

"CARING FOR STRUGGLING PEOPLE"

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

Theme: We need each other in the Body of Christ.

Introduction - the most characteristic feature of a Christian community is that of love for God and one another. This is the fulfillment of the Law - even as Jesus indicated. He also spoke of the ungodly's ability to know that a person is part of the Church because of the love we have one for another. In these verses, Paul provides the Thessalonians Church tangible ways that they can display their love for all kinds of "hard to love" people.

It is likely that these are the people for whom the admonitions in the previous verses (12-13) were directed. These people all struggled in one way or another and the mature, spiritually sensitive believers were called to display love for them - enabling them to overcome their struggle. He lays this out for them in the form of a "call to action" - *"We urge you, brethren, ..."* [παρακαλέω] - lit. "to ask call to one's side" - an exhortation to join you in the effort. Therefore, these are not merely the tasks of spiritual leadership, but the responsibility extends to all who are part of the church to minister to one another.

I. THE MINISTRY TO THOSE WHO STRUGGLE - 5:14A

A. The Ministry of Confronting - "... admonish the unruly ..."

1. This first responsibility provided by Paul is in response to those who are *"unruly"* [ἄτακτος] - referring to those who are a person who is "out of step" or is "going one's own way."
2. It became a term used to refer to a person who was undisciplined or needing restraint from impulsive behavior.
3. This person shirked their responsibilities or duties and needed to be rebuked or confronted for their sinful behavior - cp. **2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 11**.
4. This brother was "out of step" with the rest of the believers - failing to conduct their lives under the direction of God's Spirit and shirking the basic commands of Scripture for how they ought to be living.
5. They were likely the most vocal in failing to honor spiritual leadership, failing to occupy themselves with fruitful ministry opportunities.
6. "They can become criticizing benchwarmers and eventually rebels who

undermine church leadership to justify their insubordination.”¹

7. Our ministry to such people is not to flee from them, but to confront them - **“admonish”** [νουθετέω] - which essentially means to warn them.
8. It is not a hostile activity at all, but one that fears the destination of the journey they are on, desiring that they “course correct” to evade the disaster awaiting them.
9. This is best done by lovingly calling their attention to the Scriptural admonitions that ought to be embraced by them so that they would be brought into conformity to Christ - cp. **Colossians 1:28**.

B. **The Ministry of Comforting** - **“... encourage the fainthearted ...”**

1. The second responsibility is in response to those who are **“the fainthearted”** [ὀλιγόψυχος] - a reference to one who is lit. “small souled” or a person who is discouraged.
2. These are people who have no courage and for whom their personal safety is the foremost priority.
3. It is likely that some of the Thessalonians were shrinking back from the dangers associated with the persecutions that were being conducted against those in the church - cp. **1 Thessalonians 3:2-4**.
4. The believers who were confident and bold are being called upon to **“encourage”** [παραμυθέομαι] - to console or “cheer up” - lit. “to speak alongside” of someone words that will bring comfort to them.
5. This is done primarily by calling their attention back to the truths of God’s promises to them regarding things such as the certainty of salvation - **John 10:27-29**; God’s eternal love for them - **Romans 8:35-39**; and the purpose of God to glorify Himself through their lives - **Romans 8:28-30**.
6. Clearly wherever they are “losing heart” and becoming discouraged, other believers must come alongside them and comfort them by pointing them to relevant Scriptures, bolstering their shriveling souls with truth.

C. **The Ministry of Counseling** - **“... help the weak ...”**

1. This third responsibility of ministry is in response to those who are **“the weak”** [ἀσθενής] - a reference to people whose faith is peppered with

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., **1 & 2 Thessalonians**, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 177.

doubts; possessing a “deficit” of faith.

2. These believers are susceptible to sin and struggle with the abandonment of sin while failing to obey God’s will – cp. **James 5:14-15**.
3. The responsibility of believers toward those who are “*weak*” is to “*help*” [ἀντέχω] - referring to “clinging to” or “holding fast” in a way that demonstrates that you’re devoted to them.
4. It means to take interest in their struggle and come alongside of them and provide personal support through relationships and community.

II. THE MENTALITY TOWARD THOSE WHO STRUGGLE - 5:14B

A. The Frustration in Ministering to Struggling People

1. It is easy for believers to become frustrated, angry, or disgusted with chronic struggling sheep.
2. It is not uncommon for believers to invest themselves at great personal cost in time, energy, and resources to attempt to establish beneficial relationships with another struggling believer and then see it tossed aside by the struggler.
3. Even our Lord demonstrated a sanctified frustration with disciples who repeatedly failed to embrace the truth – cp. **Matthew 17:17**.
4. The danger in ministry is to dismiss struggling people after a person has been “burned” – thinking that its not worth it.
5. My father told me when I was in college studying for ministry, being disappointed in various discipleship attempts – “I would rather take a knife in the back than to attempt to serve Christ as a cynic.”

B. The Fortitude in Ministering to Struggling People

1. As a result, Paul commands the Thessalonians that they should “*be patient with everyone.*”
2. The term “*patient*” [μακροθυμέω] - means to be willing to bear up under provocation without complaint - lit. = “great endurance.”
3. It conveys the presence of a supernatural tranquility that exists toward another person when one devoid of the Holy Spirit would certainly cut them off – cp. **Galatians 5:22**.
4. The term “*everyone*” is a summary term to describe persons in the three

above-mentioned categories of people needing ministry.

III. THE MANAGING OF THOSE WHO STRUGGLE - **5:15**

A. **Negative: The Avoidance of Evil** -

1. In a sense, this verse elaborates upon the responsibility manage oneself to be *“patient with everyone.”*
2. First, Paul instructs us *“See that no one repays another with evil for evil.”*
3. As people fail to submit themselves to the Spirit of God and the Word of God, their behavior manifests the dominance of their flesh and they can do *“evil”* [κακόϛ] - something that is socially or morally reprehensible - and can refer to what is injurious.
4. The temptation when someone hurts you is to retaliate but this is forbidden by God’s Spirit - ***Leviticus 19:18***.
5. The ability to handle the hurt that comes from another believer is from the Lord and is the glory of a man - cp. ***Proverbs 19:11***.
6. When we are truly hurt, our responsibility is to cast our care upon the Lord who will deal with the person appropriately, and that is how we “leave room” for the wrath of God.

B. **Positive: The Advocacy of Good**

1. Instead, we are to *“always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.”*
2. We cannot get frustrated with a person who is failing to do what is right by failing to do what is right ourselves - we lose all credibility.
3. We are to overcome evil with *“good”* [ἀγαθός] - “that which meets the highest standards of worth and merit” - trusting that the Lord will work to bring Himself glory in each situation - cp. ***Romans 12:21***.
4. This is how genuine love is placed on display - authenticating that ours is not merely a religious activity but a dynamic manifestation of the glory of God’s grace.

We need each other in the Body of Christ.