

Sermon: "The Disciple-Making Church & the Holy Spirit"

Text: I Thessalonians 5:12-28.

Sermon Outline.

1

Introduction ~ **This morning, we come to the end of a sermon series on the Disciple-Making Church, a series based on Paul's First Letter to the Church in Thessalonika.** At the outset, I need to share with you that I personally have benefitted from this series more than any other sermon series I've ever worked on. I hope you have found it helpful, too.

As we read our text together, I hope you caught a major sense of surprise in the way Paul closes out his letter to the church at Thessalonika, a church he planted with Silas and Timothy. Paul's cruising along, obviously gliding in toward to dock; and then suddenly – **Boom! There's that tantalizing and intriguing material about the Holy Spirit. This series of imperatives is the earliest record in the New Testament of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the worship services of the Christian community. And since the same basic pattern of instruction appears in Romans 12 and I Peter 4, this is the basic teaching of all the apostles about the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gift of prophecy.**

"The Spirit do not quench;

Prophecies do not despise;

But

Test all things:

Hold fast to the good;

Avoid every form of evil."

This morning, in these moments together, I hope to give you a taste of the basic worship experiences of all the early churches and the expected activity of the Holy Spirit in the worship of disciples.

Let's back up for a moment. You remember that Paul and Silas and Timothy were focused like a laser in what they do to plant a new church. **They were not content merely with making converts; they went for disciples.**

We also discovered that a disciple is a person who lives by three simple, yet profound biblical priorities, The Three Priorities.

I. Your first priority as a disciple of Jesus is a growing relationship with Jesus Christ, your Lord.

Sermon: "The Disciple-Making Church & the Holy Spirit"

Text: I Thessalonians 5:12-28.

Sermon Outline.

2

II. Your second priority is a growing commitment to the Body of Christ, your face-to-face group of other disciples.

III. And your third priority as a disciple is a growing commitment to the work of Christ in your world, your witness to and serving Jesus Christ, your Lord.

These Three Priorities act like an on-board inertial compass for you. Together, they enable you always to recognize who you are, what you need, and what God wants you to do as a disciple of Jesus.

? Watch this! It is the role of God's Holy Spirit to enable you to grow in each of these Three Priorities as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The fact is, it's not really possible to experience a growing relationship with Jesus without the Personal Holy Spirit of God. Jesus gave you His Holy Spirit the moment you believed in Jesus and invited Jesus into your life.

The risen Jesus is seated in heaven at God's right hand this morning. But you, the disciple, are personally connected to that Jesus by the Infinite-Personal Holy Spirit. And one day, the Holy Spirit Who raised Jesus from the dead will do the same thing for you, child of God.

Don't you ever forget it:

As a disciple of Jesus, you are an already elected candidate-for-resurrection when Jesus returns!Somebody say, "Hallelujah! Amen!"

The Spirit of God will do that for you one day. It's coming soon... Why on earth be afraid of Him and His activity now?

The Holy Spirit has a specific role in making those other biblical priorities happen in your life as a disciple.

Our text is not the first time Paul has mentioned the Holy Spirit in this Letter to His church.

Sermon: "The Disciple-Making Church & the Holy Spirit"

Text: I Thessalonians 5:12-28.

Sermon Outline.

3

- In Chapter One, the Holy Spirit creates deep faith in Jesus (vs. 5), enabling people like you and me to welcome the Gospel message about Jesus alive from the dead.
- The Spirit of God gives a person amazing joy in believing in Jesus (vs. 6). [There's an oblique reference to the Holy Spirit in 3:13.]
- In Chapter Four (vs. 8), the Holy Spirit is Himself a gift from God, Who enables the disciple to live a godly life. For you as a disciple, a godly life is possible only through the empowering of the Holy Spirit.
- **And here in our text, Paul identifies the expected actions of the Holy Spirit in the worship service. What's going on here in our text?**

For these next few moments, we're going to do the "Back to the Future" thing, some time travel back to the worship service of the early churches. *Let me sketch out the basics of what happens back then and there.*

I. The early church took over the basic worship format of the Synagogue Worship Service, like the worship service in Nazareth or Capernaum in five movements...

1. First, there was an act of gathering, something like the Shema was recited together. "Hear, O Israel..."
2. Next was **praise** to the living God. A hymn or hymns were sung together by the gathered group.
3. Third were the **prayers prayed together**.
4. Fourth, there was **instruction from God's Word**. The Scriptures were read, and someone shared **a sermon** based on that passage.
5. Finally, there was a closing, the closer usually was a hymn sung together; and, after conversation, everyone went home slowly.

The early Church took over that worship format entirely; but here's where they got creative. They introduced some specifically Christian elements into it.

1. **For example, the sermon – it was on some aspect of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ.**
2. **Second, the hymns – there are a huge number of**

- hymns and they're all about Messiah Jesus!**
3. **Further, it was expected that the Holy Spirit of God would give several people direct and immediate words of prophecy,** which everybody would hear, evaluate and apply.
 4. **After that, in the primitive worship service, seekers and unbelievers were excused right after the time of instruction.** That was a hard and fast rule because of what followed next. What followed next was for believers only.
 5. You see, after the sermon and what followed, **the Lord's Supper was shared. New believers were baptized by immersion.**
 6. **Those actions were followed by the Love Feast.**

Finally, there were the close-ers, closing off with more praying and a hymn... and you headed out.

II. So let's apply these insights to our text. Paul's Letter was read in place of the Sermon. As the sermon comes to a close, as the worship leader concludes the reading of Paul's letter, what happens is this:

? Different disciples in that worship service are already receiving words of prophecy, messages the Holy Spirit intends to be shared with those gathered in worship that moment. It's the spiritual gift of prophecy being exercised in the worship service.

These prophecies occur after the Sermon. They do not take the place of the preaching of the Gospel. If Paul had understood prophecies as fully equal to God's Word, he would never have given the specific command to test all prophecies. He goes on to encourage the disciples in Thessalonika to hold on to what is good and valid. It's kind of like eating a piece of fish: you eat the meat and spit out the bones...

III. Paul and the whole church at Thessalonika clearly expect the Holy Spirit of God to speak to them in worship through the spiritual gift of prophecy. What is the New Testament spiritual gift of prophecy? Time for a definition or two.

A. The noun, *profhteia*, can refer to the spiritual gift of prophecy or to the utterance of the person prophesying. Here it is the utterances.

One New Testament scholar, **Wayne Grudem**, defines the spiritual gift of prophecy in the following way: **"Telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind" by the Holy Spirit.**

C. Pete Wagner defines it this way. **"The gift of prophecy is the special ability that God gives certain members of the Body of Christ to receive and communicate an immediate message of God to His people through a divinely-anointed utterance."**

Wagner, Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow. pp. 228ff, 259.

1. It starts with God the Holy Spirit bringing something spontaneously to mind so that the person can report it in his or her own words. Paul often calls this, "revelation."

- It can be a **train of thought** totally distinct and separate from what you were just thinking about.
- Sometimes, the person receives **the beginning phrase of a whole message** with the understanding that the rest of it will flow once you begin to speak it forth.
- Another format is highly **visual**. The Person sees an object or an event from God's perspective... and speaks out what he or she is seeing and what God's thinks about it.
- Another format is **audio**. In this format, the person receiving revelation hears a specific word, phrase, sentence, or sentences from the LORD.
- The person can receive the revelation in the worship service or during the days prior to the service.

2. The second step is the speaking out of the message.

3. The third step is the testing of the content of the message.

- A) Does it confess, recognize or declare the real Jesus?
- B) Does it square with the Gospel and the teaching of Jesus?
Because "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Sermon: "The Disciple-Making Church & the Holy Spirit"

Text: I Thessalonians 5:12-28.

Sermon Outline.

6

C) What about its purpose and effect? Does it encourage? Does it build people up in following Jesus? Does it exhort? Does it comfort?

D) Is it appropriate to the situation facing God's people?

4. The fourth step is application. "How do we apply this message? Is there something God is asking us to do... or not do?"

The spiritual gift of prophecy was a normal and expected expression of the Holy Spirit's activity in all the early churches.

All of this brings us around to the key idea of our text. We finally got around to it... Here it is:

? The disciple-making church expects and welcomes the activity of God's Spirit in the worship service. In the disciple-making church, what He does is both welcome and expected.

You can make this key insight even more personal:

? The disciple of Jesus expects and welcomes the action of God's Spirit speaking to believers in worship.

Conclusion ~ Recently, in the Adult Electives Class, Richard Edgar mentioned the books of Joel Rosenberg. **I just finished reading Rosenberg's most recent book. It's entitled, *Epicenter*.** It's about the Middle East and all of the prophecies in the Word of God about Israel. Rosenberg is a Jewish believer in Jesus, a Messianic Jew. His non-fiction book, *Epicenter*, is well worth your reading.

In discussing future events, Rosenberg adopts the format of talking about ten future headlines. I won't spoil the book for you. One of his future headlines is Chapter Fourteen. **"Future headline: Muslims Turn to Christ in Record Numbers."**

Rosenberg shares a quote from **Lazarus Yeghnazar**, an Iranian-born evangelist now based in London: "In the last 20 years, more Iranians have come to Christ [than in] the last 14 centuries." This has happened largely through Muslims seeing dreams and visions from the risen Jesus. Rosenberg states, **"What is bringing these Iranians to Christ is dreams and visions of Jesus, just as in Iraq, though in much larger numbers."** *Epicenter*, p. 218.

Sermon: "The Disciple-Making Church & the Holy Spirit"

Text: I Thessalonians 5:12-28.

Sermon Outline.

7

Rosenberg offer this as a typical real-life occurrence:

"... two Christians [were] driving through the mountains of Iran with a car-full of Bibles. Suddenly their steering wheel jams and they have to slam on the brakes to keep from going off the side of the road. When they look up, they see an old man knocking on their window asking if they have the books. 'What books?' they ask. 'The books Jesus sent me down here to get,' the old man replies.

"He goes on to explain that Jesus recently came to him in a dream and told him to follow. When he awoke, he found that everyone in his mountain village had had the same dream. They were all brand-new followers of Jesus, but they did not know what to do next. Then the old man had another dream in which Jesus told him to go down the mountain and wait by the road for someone to bring books that would explain how to be a Christian. He obeyed, and suddenly two men with a car-full of Bibles have come to a stop right in front of him." *Epicenter*, p.220

Rosenberg asserts this kind of thing is just the beginning. Our American Baptist missionaries... people like W. W. have been telling us of God doing stuff like this throughout the Muslim world for some years now. **In world hell-bent on catastrophe, God is doing amazing things to reach people with the Good News of Jesus Christ.**

But there another item for us to consider as American believers in Jesus Christ: Why is it wonderful for God to speak to Muslims in a supernatural way, God speaking in dreams and visions over in Iran... while here in America, some of us feel less than wonderful about the activity of the Holy Spirit speaking to His own people here in our worship services? Do you sense "a disconnect" somewhere in that?

Friend, the Son of God still speaks to His disciples today through His Holy Spirit and the spiritual gift of prophecy. Believe it. Expect it. Welcome it. He is here among us.