
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 4:8

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“He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit” (I Thessalonians 4:8). As we dig into this verse, we are going to start off with looking at the word translated “despiseth” twice in this verse. This English word is translated from the Greek word “ἀθετέω” which is defined as: “1) to do away with, to set aside, disregard; 2) to thwart the efficacy of anything, nullify, make void, frustrate; 3) to reject, to refuse, to slight” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon; Strong’s # 114).

Just by looking at other contexts wherein this Greek word appears gives us clarity. For example, this Greek word is translated “reject” in Mark 7:9. Notice the context that serves well as a commentary on the first part of I Thessalonians 4:8: *“Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye **reject** the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye”* (Mark 7:1-13).

Those that reject the word of God are opposing themselves (Luke 7:30). Those that refuse to hear true messengers of our Lord are despising the Lord Himself (Luke 10:16). Whether the word of our Lord is accepted or not, that is the standard of judgment in the end (John 12:48). The book of Hebrews states: *“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy*

under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:28-31). Despising the truth of our Lord, regardless of the man delivering it, is despising Christ. The consequences are clear. With all of that being said, let’s turn our attention to looking at God giving the Holy Spirit to His people.

John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Ghost (Matthew 3:11). A clear example of what that meant can be seen when you read about the conversions of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:1-11:18). Jesus told His Apostles that the Holy Spirit would come to them after His death (John 14:16-17, John 14:25-26, and John 16:1-13). We should note that they had received, at least in part, the Spirit working through them prior to Jesus’ death (Matthew 10:1-20). This was true of prophets going back long before Jesus even came to earth (II Samuel 23:1-2, Mark 12:36, and II Peter 1:20-21). Having said that, what the Apostles were able to do after Acts 2:1-4 is clearly different than what anyone did previously. We will get to that in a moment. Back to the point. The Holy Spirit was promised to the Apostles, but not just to them. Jesus promised that those that believed on Him should receive the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). The Apostles said the same when they preached after Jesus left this earth (Acts 2:38 and Acts 5:32).

As you study through the New Testament you see Christians were given the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit gave them spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 12:3-11). How all of that worked is pretty clear. The Apostles received the Holy Spirit in full in Acts 2:1-4. Aside from Cornelius and his household (referenced above), no one else after the second chapter of the book of Acts received the Holy Spirit like the Apostles did. When we come to the fourth chapter of Ephesians, there is only one baptism (Ephesians 4:1-6). That baptism is clearly baptism in water (Acts 8:26-39 and I Peter 3:20-21). The other way in which Jesus’ promise of the Spirit was fulfilled was through the laying on of Apostle’s hands (Acts 8:5-24 and Acts 19:1-7). When you read those Scriptures you see it was miraculous for the purpose of granting spiritual gifts (cf. Mark 16:15-20, Galatians 3:1-5, and Hebrews 2:1-4). That was temporary until the revelation of God was fully revealed (I Corinthians 12:1-13:13 and Ephesians 4:7-16).

The saints in Thessalonica were being instructed not to reject the word of God. The Spirit of God was working through them at this time. The Spirit served as evidence for them (Ephesians 1:13-14). That same Spirit was working through Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus equipping them to teach (I Corinthians 2:1-16). It was not as though Paul could quote multiple New Testament Scriptures in this letter, for they were not all written nor widely available. Having said that, the Spirit of God through prophets could confirm that the message was from the Lord (I Corinthians 14:37). If rejected, they’d then be rejecting God!