

Series: **Confident Hope**
Today's Title: **"Four Essentials for the Church"**

June 5, 2022 – 1 Thessalonians 5:25-28

Objective: To help Christians live in ways that build and strengthen their lives and the local church.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians 5:25-28 – p. 988

These verses are like a P.S. – a postscript to the letter.
4 thoughts and actions which are essential for any local church.

If these 4 things are present – there is a good chance the church will be healthy – Christ centered – and reaching people with the gospel.

Opening Prayer

We started this journey in **1 Thessalonians** on January 16th – and for 19 Sundays we've walked verse-by-verse through this letter, written by the Apostle Paul, to the Christians in Thessalonica.

It is likely that this letter is one of the earliest inspired letters that Paul wrote, maybe even the first of his inspired letters to the churches he and his team planted.

Today we're at the end of this letter – the last 4 verses.

Follow along as I read them.

“Brothers, pray for us.

Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

Pray for your pastors and church leaders. vs. 25

“Brothers, pray for us.”

“Brothers” is in the emphatic position. Paul uses the term “brothers” 14x in the letter (3x in our verses today!) and this is the only time in the letter Paul puts it in this position.

“Brothers, pray for us.”

This is a command in the Greek, and at the same time it’s a personal plea for their prayers.

His use of the term “brothers” places this command/plea on their common bond and unity in Christ.

The term is a common term in the N.T. and it’s used to specify those who have faith in Jesus as their Savior.

It’s inclusive – referring to all those who are followers of Jesus.

It’s exclusive – excluding those who may be religious, but not followers of Jesus.

A question to ask yourself this morning: Are you included in this term, “brothers (sisters)”?

It’s an important question to ask – and even more important to be answer it in the affirmative.

Over the years I’ve talked with many, many people about their faith.

I often ask, *“When did you become a Christian? When did you put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins?”*

One answer I get sometimes is, *“I’ve been a Christian all my life...I was born a Christian.”*

This is not possible.

Nobody is born a Christian.

Nobody is a Christian by nature of the family they were born into – or because they have always gone to church.

Becoming a Christian requires you come to a realization – and it requires you to make a decision.

It requires you to realize your sin and realize you need a Savior, and then it requires you to decide to put your faith in Jesus as the one and only Savior who being God, became flesh, lived a sinless life, gave His life as a sacrifice for sin on the cross, was buried, and rose from the dead.

You may not remember the exact date / time you came to that realization and made that decision.

But at some point, in their life, a person is a Christian because they realized their sinfulness and decided to follow Jesus – to believe in Jesus and His salvation from sin.

Have you made that decision?

Are you included in those who Paul calls, “brothers”

(sisters)?

In the Greek, the verb, “pray”, is in the present tense, which means Paul is asking them to pray now...and continue praying.

‘...begin and continue praying for us.’

“us” – Likely refers to Paul, Silas, and Timothy – see 1:1. But it may include a broader group beyond those 3. Those who traveled with them – those who helped in the ministry.

Paul’s normal practice in his letters was in the beginning of the letter to let the readers know he was praying for them.

1:2-3

“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And at the end of his letters, he normally asks his readers to pray for him – and those with him.

Let’s look at Romans to see this pattern.

Romans 1:8-10

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.”

Now, turn to:

Romans 15:30

“I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf...”

“...strive together” – In the Greek this is a compound word – a very intense word.

sun = with / together

agonizomai = fight / struggle / to help

We get our English word ‘agony’ or ‘agonize’ from this Greek term.

Jesus uses this word in **John 18:36** when He is talking with Pilate, and He tells Pilate He is a king, but His kingdom is not an earthly kingdom.

“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would have been fighting...”

Paul is saying, ‘*Strive together with me in prayer.*’
Fight with me in prayer.’

Why should you pray for your pastors and church leaders?

Because we are prime targets for the enemy.

Many falsely believe that since I’m a pastor that I don’t struggle with sinful urges and temptations.

I’ve had some people ask me to pray for them because my prayers are more powerful, and God hears my prayers more than the average person.

Not true!!!

I'm feeble – weak – easily distracted from the things of God.

To stay on the straight and narrow path, I have to fight – I have to deny my flesh – and constantly submit to God and His path.

We also live in a time where the culture is growing more antagonistic toward Christians – especially those who lead other Christians.

And for pastors who speak the truth of the Bible without apology. Those of us who speak to the sinful priorities and false beliefs of the culture – there is additional contempt.

The Devil would love to harm my testimony – or the testimony of any of our leadership in this church.

The Devil would love to ruin my marriage.

He would love to harm my family so I would be discouraged and hopeless.

He would love to discredit me and my ministry.

To speak in modern cultural terms: The Devil would love to cancel me!

I... we...need your prayers.

As I say that, I know that some of you do pray for me – for Kim, for our kids.

I want you to know that is extremely encouraging.
I know some of you pray daily for this church – for the
other pastors and leaders of this church.

Keep praying!!!

Don't stop!!!

Next, Paul says we should...

Express love to one another. vs. 26

It's easy to talk about love...to claim we love others.

But love must be expressed.

Love is not simply a feeling. In fact, love may not have
feelings or affections.

Love is an action.

Love must be acted upon for it to bring a benefit.

Just saying you love without the actions of love is not
loving.

On Friday, Kim and I celebrated 33 years of marriage.

In 33 years of marriage, you learn quickly that saying "*I
love you*" is not enough.

Actions must accompany my words.

Paul tells them...

"Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss."

"all" – inclusive – doesn't leave anybody out.

Even the annoying, obnoxious, or those who are problematic in the congregation are to have love expressed through this greeting.

“the brothers” – in not gender specific to men – but would be inclusive of the women in the church.

Although it would be appropriate for the women to greet other women with a “holy kiss” – and for the men to greet other men with a “holy kiss”.

Let’s talk about this “holy kiss” thing.

We need to realize there is a cultural reality here – and a cultural difference.

1st century Jewish and Greco-Roman culture used a kiss to greet one another.

Some cultures around the world still do this today.

For us, it’s not what we typically do in the United States.

We greet with a handshake – a hug – a pat on the shoulder or back.

Giving one another a “holy kiss” greeting is not a command here.

The command is to “greet” each other – but a “holy kiss” is not the only option we have for greeting.

The important thing is the greeting.

A genuine, sincere, heartfelt, loving greeting.

“holy” is not simply to make sure the kiss / greeting stays platonic, but it alluded to their holy standing in Christ. Their common bond in Christ.

“This is what made Judas’ kiss to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane so shocking and blasphemous. His action was motivated by an attitude that is completely opposite to its expected expression of unity and concord with the other person.”

(1 & 2 Thessalonians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, by Jeffrey A.D. Weima, p. 427)

The “holy kiss”, as Paul calls it, soon became known in Christian circles as the “*kiss of peace*”.

An expression of the shared peace they had with the Lord – and the shared peace and unity they shared on that basis.

It was a much deeper greeting than the common greeting practiced in the 1st century culture at large. It was a recognition of their common standing of ‘holy’ before God – due to their faith in the work of Jesus – and the peace and unity they were to maintain because of that work and the price paid for them on the cross.

Prioritize the Bible in your life. vs. 27

The 2 commands we have seen so far: “pray...Greet” – are now followed by a very strong directive from the Apostle.

It's not a command in the Greek, but it carries the weight of the command by the strength of the term used. "I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers."

First thing to notice is that Paul switches here from the plural (us, we) to the singular (I).

Second thing to notice is the strong term Paul uses.

"...put you under oath before the Lord"

This term *"...has a particularly strident tone since it involves causing someone to swear under oath to do something."*

(1 & 2 Thessalonians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, by Jeffrey A.D. Weima, p. 429)

This is the only time in any of the endings in Paul's letters that he gives this strong directive.

We're not sure why this is the case.

There are as many as 8 answers offered in some of the commentaries – so it's wise not to be dogmatic on why this is the case.

But this strong directive leads us to think of a few things.

1. The importance of the church to hear God's Word.

Paul knew he was an Apostle – and that his ministry was used by God to bring the gospel of Christ to the Gentile world. He knew that his writings were not simply his personal musings – but his writings were inspired by the Spirit of God

– and therefore they were on the same level as the Old Testament. So, just like in the Jewish synagogues the Old Testament would be read aloud to all, Paul realized his letters must be read aloud to “all the brothers (and sisters)”.

This speaks to the importance of God’s Word in the local church.

A high view of Scripture.

2. The possibility that some in the Thessalonian church – possibly those who are corrected in chapter 4 – would not want to hear what Paul has to say.

This is mostly speculation, but those who were idle and not working – those who were getting into other people’s business.

They might have been less eager to hear what the Apostle would say in his letter.

This can happen to us.

Due to how we’re living and the choices we’re making, we can lose our interest in hearing God’s Word – in reading God’s Word – even losing interest in gathering together for worship with other Christians.

Make sure you prioritize the Bible in your life!

3. The possibility of favoritism in the church.

Like any other group, if we let our guard down, our flesh will take over – love will weaken and fade – and we will begin playing favorites – or considering some in the congregation more important than others.

Paul makes it very clear:

“...have this letter read to *all* the brothers.”

All – don’t leave anybody out!

James was clear on this when he wrote:

James 2:1, 9

“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”

9 “But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”

One commentator noted:

“Christianity has no esoteric teachings which are reserved for the initiated few. The message of the gospel is an open secret.”

(The Thessalonian Epistles, A Call to Readiness, by D. Edmond Hiebert, p. 259)

It was vitally important for Paul that everyone in the Thessalonian church heard God’s message for them.

We can say with confidence that nothing has changed.

It’s still vital for every follower of Christ to hear God’s message for them.

How vital is it in your list of priorities?

Keep grace front and center. vs. 28

At the end of each of his inspired letters, Paul speaks of grace.

It's the very last thought in this letter.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

The 4th essential for every church is to hold onto grace.

Keep the grace of God – and our grace for each other – front and center.

Don't ever forget about grace.

Unmerited favor from God.

Receiving what we do not deserve.

Is there anything more precious than God's grace?

Ephesians 2:8

"For by grace you have been saved through faith.

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God..."

It's grace that keeps us humble.

It's grace that keeps us secure and confident of God's hold on us.

Christianity is the only religion that preaches grace.

God is the one who pays our price and gives us what we don't deserve.

Every other religion demands you live in order to deserve what you receive. You must earn the god's favor.

With Jesus – He gives us His favor.

Have you received the grace of God in your life?

Apply it...

1. Pray for your church leaders.

In the bulletin – both print and digital – you have a list of the leadership – **Pastors & Staff, Elders, Deacons, Deaconess', Clerk, Treasurer.**

These men and women are the elected officers – elected leaders of this local congregation.

There are others in our church who need your prayers.

- Ministry Directors.
- Small group leaders.
- AWANA leaders.
- The worship and tech team.
- Security and medical team.
- Welcome ministry.
- All who serve in Next Gen Kids.

We all need your prayers!

2. Express your love for others at CDOBC.

Saying we love is good – but not enough.

Our love must have actions – it must be expressed and communicated in ways that can be received.

Our love for one another should be one of the primary traits we're known for! (John 13:34-35)

3. Prioritize God's Word in your life.

Regular / daily devotional – Tuesday video 'devo' – listening to sermons from pastors who have a high view of Scripture.

Make attending worship a high priority!

4. Receive and give God's grace.

Have you received God's grace through faith in Christ?

Are you someone who gives grace to others, or do you give criticism and critiques?

There's nothing sweeter than God's grace.

Nothing more precious than God's grace.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

Closing prayer