

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

October 2, 2022



SCRIPTURE

¹² Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

COMMENTARY

5:12. Paul turned to some practical matters of church life. The first involves the relationship between the congregation or community and its church leaders. Paul first called the congregation to give respect to those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord. Honor is due to church leaders, whether they are paid staff or officers who give their time and energy (elders, deacons). Spiritual leadership is difficult and weighted with responsibility. These leaders are engaged in hard work. One of their “thankless” duties is to admonish. This deals with pointing out faults or mistakes, errors in individuals or the community. Those who perform this task take on a difficult responsibility, and they are to be respected and honored.

There are implications for the leaders as well. They are to work hard. It is good work, and they are to get their energy from God. Part of the job description of the church leader is to “stand before” or be over others in the Lord. This is not a dictatorship, but a way of lovingly and authoritatively teaching the Word of God to the people. Leaders are also to point out wrongs, sins, and failures in the lives of their people and congregation. This is not a favorite task, but it is essential to the health of believers and the church.

5:13. Not only are we to honor our leaders; we are to think of them in a special, affectionate way. We are to love them. The basis for this love is their work. Church leaders are performing a good work for Christ and His people. This deserves our highest respect and love. Paul then turned our attention toward the person sitting next to us, or across the aisle, and commanded us to live in peace with each other. This is a maintenance program for a healthy church: keep the peace. To live in peace means to go as far as possible to live in harmony with others, or “as far as it depends on you” (Rom. 12:18). Many people who would not rob a bank or tell a blatant lie will sin against this clear command. They speak or act in ways that are divisive. People who act this



way hurt not only themselves and other persons, but they also hurt the church. People outside the church notice such things and stay away.

5:14. Paul next launched into some short, staccato instructions and commands for Christian living. He focused on three types of people in the Thessalonian church who presented different concerns for him. He spoke about the idle, the timid, and the weak. The idle were to be warned. There were those in the Thessalonian church who were so certain of the imminent return of Christ that they became lazy in their daily living. If Christ is coming back soon, they may have reasoned, what is the point of the daily grind? In their neglect they became careless in their responsibilities, spent too much time chatting over the back fence, and contributed little to the general welfare of the church.

The timid were to be encouraged. These were people who had become discouraged, perhaps depressed. They may have felt this way because of difficult circumstances, or because they despaired of living up to the high standards of the Christian faith. These people needed to be helped, not warned. They needed to hear, "You can do it."

The weak were to be helped. These were the spiritually weak in Paul's time, and they are still found in every church. Perhaps they lack knowledge or experience; it could be that they struggle with certain sins which continually defeat them; they may lack courage or find it difficult to trust God. They are weak in the faith and need to be helped along the way. We all identify with this group of people at some time or other. In our weakness and inability to conquer sin, we find that Christ helped us by the sacrifice of his life. Can we who have been so blessed do any less for others in their time of need?

Everyone should be dealt with in patience. Love is what helps us be patient with everyone. Love is patient. It does not seek its own way. Because of our selfish tendencies, we need patience from others, even as we need to be patient. Perhaps that is why God can be so patient with us. He recognizes that our mistakes, our bungling efforts, our one step forward and three steps back are valuable learning exercises in growing in grace and character.

5:15. Paul was concerned not only with relationships within the church, but relationships outside the church. He gave commands for behavior to each other and to everyone else. Getting even, exacting our own sense of "justice," is a strong human tendency. Jesus was different. He contradicted just about everything we naturally do. He often began His moral lessons with "you have heard" and then called for a change by following up with "but I tell you" (Matt. 5:21-30; 33-37; 38-42; 43-47). He brought a new way to live. He is the new way.

Only as we abide in Christ and entrust our grievances, hardships, and the wrongs we suffer to him can we live with this command. It is not natural, but it is possible. It marks a distinctly Christian approach to life. Paul detailed this approach by quoting Proverbs 25:21-22 in the Book of Romans when he called us to live in peace, to not take revenge. He told us, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to



drink” (Rom. 12:20), then added “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). And so Paul told the Thessalonians to be kind to each other and to everyone else. This means everyone both inside and outside the church.

MAIN POINT

Christian community shows the world that we love God and one another.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.
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Have you ever tried to do a group project or activity alone? What was it and what happened?

Why is it easier for a group of people to do something than it is for one person alone?

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-13

The first area Paul mentioned in which believers are to work to strengthen their churches is maintaining a good relationship between leaders and followers.

Why is it important for us to let the leaders of the church know that we value them? What are specific ways we can affirm and support our leaders?

How would you describe your part in meeting the needs of your spiritual leaders? Do they know how much you appreciate them?

When a church supports the pastor and other church staff members adequately, what is the result in the staff members’ lives? In the life of the church?

Church members have an ongoing responsibility to respond properly to the spiritual leaders in their midst. According to Paul, we are to follow good leadership, receive admonition, and express high regard for godly leaders. When the leaders and the people are in right relationship, how much easier it is for all the members of the



congregation to be at peace with each other. Here is a great prescription for a healthy church. Ultimately peace is part of the fruit that the Spirit works in our lives (Gal. 5:22).

- ASK A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:14.

A second area in which believers are to work together to strengthen their churches is meeting the needs of others in the congregation. Six short instructions burst from Paul's pen.

What different types of people in the church does Paul draw attention to in this verse? What is our responsibility with each group?

What must be true about your relationships in order for you to know if the people around you fit in any of these categories?

Paul challenged the people in the church at Thessalonica to correct those who are out of step (the "unruly"); uplift those who are discouraged and fearful (the "fainthearted"); hold on to the fragile (the "weak"); and go the long haul with those who struggle ("be patient with everyone"). To know if the people around us fit into any of these categories, we have to do life with them; we have to be in genuine, deep relationships. These types of struggles are not evident on the surface.

What is the goal of correcting those who are out of step? What does it not look like? Why is this often so hard for us to do?

The unruly might refer to church members who were able to work for a living but refused to do so (2 Thess. 3:10-11). Or it may refer to church members who were shirking their church responsibilities. In either case, they were to be confronted. Whenever we seek to warn or admonish another believer, we are to remember this: Such warning is to be done with kindness and is to be redemptive in nature.

Read Isaiah 35:3-4. Why is it important that we uplift those who are discouraged and fearful? What is one instance in Scripture where Jesus modeled this specific way of loving others?

What has the encouragement of others meant to you when you've felt this way?

The term discouraged (or, "fainthearted") occurs only here in the New Testament. Whenever Jesus' followers face persecution or the death of loved ones or some other life crisis, they need the comfort others can bring. Paul had modeled this kind of behavior when he was among the Thessalonians (2:11-12), and they were to follow his lead.



One of the ways we hold on to the fragile is by carrying one another's burdens. Read Galatians 6:1-2. How do you think carrying one another's burdens as Paul describes it in verses 1-2 leads to fulfilling the law of Christ?

Which do you think is more difficult—to carry someone else's burdens or to allow someone else to carry yours? Why?

The weak include two types of people. First are those with physical illness. Second are those struggling with spiritual issues, such as dealing with ongoing temptations or issues related to maturing as believers. The church should seek to help struggling brothers and sisters, not desert them. When we are willing to step under the burden of another, we are living the life of love for our neighbor that Jesus said all the law and the prophets point to.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:15.

The directives of verse 14 advised Christians how to care for the hurting. In verse 15, the focus changes to how to deal with those wanting to hurt someone else.

Why does it please God for us to seek the best for those who are hurtful? What does this look like? What does it not look like?

Who benefits when we please God by forgiving others? How are they benefited?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Which of the behaviors we've studied today represents a strength in your interaction with others? Which is an area of weakness? How can you improve the weak area(s)?

What examples of genuine love have you observed in our group or church? How does diligent service through genuine love affect a community of believers?

What do you think are the main obstacles to a deeper sense of authentic community at church?



PRAYER

As you close your small group time, praise God for His wisdom, as He designed you to live in community. Ask Him to help your group grow closer. Pray that God would show you how to better serve others and Him.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians.

October 9, 2022 --- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

