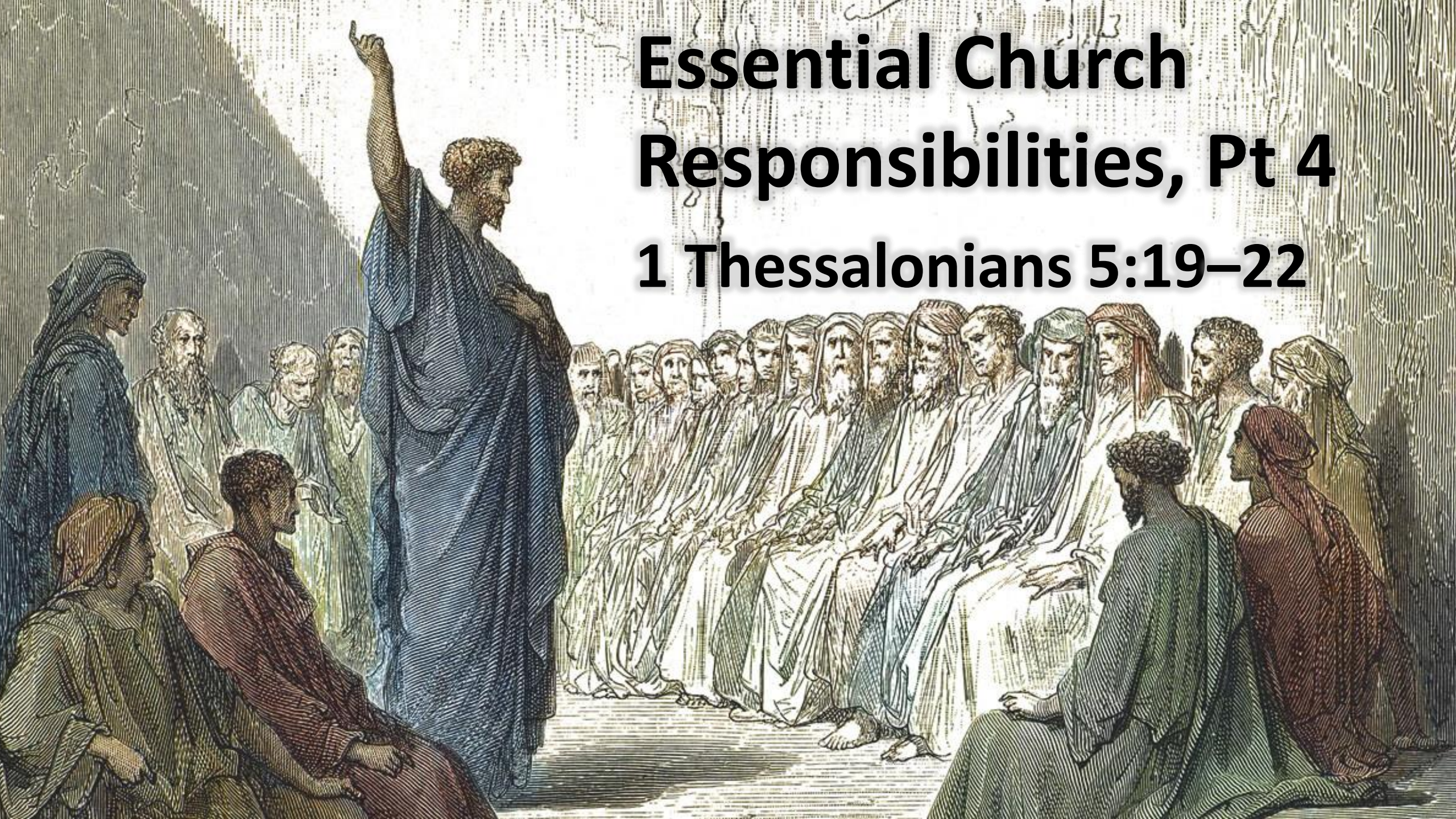


# Essential Church Responsibilities, Pt 4

## 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22





# 1 Thess 4:1–5:22 – Instructions for What Is Lacking

4:1–12

Commands  
regarding God-  
Pleasing Conduct

4:13–18

Instruction  
regarding the  
Dead in Christ

5:1–11

Reminders  
regarding the  
Day of the Lord

5:12–22

Exhortations regarding  
Church Life

vv. 12–13 - *Leaders*

vv. 14–15 - *Assembly*

vv. 16–18 - *Worship*

vv. 19–22 - *Prophecy*

## IV. The Responsibilities of Church Members to Prophecy

“Do not quench the Spirit;  
do not despise prophetic utterances.

But examine everything *carefully*;  
hold fast to that which is good;  
abstain from every form of evil.”

—1 Thessalonians 5:19–22

A. What *not to do*  
with spiritual  
instruction (vv.  
19–20).

B. What *to do*  
with spiritual  
instruction (vv.  
21–22).

## CONTEXT

- Paul writes 1 Thessalonians—his *first* letter—in AD 50.
- There was not yet any fully written canon of apostolic teaching (New Testament).
- To enable the establishment of churches, the Holy Spirit gifted certain men in local assemblies with *revelatory gifts*—particularly, the gift of prophecy.
- The apostles travelled from place to place to preach, but prophets were needed locally for instruction.

- **1 Corinthians 12:7–11** – “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”

- Something had caused the Thessalonians to have cynical attitude toward prophetic instruction.
- Timothy had brought back this news to Paul (3:6), and Paul recognized it as a definite deficiency in their faith.
- Paul does not describe the cause for their cynicism.
- At best we can speculate it had something to do with some making false prophecies about the future (e.g., “The day of the Lord has come!”)

“Paul did not wish the church to become so cynical that they treated with contempt those who came with a word of prophecy. Neither was the church to be so gullible that they accepted whatever a so-called prophet said without carefully weighing it and determining that it was indeed a true word of God.”

—D. Michael Martin, *1, 2, Thessalonians*, 184

**BALANCE**

## A. What *not to do* with spiritual instruction.

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**“Do not quench the Spirit” (v. 19).**

- “quench” – a rare verb; literally means “to extinguish” (Eph 6:16), but here used figuratively as in “to suppress, stifle.”
- “the Spirit” – the One specifically active in imparting spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7–11).
- “Stop being an obstacle to the Holy Spirit!”





## **“do not despise” prophetic utterances” (v. 20).**

- Paul follows his general prohibition with a specific one.
- “**despise**” – a strong verb; describes either an *attitude* (“to treat something as of no worth”) or an *act* (“have no use for something, reject”).
- **Luke 23:11** – “And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.”



“do not despise **prophetic utterances**” (v. 20).

- “prophetic utterances” – i.e., “prophecies.”
- New Testament prophets proclaimed the will of God as well as foretold the future.
- **Acts 11:28** – “One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius.”



- The Thessalonians were directly hindering the maturation of the church by rejecting prophecy—and it had to stop.
- **1 Corinthians 14:1** – “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.”
- **1 Corinthians 14:3–4** – “But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.”

## B. What *to do* with spiritual instruction.

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“But examine everything *carefully*” (v. 21a).

- “But” – introduces the proper response to prophetic instruction.
- “**examine *carefully***” – “to make a critical examination of something so as to determine genuineness.”
- “**everything**” – all forms of authoritative instruction.



- **2 Corinthians 11:13–15** – “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.”
- **1 John 4:1–3** – “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

# HOW WERE THE THESSALONIANS TO TEST PROPHECY?

Standard	Explanation	Texts
<b><i>1. Apostolic conformity</i></b>	The message had to conform to the apostles' preaching.	1 Cor 11:2; Rom 12:6; Eph 2:19–20
<b><i>2. Christological orthodoxy</i></b>	The message had to affirm the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ.	1 Cor 12:1–3; 1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7–11

<b><i>3. Scriptural fidelity</i></b>	The message had to be faithful to the established OT and the new writings.	Acts 17:11; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Thess 3:14
<b><i>4. Prophetic integrity</i></b>	The message had to come from one with a virtuous life.	Matt 7:15–20; 1 Thess 2:4–7; 2 Cor 2:17
<b><i>5. Corporate prosperity</i></b>	The message always had to lead to the edification of the whole church.	1 Cor 12:7; 1 Cor 14:3–5; Eph 4:11–12

**“hold fast to that which is good” (v. 21b).**

- Paul follows this general command with two specific ones.



- **“hold fast”** – another strong verb; “to adhere firmly to traditions, convictions, or beliefs”; emphasizes *tenacity*.
- **“the good”** – the instruction found to meet the standard, and therefore beneficial.



**“abstain from every form of evil” (v. 22).**

- “**abstain**” – another strong verb; the antithesis of “hold fast”; “to avoid contact with or the use of.”
- **1 Thessalonians 4:3** – “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality.”



“abstain from **every** **form of evil**” (v. 22).

- “**every**” – emphasizes the categorical nature of Paul’s concern.
- “**form of evil**” – the KJV (“appearance of evil”) has led to some incorrect applications!
- Paul’s intent is not to distinguish between *appearance* and *substance*; the term is best understood as “kind.”
- Every prophecy that fails the test is “evil” and to be avoided.

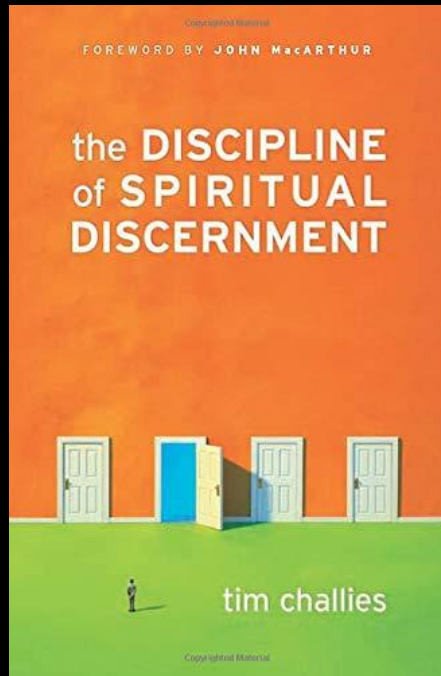
“*Evil* refers to something that is actively harmful or malignant. Such evil, which includes lies and distortions of the truth as well as moral perversions, appears in many forms. . . . Paul’s exhortation was a general call for believers to discern truth from error, good from evil, righteousness from sin, and a command to shun any of the negative teachings, influences, or behaviors that would displease God.”

—MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 199–200

# Tom Pennington, “A Case for Cessationism” ([www.gty.org](http://www.gty.org))







“We live in a world that is in direct opposition to Christianity. Just as germs are constantly waging war on our bodies, false doctrine is constantly raging against our faith. God has provided us with discernment to enable us to withstand these attacks.”

*“Discernment is the skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong.”*

—Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, 38, 61

# Applications

- What is your attitude to spiritual instruction? Do you neglect it, or are you naively open to everything?
- How vigorous is your skill of discernment?
- Do you follow through and purge that which is found to miss the standard?
- Do you tenaciously hold to genuine instruction?

