

This morning, I am continuing in my sermon series through 1 Thessalonians, which was a letter written by a leader in the early church named Paul to a church in Thessalonica that he had been instrumental in starting around the year 49 AD. Paul and his fellow missionaries had been driven out of Thessalonica by a mob of angry Jews who found his message about Jesus being Lord to be blasphemous. And 2-3 years later, Paul has not been able to return to Thessalonica, so he sends Timothy, one of his fellow missionaries, who brings back a report about how the Thessalonians are doing and what issues they are facing. In response to Timothy's report, Paul sends this letter. In the first section of this letter, Paul reminds them of the gospel and of his love for them, and he defends himself against his critics' accusations and slander. In the section we are currently in, Paul transitions to instructions about how to live as a Christian. We have already looked at God's vision for our sexuality and our work and what we need to know about death, Jesus' return, and the final judgment. Over the next couple of weeks, we'll be looking at the vision Paul lays out for relationships and worship within the church.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 - Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over 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, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

This is a short section. He begins with a couple of statements about how we should relate to leaders in the church, and follows up with a couple of statements about how we should relate to each other, and so we will look a little at both of those.

But I think that if we are going to set this passage in its proper context and understand how we are to relate to each other, it is helpful to have a proper understanding of Biblical anthropology, the doctrine of man. Let me say four things to help set the context:

We are all created in God's image, with dignity

Genesis 1:26-27 - Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

We all have dignity and purpose. We are not accidents. We are distinct from animals and anything else in God's creation, whatever sex or age or physical or intellectual capacity we might have. And this is why we are to treat each other with dignity.

James 3:9-10 - *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.*

We are all fallen into sin, which impacts every part of us

In Adam, we all sinned, and our nature is corrupt. Every part of us is stained by sin.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 - *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

Romans 3:10-12 - *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

And so we know that each individual we interact with has dignity and self-worth because they were created in God's image, but also that they are fallen, imperfect, with desires and thoughts and actions that are not pure.

Jesus loved us enough to die in our place and is transforming us into His image

John 3:16 - *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

2 Corinthians 5:17 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Philippians 1:4-6 - *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

In the end, Jesus will determine our eternal destiny based on whether or not we have trusted in Him for our salvation

John 3:35-36 - *The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."*

Every human is eternal, and their final destiny depends upon their relationship to Jesus.

Now back to this passage.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 - *Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over 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.*

Paul begins by asking the Thessalonian church to respect their leaders and to hold them in highest regard. When Paul planted churches, he always appointed elders who would oversee the church. And even though they would have been newer Christians, he still held them to a high standard:

1 Timothy 3:1-7 - *Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*

Elders have three main roles:

Set an example of godly living for the church (1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28-31). Personal holiness, relationships with others, family life, doctrine, service.

Shepherd the church (Acts 20:28-31, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Ephesians 4:11-12). Nurture, direct, and guard the sheep.

Oversee the secular affairs of the church as God's stewards (1 Tim 5:17, 1 Pet 5:1-4).

1 Timothy 5:17 - The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

We have elders. We also have ministry leaders and community group leaders.

Current elders & families – Duane & Marcia, Eric & Katie, Michele,

Past elders – Andy & Holly, Ron, John & Carrie

Treasurer – John

CG Leaders – Eric H, Eric S, Jon & Andrea Beaty, Christina Hare, Dawn & Ifeoma, Amy, Lynn

Ministry Leaders – Michele, Barb P, Holly, Michael, Rich, Lenny

Honor and pray for your leaders. Words, gifts, peace, bringing concerns to them directly.

If you're anything like me, you have mixed feelings about being honored. Part of you appreciates the recognition and approval, while part of you feels like you shouldn't appreciate the recognition and approval, because part of you knows that anything good in you is because of God, and that you have plenty in you that is not worthy of honor. But to honor each other is to emulate our God, who covers over our sins and honors our faithfulness and service and love, however imperfect it may seem to us.

He goes on to give short statements about relating to each other in the church:

Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

Paul speaks to the kind of relationships we should have with each other in the church. Live in peace. Warn those who are idle. Encourage the timid. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Don't pay back wrong for wrong. Try to be kind.

How do these truths impact our relationships in the church?

Treat each other as Jesus

Remember this parable from last week:

Matthew 25:38-40 - *When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

Jesus tells us that we will be judged on how we treat our brothers and sisters, especially the least of these. He says that whatever we do to them, we have done to Him. So treat each other as if you were dealing with Jesus Himself.

Take responsibility for each other.

Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

Encourage, help, build up, warn, admonish. These words are addressed to everyone. Take responsibility for each other's well-being.

Romans 12:9-10 - *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

When we do elder training, one of the things I challenge people with is to walk into church seeing yourself as responsible for the people there. I don't know how most of you walk in, but I'm guessing it is something like this – find a close parking spot, find a place to sit, probably a similar place every week, somewhere with enough room for your family. Participate, sing, listen, maybe say hi to some people, eat some food, head home. **How would that be different if you were walking in with a sense of responsibility for the church?**

If you are physically able, choose a parking spot that allows visitors or the elderly or those with small children to park closer

Arrive early, ready to greet, welcome, pray, or prepare your heart to meet with God

Welcome the stranger, letting them know you are glad they are here

Invite those who are alone to sit with you. Maybe even invite them to lunch afterwards.

Offer to pray with those who might need prayer

Pay attention to who is not there and reach out to let them know they were missed and to see how they are

Ask people about themselves and listen to their story

Invest your gifts by serving somewhere – how can I be a part of using my gifts to serve others

Invest your money in what God is doing here by giving tithes and offerings

Be a student of the Scripture and critically listen and evaluate what is shared

And that's just Sunday morning. Outside of Sunday, it means praying for and caring for the sick. Helping share meals with those in need. Visiting those who need a friend. Hosting a community group. Looking for people to encourage, to disciple, to befriend. Make sure you are on the directory and updating your information.

Do not just be a consumer. Take responsibility for each other's well-being.

Speak the truth in love

Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

No one is perfect. We all have blind spots. We miss the way we impact others. We need people who love us enough to tell us the truth, or at least their perspective or experience. This is why Paul's short statement includes both words of support – encourage, help, be patient, be kind – as well as words of exhortation – admonish, warn. Love includes both of those things.

Ephesians 4:11-16 - *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become*

mature, attaining to the whole measure of the **fullness of Christ**. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, **speaking the truth in love**, we will **in** all things grow up into him who is **the** Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Some are good at telling “the truth” but not in love. But we are not to pay back wrong for wrong. Some are so concerned about love that they shy away from telling the truth. But we are to admonish and warn. In the church, we are to do both. We speak the truth in love. A great picture of this balance is in John 8:

John 8:1-11 - But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for **accusing him**. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman **still standing there**. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

In some churches, you need to leave your life of sin before you can have the condemnation lifted. In others, all are welcomed but no one needs to leave sin behind, because well, we don't talk about sin. But the church that follows Jesus' example welcomes everyone and challenges everyone to leave sin and become like Jesus. God loves you just the way you are but loves you too much to let you stay the way you are.

Treat each other as Jesus. Take responsibility for each other. Speak the truth in love.

Listen to Jesus:

John 13:34-35 - "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

How will people know we belong to Jesus? By our love.