



What a Loving Church Looks Like:

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

Pastor JD Farag

Let's get started. I'm looking forward to what the Lord has for us today. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, we're going to pick it up in verse 12. We finished at verse 11, two weeks ago, now. So, our text today will be verses 12-15. I'll ask you to stand, if you're able. If not, that's all right, where you're seated is fine. You can follow along as I read.

The Apostle Paul is writing, by the Holy Spirit, and says verse 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. Hold them [verse 13] in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other and [verse 14] We urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive. Encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong. But always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

Let's pray, if you would join with me. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for your Word. Lord, at this time, would you as only you can? Settle our hearts, quiet our minds and focus our attention on you, your Word and that which you have for us today in your Word. Lord, we want to give you our undivided attention. So, you can speak into our lives. So, will you, Lord? Speak, your servants are listening. We pray in Jesus Name. Amen and amen. You can be seated, thank you.

So, I want to talk with you today about the church. Specifically, the church that is truly loving. What a truly loving church will actually, be like and look like. It's interesting that Paul, here, would turn a corner of sorts after talking about the rapture. My favorite topic of all time and now start giving them these, what I will call, "staccato" exhortations.

I'll explain what I mean by staccato. Short and even sharp, blunt if you prefer, exhortations. Urging and even warning them concerning their church there in Thessalonica that Paul loved so much, longed so much to return to, but couldn't. What Paul is doing here is painting a picture of what a healthy and loving church should be like, should look like.

I say "loving" because that's the common denominator in everything that we're going to see here and talk about today. It's the common denominator in everything he says such that they all come from the fruit, singular, of love. The fruit of the Holy Spirit, Galatians 5, you know it well. Fruit, singular, is love. From love comes everything



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else: Joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, kindness, patience, self-control. All of the above.

It all comes as a result of the fruit of love. That's what I want to talk about today. I found seven, you might find more. But 7 characteristics that mark a healthy and loving church.

The 1st one is in verses 12 and 13. It's that a healthy church will respect the leaders, the pastors. Why you looking at me like that? Please know, that I'm sensitive to how this might sound self-serving? Coming from the pastor. But the truth of the matter is, those in position of authority are to be respected.

God has called us to be in those positions and those positions of authority, in the church, are to be honored and respected. So, what I want is to do a 10-week Series. I'm just kidding. Relax.

Leaders are to be respected because of their position. Not because of their personality. Notice what Paul says here. Very important. Our respect, as leaders, is earned not because of who we are. But because of the hard work that we do and it is hard work. The profound privilege comes packaged with a profound responsibility and accountability in those positions of authority.

One day I will stand before God and give an account and that is to be taken seriously. James talks about that those desiring to be in those positions. It is hard work. The labor that is involved, and that is where the respect is earned. Let's move on. Some of you are saying, please, if you don't mind.

The 2nd one is in the 1st part of verse 14. We might need to spend a little bit of time on this one. It's that of warning the disrupters. Now, what Paul is saying, in the original language, it kind of carries with it this idea of being out of line, out of order. Almost like in a military sense, you're out of line. You're not following orders. You're disrupting. And that's what Paul is saying here.

I have to say that this is one of the most difficult aspects of the ministry: Dealing with people who cause problems, who disrupt, who cause trouble. Notice Paul says, "We are to warn those who are idle and disruptive." That's interesting. Here's what I'm thinking. It's usually the troublemakers that make trouble because they have way too much time on their hands. That's been my own personal experience.



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It's usually those who are not busy about the things of God that end up being busybodies to those who are. We've had occasion over the years in this church. It's been the hard thing, but it's been the right thing. Where we've had to confront people and we've done it biblically.

We have a biblical template, a biblical model. Jesus himself, in Matthew's Gospel, it's recorded Chapter... 18:15-17. Jesus says, "First you are to go to that person..." One on one. If they don't receive it, then you take two or more witnesses. If they still don't receive it, you take the church leadership and if they still don't receive it, he says, "Have nothing to do with them." Wow.

Titus says, "Warn a man once, [a divisive man] warn a man twice. Third time have nothing to do with him." Treat him as you would an employee of the IRS, tax collector. Well, if you work for the IRS, we love you. I just want you to know that. Especially this time of year, in Jesus name.

But as overseers of this awesome privilege that is ours, over the flock of God. It is our responsibility to create an environment that is conducive to worshipping God. If somebody enters into our midst and they're causing problems? They're disrupters: They're divisive.

You'll forgive me for the bluntness with which I say this, but early on I incorporated the "None-One-Done Principal". I'll explain what that is. "None": Zero tolerance. "One" time? You're "Done". That's it. We're going to warn you. Biblically, we're going to confront you. But if you don't fall in line? You're out of here. That's it.

I asked the Lord to help me on this particular one. But I am ferociously protective of this amazing and loving church. It has to be a place where you're safe. Boy, I tell you, if there's a wolf that comes in wearing sheep's clothing? You can always spot them out. And they're gone. They're out of here. We've had occasion over the years to do that. Warning the disrupters.

Here's the 3rd one. It's in the second part of verse 14. It's that we encourage the disheartened. Now I realize that this would seem like a firm grasp of the obvious. But do you know what's sad? Instead of encouraging others, churches are known for condemning others.

Jesus said, "I did not come into the world to condemn the world." Paul, writing to the Romans in chapter 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus."



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You'll forgive my referencing another personal experience. But what I found over the years is that people in the church, will often times judge and accuse those who are discouraged. They'll either accuse them of having sin in their life or not having enough faith in their life.

My wife and I, this was many years ago when we were first married on the mainland. We were infertile, took us 10 years. We couldn't have children. The doctor said, "You're probably going to need to adopt." So, we would go to church faithfully. Of course, here's all of our friends. They're having baby, after baby, after baby, after baby. The husband walks by, the wife sneezes, she gets pregnant. That was hard for us.

If that weren't hard enough, there were those who began suggesting that the reason you can't have children is because of some sin in your life. Unconfessed sin. I even had a brother in Christ, I mean, it was stunning. Because I grew up with him as a childhood friend. He actually, not only accused me of having sin in my life, he even went as far as pointing out the specific sin in my life. Wow. Thank you. Where's the love?

More recently, after our daughter Noelle died, I had a lady approach me and say to me that if I would have had more faith, my daughter Noelle, would not have died. We were in the throes of grieving. It was just unspeakable pain and grief and sorrow. At first, I'm like, "Lord, is that true?" Is it because I don't have enough faith? Or is there is sin in my life? It's so sad.

Please know, that I am in no way suggesting that we accept and tolerate sin. But it's not condemnation. Conviction? Yes. Condemnation? No. How do you know the difference? Well, here's a litmus test, if you will. Satan will condemn. The Holy Spirit will convict. I know it's condemnation when it distances me from the Lord. And I know it's conviction when it draws me near to the Lord. That's the litmus test.

See, if I imagine God is angry. Well, then I'm keeping my distance. I think we do err greatly when we view our heavenly Father through the lens of our earthly father. I did that for many years as a young believer.

I didn't have a good relationship with my dad. He was very strict, very hard, very absent and he was always angry at me. Of course, I probably gave him good reason to be angry with me, I'm sure. But it was like I



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wanted to sleep in and not wake up until he had already left the house. And I wanted to go to bed early before he came back to the house. Because he was always angry at me.

One of the things the Lord ministered to me is that my heavenly Father is not like that. He's not waiting with this wooden spoon. You got to love wooden spoons. Our kids hid our wooden spoons. So, we just had to keep buying more. I think we own stock in wooden spoons. He's not waiting with a wooden spoon to spank you. He's waiting with open arms to embrace you.

The 4th one. It's in the 3rd part of verse 14 and it's that of helping the weak. Again, it would seem like a firm grasp of the obvious, right? But sadly, it's not. Instead of helping the weak, Christians avoid the weak. So, I was asking myself, really enquiring of the Lord. Why is it that we do that? What is it that we don't want to associate with the "least and the last"? We don't want to associate with the weak, instead we want to associate with the "strong and the powerful". Why is that?

Here's a thought. Innate within our sin nature, we see someone who is weak and helpless as having nothing to offer us. What can they do for us? See, it's not what can we do for them? It's what can they do for us? If they can't do anything for me? Then I don't want anything to do with them. And that's why. We sort of distance ourselves and disenfranchise ourselves from "those" people. We want to associate with "those" people.

How opposite this is to the nature of Jesus Christ and we are the Church of Jesus Christ. Shame on us. I don't mean to "get up in anybody's grill" and harp on this. But I think we would do well to allow the Holy Spirit to really search our hearts concerning this.

In the gospels, I see Jesus attracted to: The weak, the least, the lame, the blind and the infirmed. Do you know his harshest words? The harshest words that ever left the Savior's lips were reserved for the religious elite. I'm getting really convicted.

So, let's move on to the 5th one. I'm going to get even more convicted on this one because its dealing with patience. It's in the 3rd part of verse 14 where Paul says, "Be patient with everyone." If you were to ask me what I thought was one of the greatest demonstrations of a loving church? This would be it.



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Let me say it this way, "Show me a loving church where people love each other? And I'll show you a church where people are patient with each other." Do you know that famous love chapter that we love to quote 1 Corinthians chapter 13 at weddings? Whenever I do a wedding, the couple wants 1 Corinthians, "Love is..., love is..." Ahh. Then I tell them I don't want to do that and then they find somebody else to do the wedding.

There's actually a reason and that's because that chapter, that famous love chapter, is not what you think. The reason Paul wrote that, by the Spirit of God, was because the Corinthian church had no idea what love was. They thought they were being loving by accepting and tolerating open sexual sin in the church.

Paul basically says to them, "That's not love." This is what love is, hence, 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Isn't it interesting that the first characteristic that Paul lists? Is "Love is patient".

I'm very open with you. Some may accuse me, rightfully, of being too open. But this is just who I am. This is a big struggle for me. I am so impatient. Oh, my goodness. And so are you, so don't look at me all spiritual and everything. I'm just impatient. I tend to be impatient with people. ... Come on!

Then the Lord is so faithful. He's always so faithful to remind me of how patient He is with me. This is across the board, by the way. It applies to forgiveness. Sometimes I'll will have a hard time forgiving somebody and the Lord just, again, so faithful, so gentle. He's not harsh. He's a gentle and good Shepherd.

In that still, small, convicting voice of the Holy Spirit says, "JD, what are you doing?" I can't forgive them. I might forgive them, but I'll never forget. Oh, I see how it is. Can I just remind you of this list? Here's the list, it's actually a scroll. It's going to take a while to "unscroll" it. Oh, what's that, Lord? Wait, it's not done yet. There it goes, the scroll. Those are all the things that I've forgiven you for. How patient have I been with you? How forgiving have I been of you? Well, I'm more convicted so let's move on again.

The 6th one. It's in the 1st part of verse 15. It's that we don't wrong, when wronged. Paul says, "Don't... pay evil with evil. If someone's wronged you? Don't try to even the score. One of my all-time favorite quotes from Oswald Chambers is that it's not a matter of: If I've been wronged. It's, have I wronged?"



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Boy, does that not change the whole complexion of the situation? It's not, have I been wronged? It's have I wronged? We are to forgive those who have trespassed against us. Just as the Lord has forgiven us of our trespasses. Don't pay back wrong, with wrong.

The 7th and last one is in the 2nd part of verse 15. It's that we do good for everyone. Now, stay with me because what Paul says here can be easily missed or even worse yet, dismissed. Notice he says, "We're to always strive to do what is good for each other but we're also to do what is good for everyone else."

In other words, we're also to always strive to do what is good for those who are not part of the body of Christ. This is how we win people to Christ. How we treat people, not just in the church. Oh, by the way, this does not just apply to the church. It applies in every arena of life.

Everything we just talked about. It applies to the marriage, a loving and healthy marriage relationship. These are principles that you don't break. They break you when you go up against them. This is again a model, a template, of what the Church of Jesus Christ should be like and look like.

I want to say in closing that I am keenly aware that I am in a club, for lack of a better way of saying it, of pastors who are very few in number. That can actually, honestly, say what I'm about to say to you and that is that you make the pastorate a joy. This is such a loving church. Not a lot of pastors can say that about their church and not a lot of people can say that about their church, either. I don't know how to thank you enough.

Being a pastor, again, I hope it doesn't sound so self-serving. It's really hard. It's really, really hard. I've started and owned two businesses and being a pastor is harder than both of those combined. It's really, really hard work. It's 24/7, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. And it takes a toll on the pastor and the pastor's family.

But this church has made that a joy. It is such a privilege for me as the pastor of this church to stand up here as I do every Sunday morning and Thursday nights for a mid-week Bible study. You make the pastorate a joy.



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I want to close this sermon by saying, "Thank you and I love you. I love you so much. The Lord knows my heart and how much I love you and thank you."

Let's pray, Father, thank you. Lord, I pray that what we've looked at and heard here in your Word, would not just be left here. But it would be what we take home with us into our day, into our week and into our lives. And that the Holy Spirit would bless the application of it to: Our lives, our marriages, our relationships, our businesses, our workplaces. And here, in this church, Lord.

Thank you for this loving church.

In Jesus name. Amen.