

God above and God within

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to our studies in 1 Thessalonians. And we look this evening at 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and the verses 16 to 22.

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the spirit. Despise not prophesying.

Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. As we turn to God's word week by week, we must be very careful that we are not tempted into treating the word of God as ordinary because we become so familiar with it.

Rather, every time we come to the word of God, we ought to grow in the conviction that this book that has been written down by men is God's word.

breathed out by his spirit so that every word of it in its original is the word of God.

[1 : 25] And that's what we handle. And we must be careful and reverent. Perhaps a passage like this helps us to see how although written down by men and not sidestepping their personalities and their backgrounds, the different writers of the different books, yet it remains always the word of God.

And just as often some of ourselves do at the end of a letter, we rush to just give some final little words towards the end. And that's just the way with Paul here. There are a number of things that crowd into his mind as he is coming to conclude his letter. There are a number of final instructions that he wants to just write down quite quickly and quite briefly and quite briefly. And we have them here.

And the very way that they are recorded for us from Paul's pen, it makes very clear to us that he is quickly and finally jotting down some final instructions for the Christians in Thessalonica.

But even there, we can see that there is an order. And there is a very suitable summing up of so much of what has already been said more extensively in the epistle.

There is such an order and a summing up that speaks of the Holy Spirit's hand and the Holy Spirit's mind penetrating it all.

[3 : 15] And what I think the Holy Spirit here through Paul is doing is he's summing up what is vital to the Christian believer in view of all the teaching that has already been expounded in the rest of the epistle.

If we were to try and sum up the epistle, we might say that what the Holy Spirit has been doing through Paul in this letter for Thessalonica and for all the church is that the Holy Spirit has been making all Christian believers aware that in this world they always live between eternity and eternity.

You may remember it was in the days that we were in Milburn when we were going through chapter 1 that we saw that right in the first chapter of Thessalonians Paul wanted to remind these young Christians they were only perhaps 18 months in the Christian life he wanted to remind them that when they were converted when they first turned to trust in Christ and to follow him that was the evidence to them of a work that God had really begun in eternity.

You'll remember how in chapter 1 and at verse 4 he says to them you've now got, you now know your election of God and you're going to be comforted by that all through your Christian life to know and to believe that your Christian experience really has its root in a past eternity before you were ever born when God graciously and mercifully chose you and set his heart upon you and he has never let you go and your conversion is the great evidence of that.

So that's the past eternity that is the context of your present Christian living and now of course we have been learning much more recently that the Holy Spirit through Paul also wanted them to learn they had learned some things already but they had got it a bit confused and so he goes over in chapter 4 and on into chapter 5 about the second coming of Jesus and how sure and certain it is

and what a blessing it is going to be for all true followers of Jesus.

[6 : 03] And so he is saying you see your life is fixed in eternity and you've got to see eternity past and eternity future if you are really going to understand the wonderful experience of being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the things that that consciousness of eternity will do is this it will give you a commitment commitment to all fellow believers. You will understand how you have been united with them for eternity that you are of the same family now if you are in Christ that is an eternal family and so as you prepare for the second coming you will become more and more committed to your fellow Christian believers and that is of course what we were dealing with last Sunday evening.

And what Paul is now really saying in these very brief statements as we bring them together he is saying this and you will also be conscious not only of your commitment to your fellow believers but you will be conscious of your convictions about God.

the reality of God and the reality of your relationship with God will become more and more the guiding principle of your life.

If you are a Christian who looks back to a past eternity who looks forward to the coming eternity your convictions about God will rule your life more and more.

[8 : 10] I think these brief statements can be divided into two two convictions about God. First of all Paul and the Holy Spirit say remember the sovereignty of God.

Rejoice evermore pray without ceasing in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. I think we can sum up that and say that what the Spirit is saying is remember the sovereignty of God.

God you see the instructions are given rejoice pray in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

In other words Paul is saying remember what we've learned remember the way we have seen just what your conversion has brought what your contact with Jesus has brought to you.

It has revealed to you you see God's good and sovereign will and you know that God's good and sovereign will is working for your good.

[9 : 41] That's what contact with Jesus brings to all believers. When we meet with Jesus when we come to know him as our saviour and our Lord when we recognise that he has died for us and that he has saved us from our sins we become aware that the whole sovereign will of God from eternity to eternity is working for our good.

We've mentioned it already we come to see that God's sovereign will was at work for our good in a past eternity when God made his great plans for the history of this world world the salvation of his people in Christ his electing them and his electing Jesus to die for them that was at the heart of all of his will and everything else was dab-tailed in so that that central thread would be unbroken from beginning to end and it's because of the assurance of that sovereign will of God that we can be so sure when we think about the second coming that we've been dealing with so often in recent weeks oh yes the second coming of of

Jesus is going to bring it's going to usher in the great day of judgment a fearful thought it's going to be a very terrifying day when the graves and the sea will give up its dead we're told it's going to be a day when we will see the power of God at work on a scale that we have never seen it before and of course in our creatureliness that makes us nervous that makes us fearful when we consider the wonderful and the things that we cannot understand that we know will happen because God has said it that we've been learning in these recent Sunday evenings that again for the people of God even if they go down to death before that day they can rest peacefully their bodies in the grave it will be like sleeping in

Jesus the Holy Spirit has told us why because this also is part of the sovereign goodwill of our God and we can consider it and we can consider all that has happened and we can consider all that will happen and if we are Christian believers we can bring our life into that context and then we can see the appropriateness of this first instruction rejoice evermore that doesn't mean that we will never weep Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus that doesn't mean that we will have no sorrows that we will have no hardships but it does mean that in every experience the

Christian believer has reason to maintain a joyful and hopeful and confident spirit within it doesn't mean that the Christian will never feel need it doesn't mean that the Christian will never have to face up to problems and perplexities and difficulties it doesn't mean that the Christian believer may sometimes reach a point in his thinking as he views the seen things of his experience when he or

she may feel surely life is too much for me that no matter how deep these experiences may be the Christian can pray without ceasing indeed the

[14 : 57] Christian must pray without ceasing there is reason you see when one considers the sovereign will of God and the great reason there is for rejoicing in the knowledge that God is for us in the knowledge that we are united with Christ and we can grow and develop and face the future positively then whatever difficulty whatever problem whatever perplexity well we pray and we don't stop praying and when we pray what we do is we give over ourselves and our situation to the Lord we come with our rejoicing heart we come and we remember that we are sure that God is for us and we give thanks for that and we rejoice in that that we have an anxiety we have a difficulty we have a perplexity perhaps there is someone here this evening a Christian believer and you couldn't begin to tell how deep and how nagging this problem and this perplexity is but you can bring it to the Lord and you can say to the

Lord I know that the context of my life is now a context for rejoicing evermore because I am yours you have made me your own and you have explained to me how the whole of your sovereign will is set out for my final good as it is for the final good of all your believing people and so I see what you have told me in another epistle in Philippians that I mustn't be anxious about anything but I must bring it to you in prayer with thanksgiving because I see the context I see that your will is for me but the difficulty is so immediate and it's so perplexing and it's so troubling but I'll keep bringing it to you Lord you must work

I don't quite know how it's going to be worked out but I have to keep committing it to you in prayer because if I try and work it out on my own the problem is only going to get worse I've got to remember your sovereign will and my greatest problem is that so often in my sinfulness I'm not inclined to your good and sovereign will so I must remember your command to pray without ceasing to deliver up every perplexity every difficulty every sadness every loss every worry to deliver it up to you so that you will work and so that you will work in me and so that it will be your work and not first and foremost my work because it's your will that is good and perfect and when the Christian believer sees that surely he will see also the importance of adding and in everything give thanks don't just have this deep inner well of joy but actually bring it to the surface even when you're praying without ceasing about perplexities and difficulties in everything give thanks

I don't think we're very good at that in our tradition I think we have to go perhaps especially to the charismatic tradition to see the value of following out in detail this instruction I think I've told you already about our experience over the last week our fortnight of having our friend Maria the cellist in the Scottish ballet staying with us Roman Catholic tradition with charismatic influence in these recent times and as we shared all sorts of problems together again and again she would say to Helen and I now you must give thanks you must give thanks and she would say it with a lovely smile and we were so often rebuked by her we might say that her theology was a little bit confused but I wonder really what right we have to say even that when the spirit of

God spoke through to our need to be bright as Christians oh yes we can't pretend that we don't have burdens we don't have problems that we have to work through because we're still in sin we're still imperfect but you see the context from eternity to eternity and every perplexity every difficulty every circumstance is set is cemented into that eternal context of hope that the Christian believer has so in everything we are to give thanks witness and that's the witness that our world needs in these days oh I'm not saying it will be the witness of some inane smile always on our faces but it should be the witness of a bright and cheerful and positive countenance because yes our faces are set to the real difficulties and problems of this world but our faces are bathed in the light that the gospel brings us the light that our saviour who loves us with an everlasting love is on the throne and has authority over everything so in everything we will give thanks and we will show it on our very faces we give thanks because in everything it's

[22 : 46] Jesus who has the final say the world needs such a witness people around us who don't know Jesus as their own saviour and lord they need that witness oh they may have very bright and cheerful faces but if they don't have Christ they are not facing up to the reality of their condition which would tell them that their future is absolutely hopeless except they find Jesus so that's the first thing that Paul says remember the sovereignty of God and then the second thing that he says in the second set of brief statements is this submit to the sovereignty of the

Holy Spirit remember the sovereignty of God perhaps particularly in the context the sovereignty of God the Father and submit to the sovereignty of the Spirit quench not the Spirit despise not

prophesying prove all things hold fast that which is good abstain from all appearance of evil you know there's a perfect balance here how often we see in the scriptures the perfect balance of doctrine in God's word you see when the believer grows in his conviction about God and we've seen that this is what this passage is about you see when we become Christians eternity has come into our lives as a real reality we are no longer the people of the world who can't think past this present world God has come and eternity has become real to us and our convictions of God grow and we are to think of God in two ways or perhaps I should say we are to think of God in two places if we are Christians we are to think of God above we have been dealing with that a little of his overruling sovereign will but we are to think also if we are followers of Jesus we are to think of God wonder of wonders within that's where God is tonight if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ the almighty sovereign God who is above is within he's in your very body the Bible says well of course it's difficult to understand that it's true because

God says it he says your body if you're a Christian believer and that's true of you if you feel that you're very weak as a Christian tonight it's still true the Holy Spirit indwells you he's made your body his home his temple now again the Holy Epistle has recognized this again and again it's focused on the great powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of his people again we had it in chapter one he encouraged the Thessalonians to go back to the time when they first turned to follow Jesus and he says what happened was that the word came to you in the power of the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit with all his power began to work in you with the word of

God that's why you were changed that's why there has become on your life a different pattern of living whether dramatically or slowly and gradually that's why you are now more inclined to seek to be conformed to God's word and to God's will the Holy Spirit has worked in his power and that's what gives you hope for the coming eternity because when that second coming of Jesus arrives it will be a day when the power of the Holy Spirit will be at work and he'll be working for you and he'll be working in you if you're a Christian for good and by his power your body will be raised from the grave if you have died by that time and although it went down into the grave in corruption it will rise in incorruption it will be a new body recreated reformed by the

[28 : 30] Spirit of God I cannot tell nor has he heard the things that the Holy Spirit will do on that day and you will find yourself being raised to meet the Lord in the air and you'll be forever with the Lord that's because of the work of the Holy Spirit who has been committed by God to you as a Christian believer for your good for the rest of eternity now if that's your condition if that's the truth about you as a Christian believer quench not the Spirit you see the Spirit is like fire that's one of the pictures that the Bible uses to help us to understand what the

Holy Spirit the third person of the Trinity what God the Spirit is like when he comes to work in the lives of his people well he works in the way that fire works it's spoken about for instance in Matthew chapter 3 by John the Baptist when Jesus comes John says he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire and in the very next verse he's talking about the day of judgment and he's also talking there about fire and he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire the Spirit is like fire in that way that when it comes I shouldn't say it I should say he when he comes he comes as fire to purify and to burn up all that is still within us that is sinful and that would be unworthy of our eternal destination in heaven that's why the

Spirit is there that's why he's within you that he might work as fire that he might sanctify you it may be slowly but it will be certainly and steadily until you're refined as fine gold and able on that last day to meet with Jesus face to face the fire having completed its work so quench not the Spirit don't put water on that work don't dampen it down how might we dampen it down well we might dampen it down by just not bothering you see we have been given minds to understand that's why these images are used by

God because although yes to know God exhaustively is beyond us yet there is so much that he can explain to us and here he is explaining and giving us the image of fire that we might understand that we might respond that we might see to it that this is the work that is to be done that we might be committed that we might be submitted under the Spirit as fire and that it might be our constant concern that sin is rooted and we are becoming more like Jesus by the power of the Spirit but if we don't bother if we never give our sanctification much thought then we are quenching the Spirit we may quench the

Spirit by unbelief we may quench the Spirit you see by saying oh yes I see what's required of me as a Christian I see the work of sanctification that is set before me but I'm too weak there is so much of

sin still dwelling with me you have no understanding of my besetting sins you see I've tried to follow that way but oh I've fallen again and again and again and I'll never really grow much more I'll always be battling I'll always be weak but well we'll just have to hope for the best no that's an argument that quenches the Holy Spirit that's an argument of unbelief I'm not saying but that all that you have said and all that you say to yourself and all that you say to

[34 : 00] God it's all true of course there's weakness with us of course we fall into the same sin again and again and again but we ought not you see it's only half the truth the other half of the truth is that the Holy Spirit of God is within us and he's powerful like fire is powerful and because he is within and because we are new men in Christ Jesus we can put off the old man more and more because our trust is not in ourselves and our own weakness that is still with us does not put us off because over and against it we have the power of the Holy Spirit of God and all that we think we can't do by his power as we submit to him as we trust in him as we remember that he has promised that when we are obedient he will enable us therefore we go forward in hope and then the other way of quenching the

Spirit and this is what Paul concentrates on the most we can quench the Spirit by neglecting the proclamation of the truth quench not the Spirit and then Paul adds despise not prophesying prove all things hold fast that which is good abstain from all appearance of evil you see the early church was living in the age when the word of God had not yet been completed and there were in their congregations gifts of prophesying that were given but there were those perhaps those who didn't have the gift of prophesying who thought that they knew better and no matter what prophecy came along they were despising it and Paul says despise not prophesying but rather prove it prove it from the scripture that you have and prove it by what it is commanding and what it produces is it in line with scripture and is it a word that would enable you to hold fast to that which is good and to abstain from all appearance of evil because the

Holy Spirit works through the word and the Holy Spirit works through proclaiming the word not the same need now for the prophesying that was still allowed in New Testament time we now have the whole canon of scripture there is nothing new to be added the scripture itself tells us but that word has to be told forth that word has to be preached that word has to be applied because this is the way that the spirit who is the spirit of truth works his fiery work in the lives of his people he comes particularly through the truth he comes first to convince the mind of what is the right way and what is the wrong way and then he works from the mind to the heart and to the will moving us forward in abstaining from all that is evil and in holding fast to what is good that is what can be proved from scripture to be

God's will now how is it with you how is it with me how do we find the word in these days do we always recognize it as the word that the Holy Spirit loves to use do we feel its power do we pray for its power do we notice it turning us from wrong things and moving to right things do you have a nagging conscience about something in your life tonight quench not the spirit how does that thought that attitude that omission from your life or that thing you are doing that is worrying you how does it fit in with

God's word spirit the spirit you see can enable you to turn from that appearance of evil and to hold on only to what is good we're going all of us from eternity to eternity are we moving forward are we moving forward under the authority of the Lord are we moving forward in the power of the Holy Spirit of God and remember Jesus is the contact point if you're feeling out of line with the

[40 : 24] Holy Spirit tonight as he would move the people of God forward to a blessed eternity if you're feeling out of touch with that spirit Christ is the contact point go to him he is the mediator he is God saviour he is the one who has the authority to give you the Holy Spirit of God Amen Amen music a vis us to