

The Messenger

COLDWATER CHURCH OF CHRIST

Mar. 27, 2011



"ABSTAIN FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL"

by Matthew Benfield

"Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

If one has been listening to preaching for any length of time the chances are that he or she has heard this quoted frequently. The most common usage of the verse is something like this: "If a thing looks evil one ought not to do it because the Bible says to abstain from even the appearance of evil." It is a wonderful suggestion to abstain from things which appear evil. It is certainly a good idea to protect one's influence and one does so by taking heed to the things which he or she does. The Bible is replete with verses that speak concerning the importance of a good name, the value of reputation, and the responsibility of protecting one's influence (cf. Proverbs 22:1; Ecclesiastes 7:1; 10:1; Matthew 5:13-16; Romans 12:17; 2 Corinthians 8:21). However, the question we want to ask is, "Is that the meaning of 'Abstain from all appearance of evil'?" Let's examine the passage in its context and ascertain its meaning.

Paul begins the passage with a REBUKE: "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings" (vs.19, 20).

On the outset this may appear to be a precautionary commandment, as if Paul is warning the Thessalonians not to begin quenching the Spirit. A closer look will reveal that this is actually a rebuke.

The Greek construction of these verses indicate that Paul was addressing a problem already present in the church at Thessalonica. The passage would be more properly rendered "Stop quenching the Spirit. Stop despising prophesyings." Can one cease a thing which one has not already begun? Of course not.

Now we ask, "What does it mean to 'quench the Spirit'?" This is an excellent example of parallelism. Parallelism is a literary device in which the writer says the same thing twice but in different words. The benefit of this is that the latter statement will interpret the former and vice versa. One "quenches the Spirit" by "despising prophesying."

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you... (1 John 1:5).

**VISITORS,
WELCOME!**

Sunday:

9:30 a.m. Bible Class

10:30 a.m. WORSHIP

5:00 p.m. WORSHIP

Wednesday:

7:00 p.m. Bible Class

We have Bible classes for
all ages & Pew Packers
on 1st & 3rd Sundays at
4:15 p.m.

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Let me explain further. Not only does Paul employ parallelism but he also employs a figure of speech called metonymy. There are many types of metonymy but we will only mention metonymy of the cause because it is the type used here. Metonymy literally means “a change of name” which hints at its function. In metonymy of the cause the cause is named while the effect is intended. One may ask, “Have you ever read Shakespeare?” That would be a foolish question were it taken literally. First of all, no one living has ever met William Shakespeare. Second, if anyone had met Shakespeare one could not read him. A person does not read people. A person reads writing. When one is asked if he or she has ever read Shakespeare that is understood to be referring to his writings. The cause (Shakespeare) is named when the effect (his writings) is intended. This is metonymy of the cause (cf. Luke 16:31, for more on metonymy see Hermeneutics, Dungan). During the first century the Holy Spirit inspired the preaching (prophesying is a reference to inspired preaching not necessarily predictions of the future) of men (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:8-11) and can therefore be said to have caused it. In this case Paul names the cause (the Spirit) when the effect (preaching) is intended. Therefore, by despising prophesying one quenches the Spirit. A good cross reference would be Stephen’s statement concerning his recalcitrant audience: “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). What had the people resisted? They had resisted the preaching of Stephen and therefore he could rightly say that they had resisted the Holy Spirit.

We also learn something about the character of the word of God from this verse. The word here translated “quench” is used eight other times in the New Testament. Every other time it is used it describes the flame of a fire being “quenched” or put out (cf. Matthew 12:20; 25:8; Mark 9:44, 46, 48; Ephesians 6:16; Hebrews 11:34). Why should its meaning be any different here? Jeremiah oft compared the word of God to a fire (cf. Jeremiah 5:14; 20:9; 23:29). The word of God is a fire that can set our hearts aflame if we would only allow it to work. One is not to despise preaching because the word of God is the power He uses to work in the hearts of men.

Paul now gives the REMEDY for one who despises preaching: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil” (vs.21, 22).

The Apostles were not the only ones preaching. There were false prophets even during this time (cf. Matthew 7:15; Acts 13:6; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1), not unlike today. One preacher says that in order to be saved all one must do is believe. Another preacher preaches that one has to believe but one also has to repent. Still another preacher says that one must have an “experience” in which one “receives the Spirit.” One preacher says that the church does not matter and another preaches that one must be a member of a church in order to go to heaven. With all of the confusion in the religious world it is easy to see how one could easily get “fed up” with religion and begin to “despise” preaching. What is a person to do? The only way to remove such frustration is to get rid of the confusion. One does that by proving all things.

The same word translated “prove” is translated “examine” in 1 Corinthians 11:28. This word was often used to describe the melting of metals and ores in order to separate the substance from the impurities. The Thessalonians were commanded to do just that with the preaching that they heard. They were to submit all preaching to the fire of God’s word (even Paul’s preaching...

...was examined, Acts 17:11). When that is done all preaching will fall into one of two categories: good or evil.

These two words have reference to the truthfulness of the preaching. The word here translated “good” has reference to a thing’s quality, not necessarily its appeal. This is the same word used by Jesus in His warning against false prophets: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:15-20). Can there be any question as to what the “good fruit” refers in this passage? It is obviously true doctrine. Preaching is considered “good” in its quality when it is found to be true and “evil” when it is proven to be false.

Paul then indicates a RESPONSIBILITY that the Thessalonians had to all preaching: “Hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil” (vs.21b, 22).

If the preaching to which they were listening was determined to be true then they were to “hold fast” to it and if it were false they were to “abstain” from it.

Hold fast is translated “keep” in Luke 8:15. There the result of “keeping” the word was bringing forth fruit. Therefore “keeping” the word refers to one’s obeying that word.

There is an interesting play on words here. The words translated “hold fast” and “abstain” share the same root word with different prefixes attached. The root word is one that is commonly translated “to have” or “to keep.” Abstain is in the middle voice which means that it is something done to or for one’s self. So whereas they were to “keep” sound doctrine they were to “keep themselves away” from false doctrine.

CONCLUSION:

Refraining from doing things that appear evil is a good principle by which to live, but hopefully we have shown here that such is not the meaning of “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” It does however give us great instruction concerning the proper response to false doctrine. Let us test all preaching with the fire of God’s word, obey the truth, and reject error.

Sermon Review

BEHOLD, I THOUGHT...

(2 Kings 5)

- I. I COULD WORSHIP ANY WAY THAT I WANT.
- II. I COULD MISS SERVICES ANY TIME I WANT.
- III. I COULD BE SAVED WITHOUT BAPTISM.

THE NARROW WAY

- I. NOT IMPOSSIBLE, BUT THERE WILL BE TESTS.
- II. NOT THE EASIEST, BUT IT IS THE BEST.
- III. REQUIRES MUCH WORK, BUT THERE WILL BE REST.

NEWS & NOTES

Please Pray

Landon Jackson, Jim and Mischel's grandson, was born on Wednesday, March 23 at 6:03PM, and he weighed 8lb 3oz. Baby, mom, and dad, are doing well.

Melaney Ferrell & Jane Sowell were sick Wednesday but are doing better.

Renee Davis; Ainsley Moore; Wiley & Betty Tuggle. Caleb Baker--kidney stone.

Tim II, Rachel, & Titus Wilkes with full time mission work. Tim has also been in the Philippines recently and plans to return this week.

Tim & Lynn Wilkes have made it home safely.

Billy Bland will be gone most of the month of April on different Gospel Meetings.

Family & Friends

Wilton Wooten--Nora's brother, had to go to the Veteran's Hospital in Murphreesboro. He has had congestive heart failure and other health problems.

Carol Busch--grandmother of Clifton's friend, may have cancer. First biopsy procedure was not successful. She will have to have a surgical biopsy.

Clay Collums; Bob Spurlin; David Bragg; Doyce "Doc" Hunt; Brianna Edwards; Joe Culbreath; James Angel; Steve Angel; Dave Leonard, Sr.; Gloria Angel; Sandy Robertson; Alegra Strong; Aaliyah Whitehead; Amy Meredith; Brandon Finley

Let us not forget to pray for the works being done through Fishers of Men, Far East Missions, and the Open Door Ministry.

March Anniversary

Herbert & Helen Bowman 3/29

March Birthdays

Ginger Bayless	3/9	Payton Jackson	3/29
Brianna Davis	3/14	Beau Davis	3/30
Betty Duke	3/18	Joe Davis	3/30
Ella Brown	3/21	Beverly Hays	3/31
Johnny Bayless	3/24		

Get Involved!

45th MSOP Lectureship: March 27-31
"The Behavior of Faith"

Sunday Night for the Savior
April 3 after evening services

Bible Bowl--Matthew 19-21
April 9, 5:00PM

Easter Egg Hunt--April 16

Men & Children Camping--April 29

Coldwater Lock-in--May 20

Coldwater VBS--June 12-16
Jerry needs more teachers.

Privileged to Serve

Sunday, March 27

Morning

Prayer Before Class	Jim Jackson
Announcements	Billy Bland
Song Leader	Jared Brown
Lord's Supper:	
Preside	Jason Bayless
	Jeffrey Ferrell
Assist	Payton Jackson
	Shane Staten
Opening Prayer	Ron Johnson
Sermon	Clifton Angel
Closing Prayer	Jerry Davis

Evening

Song Leader	Jared Brown
Opening Prayer	Caleb Baker
Sermon	Clifton Angel
Lord's Supper	Jason Bayless
	Payton Jackson
Closing Prayer	Jeremy Moore

Wednesday, March 30

Song Leader	Jared Brown
Prayer	Andy Ratliff
Invitation	Clifton Angel
Prayer	Adam Sowell