

HOW TO QUENCH THE SPIRIT: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
1 THESSALONIANS 5:19 AND 20

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Divinity in  
Grace Theological Seminary  
May 1981



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Date: May 1981  
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During recent years there has been an increasing interest in the extraordinary manifestations of the Holy Spirit within the body of Christ. Those who question the legitimacy of these manifestations have frequently been accused of quenching the Spirit. Paul's warning to some who might have been guilty of such action in his day is recorded in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 which may be rendered literally, "The Spirit, do not be quenching; prophecies, do not be despising." The significant relationship between these two clauses, and the specific definition of key terms is essential to understand how one is able to quench the Holy Spirit today.

The form of the clauses consists of a synonymous parallel relationship between them. On the basis of Paul's use of the adjectival form of πνεῦμα elsewhere with προφητεία in the same context, it may be argued that the first of these clauses represents a general principle followed by a specific example in the second clause. However, the use of the negative particle μή with a present imperative does not require that the action reproved was necessarily in progress at Thessalonica during that time.

The term το πνεῦμα is variously recognized as speaking of either the person of the Holy Spirit, the general manifestations of the Spirit, or His extraordinary manifestations. Because of the parallel between το πνεῦμα and προφητείας it seems best to understand it in this context as speaking primarily of the person of the Holy Spirit, but including secondarily His extraordinary manifestations. This suggestion is further attested by the metaphorical use of μὴ σβέννυμι, which can be concretely rendered, "do not restrain." The proper interpretation of the entire passage rests on an accurate definition of the term προφητείας. The nature of προφητείας in this context is a divinely revealed, intelligible, and potentially ecstatic utterance of a Christian prophet. But, such utterances are inexorably linked with the Apostolic Era of the Church Age.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit cannot be restrained today in the same way that was possible during the foundational period of the Church Age. Nonetheless, because "the Spirit, do not be quenching," is a broad principle, it is possible to restrain the Holy Spirit by neglecting His general manifestations, or more particularly, through the denial of the Bible: inscripturated prophetic utterances.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

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Master of Divinity

  
Adviser

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AV	Authorized Version (King James Bible)
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ITQ	Irish Theological Quarterly
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIV	New International Version Bible
LXX	Septuagint
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TEV	Today's English Version Bible
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TS	Theological Studies
WTJ	Westminster Theological Journal

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The impetus for beginning a study of 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20 came as the result of a comment by a fellow believer. This person accused another of quenching the Spirit because he did not allow speaking in tongues in an assembly of believers. Upon turning to the verses under consideration in this paper, the writer began to ponder whether this was an accurate application of this text. The objective of this study is to determine the proper interpretation and application of 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20 based on an exegetical analysis of the passage.

1 Thessalonians is one of the earliest of the Pauline epistles, written by the great Apostle in A.D. 50 or 51, from Corinth. The recurring theme of this epistle is the return of Jesus Christ. It is on the basis of this return that he issues the commands of Christian conduct which are found in chapter 5:16-22. In verses 16-18 he deals with principles for personal spiritual life. In verses 19-22 he speaks of principles for corporate spiritual life. The first two of these principles are set forth as negative commands (vv. 19, 20), while the remaining three are positive commands (vv. 21, 22). "Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise

prophetic utterances" (1 Thess 5:19, 20, NASB), are the negative commands to which the focus of attention now turns.

## CHAPTER II

### THE GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE

The interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20 is the primary objective of this study. In order to accomplish this, the grammatical structure must first be discussed so that a solid foundation is laid on which an accurate interpretation may be built.

#### The Position of the Object

When one reads 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20 in the original language he is confronted with a word order which is inverted from that which one usually finds in an English translation. In both clauses the object occurs first, followed by the negative imperative. This is not the normal word order in Pauline literature unless he is intending to emphasize the prior term. Such seems to be the purpose for his placing τὸ πνεῦμα and προφητείας first in their respective clauses. Paul arrests the readers' attention by the brevity of these clauses and once he has gotten their attention, he directs it to the first word of each clause. Thus, if one were to translate these verses literally, the result would be as follows:

The Spirit, do not be quenching;  
prophecies, do not be despising.

Although the preceding sentence reflects the way that this writer would translate these clauses, not all authorities would agree with such a rendering of the negation in each clause. Therefore, the discussion will now turn to this issue.

### The Negative with a Present Imperative

On the basis of these verses, most commentators propose that the Thessalonians were presently guilty of quenching the Spirit and despising prophecies. They would translate the clauses as follows:

The Spirit, do not continue quenching;  
prophecies, do not continue despising.

Robert Thomas is among those who espouse this view. He writes, "When Paul commands, 'Stop putting out the Spirit's fire' as vs. 19 might literally be translated, he advocates the cessation of something already being practiced."<sup>1</sup> Pope also agrees, although he remarks that such an abuse is "hardly expected at that early stage."<sup>2</sup> Moore cites the reasoning which is doubtless the basis for these statements. He declares that the negative μή, with a present imperative as distinguished from an aorist subjunctive, indicates that

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<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Thomas, "1, 2 Thessalonians," in vol. 11 of The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 292.

<sup>2</sup>H. Pope, "Prophecy and Prophets in New Testament Times," ITQ 7 (October 1912):395.

the Thessalonians were guilty of restraining the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

Robertson also accedes to this interpretation.

The contrast between the present imperative and the aorist subjunctive in prohibitions had to be set forth in connection with the punctiliar-aorist subjunctive. The present imperative was found to be regularly durative. In Paul's frequent use of the present imperative with μή, the inchoative or conative or customary (prohibiting a course of conduct) use of the present is noticeable. . . . In general, μή is used with the present imperative to forbid what one is already doing (cf. Matt 7:1; John 5:14, 28, 45; 6:20). The durative force of the present imperative is well seen in (Matt 26:45), also (1 Thess 5:16-22).<sup>2</sup>

Moulton, on the other hand, objects to the interpretation that μή with a present imperative always forbids an action which is presently occurring. Though he does regard such an interpretation as normative in Greek through all of its periods, he reluctantly admits that the canon requires "strong external pressure" in order to be forced unreservedly upon Paul's writings.<sup>3</sup> He derives this viewpoint from Paul's lopsided use of μή with a present imperative rather than an aorist subjunctive. In fifty-five uses of μή with the second person, Paul employs a present imperative forty-seven times.<sup>4</sup> Such usage hardly allows room for any

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<sup>1</sup>A. L. Moore, First and Second Thessalonians, in The Century Bible, eds. H. H. Rowley and Matthew Black (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1969), p. 395.

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research, 5th ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), p. 890.

<sup>3</sup>James Hope Moulton, A Grammar of New Testament Greek, vol. 1: Prolegomena, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), p. 125.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 123.



comparative study. Furthermore, there are times when Paul uses the present imperative with  $\mu\eta$  in such a way that it does not appear to be calling for a cessation of some action in progress.

Does  $\mu\eta$  ἀμελεί in 1 Timothy 4:14 require us to believe that Timothy was "neglecting" his "charism"-- $\mu\eta\delta\epsilon\nu\iota$  επιτίθει and  $\mu\eta\delta\epsilon$  κοινώνει in 5:22, that he was warned to stop what he was hitherto guilty of? May we not rather say that  $\mu\eta$  ἀμελεί is equivalent to πάντοτε μελέτα or the like, a marked durative, with a similar account of  $\mu\eta\delta\epsilon$  κοινώνει?<sup>1</sup>

What then, is the best way to interpret the two clauses under investigation? Is there enough "strong external pressure" to insist that the use of  $\mu\eta$  with a present imperative demands that there are already those who are quenching the Spirit and despising prophecies at Thessalonica? Dana and Mantey propose three factors which determine the use of the present tense. These are the fundamental force of the tense, the meaning of the verbal root, and the significance of the context.<sup>2</sup> The basic force of the tense is linear, but neither of the verb roots contribute any further understanding to the use of the tense in this instance. The context, however, does yield information which is determinative, in this writer's opinion.

Beginning at 1 Thessalonians 5:16, and continuing through verse 22, a chain of rapid-fire imperatives is formed. If one considers each of these imperatives as it

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1955), p. 181.

might have been understood by the Thessalonians, there is no evidence either internal to the epistle, or externally derived from history, which requires a special emphasis on continuous action.

Perhaps this observation can best be proven by looking closer at the relationship between verses 19 and 20, and verses 21 and 22. If the present imperatives of verses 19 and 20 are to be understood as durative, then those of verses 21 and 22 should also, because they are probably best understood as epexegetical of verses 19 and 20.<sup>1</sup> But if this is the case, then the commands of verses 21 and 22 are meaningless. Unless Paul is speaking to several groups in the same breath, it is unlikely that he would say, "Do not continue to despise prophecies," and follow that immediately by, "Do continue to test everything." The Thessalonians could not have been utterly debasing and despising prophecies, while at the same time examining or testing them in a praiseworthy manner. The two actions are so opposed to each other that they could not have been carried on simultaneously.

On the basis of the foregoing observation, it is the opinion of this writer that the present imperatives in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, and particularly those in verses 19 and 20, may be understood as gnomic rather than as prohibiting continuous action. The imperatives do not necessarily

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," by Eduard Schweizer, 6:422, n. 597.

mean that the action is happening, but only that it does happen.<sup>1</sup> The hortatory nature of the passage does not suffer, but is instead strengthened by such an interpretation of the verbal action. Moulton allows μή with a present imperative to be used in this way. He writes, "We are not justified in excluding, for the purposes of the present imperative in prohibitions, the various kinds of action which we find attached to the stem elsewhere."<sup>2</sup>

### The Relationship Between Verses 19 and 20

#### Parallelism

First Thessalonians 5:16-22 comprises a brief poetic section in the epistle. This is most clearly seen in the twenty-sixth edition of the Novum Testamentum Graece. Here these verses are indented and set in a strophic pattern indicating the editors' judgment that they are poetic in form. Paul uses poetic language often in his epistles, so it is not unusual that he would do so here (cf. Rom 12; 2: 6-10; 1 Cor 13; Phil 2:5-11).

Much of Paul's poetic style is rooted in his Hebraic background. The most notable feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism, and as Turner observes, Hebraic parallelism occurs throughout Paul's style.

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Sproule, "Intermediate Greek Notes," class syllabus (Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, 1979), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Moulton, Grammar, p. 125.

It is clearly derived from Hebrew, partly through the LXX, and need not be attributed absolutely to the influence of the Stoic diatribe. As the Paulines were written to be read aloud it is difficult to judge when Paul quotes a hymn and when he freely composes.<sup>1</sup>

If one studies verses 19 and 20 with Hebrew poetry in mind the reader cannot avoid the conclusion that the clauses are most likely in a parallel relationship. Both begin with an accusative of direct object followed by *μη* with a present imperative. In its simplest form parallelism expresses a thought in the second line of a couplet which is identical or similar to the thought in the first line.<sup>2</sup> This is called synonymous parallelism. It appears to be the literary device Paul uses in these verses. Therefore, τὸ πνεῦμα may be considered a synonym of προφητείας, and *μη* σβέννυτε of *μη* ἐξουθενεῖτε, though the terms need not be considered equative.

This raises another question regarding the relationship between τὸ πνεῦμα *μη* σβέννυτε and προφητείας *μη* ἐξουθενεῖτε. Are these clauses identical in meaning?

#### Clause Dependency

The question of whether or not the second clause identically repeats the information of the first clause is not settled by a definition of synonymous parallelism. It must be determined by other passages where the terms appear

<sup>1</sup>Nigel Turner, A Grammar of New Testament Greek, vol. 4: Style (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976), p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>A. Berkeley Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 325.

as collocates. Unfortunately, the exact form of each word does not occur elsewhere in so close a contextual relationship. However, there is one very significant passage in which the singular, προφητεία occurs with the adjectival form of πνεῦμα. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul exhorts the Corinthians,

Διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά μᾶλλον δὲ  
ἵνα προφητεύητε.

Here the verbal action of προφητεία is related to the activity or manifestation of τὸ πνεῦμα in a subordinate clause. Προφητεία is also identified as a πνευματικός in 1 Corinthians 12:10, where it is included in a list of spiritual gifts. Now if προφητεία is considered by Paul to be a manifestation of τὸ πνεῦμα in these passages, this writer finds an adequate basis here for deducing that Paul also considers it to be such in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20.<sup>1</sup> Calvin correctly comments on verse 19:

There are some that think that it is the same thing that is said in this clause and the succeeding one. Hence according to them, to quench the Spirit is precisely the same as to despise prophesyings. As, however, the Spirit is quenched in various ways, I make a distinction between these two things--that of a general statement, and a particular.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>It is this relationship which also provides a basis for considering these two clauses as unique partners in the broader context of 1 Thess 5:16-22. See TDNT, s.v. "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," Eduard Schweizer, 6:422-23.

<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, trans. and ed. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 298.

This is not the only place where Paul uses synonymous parallelism. Winer cites Romans 9:2; 11:12, 33; 1 Corinthians 15:54; and 2 Thessalonians 2:8 as other examples.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these, there is a particular instance of synonymous parallelism in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, where Paul follows the use of a general term by two more specific terms which are in a parallel relationship to it. Paul writes:

Διαιρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων εἰσὶν, τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα  
καὶ διαιρέσεις διακονιῶν εἰσὶν, καὶ ὁ αὐτὸς κύριος.  
καὶ διαιρέσεις ἐνεργημάτων εἰσιν, ὁ δὲ θεὸς ὁ ἐνεργῶν  
τὰ πάντα ἐν πάντιν.

In these verses χαρισμάτα is the general term which is described more specifically by διακονίας and ἐνεργημάτων.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this form of expression by Paul is not limited to the clauses under consideration in this study.

### Summary

It has been the purpose of this chapter to explore the grammatical structure of 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20 with the intent of determining the effect this might have on a proper interpretation of the passage. In the course of this study, three important discoveries were made. First, the

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<sup>1</sup> George Benedict Winer, A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament, 7th ed., ed. Gottlieb Lunemann (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1897), p. 639.

<sup>2</sup> Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians, 6th ed., trans. D. Douglas Bannerman, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. William P. Dickson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884; reprint ed., n.p.: Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 279.

objects of the clauses are the central focus of Paul's exhortations. It is the Spirit and His manifestations in prophecy that are not to be disparaged. Second, there is no cause for the insistence that these were necessarily in the process of being abused at Thessalonica. In fact, on the basis of the relationship between verses 19-20 and 21-22, the present imperatives in this context could be better understood as gnomic, expressing a general rule for all Christians in any circumstances. Third, the clauses are related in a synonymous parallelism, with the second clause being more specific than the first. Thus Paul is writing a general principle in the first clause, followed by a particular example in the second clause.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SPIRIT, DO NOT QUENCH

Once the relationship between verses 19 and 20 has been established from a grammatical viewpoint, it is necessary to investigate the meaning of each clause separately before a complete understanding can be acquired. This chapter will probe the first clause, "τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε." Each major word will be studied in order that its proper meaning in this context may be determined.

#### The Meaning of τὸ Πνεῦμα

The first word of verse 19 is the noun πνεῦμα with its neuter accusative article. The word πνεῦμα is used to refer to the Holy Spirit about 137 times in the New Testament. Occasionally it is used as the object of a simile or metaphor. Here, it is likened to a flame. But is this cryptic metaphor referring to the person of the Holy Spirit, or His manifestations?

#### Suggested Interpretations

As one might expect, various commentators have differed in their understanding of τὸ πνεῦμα. Generally speaking, there are three interpretations derived from the use of



τὸ πνεῦμα in this context. These viewpoints will be presented and evaluated, and a fourth view will be suggested.

### The person

Among those who see τὸ πνεῦμα as a reference to the Holy Spirit, none has stated it as categorically as Eadie; "τὸ πνεῦμα is the Spirit of God, and this meaning is not to be diluted in any way."<sup>1</sup> Yet, it is apparent that not only commentators, but translators also have not always agreed with him. Adeney reports that the Revised Version uses a capital "S" to indicate the Spirit of God, whereas the Authorized Version uses a lower case "s" to denote the human spirit. He then explains why he agrees with the Revised Version.

Paul is accustomed to name the Divine Spirit in this absolute way, while he generally defines the human spirit in contra-distinction as "our spirit," or with the use of some other limitation, e.g. "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit" (Rom 8:16). When the expression stands by itself it indicates the Spirit par excellence, i.e. the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

This understanding of the term has the merit of being the simplest, most natural interpretation. But, there are those who prefer to look beyond the person of the Holy Spirit for the meaning of the noun in this context.

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<sup>1</sup> John Eadie, A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, ed. William Young (London: MacMillan and Co., 1877; reprinted, Minneapolis: James Publications, 1976), p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Walter F. Adeney, Thessalonians and Galatians, in The New Century Bible, ed. Walter F. Adeney (New York: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, American branch, n.d.), p. 215.

### General manifestations

Some of those who are unwilling to accept τὸ πνεῦμα as a direct reference to the person of the Holy Spirit, see instead a reference to His general manifestations. These commentators often choose this view because they assume that the clause, "Quench not the Spirit," would require the extirpation of the person of the Holy Spirit if the first view is adopted. It is certainly this concern that caused Mason to write:

The "Spirit" here must not be taken too sharply to mean the Person of the Holy Ghost: The Person of the Holy Ghost may be grieved (Eph 4:30), expelled (Ps 51:11), neglected (1 Tim 4:14), but (though His working on the individual may be stopped) He can never be extinguished. The word here again (as in chapter 1:5) is in that intermediate sense which expresses the effect of the Holy Ghost's personal working upon our spirits.<sup>1</sup>

Gloag sees this personal working of the Holy Spirit expressed by the fruit of the Spirit in a believer's life. He points out that pure thoughts, holy actions, and devout affections may be effectively quenched by a careless or immoral life. However, while Gloag himself interprets τὸ πνεῦμα as a reference to the Holy Spirit's general manifestations, he acknowledges that most commentators believe it refers to His miraculous or charismatic expressions.<sup>2</sup> It is this viewpoint which will now be considered.

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<sup>1</sup>A. J. Mason, "The Epistles to the Thessalonians," in vol. 8 of Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, ed. Charles John Ellicott (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Paton James Gloag, 1 Thessalonians, in The Pulpit Commentary, eds. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, n.d.), p. 105.

### Charismatic manifestations

Those who see τὸ πνεῦμα as a reference to the charismatic manifestations of the Holy Spirit usually do so because of its close contextual relationship with προφητείας in verse 20. "Πνεῦμα is parallel to προφητεῖαι and denotes a power which manifests itself in an extraordinary way."<sup>1</sup>

Among those commentators who allow προφητείας to govern the meaning of τὸ πνεῦμα are Milligan,<sup>2</sup> Moore,<sup>3</sup> Smeaton,<sup>4</sup> and Frame. Frame, as representative of this position, denies that τὸ πνεῦμα refers to any ethical fruit at all, but must refer to the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, because of the presence and position of προφητείας.<sup>5</sup>

Now that three views have been suggested as possible answers to the interpretive problem of τὸ πνεῦμα, it should be readily apparent to the reader that each view has strengths and weaknesses. It is because of this dilemma that a fourth, mediate position ought to be considered.

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," by Eduard Schweizer, 6:422.

<sup>2</sup>George Milligan, St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians (New York: The MacMillan Co., n.d.; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>Moore, Thessalonians, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup>George Smeaton, The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (n.p., 1889; reprint ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 89.

<sup>5</sup>James Everett Frame, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 205.

### Mediate proposal

A better understanding of the term το πνεῦμα is that it identifies primarily the person of the Holy Spirit with a secondary allusion to His extraordinary manifestations because of the significant proximity of προφητείας. If Paul had desired to write of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit alone he could easily have used the terms χαρίσματα or πνευματικά as he did in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. Instead, he uses πνεῦμα with the article, the combination which most often refers to the person of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. In effect, he says that the person of the Holy Spirit may be quenched. The line of distinction is very fine here but it should be neither overlooked nor misunderstood. When the person of the Holy Spirit is restrained His true manifestations are also restrained and vice-versa. One action cannot occur independently from the other, but it is the restraint of the person, not His manifestations, which is emphasized in this term.

The proximity and parallel structure of προφητείας cannot change the essential meaning of the word form. On the other hand, the position of προφητείας does suggest very strongly that the Holy Spirit is seen as the source of the extraordinary gifts which are not to be despised.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gottlieb Lünemann, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Thessalonians, trans. Paton J. Gloag, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884; reprint ed., Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 555.

This proposition may be defended by the classification of προφητεία among the πνευματικά in 1 Corinthians 12:10. The denial of the general manifestations of the Holy Spirit may also occur when one quenches the person of the Holy Spirit. Contrary to Morris<sup>1</sup> however, it is not likely that such an interpretation is the primary intent of this clause because of its already stated relationship with προφητείας. In this verse then, τὸ πνεῦμα is the Holy Spirit who is personally quenched when His extraordinary manifestation of prophecy is despised.

#### The Use of σβέννυμι

The term σβέννυμι occurs infrequently in both the LXX and the New Testament. In the former it appears forty-five times, being the translation of כָּבַח twenty-one times and of שָׁחַח<sup>2</sup> six times. It occurs only eight times in the New Testament. The use of the word throughout the Bible may be divided into three categories. A brief survey of these categories will enhance one's understanding of its use in this passage.

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, in The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> TDNT, s.v. "σβέννυμι," by Friedrich Lang, 7:166-67.

### Literal Use

In both the LXX and the New Testament σβέννυμι is used literally most often when referring to fire or burning coals. In Matthew 25:8, the virgins speak of their lamps as going out or being extinguished (σβέννυνται). In Mark 9:48 (and also verses 44 and 46 in some manuscripts), the fire of Gehenna is described as unquenchable (σβέννυται). Hebrews 11:34 records that the prophets of time past "quenched (ἔσβεσαν) the violence of fire."

### Figurative Use

The word σβέννυμι is used figuratively various ways in the LXX.<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament it is used this way two times. Matthew 12:20 portrays Jesus as one who does not quench (οὐ σβέσει) a smoldering wick. Ephesians 6:16 informs the believer that with the shield of faith he will be "able to quench (σβέσαι) all the fiery darts of the evil one."

### Metaphorical Use

First Thessalonians 5:19 is the only place in the New Testament where σβέννυμι is used in a transferred, or metaphorical sense, though it is found this way often in the LXX. "It is used of quenching love (Cant 8:7), anger (Jer 4:4; 21:12), a hot mind (Sir 23:16), and passions (4 Macc 16:14)."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Leon Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, NICNT, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), p. 175.

It is also used of quenching a person (Ezek 32:7). Here God speaks of His intentions toward the pharaoh of Egypt.

It is difficult to imagine how a person can be quenched. This difficulty can be overcome when one reduces the metaphorical image to its concrete meaning. When used metaphorically σβέννυμι may mean "to suppress" or "to restrain."<sup>1</sup> Thus, in this passage σβέννυμι refers to restraining the Holy Spirit by means of rejecting His manifestations.

#### Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate the meaning of the clause, τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε. Through this study it has been concluded that τὸ πνεῦμα has primary reference to the person of the Holy Spirit, but the significant parallel with προφητείας affirms there is also a secondary reference to His expression in extraordinary manifestations. Furthermore, the negated imperative μὴ σβέννυτε is a metaphorical statement which may be translated, "do not restrain." The entire clause, therefore, speaks primarily of restraining the person of the Holy Spirit. The parallel relationship with the next clause however, suggests that this happens when one despises the extraordinary manifestations of prophecies.

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "σβέννυμι," by Friedrich Lang, 7:168.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROPHECIES, DO NOT DESPISE

The second clause of 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20 is "προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε." The intent of this chapter is to study this clause in much the same way the first clause was studied in the previous chapter. Each major word will be investigated as thoroughly as is believed necessary to determine its proper meaning in this context.

#### The Meaning of Προφητεία

The correct understanding of the word προφητεία in this context is the most critical requirement in rightly interpreting 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20. Much of the proper interpretation pivots entirely on how one understands this term. For this reason, the use of προφητεία in the LXX and the New Testament will first be examined. This will be followed by an inquiry into the nature of προφητεία, the purpose of prophecy in the New Testament era, and the duration of prophecy.

#### The Use of Προφητεία

##### προφητεία in the LXX

The term προφητεία appears fifteen times in the LXX. It is used to translate נָבִיא twice and נְבִיָּא three times.



The remaining occurrences are found in the apocryphal books of Tobit, Sirach, 2 Esdras, and the Bel and the Dragon account. In the canonical books the term is always used of the verbal expressions of a prophet. The only possible exception to this observation is 2 Chronicles 32:32, where the reference is probably to the oral messages of Isaiah which were written down. Therefore, the noun προφητεία is used in the canonical books of the LXX for the verbal testimony of a prophet. This testimony was not stereotyped in its form, however. Hill describes funereal complaints (Amos 5: 2), parables (Isa 5), enigmatic statements, predictive utterances, diagnostic commentaries on God's word, salvation speeches, prophetic actions (Jer 32), and prophetic intercession (Amos 7), as examples of prophecy in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup>

#### προφητεία in the New Testament

The noun προφητεία occurs nineteen times in the New Testament. In the Gospels it occurs only in Matthew 13:14, where it speaks of the words of an Old Testament prophet. Outside of Pauline literature, it is found seven times in the book of Revelation and twice in 2 Peter. Paul uses the term nine times. He alone uses it for both the words of a prophet and the gift of prophecy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Hill, New Testament Prophecy (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>BAGD, p. 722. See also, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "Prophet," by C. H. Peisker, 3:81.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:20, the word is translated various ways. The AV renders it "prophecyings"; the NASB, "prophetic utterances"; the NIV, "prophecies"; and the TEV translates it "inspired messages." In agreement with what appears to be the consensus of translators, this writer also accepts the term in this context as a reference to words of prophecy rather than prophetic gifts. There is an exegetical basis for this position. The word προφητεία occurs nine other places in the New Testament in its plural form. In each of these instances prophetic utterance is clearly in view. Contrariwise, anytime a reference is made to the gift of prophecy as a general term for prophetic gifts, the singular form is used.

In either case, Hill is correct when he identifies prophecy as the product of a prophet.<sup>1</sup> This raises the question, who qualifies as a prophet? Gaffin<sup>2</sup> and Friedrich<sup>3</sup> both propose, presumably on the basis of Acts 2:16, that all believers are prophets. The writer does not share this opinion for two reasons. First, the declaration of Acts 2:16-21 is not speaking of the Church. Those words were spoken by a Jewish apostle of Christ to a Jewish audience at a Jewish festival in the city of Jerusalem, the

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<sup>1</sup>Hill, Prophecy, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Perspectives on Pentecost (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup>TDNT, s.v. "προφητης κτλ.," by Gerhard Friedrich, 6:849.

capital of Judea. The words were taken from Joel 2:28-32, which speaks of events related to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.

Nowhere does Peter say that all the elements of the prophecy were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. His very cautious language, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel," points back to the one thing in which Peter was primarily interested, i.e., the testimony uttered under the Spirit's power on this occasion. . . . Peter is only saying that the miraculous testimony of Pentecost was something to be expected prior to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

The second reason for not accepting the proposition that all believers are prophets, is that it does not agree with the explicit teaching of the New Testament. Even Gaffin himself concedes that in the New Testament, prophecy "is a gift given to only some, not all, in the church; it is a gift present on the principle of differential distribution."<sup>2</sup> In the New Testament prophets are consistently distinguished from other believers who are not prophets. In fact, they are given a status exceeded only by the apostles (Eph 3:5, 4:11; 1 Thess 12:28).<sup>3</sup>

Once it is affirmed that all believers in the New Testament church were not prophets, the peculiar function of those who were prophets ought to be established. Trench points out that the prefix *προ-* in the etymological family of *προφήτης* should not be taken as temporal.

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<sup>1</sup>Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), p. 400.

<sup>2</sup>Gaffin, Perspectives on Pentecost, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup>Leon Morris, The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians, TNTC, p. 105.

This fore-telling or fore-announcing may be, and often is, of the office of the prophet, but is not of the essence of that office; and this as little in sacred as in classical Greek. The προφήτης is the outspeaker; he who speaks out the counsel of God with the clearness, energy and authority which spring from the consciousness of speaking in God's name, and having received a direct message from Him to deliver.<sup>1</sup>

Prophecy in the New Testament is not only the declaration of what God is going to do, but also what He intends men to do.<sup>2</sup> It is by prophecy that Paul and Barnabas are chosen for missionary work (Acts 13:1ff.). It is by prophecy that Timothy is ordained to the ministry (1 Tim 4:14). It is by prophecy that the weary are encouraged (1 Cor 14:3), and the wicked are exposed (1 Cor 14:25).

#### The Nature of Prophecy

Closely aligned with the use of προφητεία in the Old Testament and New Testament is the nature of the prophetic utterances. If one does not want to be guilty of despising prophecies he must be able to recognize them when they occur. Something of their function in the Old Testament and New Testament has already been described, but it is the nature of prophecy itself which will now be investigated. This will be accomplished within the limited scope of this paper by studying prophecy in its relationship to ecstasy, glossalalia, and revelation.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Chenevix Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p. 20. See also BAGD, p. 723.

<sup>2</sup>TDNT, s.v. "προφήτης κτλ.," by Gerhard Friedrich, 6:848.

## Prophecy and ecstasy

Many writers assume that prophecy and an ecstatic state or experience are related. In order to determine whether this is true, and if so, what the nature of that relationship is, prophecy and ecstasy will be surveyed in the Old Testament and New Testament respectively.

### Old Testament

As has been mentioned previously, προφητεία is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew נְבִיאָה, which is from the root נָבָא. Oepke says the original sense of the word meant "to speak with frenzy."<sup>1</sup> Though some might wince at the thought of Old Testament prophets being ecstatic, it nevertheless can be borne out by the biblical testimony. "An unprejudiced investigation makes it clear that the phrases, 'to be seized by Yahweh's spirit' or 'hand' are completely identical with the phrase 'Yahweh's word comes to' the prophet, and that all of these expressions reflect the ecstatic experience."<sup>2</sup> Gray mentions that in 2 Kings 18:19 נְבִיאִים describes both the prophets of Yahweh and the devotees of Baal. This, he says, indicates that they have certain features in common. "From the case of Saul's encounter with the prophets, nebi'im (1 Sam 10:10; 19:23f.), and from the use of the verb hitnabbē, the capacity for

<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "ἔκστασις," by Albrecht Oepke, 2:454.

<sup>2</sup>Ivan Engnell, A Rigid Scrutiny, trans. and ed. John T. Willis (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), p. 146.

self-effacement in the service of God induced by, and resulting in, abnormal behaviour and extraordinary physical feats appears to be the common element."<sup>1</sup> Thus the Hebrew prophet was as much an ecstatic as were his counter-parts in the other religions of Syria and Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

But it must be stated that among the later prophets ecstasy declined in the expression, if not in the experience, of the prophet. The ecstatic utterance, the vision, and the trance gradually disappeared as the central thread of prophecy, while intelligible instruction replaced it.<sup>3</sup> This is not mentioned to suggest that ecstasy was a negative feature of prophecy; a weakness which was finally shed. Engnell sweeps away this narrow suspicion.

There can be no doubt that the attempts to eliminate the importance of ecstasy in the great prophets are due to a modern negative evaluation of ecstasy, which is foreign to ancient Israelite thought. According to the traditional Israelite view, ecstasy does not imply infirmity or insanity, but suggests hyperactivity and concentration of power. Literally, it means to be filled with the divine spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, it may be concluded that in the Old Testament, ecstasy in the sense of some supra-normal contact

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<sup>1</sup>John Gray, 1 and 2 Kings, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), p. 393.

<sup>2</sup>Leo A. Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization, rev. ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 221.

<sup>3</sup>This observation is made by several authorities (see Oepke, "ἐκστασις," 2:455; BDB, p. 612; and Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," JBL 98 [September 1979]:336).

<sup>4</sup>Engnell, A Rigid Scrutiny, p. 146.

with, or endowment by God, did accompany prophecy either immediately, or previous to the prophetic utterance. It was not, however, a necessary part of the prophetic utterance itself.

### New Testament

While it is true that the New Testament term for prophet, προφήτης, was used to translate נָבִיא throughout the LXX, it is also true that word associations change over a period of time. For this reason, one must begin afresh to discover whether there is a relationship between prophecy and ecstasy in the New Testament.

In the book of Acts, Friedrich suggests that when believers prophesy as a result of being filled with the Spirit, they are doing so in an ecstatic manner.<sup>1</sup> This writer admits that though the experience of being filled with the Spirit might have involved ecstatic prophecy, certainly being filled with the Spirit need not always be thought of as producing ecstasy (cf. Eph 5:18).

It is in 1 Corinthians that one gets the best picture of the New Testament prophet in contrast to that of the Old Testament period.

He is not one who, possessed by God, has no control over his senses and has to do what the indwelling power orders. Alienation and raving are foreign to him. The primitive Christian prophet is a man of full self-awareness. When he is speaking he can break off if a revelation is given to someone else. When two or

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "προφήτης κτλ.," by Gerhard Friedrich, 6:851.

three prophets have spoken in the congregation others may remain silent even though something is revealed to them, IC.14:29ff.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, this is not to say that ecstasy and prophecy never occur together in the New Testament. The book of Revelation claims to be a prophecy uttered "in the Spirit" (Rev 1:10), which assuredly involves visionary or "ecstatic" experiences. This is shown as John admonishes his readers to "hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). He even equates the "spirit of prophecy" with the "testimony of Jesus" (Rev 19:10) and assumes the role of a divine oracle (Rev 22:17, 20).

Thus it may be said of New Testament prophecy as it was of Old Testament prophecy that although ecstasy might accompany the prophetic utterance, it was not an essential feature of such an utterance.

#### Prophecy and glossalalia

Schweizer, when commenting on 1 Thessalonians 5:20, questions whether it is proper to exclude the idea of glossalalia from being referred to by the term προφητείας.<sup>2</sup> This interrogative is no doubt posed because of Peter's inclusion of glossalalia in his description of prophecy when he quoted Joel in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:17). Meyer

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> TDNT, s.v. "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," by Eduard Schweizer, 6:422.



affirms that "προφητεύουσιν, . . . is by Peter specially recognized as a prediction of that apocalyptically inspired speaking, which had just commenced with the ἑτέροις γλώσσαις."<sup>1</sup> He further suggests that according to the analogy in Acts 19:6, the glossalalia is not to be thought of, in the strict sense, but only as a portion of the speaker's prophecy.<sup>2</sup> Thus glossalalia and prophecy are often closely related in the New Testament. Glossalalia is sometimes included in the general sphere of prophecy because both were Spirit-inspired utterances.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, throughout Pauline literature and therefore in 1 Thessalonians 5:20, prophecy does not include glossalalia. In fact, Paul distinguishes between the gifts in two important ways.

First, glossalalia and prophecy belong to a different set of spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 the use of ἑτερος distinguishes between the classification

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<sup>1</sup> Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles, 2nd ed., trans. Paton J. Gloag, Critical and Exegetical Handbook on the New Testament, ed. William P. Dickson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the parallel construction of γλῶσσα and προφητεύω in Acts 19:7, see Charles Smith, "Biblical Conclusions Concerning Tongues" (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1970), p. 219f.

to which prophecy belongs and the classification to which glossalalia belongs.<sup>1</sup> Smith clearly explains why Paul made this distinction.

The distinction which he emphasized is based on the fact that in prophecy the mind was employed and was expected ordinarily to be led to proper conclusions by the Holy Spirit, whereas in glossalalia the mind was not involved at all. In genuine Spirit-initiated glossalalia the Holy Spirit influenced only the spirit, or the emotions.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this intrinsic difference between glossalalia and prophecy, there is a second, extrinsic difference. Prophecy is an intelligible utterance needing no interpretation such as glossalalia requires.<sup>3</sup> Throughout 1 Corinthians 14 this distinction is at the heart of Paul's instruction. For these reasons one is justified in not accepting glossalalia as an element in the prophetic utterances of 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

#### Prophecy and revelation

The relationship between prophecy and revelation is closer than between prophecy and either of the previously studied subjects. In fact, the prophetic utterances of 1 Thessalonians 5:20 must be acknowledged as utterances of divine revelation. Those who view prophecy as more or less akin to modern day preaching need to reconsider that the

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<sup>1</sup>George W. Zeller, God's Gift of Tongues (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1978), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, "Biblical Conclusions Concerning Tongues," p. 221.

<sup>3</sup>Frame, Thessalonians, p. 206.

characteristic feature of prophecy is its origin in divine revelation (1 Cor 14:30). In the apostolic church such prophesying sometimes constituted part of the order of worship.<sup>1</sup>

Prophecy in the New Testament church was not mere preaching, it was miraculous preaching, inspired preaching. Like prophecy in the Old Testament it was saying, "Thus saith the Lord." It was a supernatural gift whereby the prophet was able to reveal to his listeners new truth from God. This might mean foretelling the future, or anything else which could not be known by natural means.<sup>2</sup>

#### Related questions

Such an explanation of prophecy is bound to raise a question concerning the nature of this revelation. Was it designed for just that specific congregation, or was it also intended to have a universal impact? In essence, the question is whether or not revelation can have temporary value, unlike the revelation which has been inscripturated. If one considers the fact that all of the words of Jesus were not inscripturated (John 21:25), then he should have no difficulty in agreeing that inscripturation is not a requirement for revelation. This comparison should also remove the thought that prophecy with only temporary significance is somehow of inferior quality. All of God's revelation is of

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Cushman McGiffert, A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age, in the International Theological Library, eds. Charles A. Briggs and Stewart D. F. Salmond (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), p. 526.

<sup>2</sup> James L. Boyer, "The Office of the Prophet in New Testament Times," Grace Journal 1 (Spring 1960):18.

the same quality because it is derived from Him, but it is not necessarily the same in its scope of application.

Once prophecy is understood to be of divine revelation, another question might also be raised. How could the Thessalonians, or any other group of believers, presume to despise prophetic utterances if by their very nature, they were revelations from God? The answer lies in the recognition that false prophets were as much a part of the early church as false teachers are a part of the church today (2 Thess 2:2; 1 John 4:1). Moreover, some believers were likely recognized as prophets because of their sustained prophesyings. Others who were not regular prophets, might have been more suspect in their prophetic pronouncements because the people were not familiar with them. "Wherever the Spirit might convey the revelation the Apostle counsels his friends to be receptive."<sup>1</sup>

In summary of the nature of prophecy in the New Testament it should be noted that its source is divine revelation; its expression is through intelligible utterances; and its essence is not necessarily ecstatic. These are the characteristics of προφητείας in 1 Thessalonians 5:20.

#### The Purpose of Prophecy

Prophecy served a special purpose in the assembly of believers. The identification of this purpose will

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, NICNT, p. 177.

assist the reader in discerning why it was so important that prophecies were not despised. Most people accept three functions of prophecy on the basis of 1 Corinthians 14:3, 22.

Edification is usually identified as the essential purpose of prophecy. This is abundantly supported in 1 Corinthians 14. Prophecy built up the church through instruction administered with love (1 Cor 13:2).

Exhortation, though similar to edification, may be recognized as another purpose of prophecy. This is especially made clear in Acts 15:32, where Judas and Silas' act of encouraging and strengthening the believers is expressly linked to their prophetic office.

Some writers suggest that a third purpose of prophecy is that of being a "sign to believers" (1 Cor 14:22).<sup>1</sup> This writer agrees with Thomas, who takes exception to this translation, and suggests instead that it should be read, "Prophecy is not for unbelievers but for those who believe." This translation avoids an elliptical construction, and leaves the grammar and meaning of the sentence in perfect order.

The supposed parallelism between tongues and prophecy is overshadowed by a dual antithesis between believers and unbelievers, one in the former part of the verse and one in the latter. In fact, the very reason for contrasting objects of the two gifts is that one is a sign and the other is not.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wayne Grudem, "1 Corinthians 14:20-25: Prophecy and Tongues as Signs of God's Attitude," WTJ 41 (Spring 1979): 395.

<sup>2</sup>Robert L. Thomas, Understanding Spiritual Gifts (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), p. 225.

Therefore prophecy was not a sign to believers. Believers needed no sign. They had faith. On the other hand, exhortation and edification were legitimate functions of prophecy. The main purpose of prophecy then, was to edify and exhort believers.

### The Duration of Prophecy

An understanding of the duration of prophecy will greatly assist a person who desires to make an appropriate application of 1 Thessalonians 5:20 to the present era of the church. The best way such a study can be pursued is by looking first at the biblical teaching and then at the historical evidence with regard to the duration of prophecy.

#### The biblical teaching

The primary passage which is used to express the duration of prophecy is 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. There are essentially three views of these verses in this regard. One view sees the disappearance of prophecy at the completion of the canon. Another view sees its disappearance at the Second Advent. The third view regards prophecy as ceasing<sup>1</sup> completely only upon entrance into the eternal state.

The writer holds to the "eternal state" view because it allows the simplest and most natural understanding of the passage. Any time short of that would preclude the two

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<sup>1</sup> A thorough discussion of these three views may be found in Charles Smith, Tongues in Biblical Perspective (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1973), pp. 73-87.

prophets of Revelation 11:3-13 from displaying prophetic gifts. Also, any time short of that would contradict Joel 2:28, which speaks of prophesying during the Millennial Kingdom. However, Smith's remarks on this matter are important to remember.

Though these revelatory gifts will be exercised in the tribulation and millennium, the passage does not say that they will continue to be exercised throughout the whole Church Age. This is, in fact, specifically denied by the fact that as far as the church is concerned prophecy is linked with apostleship as belonging to the foundational stage of the church (Eph 2:20).<sup>1</sup>

It follows that if prophecy is considered by the New Testament as foundational, then it should have disappeared at about the same time that the other part of the foundation, the apostles, disappeared. A study of church history will verify this assumption.

#### The historical testimony

If it is granted that the last of the apostles died about the beginning of the second century A.D., then one should not need to look too much further chronologically to see the passing of prophets and prophecy. The Didache, written early in the second century, gives instructions regarding the treatment of prophets, but it also speaks as though prophets are already diminishing in number.<sup>2</sup> In Ignatius' letter to the Philadelphians, dated near the

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, Tongues in Biblical Perspective, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup>Didache, in The Apostolic Fathers, in vol. 1 of 2 vols. in the LCL, 13:4, p. 329.

beginning of the second century, he recalls a prophetic utterance he made in their midst.<sup>1</sup> After Ignatius, "the office of the prophet was virtually unknown, while the charisma of prophecy continued occasionally to appear in the person of the bishop."<sup>2</sup> Green summarizes the disappearance of prophecy as a historical (though not necessarily legitimate), feature of the church.

Prophecy continued in the Church, and the Montanist movement was no isolated eruption. . . . Granted that prophecy declined as episcopacy grew in power (so much so that the bishop eventually claimed to absorb the prophetic function!), and as the canon of the New Testament increasingly made it less necessary, it continued well into the third century and made a great impression on ordinary people.<sup>3</sup>

On the basis of both the scriptural teaching and the historical testimony, it is readily concluded that prophecy did disappear early in the Church Age because of its foundational nature. It therefore is no longer a legitimate feature of a church order of worship.

### The Use of Ἐξουθενέω

There can be no mistaking the meaning of this emphatic word. It occurs thirteen times in the New Testament and used in a literal sense every one of those

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<sup>1</sup>"Ignatius to the Philadelphians," The Apostolic Fathers, in vol. 1 of 2 vols. in the LCL, 7:1, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup>James L. Ash, Jr., "The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church," TS 372 (June 1976):235.

<sup>3</sup>Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 200.



occurrences.<sup>1</sup> Vine says it means "to make of no account, to regard as nothing, to despise utterly, to treat with contempt."<sup>2</sup> The word is parallel to σβέννυτε in this context and provides the literal counterpart and explanation of that metaphorical term. When Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians 5:20 he was exhorting believers not to have this negative attitude toward prophetic utterances, and thereby also the Holy Spirit.

### Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to come to an understanding of the proper meaning of προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε as it appears in 1 Thessalonians 5:20. It has been concluded that προφητείας in this context refers to intelligible, divinely revealed, and potentially ecstatic utterances of a Christian prophet. Furthermore, these utterances were for the exhortation and edification of believers during that period which may be considered foundational in the Church Age. There have been no legitimate prophecies in the church since that time.

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<sup>1</sup>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "Abolish, Nullify, Reject," by J. I. Packer, 1:74.

<sup>2</sup>W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940), p. 300.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### Review

What is the proper interpretation of Paul's message to the Thessalonians, "τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε, προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε"? In order to make this determination the grammatical structure of both clauses was first studied corporately. The grammatical relationship between verses 19 and 20 revealed them to be in synonymous parallelism to each other. In this context, it was discovered that the first clause expressed a general principle while the second clause presented a specific example of that principle. Thus, Paul was saying that one could quench the Spirit by despising prophecies, though not every quenching of the Spirit would necessitate despising prophecies. It was further concluded that though Paul used μὴ with present imperatives in these commands, this did not require an insistence that such abuses were at that time in progress at Thessalonica; but only that they were to be avoided by all Christians in all circumstances.

After both clauses were considered together on the basis of their grammatical relationship each was analyzed individually to discover the intended content of the

commands. The meaning of the clause τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε was investigated first. The direct object τὸ πνεῦμα was concluded to be a reference to the person of the Holy Spirit who, because of its parallel with προφητείας, is revealed by extraordinary manifestations. The negative imperative μὴ σβέννυτε was found to be used metaphorically, which could also be rendered, concretely, "do not restrain." Therefore the command of verse 19 intones that one should not restrain the person of the Holy Spirit by means of rejecting His manifestations.

The second clause investigated was προφητείας μὴ ἑξουθενεῖτε. The negative imperative offered no problem of interpretation, since it was always used in a straightforward literal sense to speak of an attitude of utter contempt. The term προφητείας, however, was not as easily clarified. After a lengthy discussion it was determined that προφητείας referred to intelligible, divinely revealed, and potentially ecstatic utterances of a Christian prophet. These utterances were for the exhortation and edification of believers during the foundational era of the Church Age, and are not legitimately found today. Thus the second clause states that the prophetic manifestation of the Holy Spirit should not be despised.

A brief synopsis of the preceding conclusions will now be offered along with a statement of their implications for believers today.

### Summary

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20 Paul writes a general principle and a specific application of that principle to believers of his day. The principle states that no believer should ever be guilty of restraining the Holy Spirit. The application which Paul makes refers to a specific charismatic expression of the Holy Spirit which was valid for believers during the foundational era of the Church Age, but which has since passed away. It was as believers of the Apostolic Era treated divinely revealed, intelligible, sometimes ecstatic, prophetic utterances with utmost disdain and contempt that they restrained the Holy Spirit.

Since these two clauses, "The Spirit do not be quenching; prophecies, do not be despising," are parallel and the prophecies have ceased to continue; can the Holy Spirit be quenched today? Yes. The Holy Spirit can be restrained by the rejection of any of His manifestations. But in a way which is more closely related to this passage, the Holy Spirit can be quenched when the Bible, the inscripturated prophetic utterances (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-21), is denied and despised. In this way then, both the principle and the example may be applied to the church today.

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