

Lesson 19

Be Patient with Them All

And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all, 1 Thessalonians 5.14-15.

Introduction

God has designed His church to be a place of refuge. Each of us need to be conscious of the need to allow God to work through us to impact the lives of others in a positive and encouraging way. For some, the church has become anything but a place of refuge. For them, it has led to an experience full of hurt, antagonization, and disillusionment. Sadly, some have chosen to walk away. When things go this far, it really doesn't matter if they do or do not share the blame in how they got to that emotional place. Our job is to always meet people where they are and demonstrate the love of God.

How can we all contribute to keeping our local congregation as a place of refuge, like God intended? Every church has those who struggle. How can we approach those who come to us with problems?

A Look at People Who Struggle

Our passage of focus describes five types of individuals who deal with problems. Sooner or later, at one time in your life, you will probably fit into one of these categories yourself. Inside any congregation you will find those who are wayward, worried, weak, wearisome, or just plain wicked.

The Wayward

The CSB and ESV use the word *idle* here. The NASB uses the word *unruly*. Paul is describing the person who is not following through on his or her responsibilities. This might be the person in the congregation who is seemingly never on board with the leadership. Generally, they are not supportive or *with the program*. At times they might even recruit others to their cause, publicly or privately criticize, judging the motives of the leaders. They also could be described as the person who, more often than not, is on the outside, never part of the group that is working.

The Worried

The CSB describes this person as *discouraged*. The ESV and the NASB use the term *fainthearted*. In any congregation you will find a few who are prone to sadness, despair, and discouragement. They lack courage. Others constantly battle their circumstances and troubles.

The Weak

These are those who lack strength. This might be a new Christian, or it could be a fellow believer who has not grown as he or she should have. This is someone who is prone to specific areas of temptation requiring great efforts to avoid these at all costs.

The Wearisome

Sometimes in a local church there are people to whom so much is given, yet very little is returned. Hours are invested in instruction, encouragement, and help of various forms, but there is no growing responsibility for oneself. These are those who just have a way of wearing you out.

The Wicked

There are times when Christians will do wicked things to each other. If you've been in the church for some amount of time, you may have seen gossip, jealousy, slander, and covetousness. Sometimes we see personal sins committed like theft, sexual sin, or someone leading our kids away from the truth.

How to Help Others

If the church is going to move forward and function for the purpose God designed, then what Paul writes in verses 14-15 shows us what needs to be going on. Our congregations must become places full of admonishment, encouragement, help, and patience. Our spiritual and numerical growth will be in direct proportion to how we handle the failures in our midst.

Some need to be warned

Sometimes people must be warned about their behavior. The word Paul uses here, *noutheteo*, means to “counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, to admonish or instruct.”⁶⁷ While the action of warning here can be public in nature, it describes our coming along side someone to let them know the path they're on is not right. It's not promoting a judgmental spirit, rather Paul calls for the spirit that comes along closely and intimately as a brother or friend.

As we think about the church being a place of refuge, is there any place that we'd rather be admonished? Our brethren will instruct us with the truth and demonstrate their concern about our doing right . . . not just telling us what we want to hear.

Some need to be encouraged

The word *encourage* means to speak to someone by coming close to his side. Person to person. Brother to brother. Sister to sister. Sometimes a person just needs a hug. No words are necessary. Others need verbal consolation, comfort, strength, reassurance, cheering up, or to be refreshed. A great example of how Paul did is can be found in 1 Thessalonians 2.7-8:

Although we could have been a burden as Christ's apostles, instead we were gentle among you, as a nurse nurtures her own children. We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

Inside the local congregation, everyone is to be pulling you up, as opposed to pulling you down like the world does. We all need to be built up, encouraged, and have our burdens shared.

⁶⁷ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 679.

Some need help

The help here involves holding firmly to, clinging to, or providing support. There are times when life is hard. Satan's temptations knock us down, health problems weigh on us, or failure appears. When this comes the event is so catastrophic that we need to hold up the one who needs help. Inherent in this principle is the matter of personal touch or involvement in the life of another brother or sister. We help others from the heart.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others, Philippians 2.3-4.

In the local church, every member is on the team, because outside of that *you're on your own*.

With some, we'll need to be patient

Even though some in the congregation wear us out, we need to follow the example of God:

I will make known the Lord's faithful love and the Lord's praiseworthy acts, because of all the Lord has done for us— even the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, which he did for them based on his compassion and the abundance of his faithful love. He said, "They are indeed my people, children who will not be disloyal," and he became their Savior. In all their suffering, he suffered, and the angel of his presence saved them. He redeemed them because of his love and compassion; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of the past, Isaiah 63.7-9.

Then Peter approached him and asked, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?" "I tell you, not as many as seven," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven, Matthew 18.21-22.

Certainly, God has been patient with us. We need to keep that in mind as we respond to the needs and circumstances of brethren inside the congregation. American culture has made this more difficult because we often don't get close enough to people. We have "surface interactions" often presenting ourselves one way in public (think social media) and hide the real issues we struggle with. Today, many things can be hidden from each other – for a very long time. Some struggle alone, writhing around in pain for years. Then it all can no longer be maintained, the bottom falls out, and a person is unable to lift themselves back up.

The first question out of the minds of others is often *why didn't you come to us sooner? Before things got this bad? What were you thinking?* And on and on it goes. In these situations, this is where we must employ patience, considering ourselves as well. How would we want to be treated? Is getting on to another person really going to change the situation? The time for instruction, advice, etc., will come *after* the emergency passes.

Employing patience is not winking at sin. Rather, exercising patience involves teaching and admonishment while giving the person the space to come to the proper conclusion and work through things. Once I was charged with sin by a brother. After railing on me for over an hour, he told me that I had seven days to repent and if I did not that he was bringing the matter before the church. First of all, *who came up with the seven-day time limit?* Not scripture. Second, making such threats is not the proper

motivation for repentance. Lastly, such attitudes are the exact opposite of what Paul calls for in our text of moving with patience with those who struggle.

This is why the church is so much more than what we do on Sunday. We do not gather each week just to stare at the back of each other's heads. There must be an actual mixing of lives. We need each other. We need to know one another so that we can be more personally involved in helping each other on the journey home.

With some, we'll have to refrain from retaliation

With those who actively try to hurt us, we're not to respond in kind. Jesus' teaching comes to mind:

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous, Matthew 5.44-45.

We have been called to do good to one another and to everyone, Galatians 6.9-10.

Who Can You Help?

Who in your congregation needs your support and prayers? Pick out one person and let them know you care. Remind them they are not alone. Who is someone spiritually weak who you can help train and build up? Who had a bad week last week and needs cheered up?

If our congregations are to be the place of refuge God designed, we're going to have to move past the audience mentality and meeting an attendance requirement. It means we are going to have to get into involving ourselves in the struggles of others. *Sheep take care of sheep.* This is what our leaders are encouraging us to do. They equip us so we can serve, Ephesians 4.12. Your membership of the local congregation is about getting involved in the lives of people – going along beside them and pulling them in.

For Thought and Reflection

1. As you think about Paul's listing of those who struggle, how often could you be described as one of the people on his list? When in those situations, how would you desire to be treated?

2. What is the difference between the possession of a judgmental spirit and coming alongside a person to warn or admonish as a friend? Which would you respond to more effectively? Why?

3. As you read 1 Thessalonians 2.7-8, what are the key words Paul used to describe how we can encourage those who struggle and are weak?

4. As we think about the need to be patient toward others who deal with problems, why is it always good to be mindful of ourselves? Can you think of a passage or two that would go along with this?

5. Does patience equate to winking at sin? Why or why not?

6. How would you respond if a brother or sister stole from you? What would be the most important thing? How would that glorify Christ?

7. Who are some people in your local congregation you can encourage and help? What will you do to serve them?