

The gifts of the Spirit are given by the Spirit to unify us in the Spirit so that the Body of Christ may be built up for God's glory. Though some churches, who claim to be Spirit-filled, may place more emphasis on the experiences of the gifts over the truth of God's infallible word, I would say that many traditional churches have erred equally as they promote an orthodoxy devoid of certain legitimate works of the Spirit.

Many mainline churches deny the working of the Spirit as they deny many of the gifts of the Spirit. In so doing, I believe they also actually quench the Spirit, and they end up with a dead orthodoxy which we usually associate with a lifeless church, and which often leads to a man-centered approach to ministry instead of relying on the power of the Spirit.

What I believe the Scriptures teach is a balanced approach to all of life. Jesus told us that we must worship Him in Spirit and in truth. That is not limited to a worship service. Rather, all of life should be an act of worship for the Christian and the Christian must approach all aspects of living for Christ, as he or she relies on the truth of God's written word, coupled with a total reliance on His Spirit who enables us to walk in that truth as we surrender our lives to Christ as our love gift to Him.

Together, we then see the Living Word, Jesus, exemplified in our lives and He is lifted up. The gift of prophecy is a very important gift in the church for today. And to better understand how this gift works today I think it's important to see how it differs with prophecy in the past, that is, in the O.T.

There is a distinction. And again, I believe because the word of God is not studied and relied upon when it comes to these things that there is confusion which leads to all sorts of false teachings.

So, let me say at the outset, O.T. prophecy is not the same phenomenon as we see with the gift of prophecy in the N.T. How do we know this? Only the word of God could show us clearly.

What I'm going to do today is to take us back to O.T. times and show what it is that the Spirit of God was doing prior to Christ coming into the world and what the Spirit was accomplishing through His prophets in the O.T.

When we look at O.T. prophets of God we usually consider men like Isaiah, Moses, Daniel, Jeremiah and others. But when we look at these men we should ask certain questions as does Dr. Wayne Grudem in his book, "The gift of prophecy in the N.T. and today".

Questions like: What was their purpose? How much authority did they have? What happened if someone dared to disobey them? And did they ever make mistakes regarding their prophetic utterances?

Much of the information we'll be looking at this morning is gleaned from Dr. Wayne Grudem and so I will acknowledge his influence on this entire study at the outset.

In studying these O.T. prophets we see that their main function was to be messengers of God. They were given messages by God and then they would take those messages, word for word, to the people of Israel. Those same messages were then to be a permanent written record for all time.

In the case of Balaam we see what God desires of His messengers in terms of what He wants them to say. NUM 22:38 "I must speak only what God puts in my mouth."

And so "a true prophet is one whom the Lord has truly sent (Jer.29:9). But false prophets who prophecy lies are ones whom the Lord says, I did not send them.' "(Jer.29:9)

Now the reason that this is important is because these prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord carried with them the authority of the Lord Himself.

In other words, the origin of the message came from God Himself and they are the actual words of God. It's very common throughout the O.T. to see the phrase, "The word of the Lord, which He spoke by his servant the prophet." (1Ki.14:18; 16:12; 2Ki.9:36; 14:25; 17:23; 24:2; 2Chr.29:25; Ezra 9:10-11; Neh.9:30; Jer.37:2; Zech.7:7; etc.)

"To disbelieve or disobey an O.T. prophet's words is to disbelieve or disobey God Himself."

And so when we look at the prophets of the O.T., whom God chooses, what we see is that when they spoke in the name of the Lord none of their utterances were to be questioned. It's not as though the listeners were given permission by God to evaluate what was said, as either being good or bad, and then decide for themselves whether they should obey the message.

If the message came from God, through the prophet, they had no other choice but to obey. And they must view God's prophet as the authoritative spokes-person for God.

And so we read that "when Samuel was established as a prophet, "the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. (1Sa.3:19). Because Samuel was a man of God, (that is, a prophet), Saul's servant could say in 1Sa.9:6, 'All that he say's comes true.'"

This means that when a prophet spoke in the name of the Lord, even if one prophecy did not come true, or one message he claimed as coming from God was proved to be false, he was a false prophet.'

This is what we read in Deut.18:22 "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a

message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him."

In fact, the office of prophet was so awesome, as carrying the responsibility of giving God's actual message, that the penalty for false prophecy was death.

DEU 18:20 "But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death."

"And so what we see is that what God spoke through the O.T. prophet had absolute divine authority, extending even to the very words the prophet used." In Theological terms this is referred to as plenary inspiration.

This is not to say that a prophet could not sin or that the prophet himself was infallible. But, when he spoke in the name of the Lord, as God gave him utterance, the actual words from God, through the prophet, are infallible and carry the full weight of divine inspiration and authority.

And so when it comes to the O.T. every part is God's very words spoken through His messengers. And so what the O.T. says, God says, and to disbelieve or disobey it is to disbelieve or disobey God Himself.

Now, when we come to the N.T. "we might expect that N.T. prophets would be just like the O.T. prophets. But when we look through the N.T. itself this does not seem to be the case. There is little if any evidence for a group of prophets in the N.T. churches who could speak with God's very words (with absolute divine authority that could not be questioned) who had the authority to write books of scripture for inclusion in the N.T."

"On the other hand, there is a very prominent group of people in the N.T. who do speak with divine authority and who did write most of the books of the N.T. These men are called not prophets, however, but apostles. In many ways they are similar to the O.T. prophets."

It's interesting to note that throughout the N.T. there are several times when apostles are connected with O.T. prophets, but the gift of prophecy in the N.T. is never connected with O.T. prophets in the same way.

That doesn't mean that reference isn't made to the apostles as giving prophetic utterance in the N.T. sense, but that doesn't equate a N.T. prophet with an O.T. prophet.

"What's interesting though is that Paul, for example, never appeals to a gift of prophecy to establish his authority--something which would have been very natural and very easy if all N.T. prophets had been commonly thought to speak words with absolute divine authority. Rather, when Paul wants to establish his authority, he always appeals to his status as an apostle."

2Co 1:1 "Paul, *an apostle of Christ Jesus* by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia:"

Gal 1:1 "Paul, *an apostle* --sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead--"

He says the same thing to the Ephesian church, the Colossian church, and addresses Timothy in 1st and 2nd Timothy the same way. "Paul, *an apostle of Jesus Christ*", so as to identify his authority which must be adhered to, because what he spoke on behalf of God he spoke with divine authority, just as the O.T. prophets.

Like the O.T. prophets who spoke divinely inspired words of God, to be obeyed by God's people, the Apostles were divinely inspired by God Himself to give us the very words of God that we might know who God is and the salvation we can only have through Jesus Christ.

In fact, Peter recognizes that when the apostle Paul wrote on behalf of God to the church, he wrote words which were the exact equivalent of the O.T. scriptures, which are the very words of God.

2PE 3:15-16 "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

And so, like the O.T. prophets, the words which God has given us through His apostles are meant to be taken as God's very word which must be obeyed and followed because the God of the universe desires for us to know Him and walk with Him, without

compromise, according to His word and the power of the Spirit, which we are not to quench by avoiding such power through unbelief and rebellion.

What I want you to see today is that prophecy is something that originates with God, but there is a difference between prophecy and prophets in the O.T. and the N.T. However, the common thread throughout the entire Bible is that God has given us His very word through the apostles of the N.T. and the prophets of the O.T.

Of course, the prophet of God did not give just messages of the future, which we often think of when we use the word prophecy. To prophesy actually means to speak with inspiration.

Whether a prophet in the O.T. was given a dream or vision by God to share with the nation Israel, or he was given a command by God to admonish or rebuke the nation for disobedience, it was all a form of prophecy, because the prophet was speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit as God gave him utterance.

And so when we speak of O.T. prophets and N.T. apostles from this perspective we mean those who speak on God's behalf under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit with the express purpose of recording God's very word which we have as the Bible, the Scriptures.

I might add, that this Bible is no longer being added to since God completed it. What we have in our possession is the entire revelation of God's very word in the Old and New Testaments as He desires us to have it.

This distinction is important if we're going to understand the N.T. "gift of prophecy", which is part of the list of gifts found in our text, and in Rom.12:6; Eph.4:11, and 1Co.12:28, which were not to be limited to the apostles, but were to include anybody in the church whom the Lord chose to gift.

Let me just say again that any gift from God is to be used for His glory and should never be used to puff oneself up as though we earned or deserved such a gift or that we should be proud in an arrogant way.

This was part of the problem in the Corinthian church during Paul's time and he addressed it when writing the Corinthians.

1CO 4:6-7 "Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

In other words, if God has gifted you, you don't act as though you created this ability yourself. A gift is a gift. It's something someone else gives you that did not belong to you before and that you didn't earn or deserve.

When God gives gifts to His people we are to humbly acknowledge it as a gift of grace and use it to glorify Him and edify the body of Christ.

Each person in the body of Christ has been given gifts for service by God Himself. Not everyone has the same gifts any more than an orchestra is only made up of one instrument. Each serves a purpose and each is very important. And if God gives each of us a gift to be used in the body then we must use those gifts because it pleases God.

The apostle Paul speaks of this very thing.

1CO 12:14-20 "Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body, it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body."

And so, not every member of the body will have the gift of teaching, nor will all have the gift of mercy or the gift of healing nor the gift of prophecy. But the gift of prophecy in the N.T. church is very important, though it is also misunderstood.

Some in the church have placed it in the same category as the prophets of the O.T. who spoke the very words of God which were not to be questioned. Some Christians today will often preface

their prophetic utterance with the phrase, "Thus saith the Lord" and proceed to speak with an authority which God did not intend with this gift.

This is one of the reasons that those who practice the N.T. gift of prophecy, as though it were the equivalent of O.T. prophecy, find themselves presuming revelation which can be, in practice, on an equal par with the written word of God, which the Lord delivered to us exclusively by His prophets and apostles.

This is why certain of the teaching coming out of some Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches places more emphasis on these revelations from God than on the written word.

I'll give you a practical example of how this has happened today. Within the Calvary Chapels themselves a few years back there was a group of Calvary Chapel churches who felt that we needed to hear a fresh word from God and base our walk with Christ on this fresh word.

And so, prophecy became a very important topic and they found themselves spending more time following, what they considered prophetic promptings, rather than God's word itself. Out of those Calvary Chapels came the Vineyard churches who are no longer associated with Calvary Chapel.

Because of their placing the "Prophetic word" on a near equal footing with God's written word, at least in practice, they have become involved in such unbiblical teachings as the Inner Healing movement which is an attempt to go back to your past and invite Jesus to come to you at whatever age you were and have Him heal you of whatever problem you had or have. A lot of psychological influence is in that, together with New Age teachings, which are very similar and very popular in the New Age Movement.

There is also the Holy Laughter Movement found in the Vineyard churches, along with many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, which will dedicate entire worship services to "Laughing in the Spirit" and excluding worship and the word of God altogether.

When the word of God is diminished we open ourselves up to all sorts of strange teachings which are supposedly "revealed" by the Spirit. And what we usually end up with is anything other than the true practice of the gift of prophecy.

To suggest that the gift of prophecy is the equivalent to O.T. prophecy denies the closing of the Canons of scripture by God

when the last part of the N.T. was delivered, and allows us to add to the word which the apostle John warned we must never do.

The N.T. gift of prophecy must never be used to take the place of scripture, nor should it be placed as the most important gift in the church, outside of scripture.

But instead of a knee-jerk response to such abuses, where some churches want nothing to do with the gift of prophecy, or any other supernatural gift from the Spirit, where they deny their existence by teaching they were only for the first Century church, we must teach the whole counsel of God and teach the proper use of such gifts.

Next week we'll take the time to find out what the N.T. gift of prophecy actually is and how we should use it in the church as we seek Christ and His Spirit to edify and build up the Body in His power, according to His will found in His word.

God has been very gracious and merciful to not only give us eternal life in Christ, but to also give us the tools we need, as He gives them, so that we may more effectively be servants of our Most High God.

As Paul instructs Timothy, we do not despise prophetic utterances. But we must do all according to God's written word. I think you'll be encouraged by this gift as we study it and find God using it in our midst which He has done on several occasions.

Next week we'll address such questions as: Is teaching in the church the same as prophecy? Why are women allowed to prophesy but not to have authority over the church? Can a prophet prophesy at will? How do we know if someone has the gift of prophecy? Where and when in the church should this gift be used? Does the N.T. prophet ever make mistakes in his or her prophecy and what is the penalty if they do so? Why is prophesy important to the church?

You and I are called to be Christ's Ambassadors. You and I are indwelt, and hopefully filled continually, with His Spirit for the purpose of service to Him. Whatever service He may have you in presently or is prompting you towards now, do it with the attitude that Paul had.

COL 3:23-24 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you

will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."