

## **'DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT AND DO NOT REJECT PROPHECIES:' Analysis of 1 Thessalonians 5:16–22**

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### **Abstract**

*The Epistle to the Thessalonians points out some salient moral exhortations. It directs believers to a Christ-centered life. This study scrutinizes 1 Thessalonians 5:16–22, particularly the relevance of Paul's use of negative commands: "Do not quench the Spirit, nor rejecting prophecies." Paul's prohibition to the Thessalonians not to put out the Spirit might be because of deceptions that were used by false messengers to divert their attention from the truth. This Holy Spirit would enable them to distinguish truth from deception. In addition, some take "prophecies" in the plural as referring to spiritual gifts and others as prophetic utterances. The study suggests that Paul probably had the two views in mind when he addressed himself to the Thessalonians. In addition, the research envisages highlighting the relevance of the two negatives in understanding the Epistle. This study, which includes historical context, literary analysis, and keyword examination, aims to elucidate the theological implications of the text for contemporary Christian practice in this postmodern context.*

**Keywords:** *Holy Spirit, prophecies, prayer, joy, thanksgiving, faith.*

### **Introduction**

The letter to the Thessalonians holds salient exhortations urging Christians to live Christ-centered lives. Malherbe stresses that 1 Thessalonians is full of moral admonitions.<sup>1</sup> It records admonitions of various aspects such as prayers, thanksgiving, attending to the ministers' needs, preparation for Jesus's sooner advent, etc. Some scholars view 1 Thess 5:16–22, with its elements, such as joy and prayer, as a therapeutic model that the author advances to cure Thessalonians' emotional issues.<sup>2</sup> Others are interested in the letter to advocate the hortatory speech it presents.<sup>3</sup> Exegetes have put effort into grasping the meaning of the prohibition of quenching the Spirit and despising the prophecies in 1 Thess 5:19–20.

Black, on vv. 29–20 argues, "The first two imperatives are directed toward those who may have tended to de-emphasize the use of certain gifts in the church, especially prophetic

<sup>1</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, "Exhortation in First Thessalonians," *NT* 25 (1983): 238.

<sup>2</sup> Dariusz Iwański, "'Rejoice Therapy': Creating and Shaping 'Joy' according to St. Paul of Tarsus," *JRH* 62 (2023): 2746–2762.

<sup>3</sup> Malherbe, "Exhortation," 238–56.

revelations.”<sup>4</sup> He points out that the noun προφητείας points to the prophetic revelation. Some scholars have sympathized with this thesis.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Malherbe claims that “by *prophēteia* Paul may mean the gift of prophecy (as in 1 Cor 12:10; 13:2), but as the plural suggests, he has in mind prophetic utterances.”<sup>6</sup> The context may suggest that Paul might have had in mind both views. In addition, as it will be argued further in the present study, it is also probable that Paul, by using the plural προφητείας, had in mind the broader picture of the Scripture than simply prophetic utterances and gift of prophecies. Thus, the study asks why Paul combines the commands of rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks with quenching the Spirit and evaluating prophecies. How do the two elements, the Spirit and prophecies, contribute to understanding the pericope and the letter’s thesis? What are the theological implications do they have on the postmodern Christian?

To reach its aim, the study utilizes the historical-grammatical theological approach.<sup>7</sup> Besides the introduction and conclusion, the present study discusses the historical context of the passages under consideration, their literary context, and literary analysis. It also highlights the theological implications that the texts exhibit.

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<sup>4</sup> David Alan Black, “The Weak in the Thessalonica: A Study in Pauline Lexicography,” *JETS* 25/3 (1982): 313.

<sup>5</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, WBC 45 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982); James Everett Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 32B (New York: Doubleday, 2000),

<sup>7</sup> Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, ed., R. Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 68. This method has its presupposition that can be addressed in three aspects: Macro, meso, and micro presuppositions. For macro presupposition, the approach holds that God is not ‘timeless and spaceless’ (Fernando L., Canale, *Creation, evolution, and theology: An Introduction to the Scientific and Theological Methods*, Libertador San Martín [Entre Ríos: Editorial UAP 2009], 75). Timelessness of God origins in Greek Philosophy. It excludes God from time, and therefore, He cannot act or be involved in human affairs; He is eternal, and eternity cannot cohabitate with temporal. Friedrich Claims that “the eternity of God remains none less unique, since the antithesis between the temporal and the eternal is not in the least diminished by the infinite duration of time.... Indeed, finite being offers us some real help in conceiving the idea of eternity, since to a great degree time is merely an adjunct to finite being” (Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed., H. R. Machintosh and J. S. Stewart [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963] 204–5, §52, vol 1). Barth also posits that “eternity is God in the sense in which in Himself and in all things God is simultaneous.... Time is distinguished from eternity by the fact that in it beginning, middle and end are distinct and even opposed as past, present, and future.... Eternity is not, then, an infinite extension of time both backwards and forwards. Time can have nothing to do with God.” See Karl Bath, *Church Dogmatics*, ed., G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans., T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnson, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1976), 608, II,1, §31. Further, Vanhoozer argues that one’s view of God impacts one’s interpretation (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, eds., Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005], 22). Thus, the present study holds a high view of God, recognizing Him as an acting historical figure and a source of knowledge. See Elias B. de Souza, “Métodos Contemporâneos de Interpretação da Bíblia,” *Hermenêutica* (1996): 55; Frank Hasel, “Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed., Georg W. Reid, Biblical Research Institute Studies 01 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 37–8. Furthermore, the meso presupposition of this approach underscores the authority of the scriptures upon which theology, doctrines, and beliefs are built. See Hasel, “Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture,” 37. Finally, the micro presupposition outlines the process of exegesis that aligns with the principles of the present method. It rejects the ones that the historical-critical method and its derivatives advocate (General Conference, *Methods of Bible Study*, Rio de Janeiro, 1986. <https://www.adventist.org/documents/methods-of-bible-study/> Accessed on April 7, 2024).

### Thessalonica and Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Paul's second missionary trip left him having established the gospel in Thessalonica. Malherbe emphasizes that the church's foundation in Thessalonica is placed very early in the second missionary journey.<sup>8</sup> Paul and Silas passed through Amphipolis and Appolonia from Philippi to arrive in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1; 1 Thess 2:2). Thessalonica was an idolatrous city. Green says that the city revered Julius Caesar and built for him a temple "and his adopted son, Augustus, who was called 'the son of God,' and established a priesthood in honor of 'Dea Roma and the Roman benefactors.'"<sup>9</sup>

This consideration of Caesar's son, Augustus, as the son of god portrays the degree of its idolatry. Julius Caesar and his successors were worshiped as gods,<sup>10</sup> and "religious feelings of awe and thankfulness to the supreme power governing the Mediterranean world were mixed with a generous portion of civic self-interest in the honorific cult in Thessalonica."<sup>11</sup> Hubbard also claims that 'divine titles and attributes were assigned to the emperors, "portraying him as the supreme world sovereign, bringer of peace, and inaugurator of a new age."<sup>12</sup> Such worship of individuals, along with other idols, characterized Thessalonians. Paul sought to reveal the true God to these idolatrous people by introducing the light of the Messiah to them. Upon arrival in the city, Paul interacted with Jews in their Synagogue, persuading them to accept Christ (Acts 17:2–3). Paul had to explain, and evidence Christ who suffered, died, and rose again from the dead (Acts 17:3). As a result, some Jews, God-fearing Greeks, and many women embraced the Gospel (Acts 17: 4). Malherbe elucidates the dominance of Gentiles among these converts. He points out,

The three groups mentioned as responding to his preaching are listed in an ascending order, which emphasizes the predominance of Gentiles among them. 'Some' of the Jews were persuaded by Paul, the indefinite pronoun in the series indicating [indicates] that they constituted the least significant of the three groups.<sup>13</sup>

Bruce also argues many converts were from among Gentiles who attended the synagogue, such as "ladies of good family, wives of leading citizens."<sup>14</sup> Gentiles grasped this opportunity together with a few women, and this conversion was the church's starting point in Thessalonica. Nevertheless, incredulous Jews were displeased by Paul and his companion Silas and their gospel and, therefore, opposed them. Jews accused them of undermining Caesar's

<sup>8</sup> Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Gene L. Green, "Macedonia," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, eds. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 540–41. See also Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 171–2; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul, the Missionary: Realities, Strategies, and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic 2008), 127.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety*, Foundations and Facets (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 126.

<sup>11</sup> Jewett points out that in this city, the presence of shrines built in honor of Zeus, Aphrodite, Demeter, and Asclepius deities along with other mysterious cults was seen as well. See Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 126. See also Karl P. Donfried. "The Cults of Thessalonica and the Thessalonian Correspondence," *NTS* 31 (1985), 336–56; David B. Capes, Rodney Reeves, and E. Randolph Richards, *Rediscovering Paul: An Introduction to His World, Letters, and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 126.

<sup>12</sup> Moyer V. Hubbard, *Christianity in the Greco-Roman World: A Narrative Introduction* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 150.

<sup>13</sup> Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 57; See also Capes, *Rediscovering Paul*, 126.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, xxii.

authority. Bruce points out that “evidently the proclamation of another emperor was the most serious respect in which the missionaries were accused of contravening the decrees of Caesar.”<sup>15</sup>

These emperors were known as arrogant and proud, and contravening their decrees could result in severe punishments. One can suggest that the present accusations were grounded in jealousy against Paul. Malherbe pens, “The Jews are jealous of Paul’s success among persons of high standing, and with the aid of low-class folk from the marketplace, they start a process that ultimately leads to Paul’s being run out of town.”<sup>16</sup> It can be implied that Jews losing the populace instigated envy and hatred against these missionaries and, therefore, sought to accuse and imprison them (Acts 17: 5). Conversely, the Jews’ antagonism did not prevent the gospel from impregnating its corners. Shogren argues that Gentiles “have been converted from full paganism with no stopover in the synagogue system.”<sup>17</sup> This radical conversion enabled them to stand firm on the truth they had been taught (1 Thess 1:9–10).

### The Immediate Context of 1 Thess 5:16–22

Paul’s emphasis on joy and prayer in the first instance might have been caused by the philosophy of Romans, which this city inherited from the Greeks. While the Bible emphasized that people should be glad and joyful (Luke 6:23; 10:20; Rom 12:12), “Plato or the Stoics considered emotions to be diseases of the soul, which had to be eradicated from life.”<sup>18</sup> Paul, however, underscored that joy must characterize these newly converted Christians. He mentions elsewhere that “joy” is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22) and that every believer needs to possess it.

Paul points out that gladness must be manifest in their way of living as it did when they received the gospel (1 Thess 1:6), the good news of salvation, though in “great affliction.” In addition, the emphasis on giving thanksgiving and praying constantly might have connotations with what they usually did toward their idols (either humans or handmade ones). They would address their prayers and thanksgiving toward them.<sup>19</sup> Since the city itself was the capital of Macedonia, situated at the shore, which favored the smooth running of businesses,<sup>20</sup> it is highly probable that it was crowded with people of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. It could be the reason he underlines that they must not quench the spirit and abstain from every form of evil (1 Thess 5:19, 22). Additionally, since they no longer worship idols, the prayer, thanksgiving, and the rejoice must be directed to God. To practice such behavior required to have the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:5). Further, 1 Thess 5:16–22 is situated in the context of Parousia. Having the spirit of enthusiasm characterized by joy, prayer, and thanksgiving and allowing the

<sup>15</sup> Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, xxiv.

<sup>16</sup> Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 57. Holmes also argues that “on one hand, the synagogue would have been upset by the loss of members to a new cult. On the other hand, the conversion of leading women of the community inevitably brought the cult to the notice of civic leaders, to whom the proclamation of an alternative emperor (Jesus as the messianic King) would have sounded more than a little seditious” (Michael W. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NIVAC 52, 53 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998], 20).

<sup>17</sup> Gary Steven Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 23.

<sup>18</sup> Dariusz Iwański, “‘Rejoice Therapy’: Creating and Shaping ‘Joy’ according to St. Paul of Tarsus,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 62 (2023): 53.

<sup>19</sup> On the plurality of idols in the city of Thessalonica, see Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 234–36. See also Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 38, 41–42.

<sup>20</sup> Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 2–4.

Holy Spirit to act in their lives would firm their hope. The Spirit would strengthen their faith and cause them to stay loyal to the gospel they received.

### Structure

1 Thessalonians 5:16–22 is mainly made of a series of imperatives which contain the author’s argument. The following is an attempt structure which follows the author’s development of thought:

Rejoice always  
 Pray without ceasing  
 Give thanks in everything  
     For this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus  
 Do not quench the Spirit  
 Do not utterly reject prophecies  
     But examine everything  
     Hold firmly to that which is good  
     Abstain from every form of evil.

The structure exhibits some essential elements. It starts with three affirmative imperatives followed by two negative commands and ends with three affirmative imperatives—though the last has an implied negation. The author appears to emphasize the two negative commands. The deliberative choice of using the negative way of saying implies that he likely wanted to underscore their significance.

### Textual Analysis

Reading 1 Thess 5:12–22 signals that Paul is concerned about the ethical behaviors of Thessalonians. The text demonstrates that vv. 12 to 15 is an exhortation and a command for the body of Thessalonian Christians to care for their ministers and neighbors—but vv. 16 to 22 (<sup>16</sup>πάντοτε χαίρετε, <sup>17</sup> ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε, <sup>18</sup> ἐν παντί εὐχαριστεῖτε· τοῦτο γὰρ θέλημα θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς. <sup>19</sup> τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε, <sup>20</sup> προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε· <sup>21</sup> πάντα

δὲ δοκιμάζετε, τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε,<sup>22</sup> ἀπὸ παντὸς εἴδους πονηροῦ ἀπέχεσθε) signal more that it addresses everyone personally in the Christian community. Shogren remarks that the first part concerns the interpersonal relationship, while the second is the vertical relationship (people and God).<sup>21</sup> The texts under analysis start with the following command: Πάντοτε χαίρετε. The adverb Πάντοτε from the word πᾶς means “always, at all times,” and functions as an adverb of time.<sup>22</sup> It is used together with the imperative χαίρετε (2<sup>nd</sup> pers. Plur). The present verb is a conjugated form of the verb χαίρω, which means “to enjoy a state of happiness and well-being— ‘to rejoice, to be glad.’”<sup>23</sup> The command of being happy is no less important than it can appear to be at first sight. The adverb πάντοτε portrays that the apostle Paul does not limit a set time of being glad. Instead, it denotes a continuous attitude and state of being joyful.

<sup>21</sup> Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 225.

<sup>22</sup> BDAG 755. s.v. Πάντοτε.

<sup>23</sup> J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed., (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 303. s.v. χαίρω.

Paul mentions this attitude of gladness at least six times throughout the Epistle. In 1 Thess 1:6, he opines that Thessalonians received the word in the days of affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Thess 2:19–20, he references it twice that these believers are their joy and “crown of pride” at Christ’s advent. In 1 Thess 3:9, he underscores that there is no way to express their gratitude to God for how they are joyful because of Thessalonian Christians. Finally, he commands them in return that they need to always rejoice (1 Thess 5:16). Ceslas Spicq argues that joy was a distinctive marker of Judeo-Christian that contrasted “the pessimism and despair of first-century paganism.”<sup>24</sup> Since many of these Christians had a gentile background, manifesting joy and gladness in their daily lives could likely impact their surroundings.

The emphasis on gladness to the believers is not exclusive to the NT; the OT similarly does as well. God himself required the Israelites to be joyful (Deut 12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11) and serve him with gladness (Deut 28:47). Anderson contends that the command of being happy to Israel was a “legal obligation.”<sup>25</sup> The Psalmists emphasize the same in Ps 32:11, and God is portrayed as the source of joy (Ps 66:1, Cf. John 15:11). Quidet states, “A thankful heart is a happy heart.”<sup>26</sup> In addition, it might be that apostle Paul is highlighting this notion of joy due to the afflictions these Thessalonians were facing (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14–15). Fee posits that Paul speaks of a church facing significant adversity due to its allegiance to Christ.<sup>27</sup> This joy would help them to endure those sufferings with the hope of seeing Christ’s second coming (1 Thess 3:13).

The second imperative that Paul articulates is ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε. The present clause syntactically resembles the previous as it starts with the adverb, in this case, ἀδιαλείπτως, and ends with an imperative προσεύχεσθε. The adverb ἀδιαλείπτως means “constantly, unceasingly.”<sup>28</sup> Paul also uses it to point out that they constantly remember the Thessalonians’ work of faith (1 Thess 1:3) and continually thank God for how Thessalonians received the word (1 Thess 2:13). However, in 1 Thess 5:17, the adverb is used with the verb προσεύχεσθε (2<sup>nd</sup> masc. plur. middle/passive) to denote how these newly established Christians must pray. They are to pray constantly. Paul has argued before that he, along with Silvanus and Timothy, keep them in prayer (1 Thess 1:2). He also mentions that he prayed day and night to see them and strengthen their faith (1 Thess 3:10). Paul requests these Christians to pray for them as well (1 Thess 5:25). In addition, Paul might have underlined the “constant prayer” due to the social-cultural milieu that these Christians were living in. The city was idolatrous. Since they were newly converted to Christianity, they would likely return to their old pagan habits. The reference to Satan as a tempter (1 Thess 3:5) and the evil practices such as sexual immorality (1 Thess 4:3), lustful passions (1 Thess 4:5), taking advantage of someone else (1 Thess 4:6), and impurity (1 Thess 4:7) indicate the status of the city. The way they could withstand such temptations was to persevere in prayer and rely on the word of God they embraced (1 Thess 2:13). Fee argues that “continual prayer is the ongoing reminder that God’s children are always and always wholly

<sup>24</sup> Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3: 498. s.v. Χαρά.

<sup>25</sup> Gary A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 14.

<sup>26</sup> Carlito P. Quidet, Jr., “Pursuing Happiness,” *Health & Home* 64 (January-February 2023): 5.

<sup>27</sup> Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 214.

<sup>28</sup> BDAG 20. s.v. ἀδιαλείπτως.

dependent on their heavenly Father in all things.”<sup>29</sup> Paul’s use of the imperative suggests that prayer was deemed the sole means of resisting temptation

Paul underscores the importance of prayer in anticipation of the second coming of Christ, which he characterizes as imminent and unexpected (1 Thess 3:13; 5:2-3). He exhorts the Thessalonians to remain vigilant and sober (1 Thess 5:6, 8), advocating for developing a persistent prayer practice (1 Thess 5:7). Such a discipline would not only support their efforts to lead a sanctified life amidst the pervasive pagan influences but also reinforce their fidelity to Christ while awaiting His revelation.

The third imperative Paul mentions is ἐν παντί εὐχαριστεῖτε. Now Paul uses an adjectival prepositional phrase ἐν παντί with the imperative εὐχαριστεῖτε. The adjective παντί from πᾶς can have a number of usages, but in this context, it holds its standard meaning, which is “all, every, everything.”<sup>30</sup> The use of the preposition ἐν together with the dative παντί may function as a “temporal dative.”<sup>31</sup> Paul uses the verb εὐχαριστέω in the prologue, expressing gratitude to God because of the Thessalonians’ love, their work of faith, and perseverance of hope in Jesus Christ (1 Thess 1:2–3). He also mentions that he does give thanks to God due to the enthusiasm they manifested in receiving the word of God (1 Thess 2:13). However, in 1 Thess 5:18, he uses it in a different context. He commands them to give gratitude to God in everything. The fact that the verb is used with ἐν παντί—a temporal dative—may refer to every situation, either good or bad, they may go through.<sup>32</sup> In other words, they must find reasons to praise God in every circumstance. The current instructions are linked to the previous directive to pray continuously, emphasizing the expression of gratitude through prayer, which aligns with God’s will.

The present imperatival clause, ἐν παντί εὐχαριστεῖτε, is subordinated by another clause, τοῦτο γὰρ θέλημα θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς (which literally means, for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ for you) which is introduced by the particle γὰρ. Runge points out that “the information introduced [by γὰρ] does not advance the discourse but adds background information that strengthens or supports what precedes.”<sup>33</sup> That is, the statement above supports the idea of giving thanks. Paul stresses that render thanksgiving is θέλημα θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ εἰς ὑμᾶς. When they express gratitude in every circumstance, they accomplish the will of God.

The fourth imperative Paul uses is τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε. The present imperatival clause differs from the preceding clauses, as it is expressed in a negative form. The accusative τὸ πνεῦμα functions as the direct object of the verb μὴ σβέννυτε. The word πνεῦμα can have a wide range of meanings, such as “wind, breath, life, soul, and Spirit.”<sup>34</sup> However, the context of 1 Thess 5:19 indicates that the word πνεῦμα refers to the “Holy Spirit.”<sup>35</sup> In addition, the verb

<sup>29</sup> Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 215.

<sup>30</sup> BDAG 782–84. s.v. πᾶς.

<sup>31</sup> For the use of the temporal dative see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 372.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce argues, “To ‘pray without ceasing’ does not mean that every other activity must be dropped for the sake of prayer but that every activity must be carried on in a spirit of prayer which is the spontaneous outcome of a sense of God’s presence.” See Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 127.

<sup>33</sup> Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 52. See also A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919), 1190.

<sup>34</sup> Schweizer, “πνεῦμα,” *TDNT* 6:335–36.

<sup>35</sup> Ceslas Spicq and Ernest remark that the fact that the word πνεῦμα is in singular refers to the Holy Spirit. They posit: “the singular *to pneuma* points not to the charismatics but to the person of the Holy Spirit, or better the

μὴ σβέννυτε (2<sup>nd</sup> pers. Plur., from the verb σβέννυμι) means to “extinguish, quench.”<sup>36</sup> BDAG also argues that it can mean “to cause an action, state, or faculty to cease to function or exist, put out, stifle, or suppress.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the context in which the verb is used and the fact that it is utilized with the negative particle μὴ might be referring to the prohibition to the Thessalonians not to put out the work of the Holy Spirit in them and among them.

The fifth imperative is προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε. The present clause holds the same syntactical construction as the previous one, i.e., accusative + μὴ + imperative. The verb ἐξουθενεῖτε (a conjugated form of the verb ἐξουθενέω, which means “to have no use for something as being beneath one’s consideration, reject disdainfully”)<sup>38</sup> commands Thessalonian Christians not to reject disdainfully προφητείας (prophecies). But which prophecies does Paul refer to? I will come back to this question in the subsequent sections. In addition, Paul argues that they should, on the contrary, examine them and retain what is good. To do so, he introduces the clause πάντα δὲ δοκιμάζετε, τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε with the connective particle δὲ. Runge says that the connective “δὲ is a coordinating conjunction like καὶ, but it includes the added constraint of signaling a new development.”<sup>39</sup> BDAG also points out that this particle connects “one clause to another, either to express contrast or simple continuation.”<sup>40</sup> In the present context, the particle adds a new development to the previous clause with a contrastive idea.

The verb δοκιμάζετε (an imperative form of the verb δοκιμάζω) means “to determine genuineness.”<sup>41</sup> The adjective πάντα (every, all) might be referring to (or modifying) the noun προφητείας, given that both are in the accusative plural. Bruce claims that “the distinguishing of genuine from counterfeit coinage is a good figure of speech for distinguishing true from false prophecy—or any other kind of religious teaching.”<sup>42</sup> Once the examination is done, they, therefore, need to κατέχετε (hold to)<sup>43</sup> what is καλὸν (good).

Finally, the last imperative is ἀπέχεσθε (2<sup>nd</sup> pers. Plur. Middle), which is used in the present prepositional clause ἀπὸ παντὸς εἴδους πονηροῦ ἀπέχεσθε. The verb is a conjugated form of ἀπέχω, which means to “remain distant, abstain.”<sup>44</sup> The fact that the author chose to place it at the end of the clause may portray the emphasis he places on it. Additionally, the preposition ἀπὸ + the genitive elucidates this abstention well. Wallace argues that the preposition ἀπὸ sets forth the idea of “separation from.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, they were to remain distant from every form of evil.<sup>46</sup> This resistance could manifest their total acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Holy Spirit’s inspiration, which is like a shining and burning flame.” See Ceslas Spicq and Ernest, *TLNT* 3:243. s.v. σβέννυμι.

<sup>36</sup> Ceslas Spicq and Ernest, *TLNT* 3:242. s.v. σβέννυμι.

<sup>37</sup> BDAG, 917. s.v. σβέννυμι.

<sup>38</sup> BDAG 352. s.v. ἐξουθενέω.

<sup>39</sup> Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> BDAG 213. s.v. δὲ.

<sup>41</sup> BDAG 213. s.v. δοκιμάζω.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 127.

<sup>43</sup> Ceslas Spicq and Ernest, *TLNT* 2:285. s.v. κατέχω.

<sup>44</sup> Ceslas Spicq and Ernest, *TLNT* 1:162. s.v. ἀπέχω.

<sup>45</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 368.

<sup>46</sup> Holmes argues that the phrase “from every form of evil” “would refer to questionable charismatic activity” (Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 272). Green holds a balanced view regarding the rendering of the present phrase of whether it should be taken as referring to either “abstain from the false prophetic revelation/utterances,” or



## Τὸ Πνεῦμα μὴ Σβέννυτε

As mentioned earlier, τὸ πνεῦμα μὴ σβέννυτε translates to “do not quench the Spirit.” The prohibition of not quenching the Spirit carries significance.<sup>47</sup> Since the verb σβέννυμι indicates the idea of extinguishing or putting out something such as fire, lamp, etc.,<sup>48</sup> being used with the noun πνεῦμα might refer to His work in a given individual life. In fact, the Spirit is often associated with fire. For instance, on Pentecostal day, the disciples received the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire (Acts 2:3), and the prophet Isaiah refers to Him as a Spirit of burning (Isa 4:4).

Paul in 1 Thessalonians refers to the Holy Spirit three times. He refers to Him speaking of these Christians that they accepted the word of God with “the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:6). He also mentions Him together with God in connection with sanctification (1 Thess 4:7–8); the text says: “For God has not called us for impurity, but in sanctification. Therefore, the one who rejects *this* is not rejecting man, but God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”<sup>49</sup> Finally, Paul talks about the Holy Spirit here in 1 Thess 5:19. In the context of 1 Thess 5:19, Paul mentions Him after he has commended them to rejoice, pray, and give thanks continuously. He then states that by doing that, they align themselves with the will of God (1 Thess 5:18). Thus, one can infer that accomplishing the above commands required the help of the Holy Ghost, which is why he emphasizes not to quench Him. In addition, Richard posits that the imperative present commands someone to continue an action that he/she was already doing.<sup>50</sup> As such, since the command in view here is negative, it implies that they have already started quenching the Spirit, and now he commands them to stop such attitude but kindle Him instead and let Him act in their midst.<sup>51</sup> He likely envisaged to stress that they needed to keep Him burning/acting in their lives, which could strengthen their faith.

Moreover, possessing the Holy Spirit was significant considering the environment in which the Thessalonian believers resided (1 Thess 3:5). Living in a setting where the inhabitants worshiped idols (1 Thess 1:9) and practiced immoral behaviors could impact their spirituality and, therefore, not work for the salvation of their fellow. By emphasizing the idea of not putting out the Holy Spirit, Paul might want to underscore what he has referred to earlier in 1 Thess 4:7–

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to a broader view of ethical dimensions. But he seems to favor the former than the latter. See Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 265–66. On the other hand, The SDABC points out that Paul “recognizes that ‘evil’ appears in many guises, and he warns his converts against all the many forms in which it masquerades” (“Appearance” [1 Thess 5:22], *SDABC* 7:256). I believe Paul had in mind both views. BDAG points out that the noun εἶδος can mean “a variety of something, kind” (BDAG, 280. s.v. εἶδος). Green also mentions that “frequently [the noun] is found alongside the words *every* [πᾶς], and in these contexts it means *every kind*” (Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 265). In addition, given the setting in which these Thessalonian Christians were, the warnings that are present in the latter, and the usage of the word *every kind* might suggest that Paul might have been referring to abstain from wrong prophecies and from every kind, form, or manifestation of evil.

<sup>47</sup> Wallace stresses that the “the imperative is commonly used to forbid an action.... μὴ (or a cognate) is used before the imperative to turn the command into a prohibition.” See Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 487.

<sup>48</sup> BDAG 917. s.v. σβέννυμι.

<sup>49</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible passages are taken from the New American Standard Version (NASB).

<sup>50</sup> W. Larry Richards, *Read New Testament Greek in 30 Days (or Less)* (Berrien Springs, MI: Breakthrough Books, 2006), 91–93.

<sup>51</sup> Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 183. See also Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 125.

8. Quenching the Spirit could result in being impure by indulging in evil passions, and the sanctification he advocates could not take place. That sanctification comes from God, who gives them the Holy Spirit. Thus, the constant dependence on the Holy Spirit was significant in maturing their ethical behavior and their faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>52</sup> It also might be “that the Thessalonian church had been cooling the ardor of some of its number who had been exercising spiritual gifts” and that Paul is against such practice.<sup>53</sup> The Spirit of the Lord has been at work since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and was still moving His people to edify the church (1 Cor 14:3).

### Προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε

The sentence προφητείας μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτε translates, “Do not despise prophecies.” Which prophecies is Paul talking about? First, it is worth noting that the present prohibitive imperative is related to the previous clause, refraining them not to quench the Spirit. Second, the present imperative also elaborates on it. The Spirit of prophesying was still visible in early Christianity, as Luke points out in Acts 11:28; 15:32; 21:8–11. Thus, it is likely that Paul commanded these Christians not to reject prophecies from prophets among them with contempt. Fee opines that in Thessalonica, there might have been a tendency to value more “spectacular gifts” than “prophecy,” which resulted in “the warning that prophecy must not be depreciated but heard with respect due to the Spirit whose voice communicated through the prophet.”<sup>54</sup>

Speaking on the plural form of the word προφητείας, Frame argues that the plural is envisaged due to “prophecy has many forms of expression or because individual cases are in mind.”<sup>55</sup> Malherbe contends that by using the plural, Paul “has in mind prophetic utterances.”<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, others argue that Paul referred to the gifts of prophecy and, thus, the gifts of the Spirit.<sup>57</sup> Considering the context of the text, vv. 21–22 denotes that the apostle Paul refers to both prophetic utterances and spiritual gifts. The prohibition in the plural might also refer to every word that might come to them as if it were authoritative. These texts point out that Thessalonian Christians ought to examine all, including the prophecies mentioned in v. 20, and retain what is good. This plurality can probably be seen in 2 Thess 2:2, where Paul points out that Thessalonians shouldn’t be disturbed by either a manifestation of a spirit, message or a letter that appears to come from them. They ought to be sober and not be deceived in any way (2 Thess 2:3). Bruce avers that Paul referring to the λόγος (word, message) in 2 Thess 2:2 may denote “a nonecstatic spoken word, which might be a word of apostolic authority (as in v 15) or a word of

<sup>52</sup> White stresses that “men have the power to quench the Spirit of God; the power of choosing is left with them. They are allowed freedom of action. They may be obedient through the name and grace of our redeemer, or they may be disobedient, and realize the consequences.” See Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol 3 (Boise, Idaho, Ontario: Pacific Press 1948), 428. For the ethical dimension of this text, see also Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Sacra Pagina Series 11 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 279.

<sup>53</sup> “Quench,” [1 Thess 5:19], *SDABC* 7:255–56; Ceslas Spicq and Ernest, *TLNT* 3:243. s.v. σβέννυμι; Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); 219–20; Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 125.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 125.

<sup>55</sup> Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, 206.

<sup>56</sup> Malherbe argues that “by *prophēteia* Paul mean the gift of prophecy (as in 1 Cor 12:10; 13:2),” but the plural denotes prophetic words (1 Cor 14:6, 22). See Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 332. See also Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 226; Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 184; Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 125.

<sup>57</sup> Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 262–63; “Prophecysings,” [1 Thess 5:20], *SDABC* 7: 256.

spiritual wisdom (as in 1 Cor 12:8) or a word lacking either authority or wisdom. Again, discrimination on the hearer's part was called for."<sup>58</sup>

They were to be like Bereans in scrupulously examining everything (Acts 17:11) and holding on to what is accurate (1 Thess 5:21). Thus, by having a constant spirit of discernment, which they would acquire from the Holy Spirit, these Christians would be prepared for distinguishing the true from the false.<sup>59</sup> They would also hope for parousia, which he (Paul) alludes to in 1 Thess 5:1–11. Therefore, the phrase “do not despise disdainfully prophecies” could be a command to be sober in examining them and retain what is good.

### **Theological Implications**

The present section deals with the theological implications highlighted by the texts analyzed above. It discusses God as the source of joyfulness, the relevance of prayer, and the evil and the evil One. The role of the Holy Spirit, resistance from false prophecies, and the ways to abstain from temptations.

#### ***God: The Source of Joy***

Paul stresses that joy is a requirement, not an option. The command to the Thessalonians to ‘rejoice always’ highlights the weight Paul places on it. They are to rejoice in all situations. Since these Christians were facing suffering from their people (1 Thess 2:14), the comfort that would relieve their burdens would come from the joy that God provides.<sup>60</sup> Morrice stresses that the Thessalonians’ joy “was inspired by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>61</sup> They received the gospel with gladness of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:6). The same Spirit would compel them to rejoice even when the situation does not permit that. In addition, Paul elsewhere mentions that Christians have to rejoice in the Lord (Phil 4:4).

Joy also gives the hope of the future. Looking at the broader picture of 1 Thess 5, it is likely that Paul stresses that this gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22) must characterize those who await Christ's return. The SDABC points out that “whether from possession of present good or anticipation of future happiness, the Christian has abundant reason for rejoicing.”<sup>62</sup> The expectation of Christ's return instills joy in the Christian's heart and anticipates the future gladness that God establishes. Thus, this hope gives reasons for Thessalonians to ‘rejoice always.’”

#### ***Relevance of Prayer***

After Paul has commanded the Thessalonians to be glad always, he stresses that they are also to ‘pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess 5:17). As argued earlier, prayer was the way which could render them sober (1 Thess 5:6) and live a life that pleases God (1 Thess 4:1). It is through prayer that one develops an intimate relationship with God. It is through it that spiritual growth

<sup>58</sup> Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 164.

<sup>59</sup> 2 Thess 2:1–2 portrays that these false prophecies were already present in the church. They were teaching that the coming of the Lord has already come. Paul corrects such false teachings throughout 2 Thess 2.

<sup>60</sup> Holmes argues that “though the basis for joy is not indicated here, the earlier references in the letter to joy (1:6; 2:19–20; 3:9) make it clear that the basis is God's activity and work among his people” (Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 182).

<sup>61</sup> William G. Morrice, *Joy in the New Testament* (Greenwood, S.C: Paternoster Press, 1984), 73.

<sup>62</sup> “Rejoice evermore,” [1 Thess 5:16], *SDABC* 7:255.

takes place. Richard avers that “the audience is exhorted to adopt prayer as a conscious, continuous state of mind.”<sup>63</sup> When this attitude of prayer is cultivated and cherished, the conscious transformation occurs. Prayer disassociates the mind from evil thoughts and allows the Holy Spirit to indwell one’s mind and heart.

Paul emphasizes this attitude of prayer across his letters. The present command he gave to the Thessalonians, he also did to the Ephesians. He also urges them to pray always in the Spirit (Eph 6:18). It is through prayer that the supplications are made known to God (Phil 4:6), and God guarantees to hear a faithful prayer (1 Pet 3:12). Through it, the Spirit of God is sought, and then only by Him, one can be able to do His will (1 Thess 4:8).

### ***Evil and the Evil One***

The command to abstain from every form of evil requires a constant dependence on God. The generic adjective “every” denotes that nothing has to be underestimated, but rather, everything must be weighed and evil forsaken. Since evil comes from the evil one, seeking God’s power through prayer and thanksgiving is the way to shutter Satan’s temptations. Paul guarantees his readers that God will protect them from the evil one (2 Thess 3:3). The devil prompts God’s people to be disloyal to Him and to forget their obligations. The remedy to withstand the sin and its instigator is developing a constant and intimate relationship with God. Once these bonds are established, one is guaranteed victory over the evil and the evil one, and abstinence from them becomes possible.

### ***Role of the Holy Spirit***

The Holy Spirit is significant in the life of a believer as an individual but also is important in facilitating the church’s growth. As Paul emphasizes to the Thessalonians, contemporary believers must not quench the Holy Spirit if they do not envisage being vulnerable to Satan’s prey. It is salient to remember that the church is formed by individuals. When the believers fail to develop spiritually, so is the church. Additionally, the Holy Spirit sanctifies His people to prepare them for a mission. In fact, Paul awns the Thessalonians not to despise God who gives His Holy Spirit to them (1 Thess 4:9). Richard notes that the ones prepared to witness become “agents of a God who chooses, calls to a life of holiness, and gives the Spirit as the dynamism of the quest for salvation.”<sup>64</sup> The Holy Spirit empowers believers to be steadfast ambassadors of Christ, enabling them to transcend fear and endure suffering and hardships. Through fervent prayer, those who earnestly seek the Spirit of God are endowed with strength and resilience.

### ***Combat the False Prophecies***

The command of evaluating prophecies indicates that in Paul’s time, this threat was prevalent in Thessalonica. Such warning is significant in this post-modern era. Today, the plurality of prophecies from various prophets are frequent in Christendom. In fact, it has become a tool for the evil one to distract people and not to pay attention to the Scriptures. For instance, it

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<sup>63</sup> Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 271.

<sup>64</sup> Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 289.

is unsurprising to hear the prosperity gospel in Africa.<sup>65</sup> Such teachings claim that true faith brings blessings in nature, visible and palpable.<sup>66</sup> This kind of teaching is evident around the world in Christendom. It is often associated with prophecies which claim allegiance to the truth of the Bible. It is, therefore, imperative to combat these wrong prophecies using the truth of the Scriptures.

Nevertheless, the identification of such prophecies may not be as lenient as it may seem to be. This is because the devil uses different cunning strategies, mixing the truth with errors. As previously indicated, establishing a consistent rapport with the Holy Spirit is the only way to discover such false teachings. Being the ultimate guide (John 16:13) and helper (John 14:16–17), the Holy Spirit will provide guidance towards the truth.

### Conclusion

The quenching of the Spirit and examination of prophecies are two key underlying concepts in 1 Thessalonians. As argued earlier, Thessalonians Christians needed to constantly seek the Holy Spirit and let Him direct their way of thinking and acting in order to overcome temptations from the devil. This search for the Spirit was relevant because of the geographical and political setting they were living in. It was effortless to be influenced by pagans' behaviors, considering that they had a gentile background. The Spirit was needed to burn in their hearts and in their midst as a congregation. In addition, this Spirit would enable them to test and distinguish false prophecies in order to cling and hold on to what is accurate. This command implies that this manifestation of false prophecies was being propagated in Thessalonica. Thus, Paul felt the need to address them. The Spirit would help them search for daily sanctification from God (1 Thess 4:7–8). He also urged them to foster the habit of prayer and thanksgiving. As such, the same commands are relevant in the present Christendom. Prophecies of various forms are frequent. The need for the Holy Spirit and a constant relationship with Him is imperative if believers envisage being loyal to God. Once the above elements and the Spirit of prayer, thanksgiving, and study of the Scriptures are sought, spiritual growth occurs at the individual level, extending to the corporate one: the church. With this attitude, the withstanding against temptation and deception is possible.

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<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth W. Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Carlisle, United Kingdom: HippoBooks, 2019), 201.

<sup>66</sup> Mburu, *African Hermeneutics*, 201–2.

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