

1 Thessalonians 5: 20; "Do not Despise Prophecies", Sermon # 30 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 18th, 2009, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

It appears to me that verses 19 to 22 are all linked together in regard to their effects upon the ongoing ministry of the local church as well as their effects upon individual lives of people who are a part of that church. If you are quenching the Spirit you are probably also despising prophecies, and you do not care to test all things and hold fast what is good. You will not be abstaining from every form or appearance of evil and not only you, but the progress of the kingdom of God through the local church that you attend will be affected. What these verses are all addressing is the subject of a careless spirit. What they are warning against is a spirit which does not care to pay attention to the things that are important to God. The things that are important to God are whether we receive His Word and live out the truth of it, holding it fast to ourselves and not letting it go. There is a tendency, after we have been a Christian for a few years; when we see that people around us are not being converted and even other Christians are not pressing on to know the Lord in an evident way; that we become skeptical. We fall into a form of unbelief that may indeed show that we are slipping spiritually. And the way that this skepticism manifests itself over time is to slowly relinquish from our grasp the importance of preaching, and the primacy of preaching. It just isn't as important to us as it should be. The means of grace that God has established for our growth to greater maturity, itself comes to be despised. This message is intended to stir up your holy minds by way of remembrance, that the Lord's Word is not to be neglected and the preaching of it is to be received with reverence because it leads us to hold fast what is good, and will help us to understand better the importance of abstaining from every form of evil.

I must begin this afternoon with this phrase, "Do not despise prophecies." What is meant by the word "prophecy"? When we think of the word prophecy we probably think of the written prediction of things to come. Prophets foretold the coming of Christ and the setting up of His kingdom, and the glorious progress of that kingdom to the consummation of all things in His Second Coming. This is the kind of prophecy which fascinates the minds of many Christians. And so it ought to be, unless it takes the place of our making progress in our knowing God and in our becoming more like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is the tendency of young Christians, and not a few unbelievers who are close to the kingdom. They become so fascinated with discovering what is predicted in the Bible for the future of the world and nations in it, that they neglect their growth in every day grace. Anything related to "things to come" they drink in greedily and stock-pile all of their knowledge on the subjects of the Millennium, Christ's Second Coming, and the Antichrist, because it is exciting and mysterious to think upon such subjects. Christ may come at any time. Who is the

Antichrist? Is the end of the age coming soon or does the Millennium come first? And for some Christians, they are so preoccupied with thinking and searching the Scriptures, to have more knowledge on these things, that they really end up neglecting the great salvation that has been given to them by the Living Risen Christ who has died to give them all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. The most important thing that any Christian should be thinking about is; will I have so lived my life in devotion to Christ and in His service that I will not only not be ashamed at His coming, but I will be eagerly reaching forward to that day?

But the word "prophecies" here in our text is not primarily referring to our despising the written record of the Scripture concerning things to come, or even preaching about those things. It is referring primarily to the possibility that you could, or that you might be despising the preaching of the Word which you hear Sunday by Sunday from the pulpit here; that you might be quenching the work of the Spirit through the preaching of that word, by your not listening carefully in order to receive what God would teach you through it. The word "prophecy" means the forth-telling of God's word, here in this place. It is God's primary means of growth for the Christian and even though unbelieving men may think it foolish or despise it, the serious Christian should not do it. So this afternoon I would like to ask the question, How can a Christian despise prophecies" or "prophesyings? There are a number of ways but let me give you 3.

1st - He can despise prophecy because he does not understand the importance of the preaching of the word.

I think that it will be good for us if we can understand what prophecy was like when it was exercised by those gifted believers in the early church. So if you will turn over with me to 1 Corinthians 14, we will see how Paul would have us to understand the gift of prophecy. "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy." "For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however in the spirit he speaks mysteries." "But he who prophesies speaks edification, and exhortation, and comfort to men." "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church." The Apostle Paul says that it is especially desirable in a local church that there be a gift or gifts of prophecy in exercise on a regular basis. The gift of tongues is not helpful to believers who cannot understand the one speaking. It will not profit the believers unless there is someone who can interpret what he is saying. Without the interpreter he speaks mysteries. But verse 3 tells us of the value of prophecy. "He who prophesies speaks edification; that is, he builds men up in their faith by teaching and preaching to them the sound doctrine of the Scriptures and applying the truth of the Scriptures to the many situations of the lives of the people in the congregation. His calling is to see what the people of his congregation need, in terms of the truth of the word, and then to bring it to them. He who prophesies speaks also exhortation to the

people in the congregation. He tells them what their duties and responsibilities are in light of what is said in the Scripture. He presses upon them God's expectation of what they ought to be doing in light of all the grace and truth that God has given to them. And then; the one who prophesies also speaks comfort to the people in his congregation as well. God knows, and the one ministering knows, that true believers need the comfort of the promises of the grace of Christ applied to their minds and hearts. They need to know that God is for them, and will be with them in all of their trials and all of their attempts to do what is right and good in every situation. There is comfort in Christ.

But the way that a Christian can despise prophecy is not to rank the exercise of this gift and ministry as high in his mind as he should. A person in that day could become more impressed with the gift of tongues because it seems so mysteriously spiritual. Even though he could not understand what was being said, it seemed more impressive. But if you turn over to verse 18 you can see where Paul's priorities lay. "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." He says in verse 20, "Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature." "In the law it is written: with men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me, says the Lord." The object in prophecy is that men might hear God. He goes on to say, "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe." Here is an important distinction. Prophecy is for believers. They really do need to pay attention to the Word preached, because if they despise it they will not become mature in their thinking and in their discernment how they should live to do God's will and glorify him. They will be babyish in their faith and be prone toward thinking that faults that they see in people around them, even other Christians, are the reason that they cannot make progress in the Christian life. This is simply not true. The truth is that they have not understood how important it is to meditate upon the teaching that you are given.

In applying this to us today; we do not believe that the revelatory gifts of prophecy and tongues are in existence today. They were given to the church for that time when the written Word was not yet canonized and there was a need for the direct revelation of God's will to gifted men. Tongues were primarily given for unbelievers to convince them of the marvelous work of God's ability to allow men to preach to them in their own language, the unsearchable riches of Christ. And yet, for all that, many still did not believe. Today we have the completed Scriptures and they are sufficient for every area of faith and practice. Therefore it is doubly important that we do not despise prophesyings; that is, the preaching and teaching of the word that comes to us through the minister that God has given to us in the local church that we attend. He

is been given the gift of prophecy, not in the sense of a revelatory gift, but rather in the sense of explaining the passage and making suitable applications to the congregation that he is preaching to. He is given "the prophetic word made more sure" and he has been given the gift of a pastor-teacher to speak it. I am suggesting that there is still a danger of our more modern form of prophecy being despised. The words of Paul in 2 Timothy 4: 2 are very applicable. "Preach the word!" "Be ready in season and out of season." "Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." Do not despise prophesyings of your pastor which he gives you Sunday by Sunday or you may find that God will give you over to a complaining spirit and possibly even eventually to be one who apostatizes from the faith. If thoughtful meditation and reflection upon God's word is not taking place, or if you fail to apply what is said to yourself, then God is not being heard. You, as the Christian who is sitting in the pew listening, have the responsibility to pray for your pastor, and to listen carefully to what is said from the pulpit, fully believing that God has prepared good things for you from the use of those means. If you pray to listen and to receive and to glean among the sheaves of the preaching, then surely there will be food for your hungry soul. Do not despise him or his prophesying but rather see him as one who is preparing good meals for your soul. It is to be hoped and prayed for that your pastor will be like the man in Jesus' parable in Luke 12: 42. "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion in due season? "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes." Your minister is the one whom God has appointed to "give you your portion in due season." But he is his Master's steward.

Secondly - There may be a despising of prophecy when the minister's gifts and abilities are exalted above his preaching

Sometimes a person who is listening to a preacher may become more enamored with the impressive gifts which that man has, than actually trying to apply his message to their own life. They become impressed with the preacher's style or his ability to argue a point well. They become so caught up with the man who has these gifts and abilities that, as a result, they actually fail to think deeply and carefully about the things that are said; that those things are meant for them so that they might be changed and transformed by them by the power of Christ. Sometimes when people listen to preachers they are looking for a champion for the cause of Christ. They are looking for one who can refute all the arguments of unbelievers in a way that will make the unbeliever's arguments look bad and foolish. They believe that if the same truths were spoken to them by a less impressive or gifted man, they might not be listened to at all. But God's ways of doing things and His choice to use the weak

and despised things and people of the world to show forth His truth must be remembered. Ecclesiastes Chapter 9 verse 14, "There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it." "Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city." "Yet no one remembered that same poor man." "Then I said: 'Wisdom is better than strength.'" "Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." "Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shouting of a ruler of fools." You see, this is a good example of despising the prophecy, in that the poor man's message was slighted and not remembered because he who spoke it was not as impressive in his person or delivery as they thought that he should be for them to remember it. But still God used him and he delivered the city.

We as Christians need to beware of a fleshly evaluation of men. The person who has a tendency to boast in men and their gifts needs to see and to understand that the treasure that God would have them to search for is not found in the man, but in the message from God that he brings. The minister should be a good living example of the message that he preaches, but his purpose in ministry is to have those who listen to him see that everything that they need spiritually comes to them directly from Christ himself. God will use men, but every blessing which comes to them through men is actually coming to them from God. The minister is an important means of spiritual truth being communicated to the believer, but the object in the communication of truth is that men see Christ's glory; not man's glory. The treasure is seeing Christ in His word and having Christ work in your heart to lead you to a sincere obedience of His word. The minister is there to help lead you into the truth by word and example, but the minister's gifts and graces are not set before you so that you will be more preoccupied and taken up with him, than you are of Christ. You are to follow him as he follows Christ, and only as far as he follows him. It is Christ who is to be the One who you are to be impressed with. This is a truth to be considered because there are so many in our day who are more enamored with the men who preach, more than the God who has given them the ability to preach. Let no one boast in men. In 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 7 says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." And in verse 5 of that same chapter it says, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake."

And finally, prophesyings can be despised when we fail to test all things by the word of God itself.

In verse 21 it says, "Test all things; hold fast what is good." The prophetic words which we hear preached to us from God's word can be despised when we fail to test what we hear from the preacher's mouth. When God says to us that we ought to test a thing then we ought by all means to do so, and he has said so here through the Apostle Paul. The man or men who preach to you the word are not infallible. They

are not like the writings of the Scriptures which they preach to you. They think and reason and prepare material in their sermons which they hope will speak to your heart and to your soul. But any true preacher of the Scriptures will never ask you to believe what he says is true simply because he says it. He will instruct you to be "noble-minded" like the Bereans in Acts 17: 11, "who searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so." Do you do this, my beloved brethren? If not, I believe that you are despising the prophecy. For you will accept that I, as the one who has preached to you, have done my homework, but you will not go back to the Bible itself in order to have dealings with God over what has been preached. This is harmful to yourself and to the cause of Christ in His church. You must, when you hear my words, look beyond my words to the word of God, and in looking at them, test and see whether what I have spoken to you is accurate and true. If it is; rejoice in that truth, receive that truth, and live your life by it.