

“Guard the Gate”

1 Thessalonians 5:19-28

3/20/22 Epicenter/BAC

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

The test for validity is the sum total of Biblical teaching. The Thessalonians were trying to figure it all out. Now that Paul had gone, they wondered how they could know what's true and noble and beautiful and good. That is where we land in v.19-22, wherein Paul gives a warning and an encouragement to those who seek truth: Guard the gate! Guard the gate of your beliefs; your theology; your life. We live in a world of scammers and spammers; a world in which you must scrutinize all statements and claims, in order to verify their authenticity. The same is true of spiritual claims – guard the gate, lest the enemy gain a foothold.

Guard the Gate: The fire still burns. Verse 19 says, “Do not quench the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit (and God's presence in general) is sometimes described using the imagery of fire. Consider:

- Exodus 3 – Moses encounters a burning bush (not the *Euonymus alatus*)
- Num 9:15 – God's presence at the tab appeared like fire
- Matt 3:11 – John the Baptist says Jesus baptizes with HS and with fire
- Acts 2:3-4 – The Holy Spirit descended and appeared as tongues of fire

Don't quench the fire of the Holy Spirit. “Quench” comes from Gk. σβέννυμι – ‘to extinguish.’ The fires you extinguish are those that you do not want. After all, what good is a fire that has been extinguished? Is it good or bad that you put out a fire? If it's burning your car, it's good to put it out, but if it's grilling steaks, it's best to let that fire alone!

You quench the work of the Holy Spirit when you harbor unresolved doubt about God or a grudge against your brothers or sisters. You quench the Holy Spirit when you choose indifference over passion; when you make religion about rules or traditions of yourself. Do not stamp out what God wants to do in your life; let God do what God wants to do!

Guard the Gate: There are wolves among the sheep. Verse 20 says, “Do not despise prophecies.” Prophecy is the work that a prophet does, which generally means either oracles regarding the future or declarations on the purposes of God. Another way this has been said is, “Prophecy is not always foretelling; often, it is forthtelling.” God speaks today, and guarding the gate means listening to God's message. Psalm 78:1 calls you to “Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!”

Paul was the founding pastor of the church at Thessalonica, and now that he had been run out of town by his enemies, others would bring God's Word to the church at Thessalonica. Paul is telling them not to automatically reject a teaching just because God is speaking through someone else.

The test is not an evaluation of who the message comes *through*; it is an evaluation of who the message comes *from*. Guard the gate, because sometimes false teaching is presented as truth. Did you know that 25/27 NT books address false teachers or false teaching? False applications,

distorted revelations, and subtle misrepresentations of God's Word and God's work have been around for a very long time!

Guard the Gate: Truth always passes the test. Verse 21 tells us to "Test everything." When you hear a statement that you're not sure about, or that doesn't sound like God, go back and examine God's Word. See what the Bible says about these statements: 'You become an angel when you die' – 'God helps those who help themselves' – 'God won't give me more than I can handle' – God uses evil to accomplish his purposes.'

To test means, "*To recognize as genuine after examination*"[1] *That examination consists of comparing all claims to truth against the one standard of truth: God's Word. Is it clearly stated in the Bible? If not, is it clearly taught in the Bible? Remember, the test for validity is the sum total of Biblical teaching. So, if you have to set aside some portions of Scripture to hold a 'truth' then it is simply not true. Don't reject what God says just because it stings a bit.*

I submit for your consideration the following: If it's new, it's not true; if it's true it's not new" (Rev. James McDonald) Do you agree with this? Remember that new *to you* is not the same as new. It may *sound* new, but new to you doesn't mean it *is* new. When you hear something you're not familiar with or not sure about, head back to the Bible – truth always passes the test! Check out what the Bereans did when they encountered something new to them (Acts 17:10-11).

Guard the gate: Embrace truth. Verse 21 goes on to say, "Hold fast" – literally, "to hold back, detain, keep firm possession of." Don't believe everything you hear, but don't reject everything you hear, either – embrace that which is true. Beware! Not all preachers are preaching truth! Don't take their word for it – take God's Word for it! Not, "what does the TV say?" or "what does the website say?" or "what does the radio say?" Rather, "What does the Bible say?" Embrace all truth – and only that truth – that fits with the sum total of Biblical teaching – God's Word, simply, wholly, eternally. If you need more than God's Word to defend a position or a statement, it fails the test. If you need to set aside any portion of God's Word to justify or prove a point, it fails the test. And if it fails the test...

Guard(ing) the gate (means): Rejecting the rest. Just turn it away at the gate. The test is simple: does it fit with the sum total of Biblical teaching? If not, then like a small cavity in your tooth, the more you let it linger, the more damage it's going to do.

You never have to get rid of false theology if you don't let it into your life in the first place. There are lies, deceptions, and candy-coated hypocrisy freely available to anyone who has access to the internet. There are things out there that you want to believe, and that I want to believe as well, but they are not valid according to the sum total of Biblical teaching and therefore belong in the trash can.

v.22 – "Abstain from every form of evil." (ESV). This is a very commonly misapplied and incorrectly taught verse. The KJV translates this, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." So, which is the best way to understand this verse? Only one of those translations fits with the sum total of Biblical teaching!

v.23-24 – Jesus Christ is our Sanctifier (1 Thess. 4 covers this topic in more depth; check out the message from Feb. 6, "Negentropy" on the Epicenter website. *Sanctification is separation FROM the world and separation TO God.* You have a role to play in that – guarding the gate, so you can

avoid evil of every kind in your life, but when something does get past the gate, Jesus is there to come alongside you and say, "There's a better way. Follow me." These verses are both a comprehensive statement and a passive statement. Put simply, that means Jesus is everything you need, and the only thing you need to overcome sin in your life. He's just that good.

So, are you guarding the gate? Have you let an enemy slip through? Have you stomped out the work of the HS in your life? If so, it may take time and effort, but those can be identified and remedied by the power of the Holy Spirit at work within you. Or maybe you've rejected solid Biblical truth because it's not what you want to believe, or what you always have believed. Remember that truth stands up to the test of fitting with the sum total of Biblical teaching. So, treasure all that passes that test, and toss into the trash all that fails. Trust Jesus to help you; He is right there, guarding the gate with you.

[1] <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1381/kjv/tr/0-1/>

Takeaways from this message.

Guard the Gate: Keep the FIRE BURNING

- ✓ We extinguish a fire that we don't WANT

Guard the Gate: Beware of WOLVES among the SHEEP

- ✓ Prophecy is not always FORETELLING; often, it is FORTHTELLING

Guard the Gate: Truth always PASSES the TEST

- ✓ The test for validity is the sum total of BIBLICAL TEACHING

Guard the Gate: EMBRACE the truth

- ✓ "If it's NEW, it's not TRUE; if it's TRUE, it's not NEW." ~ Rev. James McDonald

Guard the Gate: REJECTING anything that's not true

- ✓ "What you believe about GOD is the most IMPORTANT thing about you." ~ A.W. Tozer

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

- 1. When have you quenched the work of the Holy Spirit in your life? Explain. When have you stoked the flame of the Holy Spirit in your life? Explain that, too.**
- 2. Give some specific examples of how someone might quench the Holy Spirit, either by ignoring Him or by rejecting Him.**

3. **What is your favorite game show? Why?**
4. **Prophets often did not foretell the future; they frequently gave oracles from God to His people. Name some specific examples of this (perhaps from the lives of Jeremiah, Nathan, Elijah, etc.)**
5. **What do we learn about false teachers from 2 Corinthians 11:14-15?**
6. **Explain the difference between 'quenching the Spirit' and 'being discerning.'**
7. **What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?**