

Seize¹ Good!

The last chapter of 1 Thessalonians contains a listing of counsels that we would be wise to adhere to. They are as follows:

- 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 prophesyings.
- Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.
- Abstain from all appearance of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22).

The Admonition:

Today we look at the last clause of the 6th in that list, specifically **hold fast that which is good**. This is a common scriptural theme. A similar admonition is seen at 2 Timothy 1:13-14 - **Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.** And this from Titus 1:9 - **Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.** Indeed, **we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.** (Hebrews 3:14). **[L]et us hold fast our profession.** (Hebrews 4:14). And finally, **I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith[.]** (Revelation 2:13).

Holding fast to the truth is a job, a duty, an obligation that we each have. We are to hold truth tightly, with both hands, against adversaries and all opposition, against seducing doctrines, Satan's temptations and the world's persecutions. This duty is not burdensome, for as Christ told us: **[M]y yoke is easy, and my burden is light.** (Matthew 11:30). But it is necessary and easily overlooked.

¹ To take hold of forcibly; grasp; grasp mentally; understand clearly and completely; take possession of by force or will; clutch; grab; keep.

Controversy is seldom popular to the flesh. Most people like a quiet life in religion; they are innately put off by strife. They want no trouble, contest or undue exertion. But peace at the expense of truth is not worth having. So we need reminding of Paul's counsel: **[H]old fast that which is good.**

Why did Paul find it wise to give us this directive? I answer this way:

- Paul had a pretty good idea of what the hearts of all Christians are. **The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?** (Jeremiah 17:9).
- He knew our grasp of the Gospel, on our best day, is very cold, that our love soon waxes feeble, that our faith soon wavers, that our zeal quickly flags, and that familiarity with Christ's truth often brings with it a species of contempt.
- The apostle Paul knew that, like Israel of old, we are apt to be discouraged by the length of our journey; we become **faint and weary.** (Deuteronomy 25:18). If you say you don't get weary, you lie! Jesus himself grew weary from the journey. **Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour.** (John 4:6). Yet we can't be **weary in well doing.** (2 Thessalonians 3:13).
- Paul knew that, like Peter, we are ready to sleep one moment and fight the next, but, and still like Peter, we are not ready to watch and pray. **And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.** (Matthew 26:40-41).

All this - and doubtless much more - Paul remembered and, like a faithful watchman, he cries by the Holy Ghost, **Hold fast that which is good.**

And I say more than this. I say Paul foresaw by the Spirit that the good tidings of the Gospel would soon be corrupted, spoiled and plucked away from the church. He knew that Satan and all his agents would labor hard to cast down Christ's truth. And though we are not **ignorant of (Satan's) devices** (2 Corinthians 2:11), yet it was most

needful for Paul to put it out there in the strongest language that we seize **that which is good**, and don't let go!

And such strong advice is always needed as long as this old world stands. There is a tendency to decay in the very best of human institutions. We see it all around, every day. Thus the classic line in the old hymn, "Abide with me":

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not abide with me.*

The best visible church of Christ is not free from this liability to degenerate. It is made up of fallible men. You know it's so. There is always a tendency to decay. Leaven was creeping into the church, even in the Apostle's time. There were evils in the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians Chapter 5), evils in the Ephesian Church (Ephesians Chapters 4 and 5) and evils in the **churches of Galatia** (Galatians Chapters 1:2 and 4). None of the seven churches featured in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 went without chastisement, with the arguable exception of the **church in Philadelphia**. (Revelation 3:7-13). And what we are to learn from Paul here is that a strong tool against a fading, receding church is to **Hold fast that which is good!**

3

Ways to heed the admonition:

Now that we have the admonition firmly in our minds, what are some methods or ways we can utilize and call upon to heed that admonition? What are some practical scriptural tools to get that work done? What does compliance with that instruction look like on the ground? Here are some suggestions:

1. **LIST MATES** - context counts. Recall we started today with a listing of admonitions. Habitually practicing those will help us to hold fast that which is good. Matthew Henry points out that this list of duties *briefly expressed (are) set close to one another and they seem to have a mutual connection*. So, let's take another look at that listing, accompanied by observations as to each.
- **Rejoice evermore**. Remaining sad and depressed shows a distrust of God's power, providence and forgiveness. Nobody can be joyful 24/7, but the idea here is to adopt happiness and rejoicing as your go-to state. This command is particularly helpful to greatly persecuted churches, such as was the case at Thessalonica. Think on this verse: **For the kingdom of God is not meat and**

drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (Romans 14:17). And this: **Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.** (Philippians 4:4). We're talking about spiritual joy. Joy is an unmistakable feeling in the soul springing from the hope or possession of some suitable good. **We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.** (Romans 5:2). We need to spend time [r]ejoicing in hope. (Romans 12:12).

- **Pray without ceasing.** This relates to a habit or custom of conversing with and giving thanks to God for everything. Elliott says *[t]hrough a man cannot be incessantly praying in words, the mind may be held continuously in an attitude of prayer, even in sleep*, citing Song of Solomon 5:2 - **I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.** This also suggests praying without fainting, as when Jesus spake a parable unto them to this end, **that men ought always to pray, and not to faint** (Luke 18:1). In other words, a perseverance in prayer. **Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.** (Ephesians 6:18). **Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.** (Colossians 4:2).
- **In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.** As we just saw from Colossians 4:2, thanksgiving is inseparably joined with prayer and, indeed, is a type or form of prayer. Philippians 4:6 cements that notion: **Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.** And this giving of thanks is to be for everything, whether we deem it good or bad (for nothing is really so in the end), and so we read: **Giving thanks for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (Ephesians 5:20). In satisfying this directive, we follow Christ's example; see Matthew 15:36 [**And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks**]; Matthew 26:27 [**And he took the cup, and gave thanks**]; Luke 10:21 [**I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes**]; and, John 11:41 [**Then they took away the**

stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou has heard me.]

- **Quench not the Spirit.** This is not talking about the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost may be grieved (**And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption - Ephesians 4:30**), expelled or taken away (**Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me - Psalm 51:11**) and neglected (**Neglect not the gift [spirit] that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery - 1 Timothy 4:14**). But the Holy Ghost can never be extinguished or wiped out of existence.

Instead, the “spirit” here mentioned has to do with the effect or impact the working of the Holy Spirit has on our inner spirits. This concept is captured in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 - **For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.** Barnes does a good job speaking to this: *Anything that will tend to damp the ardor of piety in the soul; to chill our feelings; to render us cold and lifeless in the service of God, may be regarded as “quenching the Spirit.”* Our spirit is a holy fire. **I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire[.]** (Matthew 3:11). It came upon the apostles in a similitude of fire. **And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.** (Acts 2:3). We are here enjoined to intelligently and energetically strive to not quench, subdue, overcome or quell that spirit.

- **Despise not prophesyings.** The “prophesying” here primarily, if not exclusively, refers to preaching. **But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.** (1 Corinthians 14:3, 4). Our duty with respect to that preaching is not to despise it or set it at nought as a thing of no worth. The sense of that word “despise” is seen in verses such as Acts 4:11 (**This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner**) and Luke 18:9 (**And he**

spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others).

I found some of Benson's remarks to be particularly poignant, so I will share them with you: *Some neglect attending the ministry of God's word, on pretence that they are so well instructed that they can receive little or no benefit from it. But let such consider that the spiritual life is maintained and increased in the soul, not so much by receiving new discoveries in divine knowledge, "as by the recollection of matters formerly known, and by serious meditation thereon." Persuaded, therefore, that a regular attendance on the ministry of the word will greatly tend to cherish the influences of the Spirit, and a neglect thereof will proportionably obstruct them; listen with attention and reverence to the ministers of Christ, while they interpret and apply to men's consciences the Holy Scriptures, or speak to them by way of instruction, warning, reproof, exhortation, or comfort: and own the authority of God as speaking in and by his appointed messengers.*

- **Prove all things.** This relates back to the previous injunction; it's as though it says pay attention and respect to the preaching, but take care and put it to the test. **Let no man deceive you by any means.** (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Now, the logical question is, "how do we prove or test the preaching?" I answer with these scripture-based suggestions:

- Is the preaching compatible with **the ancient landmark?** (Proverbs 22:28). **To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.** (Isaiah 8:20).
- Are other preachers/elders/prophets in the church satisfied with the prophesying? Listen to this built-in safeguard! **Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.** (1 Corinthians

14:29-33). [Incidentally, look at the verse that follows this passage, remembering that context is important: **Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.** 1 Corinthians 14:34]. It is axiomatic that a female preaching does not pass this “prove” test!

- Does the preaching conform to common sense or common scriptural principles? **Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.** (1 John 4:1-3).
- Abstain from all appearance of evil. The meaning here is to abstain from every form of evil. One version reads this way: “Hold yourself aloof from every evil kind.”

While generally reluctant to quote wordy Gill, he seems to capture best the spirit of this language, especially given the context: *Abstain from all appearance of evil. Of doctrinal evil. Not only open error and heresy are to be avoided, but what has any show of it, or looks like it, or carries in it a suspicion of it, or may be an occasion thereof, or lead unto it; wherefore all new words and phrases of this kind should be shunned, and the form of sound words held fast; and so of all practical evil, not only from sin itself, and all sorts of sin, lesser or greater, . . . and from the first motions of sin; (and) from every occasion of it, and what leads unto it, and has the appearance of it, or may be suspected of others to be sin, and so give offence, and be a matter of scandal.*

The Jews have a saying compatible with this verse, *viz*: “Remove thyself afar off from filthiness, and from everything that is like unto it.”

2. **LEARN WHAT IS ‘GOOD’** - to hold fast that which is good, we must work to determine what is “good.” Regularly assembling in the Lord’s house, exhausting your resources in service to the church, reading the Bible, singing hymns, praying, spending time with fellow saints, listening, talking, and so on aids that effort. We get a flavor of what it looks like to ascertain the “good” from the Old Testament story of king Josiah, set forth in 2 Kings:

22 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath.

² And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.

³ And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of king Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD, saying,

⁴ Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people:

⁵ And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the LORD, to repair the breaches of the house,

⁶ Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house.

⁷ Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully.

⁸ And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

⁹ And Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Thy servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of them that do the work, that have the oversight of the house of the LORD.

¹⁰ And Shaphan the scribe shewed the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.

¹¹ And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.

¹²And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah a servant of the king's, saying,

¹³Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us. (2 Kings 22:1-13).

All such behavior and activity will make you a **workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.** (2 Timothy 2:15). When you are **rightly dividing the word of truth** you are *a fortiori* ascertaining that **which is good.**

3. **DON'T TOLERATE UNPURE DOCTRINE** – Proverbs 19:27 instructs us: **Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.** There is an intolerance that is highly praiseworthy, and that is the intolerance of false teaching in the pulpit. Would you tolerate a little poison in your daily bread? There is a hatred that is charity, and that is the hatred of erroneous doctrine. We must not tolerate or countenance any doctrine that is not the pure doctrine of Christ's gospel.

We should be interested in – and only interested in – the **whole counsel of God** (Acts 20:27), nothing more and nothing less. **Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.** (Deuteronomy 4:2). The Bible closes this way: **If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.** (Revelation 22:18-19).

And, finally as to this point, probably the chief Bible passage is Galatians 1:7-9 that tells us in the strongest language: **[B]ut there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you,**

let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

4. **NO UNEQUAL YOKING** - we must not make common cause with the Philistines. Believe me, there is no satisfying them; there will be no cooperation from the spiritual enemy. They seek nothing less than our capitulation. The presence of a common foe against us ought to sink any minor differences among us.

This is why Paul was so strong on this point, when he wrote the following words (now found at 2 Corinthians 6:14-18):

¹⁴Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

¹⁵And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

¹⁶And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

¹⁷Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

¹⁸And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

To close, consider Luke 8:15: **But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.** And this: **Kkeep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.** (1 Corinthians 11:2). The ungodly do the exact opposite; they **hold the truth in unrighteousness.** (Romans 1:18). I love you. Amen!

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But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

[T]he Church is painted as a massive pillar, holding up and displaying before men and angels the truth—the saving truth of the gospel. [O]ne massive foundation-pillar, supporting and displaying the glories of redemption. [Ellicott]

The word "pillar" means a column, such as that by which a building is supported, and then any firm prop or support; [Galatians 2:9](#); [Revelation 3:12](#). It means that [the church] is the support of the truth, as a pillar is of a building. It sustains it amidst the war of elements, the natural tendency to fall, and the assaults which may be made on it, and preserves it when it would otherwise tumble into ruin. * * * * *

The word rendered "ground" - ἐδραῖωμα hedraiōma - means, properly, a basis, or foundation. The figure here is evidently taken from architecture, as the use of the word pillar is. The proper meaning of the one expression would be, that truth is supported by the church; as an edifice is by a pillar; of the other, that the truth rests "on" the church, as a house does on its foundation. It is that which makes it fixed, stable, permanent; that on which it securely stands amidst storms and tempests; that which renders it firm when systems of error are swept away as a house that is built on the sand[.]

[Barnes]

[T]he pillar and ground of the truth; which holds forth the truth to be seen and read of all, as pillars that bear inscriptions; and which supports and maintains truth, as every true church of Christ does so long as it remains so; though truth is the pillar and ground of the church; for if once truth is gone, a church is no more so: [Gill]

Pillars also were of ancient use to fasten upon them any public edicts, which princes or courts would have published, and exposed to the view of all; hence the church is called, the pillar and basis, or seal, of truth.

[Poole]