

McGregor Baptist Church  
3750 Colonial Boulevard  
Fort Myers, FL. 33912

James O. Holbrook  
Pastor

7/27/97

I Thessalonians 5:20-21

**“LEARN TO TAKE INSTRUCTIONS”**  
(How To Stay In Top Shape Spiritually #6)

Today, with so much emphasis on being in top shape physically, many people are taking exercise classes or slimnastics or body-building programs. In every case, it is best to have a qualified instructor—someone who can show you the right way to build yourself up and who can keep you from doing more harm than good.

Now wouldn't it be foolish for a person to get mad or resent his instructor, just because the instructor asked him to do something that was difficult or that embarrassed him, when he was not very good at doing it? It would be working against our own best interests, if we “despised” the one, who was put there to help us.

Many men, who served in the Marines in World War II, were not particularly fond of their Drill Instructors. These drill instructors would bark out orders and make the men do anything to break their self-wills. They would try to shape individuals to become parts of a fighting unit.

Now, in ordinary life, these D.I.'s could have been the guy next door. But in wartime, they became hard task-masters. Many a G.I. despised them and would have loved to have gotten their hands on them, if they had been out of uniform.

Did you hear the old war story about the Marine Drill Instructor, who was riding in an elevator with three other Marines? All of a sudden, one of the Marines struck the officer. And right away, another Marine struck the D.I., also.

Brushing himself off, the D.I. said: “Now what is the meaning of this?” The one Marine, who hadn't hit him, quickly explained that he was a medical orderly; and the first man, who hit him, was his patient. He had suffered a mental breakdown and was not really responsible for his actions. “O.K.” said the D.I.

Then he turned to the other Marine and said: “And what is your excuse for hitting me?” To which the Marine answered: “When I saw him hit you, I thought that the war must be over! So I couldn't resist hitting you, also.”

Really, as rough as these Drill Instructors may have seemed, most Marines realized later that these men were doing a very necessary thing: they were toughening them up for combat. They were conditioning them for the battlefield, where they must act as a part of a fighting unit and not as individuals. They knew that they couldn't “despise” someone, who was really trying to help them.

Now, as members of the kingdom of God, we are in the Lord's Army. We are “Christian Soldiers,” involved in a spiritual warfare.

And in order to keep us combat-ready, God has appointed certain men and women to instruct us. They may be as ordinary as your next door neighbor, but God has appointed them to be instructors in the faith.

We call the “prophets,” or “preachers.” They speak-forth the instructions of God.

Now don't get mixed-up. We often think of prophesying as “for-telling the future.” Actually, in truth, a Bible prophet was not mainly a fore-teller. He was someone, who told-forth the message of God. He was one of God's instructors, to help people stay in top shape spiritually.

If people resented what these God-appointed instructors told them, they were only hurting themselves. The people of ancient Israel did “despise,” and even persecuted and killed, God's prophets. Consequently, they went to ruin as a nation.

Now that we have God's Word, we don't need people, who can foretell the future. All we need is people who can tell-forth what God has put into this Book. A modern prophet is one, who instructs people from the Word of God.

When I preach to you, I am prophesying. I am trying to instruct you, from the Bible, in becoming stronger spiritually.

Your Sunday School teacher is prophesying, when he instructs you on what the Bible, says. Of he makes some lifelike applications of the truth. And, believe it or not, your mother and dad may be prophesying to you, when they teach you how to live, if they are basing their instructions on the Word of God.

Now, in relation to all such instructors, God tells us to “despise not prophesying.” Try not to resent it, when someone instructs you in God’s truth for living. If you want to stay in top shape spiritually, learn to take instructions!

How many people have “gone to pot” spiritually, because they refused to humbly take any instructions? They got mad at the preacher, who urged them to do something difficult. Or they left home, because they did not like the standards, which their parents set. They despised instruction from God’s appointed “prophets,” and it left them to learn so many of life’s lessons in the hard way.

I have even known people, who say that they will visit a church. But the first time that the preacher even mentions some touchy subject—like divorce, or money, or loving people of another race—they are gone. They will never go back to that church again. How sad, because everyone has some touchy subjects!

Did you hear about the black preacher, who had an “amen corner?” When he preached, some of his men would encourage him by saying: “That’s right, brother; Oh, yes;” or some other encouragement. (I wouldn’t mind that, around here!)

Well, one day he was preaching and said: “Brethren, this church has got to walk for Jesus.”

“Amen, brother, let her walk!”

“Brethren, I say that this church has got to run for Jesus.”

“Adam, brother, let her run!”

“Brethren, this church is going to fly for Jesus.”

“Amen, brother, let her fly!”

“And if this church is going to fly for Jesus, then some of you are going to have to begin to tithe (give a tenth of) your income.”

And the man, who had been “amen-ing so enthusiastically, said: “Let her walk!”

Oh my, there are touchy subjects with all of us. But if we are going to stay in tip shape spiritually, then we’ve got to learn to take instructions from the entire Word of God. **“Despise not prophesying!”**

Let’s ask some questions:

#### I. **WHY DO SOME PEOPLE DESPISE PROPHECYING?**

Just what are the reasons why people have trouble taking spiritual instructions?

A- Some despise **where it is that they heard the instructions.**

If some people heard God’s truth in a little clapboard church, on the other side of the tracks, they would pay no attention. Or if it came from a preacher in some different denomination than the one in which they grew up, they might despise his instruction.

Please, despise not prophesying. No matter where you hear it, give it respectful attention. God has sometimes delivered His message in the strangest places, by the most unlikely men.

I personally don’t need a cathedral, with stained-glass windows and a pipe organ, to hear God, speak. We have built a nice church building, and I hope that many will hear God speak, when they are in it. However, as far as I am concerned, all that we really need is three things: enough room to hold the listeners, the Word of God in the center of everything, and a human instructor, who has the guts to tell everything that it says.

B- Some despise **whom it is that gives God’s instructions.**

Unfortunately, we are all impressed or turned-off by certain types of people. If some do not like the instructor, they may fail to listen to his instructions and, thereby, become the losers.

If the instructor is young and handsome, with a mellow voice, that always helps. One of our seminary professors used to say that a good head of hair was of more value in the ministry than a Ph D. Unfortunately, that is often true.

Some despise the instructor, if he is an older generation. That is foolish! God tells us to “honor the white (hoary) head.” I want to tell you: there is a very real experience, from which we can all profit,

behind each of these white hairs (on my head). And I learned them all right here, because I didn't have any white hairs when I got here!

One of the men, who influenced my Christian life, was a self-supporting bi-vocational preacher. He tuned pianos by day and had 4 or 5 little country "chapels," where he preached in the evenings. They were nothing more than small Bible study groups, by out standards. My own parents were not even impressed enough to pay attention to the man. But I still remember things he said, which shaped my life!

Listen, God can use anybody. Once He even used a jack-ass to speak his instructions. (You can draw your own conclusions, but please keep it to yourself!) But don't despise one of God's instructors, because he may not be your favorite charming personality.

Now there are people, of whom I am not too fond. I get more out of positive encouragement than from negative scolding or from people who are always "fighting evil." Yet it was a hell-fire evangelist, who scared me into the arms of Jesus, as a boy of 15.

And I'm glad for people, like Jerry Falwell, who have the "guts" to take on the corruption in our government. Somebody certainly needs to!

God sometimes uses the most unlikely people to instruct us. It was back during the Great Depression. A church in downtown Philadelphia needed to enlarge. They had a preacher, named Russell Conwell, who was world-famous and drawing larger crowds than they were equipped to handle. But the times were hard, and, many thought it was no time to build a larger church building.

One night the issue was being hotly debated in a business meeting. The church was about to split on the issue.

But during the debate, there was a "squeek, squeek, squeek" sound, coming from the back of the auditorium. Looking around, the people saw a small boy, pulling his little red wagon full of bricks. He had gone out and gathered up these old bricks and brought them, as his first contribution to the project. "I just wanted to help to build the new church," he said, in his child-like faith.

Tears came to the eyes of those, who had been involved in such a heated debate. Even the most hard-hearted "realists" were melted. And God used that small boy to pull that church together. And yes, during the Great Depression, they succeeded in building the great "Baptist Temple" of Philadelphia. And later that same faith led that church to start the great Temple University and Good Samaritan Hospital. God used a small child, with his small red wagon, to instruct an entire congregation and to turn it into a people of vision and faith.

God can use anyone to help to instruct us. So "despise not" the one, who speaks for God. Learn to take instructions!

Still others are in danger of "despising" **what it is that God instructs.**

God's standards are high. His challenges call for the best in a person. His ideals are not always popular with the masses, nor "politically correct" for the times. Sometimes what God says steps on our toes and cramps our styles. But all that He tells us is from the loving heart of a concerned Father.

Quite naturally, from time to time, God's instructors will—of necessity—make us uncomfortable, embarrassed, and even a little frightened, as they relay to us His challenge. We may even resent the difficulty in what they encourage us to do.

But face it squarely! Learn to take instructions. Despise not their prophesying (preaching)!

But wait a minute, preacher...

## II. **HOW DO YOU KNOW WHICH PROPHET TO LISTEN TO?**

"Many give different kinds of instructions. There are so many different voices. How do you know which one to heed? There are so many different denominations, which conflicting instructions on how to live for Christ."

"And religious TV has not helped. On it you can find all extremes. Robert Schuller teaches Possibility Thinking. Jack Van Impe says that the world is coming to an end. Jerry Falwell wants us to get involved in politics and help to save America. And Benny Hinn knocks them cold in the isles."

I know it can get confusing. And I have not yet mentioned the kooks and the cults.

I heard a little story, which shows the difference in approach in some of our best-known religious instructors. Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, and Robert Schuller went to Hell. So what did they each do? Well, Billy Graham tried to get everyone in Hell saved. Oral Roberts tried to raise enough money to get out of there. And Robert Schuller tried to get the place air-conditioned!

(That's really not accurate, nor even fair. But I thought it was kind of cute. And I'm sure that each of them would get a chuckle out of it. It may have even been Schuller, from whom I heard it.)

But really, how do you know whom to believe? Who is a true prophet, and who is only in it for the profit? "Don't you have to sort it out?"

You bet you do! That's why God says, in verse 21: "Prove all things; hold fast (only) to that which is good."

God never wanted us to follow everyone, who claims to be a spiritual instructor. That's why He said, in verse 12, to "know them that are over you and instruct you."

That's why God warns us to "beware of false prophets—wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15). That's why it says, in John 4:1: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but **test the spirits**, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

God wants us to "sift" what we are told, to "prove" all things, and to "hold onto only what is good." Don't "despise" anyone who speaks for God, but don't necessarily "buy" everything he tells you, either. Prove it!

And, by the way, in Baptist circles we believe you have within you all the necessary equipment to test what you hear. One of our most prized doctrines is "**the priesthood of the believer**." That means that every believer can interpret the Bible to his own needs, with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Now someone will probably say: "Wait a minute, preacher. I have never been to theological seminary, nor even to Bible college. How can I prove, or test, what preachers tell me?"

There are **three ways for you to "prove" all things**; which you hear men teaching:

#### #1-**Search the Scriptures.**

God paid a very high compliment to the Christians in the town of Bere (Acts 17:11): "These were more noble...in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were (really) so."

There you have it: They despised not prophesying ("receiving the Word with all readiness of mind"). And yet they proved all things, which they had heard, by "searching the Scriptures, whether those things were so."

That's what God wants you and me to do. Check-out the ideas in your own Bible. Make sure that you are not hearing a man's pet philosophy. Make sure that God has really said it.

And if you wonder, why not ask your own pastor? At least give him "equal time."

One important idea is to see if what is being taught is what the entire passage of Scripture means. Or is it an isolated verse, which has been twisted out of its context? "A text without its context is a pretext."

You can take isolated verses from the Bible and glue them together to say anything. That's what the cults love to do.

There is one verse that says: "Judas went out and hanged himself." Another place in the Bible says: "Go and do thou likewise." And still another place says: "And what you do, do quickly!"

You need to be careful, when people jump all around in the Bible and glue things together, like a patchwork quilt! So "search the Scriptures."

"But I don't have time to study the Bible like that!" You take time to read a road map, when you are on a trip, don't you? Well, life is a journey, on which you don't want to end up on a wrong road. Take the time to search the Scriptures.

"But I can't afford all of those Bible commentaries and dictionaries!" You can afford a \$600 TV, can't you? Besides, you can borrow these study helps from our church library, for nothing!

"But I don't like to study!" Neither do I. But there is no other way to learn, my friend.

I'll tell you a secret. Stick, around here for 52 weeks a year, and we'll go verse by verse. By the end of a year, we will have covered 52 parts of the Bible. Come back Sunday night, and we'll cover 104 parts of the Bible. In ten years, we will have studied 1,040 parts of the Bible.

That's why I am an expository Bible preacher. I want you to develop a back-log, so you can be ready to "prove all things" which you hear and to figure out what is good for you, by yourself!

#### #2 way to "prove all things" is to **Search For the Inner Witness.**

The presence of the Lord in our lives can help us to "prove," or test, the things which we hear. If we are in fellowship with Him, He can make things "ring true." There is an inner witness from God, if we will just learn to LISTEN for it.

Now I almost hesitate to say this, because there are so many people, who tell me that God “OK’d” something with them, when He seems to tell me the opposite in His Book. I can’t figure this, but I still believe that God will give us an inner witness, to prove whether or not something is right.

I John 2:26-27 says: “These things have I written unto you, concerning them who try to deceive you. But **the anointing** that you have received of Him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie...”

When you want to prove all things, earnestly pray for God’s leadership in understanding it. Take a few minutes and be quiet. Listen for that still small voice of the Holy Spirit.

I tell you to do that at the end of each sermon, which I preach. Make it a habit to listen, and the Lord will lead you rightly.

There is at least one other way to “prove all things:”

### #3- **Search Out Your Own Heart.**

Sometimes we don’t “get” (or understand) some truth, because we don’t want that truth to “get” a hold on our lives. Some people “don’t get it,” because they are afraid that it will get them! Sometimes we won’t receive some message from God, because we don’t want, in our hearts, to do what it tells us to do.

Jesus said: “If any man desires to do (His) my Father’s will he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God...” (John 7:17).

That’s why we need to search our own hearts. Most of us believe what we want to believe. So if our hearts want the wrong thing, we are in danger of believing something that is wrong.

Dare to search your heart, when you are looking to “test all things.” (Read Jeremiah 17:9)

But, whatever you do, be willing to take instructions!

Once a boy of 15 went to listen in a modern day prophet, who was speaking a message from God. As the preacher spoke, the boy realized that he was a sinner and that he was separated from God by those sins. As he listened, however, he learned that God loved him so much that He had come to earth and taken the boy’s punishment for him. God-in-a-body died on the cross, in order to pay the death penalty, which we each deserved to pay for our own sins.

Then that preacher showed that boy how to pray and how to accept God’s forgiveness and how to take his place in the family of God. And the boy responded. He invited Jesus to come into his life and to be his personal Savior.

In later years, that same boy met some older Christians, who taught him how to live for God. One ex-G.I., in the Navigators movement, showed him Psalm 119:11, and he began memorizing parts of the Bible.

Later yet, another preacher said something, which stuck in his mind. He said: “Give your life to Jesus. He can do more with it than you can.” The young man gave his life to God for whatever God wanted. And God took his life and led him into full-time Christian services, as a Pastor.

Later, a man in California, named Bill Bright, showed him that God had called him to “bear fruit”...that the most important thing in the Christian life is to reproduce your faith in someone else. And that young Pastor decided to make the major thrust of his ministry an attempt to win souls to Jesus.

Later, as a result of this philosophy, his church got so crowded that it had to go to three morning services. But this wasn’t an ideal situation. It led to all sorts of problems. And the problems seemed impossible!

That Pastor was frustrated almost to despair, stands before you, as a senior citizen. And the truth is that he is the product of so many other people, whom God used to instruct him. And he is so thankful today that he did not “despise” their prophesying. He is so thankful to God that he was **willing to take instructions!**

And my best advice to you, my friends, is to “despise not prophesying. Prove all things: hold fast to that which is good.” And you will stay in top shape spiritually!