

## ***Encouragement for the Community of Believers***

### **I Thessalonians 5:12-28**

The closing verses of our study of 1 Thessalonians are wonderful, practical guidelines on how to live for Jesus in three areas of life. First, how we should act toward the leaders of the church, treating them with respect for their hard work. Next, how to treat each other, encouraging those who are going through challenges in life. And finally, how to treat God and respond to His plans and guidance with a humble and surrendered heart.

#### **I. Practical Instructions on How to Treat the Leaders of the Church. (5:12-13)**

<sup>12</sup> Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. <sup>13</sup> Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

##### **A. Three Actions Steps**

###### **1. Respect your spiritual leaders.**

(12) “respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you”

All leaders have their own personal idiosyncrasies. One of my favorite books is “Everybody’s Normal Until You Get to Know Them.” We are called in the word to treat everyone with respect.

###### **2. Appreciate and encourage your spiritual leaders.**

(13) “Hold them in the highest regard in love”

The phrase, “highest regard” is an adjective that means “super-abundantly” or “beyond all measure.” There was an old school approach to leadership to never express appreciation because it may “build up their pride.” Encouragement changes everything.

###### **3. Get along with each other.**

(13) “Live at peace with each other.”

I’ve seen churches that are filled with constant friction, factions, tension and conflict. It’s no fun. There’s nothing more debilitating than discord in the church.

- Ephesians 4:3: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”
- Psalm 133:1 declares: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”

Illustration of getting along with other on a family road-trip vacation. It makes or breaks the whole experience! The same with the church.

## B. **Three Reasons for Treating Our Spiritual Leaders Well:**

### 1. **Leaders are sent by the Lord.**

(12) “who are over you in the Lord”

Leaders have been appointed by the Lord, regardless of the human process by which they were chosen. God has appointed our next lead pastor. A good pastor is like a shepherd that watches over his flock with protection and care.

### 2. **Leaders admonish the church.**

(12) “and who admonish you”

The word is literally, "to put in mind." Our goal as spiritual leaders is to remind you to apply God's truth that you may already know. My experience of listening to the word since retirement – truth needs to be reinforced. In this season of confusion from the world, our leaders help us to keep our feet on the right path.

Hebrews 13:7: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

### 3. **Leaders work hard.**

(12) “to respect those who work hard among you”

Contrary to what some people think, pastors work more than one day a week.

## II. **Practical Instructions on How to Treat Each Other (5:14-15)**

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

### A. **Best Practices When Responding to Three Behaviors:**

#### 1. (14) “Warn those who are idle”

The word “idle” occurs only here in the New Testament and was used of a soldier who had stepped out of the ranks and had become disorderly. Our English word “slacker” probably best captures the idea of the Greek word.

In Thessalonica, there was a growing group of people who had quit working because they expected the Lord to come at any moment. These were living off the gifts of others, and were not willing to work and support themselves. “Warn them,” Paul says. He does not mean to do this in a mean-spirited way, but to point out to them

that this kind of behavior is unacceptable. (In 2 Thessalonians Paul has to address this issue again, this time it's not just a bullet point but a whole paragraph, and his language becomes more precise. "You don't work, you don't eat!")

## 2. (14) "Encourage the timid"

The word "encouragement" is mentioned 46 times in the New Testament because it's so necessary to life.

The timid or "faint-hearted," literally means the "small-souled" person, one who feels inadequate and ungifted.

- Matthew 12:20: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out." Jesus handles the bruised with gentleness and looks for ways to fan into flame the fire that once burned bright.
- Isaiah 35:3-4 provides us with a great description of how we can encourage the worried: "Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come.'"

## 3. (14) "Help the weak"

Romans 14:1 (NIV84) "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters."

The word "help" means to prop something up that's about to collapse. The picture is one of keeping yourself face-to-face with someone, and holding him or her up. It's the idea of a "buddy system," where every weaker believer is held up by a stronger one. Titus 2:3-4 challenges older women to "train the younger women to love their husbands and children."

As I think about these three groups of people it strikes me that it's important that the right medicine is given to each situation.

The Message translation says: "Our counsel is that you warn the freeloaders to get a move on. Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet."

## B. Three Essential Attitudes:

### 1. (14) "Be patient with everyone"

How patient should you be with others? As patient as God is with you. That's pretty patient.

### 2. Be Forgiving (15) "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong"

There was a group of American soldiers living in a rented house in South Korea after the war. They had a houseboy working for them and they would play terrible practical jokes on him. They would put a bucket of water on the top of a door, so that he would get drenched when he opened it. They'd dump dirt on the floor, so he'd have to clean it up. They'd grease the knobs on the stove, so he couldn't turn it off. This went on for a long time and the boy just smiled and took whatever came his way. Eventually, one day the GI's felt bad and they apologized to him. He wanted to make sure they were serious, so he asked, "No more water on top of the door?" They said, "No, no more." He said, "No more grease on the knobs?" "No, no more grease." "No more dirt on floor?" "No, no more," they replied. With a big happy grin on his face the boy replied, "OK, then no more spit in soup!"

### 3. "Always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else"

Kindness is a continual attempt to better a situation, to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

## III. Practical Instructions on How to Treat God (5:16-22)

<sup>16</sup> Be joyful always; <sup>17</sup> pray continually; <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup> Do not put out the Spirit's fire; <sup>20</sup> do not treat prophecies with contempt. <sup>21</sup> Test everything. Hold on to the good. <sup>22</sup> Avoid every kind of evil.

In the last section of this letter we find instructions on how to behave toward God. What is your attitude to be toward God?

### A. Best Responses to God's Plans

#### 1. (16) "Be joyful always"

The word could be translated "Be cheerful" We might experience brief encounters with joy but they seem to be the exception, rather than the rule. And yet, the Bible is clear that joy is to be a way of life for the believer.

- Psalm 5:11: "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy."
- Psalm 32:11: "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!"
- Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Paul had to say it twice because we don't automatically default to a spirit of joy:
- Psalm 16:11: "...You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

#### 2. (17) "Pray continually"

Praying is to be as normal as breathing. If that's the case, then many of us, including me, have been guilty of holding our breath.

The word for “prayer” here is a general word that encompasses thanksgiving, confession, praise, intercession for others, and personal requests to God. The word “continually” refers to something that is constantly recurring. Prayer is like a long conversation with God that is never broken. Jesus put it this way in Luke 18:1 when he said that we, “...should always pray and not give up.”

### 3. (18) “Give thanks in all circumstances”

Notice how Paul underlines this: “for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

The will of God is the quiet response you make to the daily trials and circumstance in which you find yourself.

Twice in this letter we have had this phrase, “This is the will of God.” We had it first in 4:3, where Paul says, “This is the will of God for you, that you know how to live in purity.” That is the will of God for your body! But here is the will of God for your spirit, your inner life -- that you “give thanks in all circumstances.”

I love the story from the book, *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom where she and her sister, Betsy, were prisoners of the Nazis, and had just been transferred to the worst prison camp they had ever been in. The barracks were extremely overcrowded and infested with fleas. Their Scripture reading from their smuggled Bible that morning was 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 where they were reminded to rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances. Betsy told Corrie to stop and thank the Lord for every detail of their new living quarters. Corrie at first flatly refused to give thanks for the fleas, but Betsy persisted. They both finally agreed to thank God for even the fleas.

During the months they spent at that camp, they were surprised to find how openly they could hold Bible study and prayer meetings without interference from the guards. Several months later they learned that the officers would not enter the barracks because there were too many fleas!

## B. Best Responses to God’s Resources

### 1. (19) “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire”

Have you ever noticed how “on fire” new believers are? Unfortunately, some older believers can pour cold water on them by dousing their enthusiasm and joy.

I’m reminded of what Paul wrote to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6: “...I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God...” That phrase literally means to stir up the coals again by blowing some air into the embers.

### 2. (20) “Do not treat prophecies with contempt”

A lack of response to the Word of God can hinder the work of God in our lives. Numbers 14:11 reveals what God thinks of people who slight Him: “The LORD said to Moses,

‘How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?’”

### 3. (21) “Test everything”

We must learn to test the gifts of the Spirit from scripture. Paul commended the Bereans for this, saying they were more noble than those in Thessalonica because they "received the word with all readiness of heart and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so," (Acts 17:11).

### 4. (21) “Hold on to the good”

Once we’ve tested to make sure things are true, then it’s urgent that we apply the truth into our daily living. This literally means, “to hold down or seize” that which is good. Romans 12:9 captures it well when we’re told to “cling to the good.” When you find something that is true, don’t let go of it.

### 5. (22) “Avoid every kind of evil”

We should avoid anything that can replace God in our hearts.

## Conclusion

Then, with regard to the resources God provides, we have this wonderful closing passage:

<sup>23</sup> May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Paul’s closing prayer is really a short course in sanctification.

“Sanctify you through and through.” This phrase actually translates an unusual two-part word. Onepart means “whole” and refers to being “complete” or “at the end.” The idea is that we are being wholly sanctified so that in the end we will be complete.

“Be kept blameless.” This word comes from the courtroom. It means to be acquitted. No one can bring a charge against us because we will be blameless.

<sup>25</sup> Brothers, pray for us. <sup>26</sup> Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. <sup>27</sup> I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. <sup>28</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

## Discussion Questions

1. In what ways could we show appreciation to our leaders?

2. What can we learn about how to treat others (friends, family, etc.) from this section of Scripture?
3. When is it hard for you to be patient with others?
4. How can we rejoice always, even when things aren't going well or according to plan?
5. How has God been faithful to you in the past year?