

1Thess. 5:19-22 (BCF 29) “The Other Three Marks”

For the Children: Different sports teams generally have different things marking them out – a particular colour shirt, a well-known mascot walking out onto the field, a particular style of play, a team-song etc. The church is not a club like a sports-team. But it does have things that mark it out as different from all the other clubs and teams in the world. Things that mark it out as different from those who claim they are the true church, but they are not. The 3 things that can especially tell us whether a church is true or false are: true preaching, sacraments and church discipline. **Questions:** How does the Holy Spirit enable the church to be true? What kind of “prophecy” do we have to accept today? What does it mean to “test” everything?

Introduction:

First Point: The Spirit-Filled Church

- 1) The Spirit Unquenched: Both the individual believer (1 Cor. 6:19) and the church (1 Cor. 3:16, 2 Cor. 6:16, Eph. 2:21-22) are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. “Not quenching” the Spirit means that the church must not tolerate anything that may cause the Spirit to withdraw from the church – either partially or completely. See Rev. 2:5. The Spirit must be listened to when He warns against tolerating error or loss of love for the Lord (Rev.2-3).
- 2) The Spirit’s Role in the Church: The Spirit’s illuminating grace enables the church to understand and respond to God’s Word; to repent of collective sins; He gives wisdom to the church’s leaders; He guides the selection of office-bearers; He comforts, heals and unifies the church; and He creates the desire for worship and participation in church-life. To quench these works is to risk reducing the church to no true church at all! To agree with this True/False distinction in the BCF in no way contradicts the emphasis of WCF 25:4 – which teaches that no true church is perfect in this world.

Second Point: The Word-Based Church

- 1) Regards for Prophecy: The command not to despise prophetic utterances required believers in the NT to respect any new revelations from the Holy Spirit. Now, however, there are no new revelations (Rev. 22:18). But we must not take lightly the old utterances recorded in Scripture. See Rev. 22:19. Then and now, there were those who would not listen to those bringing God’s Word – either because they didn’t like what it said, or didn’t like those bringing the revelation.
- 2) Preaching, Sacraments and Teaching: The church marked by regard for God’s Word is the church that is marked by regard for true preaching and for proper administration of the sacraments (= “visible Word”). The church must also have regard for all true teaching of God’s Word. However, BCF 29 is focusing on those marks that apply only to the church – as distinct from those things that mark individual believers (like true teaching). Only the church is given the ministry of preaching and sacraments and church discipline. WCF 25:4 adds the proper oversight of worship. The false church adds to God’s Word or takes away from it, in both preaching and the sacraments. It also reacts against those who try to uphold the Truth.

Third Point: The Testing Church

- 1) Testing Everything: Those who claim to speak from God must be tested against the Word of God (Dt. 13:1-5; 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Jn. 4:1). Views from our culture, other religions and philosophies, must also be dealt with in a discerning way.
- 2) Holding Fast and Holding Away: When we have discerned what is good and true, we should hold fast to it, embrace it. On the other hand, whatever threatens to hurt, poison or pervert the church, should be rejected and kept at a distance. The church’s “abstaining” from evil includes church discipline. The false church embraces the evil and persecutes the faithful. These commands to hold fast and hold away imply the sharp distinction between the true and false church, as we find it in BCF 29.

Conclusion:

