

Since we are children of the light appointed by God to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ we know we are secure what ever happens. Knowing this we together encourage and build up one another. The Thessalonians were already doing this, but he wants to encourage them to continue. There were already those who were laboring among them, some who had taken on the loving care of the assembly there, and faithfully admonished those who needed it. While we do not read of elders being appointed over them the Holy Spirit had evidently already raised up conscientious brothers looking after their spiritual well being. In general this is God's way in this age.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Assemblies never are authorized to appoint elders over themselves. Paul gave Timothy the qualifications of an overseer/elder so we can recognize and encourage them. He also asked Titus to point out elders in Crete to fend off false teachers and to restore order among the saints there. We are to note those who take on the oversight and esteem very highly in love because of the work they are doing. There is no thought of a hierarchy here but one of humble oversight by those who are older, wiser and respected. Spiritual gift for this is not hinted at either. The most delightful reward an elder could receive would be to see growth and a pleasant peace among them. This is the joy of a father (grandfather) of children as well.

But some are acting unruly (disorderly). They are to be warned. The warning would be the more effective if given by a highly esteemed person. Examples might include disruptive conduct, habitual tardiness, lack of self control, disrespect, rudeness, idleness, disobedience.

Some are fainthearted, (not "feeble minded," KJV, in the sense of mentally slow), but just naturally less than bold. These were to be encouraged, not despised by those had more courage.

Some are weak, whether spiritually or physically. These are to be supported and protected, not left to fend for themselves. The stragglers were the first attacked by the Amalekites after Israel crossed the Red Sea.

Deuteronomy 25:17 Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; 18 How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God.

Being at peace among themselves meant they needed to be patient and longsuffering with one another. Nothing

less than fundamental doctrinal error or immorality was to be allowed to divide them from one another. This young assembly of Europeans learns the importance of keeping the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:4) early on in its life. If one was wronged by another they were not to repay evil for evil. This is the natural way of man (Lamech, Genesis 4:24). God established and empowered governments and rulers to see to justice when one harms another. But Christ overrules the Law of Moses, which God established to govern Israel, with a higher "law" or principle for His disciples, Matthew 6:38-48. A law of turning the other cheek. This is what Paul enjoins us here. He later reprimands the Corinthians, ch. 6, for taking one another to court for personal wrongs. Rather we are to follow whatever course or action that can be characterized as **good**. And this goodness was not limited to believers but to all men (even those who persecuted them). On the other hand familiarity was not to breed contempt. There is no excusing less than good treatment of brothers and sisters in Christ, our natural family members or spouses, 1Timothy 5:2.

With our attitude and conduct set right we can freely **rejoice evermore**. The future is sure and the present is in the Lord's hands as well. We can pray unhindered for one another and for the lost. We can be thankful in everything and express it verbally to God and to one another, publically and privately. Some things that happen are hard to be thankful for. But, at the very least, we can be thankful **in** everything even if not **for** everything. However we can even confidently be thankful **for everything** knowing from Romans 8:28 that all things work together for good if we are His own. Even if we don't **feel** thankful we can give thanks in faith knowing it is God's **will** in Christ Jesus that we do so, and everything comes from His hand. This is the second time this expression is used in this epistle, ch. 4:3. We sometimes wish we knew God's will for our lives. Well, these are two statements for starters. Look for others in other epistles. These will shape our attitude and conduct such that we will be able to know His will for other less obvious decisions. Not only is thankfulness established as a customary attitude for the individual believer, the collective **you**, the assembly as a whole, is to be thankful in all things.

The role of the Holy Spirit in the assembly is here strongly enforced. **Quench not the Spirit**. They are not to do any thing to hinder or prevent Him from leading them in their assemblies. The assembly is to be a lively, thriving body of believers unified in love by the Spirit because of the love of Christ for His Bride, such that He gave Himself for her, Ephesians 5:25. The Spirit is to be free to move whomsoever He will to pray and prophesy in the assembly. Paul gives more detail in his first letter

to the Corinthians, ch. 14. The Corinthians were beginning to quench the Spirit with their selfish ambitions and divisive factions. Quenching the Spirit was, in that case, rather **incidental** to widespread self centered behavior and consequent disorder unbecoming to believers. A local assembly of believers is intended by God to be an expression of the unity formed by the death of Christ on the cross. One way to quench the Spirit in an assembly **incidently** is for one person there to harbor unjudged sin. 1Corinthians 11 gives an example.

11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. {damnation: or, judgment} 30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

Another way is for one to come to a meeting having already decided **not** to participate. The motive can be fear, a sense of inadequacy or unworthiness, laziness, whatever. This puts an additional burden on others less suited for it, or simply deprives the assembly of what it needs. On the other hand one can come to meeting prepared and intending to speak, whether led to or not. He might even become a routine participant, feeling he has a gift, a message, or is more qualified or eloquent than others. (This can lull others into inaction.) He may indeed have a spiritual gift, be more knowledgeable or be naturally eloquent but that is not the Lord's criteria for one to pray, prophesy or worship in assembly. Others simply seem to like to hear themselves talk, taking time and audience attentiveness from following speakers. This is unruly as well. The bottom line in these cases is that the Spirit is not able to freely choose and wholly use whom He would have participate in that meeting. Yet do not despair, for although we are weak the Lord knows our infirmities and compensates for them and draws us to Himself in faithful love.

There are also a number of ways to **systematically** quench the Spirit in a local assembly. Adding or substituting some human arrangements or traditions (systems?) of men for the order laid out in scripture systematically quenches the Spirit.

Isaiah 29:13 Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

Mark 7:7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Supplanting the Holy Spirit by a man or men presiding over prophesying, prayer and worship in the assembly **systematically** quenches the Spirit. A hierarchy, liturgy, "order of service," choirs, etc. do too.

We can **despise prophesying** by simply not scheduling meetings for that purpose. May we be jealous and zealous for the Holy Spirit's prerogatives in the assembly. He is the One by whom the Lord in the midst leads. Let Him.

Further provisions are made here and in 1Corinthians 14 to guard against prophesying that is unspiritual, or unscriptural.

1Corinthians 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

If one hears something that appears to be wrong he should discuss it with the speaker. Perhaps all is simply a misunderstanding and can be graciously resolved. If something is seriously in error and cannot be cleared up in a private conversation, others should be alerted. But the **assembly as a whole** is responsible for what is presented in its meetings. It, and each listener, is responsible to prove all things and separate that which is good from that which is evil or wrong whatever form it takes. What is referred to is more than an "appearance" of evil (KJV) although we should certainly avoid doing anything that can give others the idea that we are doing something evil. The thought is that evil teaching can take many forms. We need to be alert personally when listening and test everything said by everybody with scripture. Even ordinarily reliable, godly, gifted men can make mistakes or fall into error. The responsibility to weigh what has been said rests upon each individual. We sift out the precious from the vile. We each are capable of this because we have the Holy Spirit in us. (This is true of written things also.)

1John 2:20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things 26 These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you.

27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

But if serious error is publically stated a public response is needed. Sometimes a correction or clarification may be presented by a subsequent speaker in the same meeting. A public correction should be stated so others are not taken in by bad doctrine they heard here. The Lord's Name is at stake. We shouldn't enter a meeting in a spirit of suspicion but of watchfulness and care, in prayer for the leading of the Holy Spirit to move individuals to speak and in what they say. We anticipate blessing from God through the Spirit and whomsoever He chooses. Peter says:

1Peter 4:11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

This is to be the norm. Quench not the Spirit!

By Ron Canner, October 26, 2005.