

The Challenge of “Zeal with Knowledge” in the Context of Myanmar Churches, Based on Some Pauline Letters: Part 1

by Stephen Shwe

Introduction

A dispute between those who champion the necessity of spiritual zeal and others who focus on the essential role of knowledge has been a tension in the churches of Myanmar for many years. While some, especially Pentecostal churches, focus more on fire or a Spirit-filled life, other churches, mostly non-Pentecostal, put more emphasis on knowledge (academics or education). In seeking balance between these point of disagreement, the teachings of Paul offer wisdom that points to a solution. While examining Paul’s instruction, this research will answer the questions: (1) What are the challenges of the tension between zeal and knowledge in the churches of Myanmar? (2) What does Paul teach in his letters regarding zeal and knowledge? (3) How can a balance be found between zeal and knowledge in Myanmar’s churches today?

Because this topic is too broad to thoroughly research and evaluate in a limited number of pages, the background of the issues will mainly be presented. In Part 1 of this article an analytical exegesis of zeal, which includes enthusiasm or eagerness for spiritual things; an exegesis of knowledge which includes intellectual activities such as teaching, reason, and understanding from some Pauline letters will be presented. In Part two, an analysis of the role of zeal and knowledge in the lives of biblical characters from both Old and New Testaments will be given and finally, an application to the churches of Myanmar.

The Background of the Issues

This study will present the tragically negative attitude, which some Pentecostal Churches have toward intellectual exercises, academics, and highly educated people in our Christian community in Myanmar. Keith Warrington points out a truth evident in the Myanmar Pentecostal community that “although this has been greatly reduced in some

countries, a continuing anti-intellectual stance by some Pentecostals still exists.”¹

A specific example that the writer heard from his friend and student will be described. One Assemblies of God minister in Mandalay (the former second capital city of Myanmar) has a very big church, beautifully built on his own property. In one sense, he is a successful pastor in his area and very well-known among the Myanmar Christian community. Nevertheless, he is an anti-intellectual minister. He does not allow his church members to study in Bible Schools. His children are not encouraged to go for higher education. One young man was kicked out of his church after spending four years in a Bible School. In addition, one of the students from Peace Evangelical Myanmar Bible College (PEMBC) went to that church in his summer break because it was his former mother church. During his visit, the church called him to the altar and prayed for him in order to cast out education demons. The church pastor verbally spoke against higher education, as well. In fact, there are many preachers who preach against higher education and put more emphasis on the Spirit-filled life and revelation from the Holy Spirit, which is not wrong all the time. But for them, being zealous for God and fervent in Spirit is the most vital thing in ministry and in a believer’s life. For this reason, they speak against educated people and accuse them of not giving room for the Holy Spirit.

In contrast, non-Pentecostal people in Myanmar put more emphasis on the necessity of theology and intellectual growth. Since the 1960s, liberal theology has been discussed in some of their schools, including the Myanmar Institute of Theology, which is one of the most advanced non-Pentecostal Bible schools in Myanmar.² As a consequence, “this [Liberalism] has resulted in nothing but creating nominalism in almost all churches.”³ Being passionate for preaching the gospel and having zeal for a Spirit-filled life has been diminished and lost in non-Pentecostal churches. These churches stress a traditional way of worship and head knowledge in studying the Scriptures.

Many times, non-Pentecostal people speak about the lack of education in the Pentecostal community. According to them, Pentecostal people are weak in Biblical education. Most theological books were written by liberal scholars and Baptist theologians, but not many are written by Pentecostals. Chin Khua Khai confirms this, stating “in Myanmar, critics [non-Pentecostal people] often speak of Pentecostals

¹Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 156.

²Saphir Athyal, ed., *Church in Asia Today: Challenges and Opportunities* (Singapore, The Asia Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1996), 356.

³Ibid.

as emotionalists who are not oriented towards intellectual matters.”⁴ In their perspective, Pentecostal preachers rely more on emotions and instant revelatory messages for their preaching than proper preparation. Therefore, a balance between the two perspectives needs to be considered to serve God and His people in our Christian community with excellence.

Clarification of the Topic

The topic of this paper, “Zeal with Knowledge,” was taken from the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS) theme. However, the theme verse, Isaiah 11:2, will not be used for this writing. Instead, select Scripture verses from Pauline letters will be the main texts for this study. In exploring this topics, it becomes evident that the terms, “zeal” and “knowledge,” may imply more than their literal meanings because these two words convey broader metaphorical or figurative ideas. Nevertheless, the original terminologies of zeal and knowledge from Greek will be precisely analyzed here based on the writings of Paul in his epistles.

The word “zeal,” is derived from the original Greek word *ζηλος* which can be defined as “eager striving, competition, enthusiasm, admiration, and in suitable contexts praise, glory.”⁵ This word portrays two meanings both positive and negative. Its negative sense, zeal means “an envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy”⁶—envy (2 Corinthians 12:20), jealousy (Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 3:3), emulation (Galatians 5:20). In a positive sense, zeal signifies “ardor in embracing, pursuing, defending anything”⁷—zeal for the good of Paul (2 Corinthians 7:11), and zeal stirred up very many of the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 9:2). Furthermore, the word also implies having zeal for religious laws (Romans 10:2) and because of that it can even cause violence (Philippians 3:6). However, since none of the above usages fit the intended implication of this research, the Greek word *ζηλωται* which means “one burning with zeal; a zealot”⁸ will be traced as the main term for this discussion. Its main text is 1 Corinthians 14:12.

The Greek word, *ζηλωται* which is from *ζηλωτης* is used in different places in Paul’s epistles with different meanings. W. E. Vine says that

⁴Chin Khua Khai, “Pentecostalism in Myanmar” in *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 2002), 67.

⁵Verlyn Verbrugge, ed., *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 506.

⁶Joseph Henry Thayer, *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament with Index* (Christian Copyrights, 1983), 271.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

this word is “used adjectivally, of being zealous (a) ‘of the Law,’ Acts 21: 20; (b) ‘toward God,’ 22:3; (c) ‘of spiritual gifts,’ 1 Corinthians 14:12; and (d) ‘of good works,’ Titus 2:14.”⁹ *ζηλωται* also describes Paul’s loyalty to Judaism before his conversion. Out of these various implications, the direction for this particular discussion is from 1 Corinthians 14:12, where Paul urged the Corinthians to be zealous for spiritual gifts to edify the church.

Another understanding for this word *ζηλωτης* is “the Zealot.” This word has been common to Jewish people since the Old Testament times. Joseph Henry Thayer describes the original source of the word and how it derived in history as the following:

For the Heb. *קנא* used of God as jealous of any rival and sternly vindicating his control; Exo. 20:5; Deut. 4:24. From the time of Maccabees there existed among the Jews a class of men called Zealots, who rigorously adhered to the Mosaic Law and endeavored even by a resort to violence, after the examples of Phinehas (Num 25: 11; 4 Maccl, 18: 12), to prevent religion from being violated by others, but in the later days of Jewish common wealth they used their holy zeal as a pretext for the basest crimes, Joseph b.j. 4, 3, 9.¹⁰

Apparently, it is understood that the Zealots had a zeal for the law and eagerly wanted to protect their religion from violations. In this sense, their religious law meant everything to them; they would do anything to keep the purity of the Mosaic law. Colin Brown even says, “the Zealots themselves suffered willing martyrdom for their beliefs (Josephus, War 2, 170 f.; 3, 9).”¹¹ This illustration of their passion brings greater understanding of how this word, *ζηλωται* was used and implied in different verses of Paul’s letters and in Jewish history.

To further clarify the topic of zeal, the word, *ζεοντες* from the root word *ζεω*, which literally means, “to boil over, and be on fire,”¹² will also be studied as a key word for this paper. Some scholars have their own interesting understanding about the word *ζεω* and see it as a link to *ζηλος*. According to Joseph Henry Thayer, the word zeal is

⁹W. E. Vine, *The Comprehensive Dictionary of the Original Greek Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers* (McLean, Virginia: Macdonald Publishing Co., 1989), 1272.

¹⁰Joseph Henry Thayer, 271.

¹¹Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol., 3, Pri-Z (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 1167.

¹²Michael F. Bird, *The Story of God Bible Commentary: Romans*, eds., Tremper Longman III & Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 432.

“(from ζέω (Curtius, § 567; Vanicek, p. 757)); the Sept. for ζέω; excitement of mind, ardor, fervor of spirit;”¹³ For Thayer, these two words, “zeal” and “heat” (fig. fervent), have a connection. Moreover, James Strong also confirms that the word ζηλος is “from 2204/[zeo]; prop. heat, i.e. (fig.) ‘zeal’ (in a favourable sense, ardour; in an unfavourable one, jealousy, as of a husband [fig. of God], or an enemy, malice):—emulation, envy (-ing), fervent mind, indignation, jealousy, zeal.”¹⁴ In line with Thayer, Strong also agrees that zeal is derived from the word ζέω. In this sense, one way or another, the word ζέω can be drawn as eagerness or zealous for God and His works. The main text for the word, ζέω will be traced from Romans 12:11. To sum up, the whole concept of *zeal* signifies, in a broad sense, spiritual enthusiasm which includes power, being zealous for spiritual things and continually burning with spiritual fervency.

In addition, the word “knowledge” is significant to this study and will need to be analyzed from its original context. The Greek term γνῶσις which can be translated as “knowledge” can also be found in different places in Paul’s writings with different intended meanings. For instance, Paul spoke about knowledge in (1 Timothy 6:20) which refers to worldly knowledge (science) that leads people to stray from the faith; the word “knowledge” is used to refer to knowing the law (Romans 2:20), knowing sin (Romans 3:20); also, it is used for knowing the truth (1 Timothy 2:4) and knowing Christ or His salvation (Philippians 3:8). But the intended meaning for “knowledge” here is “all knowledge”, including intellectual components—teaching, mind, understanding, thinking and reason. In line with what Anthony C. Thiselton says, “‘knowledge’ is sometimes used as it is here, in a wide, general sense that embraces wisdom, understanding and reason.”¹⁵ Lastly, the main text for “knowledge” will be based on Romans 15:14.

Analytical Exegesis of Selected Texts

There are many passages that speak about “zeal” and “knowledge” in Paul’s writings. However, selected texts on zeal (1 Corinthians 14:12; Romans 12:11), knowledge (Romans 15:14) and on zeal with knowledge (2 Timothy 1:7; 1 Corinthians 14:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21) will be particularly elaborated in this analytical exegesis.

¹³Joseph Henry Thayer, 271.

¹⁴James Strong, *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 34. (A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament; with Their Renderings in the Authorized English Version, 1890).

¹⁵Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 37.

Zeal – 1 Corinthians 14:12; Romans 12:11

1 Corinthians 14:12 – Thus also you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek to excel in the edification of the church.¹⁶

In this verse, Paul obviously testified that the Corinthian believers were “zealous or zealots for the Spirit.” The word “*ζηλωταί*” conveys both negative and positive meaning—becoming a zealot for traditions of Judaism and zealous for the Spirit. If someone views this word in terms of the first connotation, the best example would be the former life of Paul himself. He was a zealot for Judaism, which caused him to destroy the church. However, this word implies here a positive meaning of affirming believers in Corinth who were striving after the gifts of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ He said much the same thing about their great desire to receive spiritual gifts in other verses—1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1.

The Greek term, *πνευμάτων* literally means “spirits.” Anthony C. Thiselton interprets this word as “powers of the Spirit.”¹⁸ Similarly, Charles Hodge views this word as “manifestations of the Spirit, or forms under which the Spirit manifests himself,”¹⁹ (1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 John 4:1; and Revelations 1:4). However, Simon J. Kistemaker translated this word as spiritual gifts. He says that, “he [Paul] exhorts them to become recipients of spiritual gifts.”²⁰ The translation of Kistemaker would be true when he defines the word *πνευμάτων* as “spiritual gifts” because chapter 14 is mainly speaking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, specifically speaking in tongues and its interpretation and prophecy.

The last phrase of this verse shows that the purpose of their eagerness for spiritual gifts should be “to edify the church.” The believers in Corinth should seek to build up the body Christ, the church, by their gifts, which they earnestly long to possess. In this sense, the writer of this letter, Paul would “redirect their zeal to those things that contribute to the edification of the entire church: ‘if you are eager for spiritual powers [gifts], strive to excel in those that build up the entire church’.”²¹

¹⁶All translations from the Greek New Testament are my own.

¹⁷Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 487.

¹⁸Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 1107.

¹⁹Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 252.

²⁰Simon J. Kistemaker, 488.

²¹David E. Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians*, eds., Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 638.

By looking at this verse, it is fairly certain that being zealous for spiritual gifts is a good thing. In no place will one see that Paul blames any churches or believers for eagerness to receive spiritual things. He did not speak negatively about zeal for spiritual gifts. Instead, he praised it (2 Corinthians 8:7) and he urged the Corinthians to have those gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1). For this reason, undoubtedly, one can say that eagerness to have spiritual gifts is a precious thing and a praise-worthy desire. Therefore, like the church of Corinth, ministers, elders and all believers should have a zeal to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Also, one should remember that the purpose of those gifts is not for our own benefit but for the edification of the body of Jesus Christ, the church.

Romans 12:11 – Do not be slothful in diligence;
fervent in Spirit; serve the Lord.

The Apostle Paul strongly encouraged the Roman believers that “they should not allow their diligence to dwindle.”²² This means, they ought not to be slow in making an effort but instead, they should be on fire in Spirit and serve the Lord. With this in view, the main focus in this verse will be “fervent in Spirit.”

After Paul urged the believers in Rome not to lag in their diligence, he continued urging them “to be fervent in Spirit.” The word, ζεουτεζ from the root word ζεω literally means “to boil, to be hot”²³ or “burn”²⁴ but metaphorically it means “to be fervent, ardent, zealous.”²⁵ The church members in Rome were encouraged not only to be diligent but also to be fervent or to be on fire; and their “fiery fervency”²⁶ must be in Spirit. When Paul used the word πνευματι there were different interpretations about whether it was referring to “the Holy Spirit” or “human spirits.” William. S. Plummer says, “some think spirit here means the Holy Spirit; but we obtain a good sense by understanding the phrase as warm-hearted, full of life, as in Acts 18:25.”²⁷ For him, this word is not definitely referring to the Holy Spirit, rather to the human spirit in line with Acts 18:25, which speaks about Apollos’ fervency for the Word of God. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland have no

²²Michael F. Bird, *The Story of God Bible Commentary: Romans*, eds., 432.

²³William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 232.

²⁴Sakae Kubo, *A Reader’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and A Beginner’s Guide for the Translation of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 144.

²⁵William D. Mounce, 232.

²⁶Michael F. Bird, 432.

²⁷Wm. S. Plummer, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1971), 572.

specific stand regarding this word. They say, “Paul calls his readers to have ‘spiritual fervor’ (the same language is used of Apollos in Acts 18:25. As often happens, it is not fully clear whether ‘spirit’ should be capitalized and taken as a reference to the Holy Spirit”²⁸ For these authors, this word is not clear in their reference.

However, John R. W. Stott says that “in telling the Romans to be ‘aglow with the Spirit’ (RSV, REB), he is almost certainly referring to the Holy Spirit. . .”²⁹ Also, William Hendriksen, in line with Stott, says, “the source of enthusiasm is not in man. If a person is going to be ‘set on fire,’ it is the Holy Spirit who must do this.”³⁰ In looking at these authors and their views on the word “in Spirit,” Stott and Hendriksen’s views are true and correct. The reason is that, although this word was used for “human spirit” in other letters of Paul, whenever he used this word in the book of Romans, he always referred to the Holy Spirit, not the human spirit (Romans 8:2; 15). In other words, the context of Romans stands as evidence of this argument. Therefore, “fervent in the Spirit” in Paul’s encouragement does not refer to human spirit or one’s emotion but the Holy Spirit for He is the source of zeal and fervency.

The last phrase of this verse ends with to “serve the Lord.” The intention of fervency or being on fire should be motivated by serving the Lord. In saying “serve,” it conveys the meaning of “the slave,” (Romans 6:6). It is important to understand that “the imagery of the slave is a reminder that what is in view is not personal satisfaction or flights of spirituality, but the will and command of the master.”³¹ To sum up, without being slothful in diligence, believers should be always fervent in the Holy Spirit and serving the Lord effectively.

²⁸Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans - Galatians*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 190.

²⁹John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 332.

³⁰William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 415.

³¹James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 9-16*, eds., David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol., 38 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 754.

Having explored the concept of zeal, the New Testament idea of knowledge will now be analyzed.

Knowledge – Romans 15:14

Romans 15:14 – Now I myself am confident about you, my brothers, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.

In this verse, one can see the compliment of Paul to the people in the Roman church, who were his brothers and sisters in Christ. His compliment includes three parts. First, Roman believers were full of goodness. Second, they were filled with all knowledge. Third, they were able to instruct one another. The first phrase will not be emphasized in this elaboration, but in brief. When Paul mentions their fullness of goodness, it is definitely referring to the fruit of the Spirit which is in Galatians 5:22.³² The second clause “having been filled with all knowledge” and the third phrase “ability to instruct one another” are closely related to each other and these two will be specifically elaborated on for they are the main emphasis of this discussion.

The word *γνώσεως* is attached to *πασῆς* with the definite article *της*, which New King James Version (NKJV) and English Standard Version (ESV) translate as “with all knowledge” and the Bible in Basic English (BBE)³³ put it as “complete in all knowledge.” Thus, it is sure that Paul’s meaning of “knowledge” is not merely one type of knowledge. Also, James D. G. Dunn says that “pas + definite article = all (that is, the whole range of) knowledge.”³⁴ For Dunn, when he says, “the whole range of knowledge,” it would include all components of knowledge “that is necessary for the Christian life.”³⁵ This is why one can imply that “all” is a hint of the whole range of knowledge which would consist of intellectual components—teaching, thinking, reasoning and the mind.

The phrase “instructing one another” is the evidence of the continuation of Paul’s implication regarding their knowledge. The word *νουθετεῖν* “reflects more than the imparting of information; it connotes the giving of counsel, reproof, or warning (cf. New American Standard Bible or NASB, ‘admonish,’ cf. Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:14).”³⁶ This intellectual ability helps the church members to edify one

³²Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, 218.

³³A Version of *Bible in Basic English*.

³⁴James D. G. Dunn, 858.

³⁵Stanley E. Porter, *The Letter to the Romans: A Linguistic and Literary Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 277.

³⁶Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, 218.

another in instructing, warning and counseling, which today's churches also definitely need. "The members of Roman house churches were under mutual obligation ('to one another') to exercise such a ministry among themselves."³⁷ This is a great lesson for believers and especially for the Pentecostal community that having zeal for spiritual things and being on fire is not enough. One must have all knowledge and a teaching ability to teach one another. Therefore, it is reasonable to hold that all knowledge implies the intellectual ability to think, understand, reason and teach others.

Zeal with Knowledge: 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 Corinthians 14:14-15,
1 Thessalonians. 5:19-21

In observance of Paul's writing, one can certainly see that Paul never went to the extreme but rather, he always held a balance between zeal and knowledge. Although, the exact words "zeal" and "knowledge" are not seen in the selected verses below, it is fairly certain that the following verses clearly show the ideas of zeal with knowledge, which never contradict each other but almost always go hand in hand. Specifically, three passages will be analyzed under this topic: 2 Timothy 1:7—power and sound mind, 1 Corinthians 14:14-15—spirit and mind, and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21—not quenching the Spirit but testing everything.

2 Timothy 1:7 – For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice,
but a spirit of power, of love and of a sound mind.

In this verse, a young minister, Timothy, was encouraged by his spiritual father, Paul. In his encouragement, the Apostle displayed two things—what Timothy had received from God and what he had not. At first, Paul explained that God did not give Timothy a spirit of fear. The word *δειλία* is translated as "timidity or fear" in most translations, including the New King James Version (NKJV), English Standard Version (ESV), New Living Translation (NLT) and New International Version (NIV). However, Gordon D. Fee states that "in giving his Spirit to Timothy, God did not give him timidity—a translation that is probably too weak. The word, often appearing in battle contexts, suggests 'cowardice' or the terror that overtakes the fearful in extreme difficulty (cf. Leviticus 26:36)."³⁸ Fee's statement is true because Timothy was fighting ministry battles. Also, it is observed that naturally, Timothy was a fearful man (1 Corinthians 16:10). Therefore, William D. Mounce

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Gordon D. Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, ed., W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 227.

confirms that “δειλίας, ‘cowardice,’ tells us about Timothy’s character.”³⁹ In the midst of all these great challenges and extreme difficulties, he needed this sort of encouragement. This is why Paul had to give support by saying that God has not given him a spirit of fear, or more strongly ‘cowardice’” as the very first encouragement.

Secondly, in contrast to a great fear or cowardice, the Apostle mentioned three positive qualities that the Lord gave to Timothy—power, love and a sound mind. In this list of God’s gifts, mainly, “power” and “sound mind” will be emphasized. The second component, “love,” will not be widely covered in this particular discussion. So, in contrast to cowardice, the very first quality that Paul explored was “power.” It is the opposite of great fear. This power can be understood as “manfully to bear up against trials and difficulties, to hold our ground when others are ready to yield and give way.”⁴⁰ In the middle of ministry storms, this power can make ministers stand strong and firm. When other people are about to give up because of challenges, the power that is inside of us will help us to be persistent and persevering. When Paul said this word to Timothy, in fact, “he speaks particularly about ministers, and exhorts them, in the person of Timothy, to arouse themselves actively to deeds of valor; because God does not wish them to perform their office in a cold and lifeless manner, but to press on forward powerfully, relying on the efficacy of the Spirit.”⁴¹ It is very true that Paul was encouraging all ministers and servants of the Lord through Timothy, that God has clothed us with His power to serve Him effectively; thus, His men and women should be active and always come alive with boldness for His service.

After a gift of power, Paul went on to describe a spirit of love which is also an essential contrast to cowardice, for love is a great tool to overcome fear. 1 John 4:18 states, “*there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. . .*” (NIV). But this quality, love, will not be elaborated further because our basic discussion is to seek a balance between “power” and a “sound mind,” which we can relate to “zeal” and “knowledge” in an indirect or figurative sense.

The last component, one of the main qualities for this analytical emphasis, is “a sound mind.” For this word, the Greek term *σοφρονησμου* is used and it has different translations such as self-discipline or

³⁹William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles*, eds., Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, vol., 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 477.

⁴⁰Patrick Fairbairn, *Pastoral Epistles*, foreword by Cyril J. Barber (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1980), 315.

⁴¹John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 191.

discipline (NIV, NLT, NASB), self-control (ESV, Revised Standard Version or RSV, Today's English Version or TEV), a sound mind (NKJV, YLT⁴²) and soberness⁴³ (Vulgate). According to I. Howard Marshall, a "sound mind" is "to be understood in the light of the use of the word-group in the PE [Pastoral Epistles] to signify 'moderation, self-discipline, prudence.'"⁴⁴ Marshall is strongly akin to NIV, NLT and NASB translations which put more emphasis on discipline. Gordon D. Fee states his view on the word "a sound mind," saying it is "a cognate, and here probably a synonym, for the 'sound mindedness' of Titus 2:2, 5 and elsewhere. In all likelihood Paul intended to call for a 'wise head' in the face of deceptive and unhealthy teaching of the errorists."⁴⁵ For Fee, it is very clear that *σοφρονησμου* is not self-control or discipline that helps only oneself but it includes the intellectual aspect of clarity that can even enable us to distinguish right or wrong teachings of heretics. Also, Fairbairn indicates that "a sound mind" "expresses the authority which admonishes and restrains those who walk in a disorderly manner, and is opposed to cowardice."⁴⁶ It is consistent to believe that Fee and Fairbairn are accurate in their understanding of this term because it is possible that Timothy was challenged by other doctrinal teachings in his surroundings. Besides his own natural fearful character, being surrounded by false teachings could have threatened Timothy. Therefore, Paul encouraged him that God had given him not only power and love, but also a sound mind which would help him to get rid of all confusion and instead give him clarity in mind, or a "wise head."⁴⁷

When Paul described the opposite of cowardice, the spirit of "power" seems adequate and a direct antidote to great fear. Paul, however, added the spirit of a sound mind together with love. This might be "for the purpose of distinguishing that power of the Spirit from the fury and rage of fanatics, who while they rush forward with reckless impulse, fiercely boast of having the Spirit of God. For that reason, Paul expressly states that this powerful energy is moderated by 'soberness.'"⁴⁸ This is why power, which reflects the concept of zeal, is an indispensable quality together with a sound mind, which represents the idea of knowledge. Power arouses us to stay awake or alive and prevent us from being cold or lukewarm. While a sound mind helps us to protect the

⁴²A long form for YLT is Young's Literal Translation.

⁴³In the original version, Vulgate, the word "soberness," is described as *sobrietatis*.

⁴⁴I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ed., J. A. Emerton (London, T & T Clark, 2004), 700.

⁴⁵Gordon D. Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 227.

⁴⁶Patrick Fairbairn, 315.

⁴⁷Gordon D. Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 227.

⁴⁸John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 192.

people that God has entrusted to us from wrong doctrines or false teachings. The central conclusion is that both are equally important.

1 Corinthians 14:14-15 – For when I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful or unproductive. What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit and I will also pray with the mind. I will sing with the spirit and I will also sing with the mind.

The original phrase *πνευμάμου* which means “my spirit” is interpreted in several ways. Charles Hodge specifies three points—first, “that spirit (my spirit) here means the higher intellectual powers of the soul, as distinguished from the understanding.”⁴⁹ Second, it may be “that spirit” here means the affections. ‘My feelings find utterance in prayer, but my understanding is unfruitful’⁵⁰ Third, “my spirit may mean the Holy Spirit in me; that is, my spiritual gift.”⁵¹ According to David E. Garland, Barrett also is in line with the last view. Garland states, “Barrett opts for the spirit as the spiritual gift.”⁵² Different from these views, Gordon D. Fee holds a different view, that when Paul used the word “my spirit,” it meant “his own spirit is praying as the Holy Spirit gives the utterance.”⁵³ This means, his “innermost spiritual being”⁵⁴ was connecting to the Spirit of God through praying in tongues. In this sense, the interpretation of Gordon D. Fee is rooted in the fact that Paul did not refer to his intellectual power or his affections when he said, “my spirit.” The reason is that the intellectual power is directly related to “the mind” which Paul separately mentioned in the next phrase, and “in this whole discussion *spirit* is not once used for the feelings.”⁵⁵ Also, the interpretation of that word as “spiritual gift” is very general; no one can know what “spiritual gift” refers to. Therefore, it is logical to hold that “my spirit” must be referring to the inner spirit of Paul which is connected to the Holy Spirit who enables him to pray in another tongue.

⁴⁹Charles Hodge, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: 1 Corinthians*, eds., Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, Illinois: A Division of Good New Publishers, 1995), 252-53.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 253.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²David E. Garland, 639.

⁵³Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistles to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 671.

⁵⁴Anthony C. Thiselton, *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 242.

⁵⁵Charles Hodge, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: 1 Corinthians*, 253.

What is the meaning of “my mind is unproductive,” then? It is clear that when Paul prays in tongues, he does not comprehend what he is speaking about.⁵⁶ Does he need to understand when he prays in tongues for verse 2 says that “no one understands them” (NIV)? There seems to be a contradiction between verse 2 and 14 but in fact there is none. A simple explanation of the above phrase is “the mind is unproductive, because it does not edify others.”⁵⁷ This phrase is confirmed by verse 16 that “if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?” (ESV). Therefore, it is clear that if our prayers are not understood and as a result are not edifying others, and furthermore, are not interpreted, then one should pray privately.

After that, Paul begins verse 15 with “what is the conclusion then?” (NKJV) and he makes a determination to do both praying and singing with his spirit and with his mind. So Paul makes a decision to pray and sing with his spirit which means he will continue praying and singing in tongues to edify himself. It is also encouraging to know that Paul prayed in tongues more than the other believers in Corinth (1Corinthians 14:18).

The Greek word, *νοῦ* is interpreted as “mind” (NIV, ESV) or “understanding” (NKJV). Paul drew a conclusion that he would not only pray and sing with his spirit in tongues, he would also pray and sing with his mind which could be understood as “full possession of his mental faculties.”⁵⁸ For Paul, worshipping in Spirit does not mean that our mental state is absent. “The mind, too, can be in communion with the deity, and the use of the mind is important for Paul.”⁵⁹ To sum up, the whole context of this chapter mainly teaches the correct use of spiritual gifts, especially, speaking in tongues and its interpretation, and also the gift of prophecy. Out of this teaching, one can draw out some truths that connect the relationship between spiritual enthusiasm and intellectual understanding or thinking.

The strength in the church of Corinth was that many people in it exercised the gifts of the Holy Spirit; they had all the gifts (1:5). Paul cautioned them and gave them practical advice about how to use those gifts in the church in a proper way. The fact that they were zealous for spiritual things was good. No one can find any place where Paul told them to stop using spiritual gifts. But in order to exercise them in a proper way, they also needed to control the gifts with their mind.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 491.

⁵⁸David E. Garland, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians*, 640.

⁵⁹Ibid.

In the previous verse of this chapter, verse 6, Paul told the Corinthians to exercise not only speaking in tongues but also revelation and prophecy together with knowledge and teaching. Interestingly, Paul illustrated this with examples of musical instruments which need to be played in an accurate way and a trumpet that needs to make a certain sound so that people might prepare for battle (1 Cor. 14:7-8). In the same way, the gift of tongues should be used in a beneficial way by providing an interpretation. Furthermore, verses 19 and 20 speak about being mature in thinking, becoming adults. Therefore, in one way or another, we can say that spiritual activity should be combined with an understanding mind in worship.

To conclude, the whole chapter is about spiritual gifts which the church members of Corinth should be zealous for, (14:1, 12). Also, Paul told the Corinthians to use those gifts together with their mind or understanding (14:14, 15), knowledge and teaching (14:6), and to become adults in their thinking (14:19, 20). Therefore, one can see that the use of gifts must go together with understandable words.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 – Do not quench the Spirit; do not
despise the prophecies, but test everything;
hold on to which is good.

In the first part of this chapter, the Apostle Paul reminded believers in Thessalonica to be alert because the day of the Lord was at hand. Then in the second part, he gave various exhortations including 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21. This passage begins with the Greek phrase, *τό πνεῦμα μὴ σβεννυτε* which can be translated as “do not quench the Spirit.” “The Spirit” here can mean “*charismata* or gifts of the Spirit”⁶⁰ or “the manifestations of the Holy Spirit.”⁶¹ Also, it can mean the works or the activities of the Holy Spirit.⁶² One thing is extremely clear: Paul strongly urged believers in Thessalonica to not stop using spiritual gifts and they should keep allowing the move and works of the Holy Spirit in their lives and community. In this sense, the spiritual fire which was burning in their midst, should not be put out but rather be kept burning.

As for the word “quench”, it is used for fire and “fire is a common metaphor for the Holy Spirit’s activity (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; Acts

⁶⁰Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 202.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians*, ed., Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 11 (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 279.

2:3; Romans 12:11-12; 2 Timothy 1:6).⁶³ Thus, it makes sense that the move of the Spirit should not be quenched in the lives of believers. Charles A. Wanamaker also says that “to quench the Spirit was to suppress or restrain the Spirit from manifesting itself in Charismatic activities like speaking in tongues and uttering prophecy within the life of the community.”⁶⁴ Therefore, it is logical to state that those gifts, prophecy, speaking in tongues and all others gifts which are listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, should be continually used and practiced in the church. But in 1 Thessalonians 5:20, specifically only prophecy was mentioned by Paul that the believers should not despise. This gift must not be despised because prophecy and its utterance of prophesying can edify, exhort, and encourage believers and the churches (1 Corinthians 14:3, 31).⁶⁵

After Paul’s exhortation to not quench the Spirit and to not despise prophecy, he further instructed “to test everything and to hold on to what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). So, the exercising of spiritual gifts and allowing the manifestations of the Holy Spirit were greatly encouraged. Also, the people were strongly urged not to neglect the gift of prophecy. However, Paul pointed out a very important need, “to test all of their activities.” The word “test” can be understood as to weigh (NIV), evaluate (NLT) and discern (ASV) in 1 Corinthians 14:29. “The verb *dokimazo* was used for the proving or testing of precious metals and the like and then came to be used metaphorically as here.”⁶⁶ It is important to understand that every spiritual movement should be tested or evaluated like people test metals to determine whether they are real or not. In the same way, Paul “expected his readers to weigh supposed Spirit-inspired words and deeds against the doctrinal and ethical norms they had received from him.”⁶⁷ In testing or weighing, the concept of knowledge can be applied.

If questions arise, how do we test? What do we need to make that testing successful? The answer is that the person who is testing must be qualified. In other words, he must have knowledge or wisdom to distinguish whether spiritual gifts or manifestations, are right or wrong. At first, he must know the Word of God; then in order to test or protect the doctrinal errors, he or she must have wisdom and knowledge from both the revelation of God and well-trained experience.

⁶³Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 168.

⁶⁴Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 202.

⁶⁵Charles A. Wanamaker, 202.

⁶⁶Ben Witherington, 169.

⁶⁷Charles A. Wanamaker, 203.

Only after that the believers in Thessalonica were to take hold of the good and to reject what was not good.⁶⁸ “They can hold fast to it, in the sense that they take the message to heart, believe it, and act upon it.”⁶⁹ By doing that, the life of members will be strong in the faith and the ministries of the church will grow. Our major point is to keep spiritual fire burning, not to quench and despise it. At last, it is important to examine all activities that have been heard and seen, then hold on to the good and to reject the bad.

In Part 2 an examination of the balance between zeal and knowledge in the lives of two biblical characters, Moses and Paul, and a proposal on how a healthy balance between zeal and knowledge can be achieved in the churches of Myanmar today will be discussed.

⁶⁸Earl. J. Richard, 283.

⁶⁹I. H. Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1983), 155, quoted in Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 170.