

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-14 "Be An Encourager In The Body Of Christ, Not A Discourager"

This next section of 1 Thessalonians is Paul's closing encouragement to the church. And what would seem to be an entirely different direction from what has preceded, regarding the second coming of Christ, is actually closely related as we'll see.

The fourth chapter of this letter begins with a call to holiness, and now at the close of this letter Paul shows the church how holiness, or sanctification, is worked out practically.

It's interesting how Paul sandwiches the coming of Christ for His people into this call to holiness. And part of the reason for this is to not only instruct those in Thessalonica concerning those who have died in Christ and how the Lord will resurrect them first, but to also give them a sense of His return so that they would be ready for His return as servants instead of spectators.

This is why he writes in 1TH 5:4-11 "But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

And so the point of 1Thes.4:13-18 -- 5:1-3 is to help us consider the God who saved us and will come back for us, and encourages us to live unto His honor and glory as we have a gratitude for so great a salvation.

I was reading through Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse's commentary on Thessalonians and he said something which made me laugh as well as put into perspective how important it is that we not be so consumed with ourselves that we neglect God's sanctification in our lives.

He say's, "If there is anyone reading these words who has his Geiger counter out and wants to find out what my prophetic eschatological position is, I will get you out of your misery immediately and say that I am a pretribulational premillennialist. But, then I will go on to say so what?"

..... "My chief interest in the doctrine of the return of the Lord is: What does it do for us right now? And if you don't live by 1Jn.3:3, I am not interested in your ideas about prophecy. For 1Jn.3:3 say's, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." And what God wants from us is holiness in our Christian living."

Though I could not subscribe to the pretrib/premill. position, as I once did, I believe Barnhouse is absolutely right about how our understanding of the hope of being reunited to Christ in the resurrection should produce in us a desire to live to His honor and glory today.

Paul understood that these Thessalonians came out of and continued to live around pagan people who would try and drag them back into the world which promotes the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life. Christ's return should motivate us to keep our eyes above and to please Jesus in everything we do.

And now as Paul begins to close his message of hope he reminds his listeners, which now includes you and me, to consider those leaders, whom God has specifically given us, to instruct and build up the Body of Christ.

Keep in mind that all of us are to be encouraging one another to love and good deeds, and all of us are to be ministering to one another and reaching out to the lost, but there are those who have been called to shepherd the body and to equip the saints, so they in turn can minister to others.

And so Paul says in 1TH 5:12 "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you."

Paul is not speaking of three different positions within the church when he mentions those who work hard among you, those who are over you in the Lord and those who admonish (or teach) you.

As F.F. Bruce puts it, who by the way is a Biblical scholar in N.T. Greek, "He is speaking of one group of people who perform the three specified services in the church."

The people being referred to here are given the designation, "those who have charge over you in the Lord". A more literal translation would be, "those who stand in front of you in the Lord, which means your leaders in the Lord, specifically your Pastor, but would also include elders and deacons.

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way. HEB 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account."

This authority is not something which is inherent, but is given by God and it must be used wisely and with great care as God leads and uses His shepherds to help tend His flock. What many in the church fail to realize is that those who have been called by Christ to lead in His church are actually called to speak on God's behalf as they speak from His word.

This is what Ezekiel was told by God as well in EZE 3:17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me."

Now obviously, Ezekiel, being a prophet of God, spoke in a way which conveyed the very words of God when God gave them to him. But there is a connection for today in that we have that very word of God which we are to use to build each other up. And the shepherds in Christ's church must be using it in a way that equips the saints.

This is why Paul says to appreciate or respect those who diligently labor among you. In other words give them honor as men who were placed there by Christ Himself for your benefit.

If you look throughout the Old and New testaments you will always find that God is the One who calls His servants to be leaders, and it is God who equips them to such service, which is why we must understand that these positions are not to be entered into lightly, whether Pastor, elder or deacon.

Paul makes it quite clear that God is the one who is ultimately responsible for putting men in positions of equipping and tending the Body of Christ.

EPH 4:11 *"It was He who gave some* to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,..."

T. Croskery in the Pulpit Commentary, regarding the appointment of leaders and teachers in the church says, "This was by Divine appointment. There is no hint given in scripture of a time when pastors would cease to be necessary, and when the church would be served by an "any-man" ministry."

It is no small thing to be called by God to be a laborer in the church in this capacity. And he is to be a laborer who labors diligently as Paul says in this 12th verse. The word labor in the Greek gives the idea of feeling fatigue because of honest, hard work. In fact, Paul tells us in verse 13, "Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work."

There is something to be said for holding a Pastor in the highest regard for the position to which God has called him. And so the office of Pastor is not to be berated even if that Pastor is not totally laboring as unto the Lord.

The classic example of this is with King Saul, who was very much out of the will of God and yet David would not take his life, even when he had opportunity, because he recognized Saul as God's anointed.

Unfortunately, there are many in leadership in the church today who fall into this category of abusing their authority. And there are biblical ways of dealing with such problems within the church. If they are serving with wrong motives or even if God has not called them to that position and they are serving in the flesh He will ultimately deal with it.

1PE 5:2-3 "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

Our Lord is very serious about those leading His flock. When Jesus wrote to the Ephesian church He gave them a warning, and every church should take heed. He said in REV 2:5 "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

When God addresses an entire church you better believe that it is the leaders in that church who are responsible before God for the spiritual temperature of that church. This is why when a Pastor is laboring before God in the Spirit with a particular church, he is to be given honor and respect because he is obeying his Sovereign Lord and Master.

In our text Paul is assuming that these leaders have been called by God, approved of men, and are laboring in the Lord. And as men of God who take their call seriously the rest of the church should be encouraging him in his work because God is pleased with him as He works through that man.

A leader in the church must be a servant who imitates Jesus Christ who said, 'I did not come into this world to be served but to serve and give My life as a ransom for many.' If a Pastor, elder or deacon puts himself above serving then he is no leader in the biblical sense.

But, when the church is showing its appreciation for godly leaders and praying for them, it's actually giving honor and praise to God who put that man there in the first place to direct and comfort and feed the sheep.

Not to do so is to question God's choice and His integrity which is why He can say in Ps.105:15 "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm."

Your Pastor has only one desire and that's to serve the living God to the best of his ability in the power of the Holy Spirit. And in so doing I long to see all of you built up in the Lord to be His servants and to grow in the Lord and draw close to Him to His honor and glory, so that you will take seriously your service to God.

I have a great responsibility as well as the privilege to serve Him as I serve you. Pray that I may always diligently labor among you and I will pray that you will in turn continue to encourage and honor me as the one whom the Lord has anointed for your benefit.

May my honor not come from some title, but in the laboring, in the work that God has set before me and given me to accomplish according to His will for this church. And as we continue to grow and move in the direction God wants for us, under the leadership He's given you, then as Paul say's, we may live at peace with one another.

The peace which comes from being "like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." (Phil.2:2)

The peace of knowing that God is the One who put this work together and the peace of knowing that He will not only sustain it but will cause its growth in His time, and in the process we will be a lampstand which will shine as He intends it to shine.

And as each one of us find ourselves serving our Lord in the areas He wants we will experience a peace from sharing in the greatest work this world has ever known, the work of the Lord.

To this end I encourage you and I labor among you knowing that I am to continue in giving instruction from God's word and taking my charge, given to me by Jesus Christ, very seriously, with joy.

But, notice where Paul now goes in verse 14 "And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone."

This verse should be a "given" for the Pastor and leaders of the church, but it should also be part of the makeup of all of the brethren. Each of us are to be looking out for the interests of other believers in the church. That doesn't mean we're to be meddlers, but we are to be concerned for others and help as we can.

Paul mentions three things here which are general in nature, but gives a good overview of some of the responsibilities we have one toward another.

He say's, "warn those who are idle", or as the NAS puts it, "admonish the unruly". The idea here is to caution Christians who are undisciplined in their lives and who are not taking their responsibilities to the Lord seriously.

Dr. George Milligian makes an interesting observation concerning those who are idle. "In the present passage the special reference would seem to be to the idleness and neglect of duty which characterized certain members of the Thessalonian church in view of the shortly-expected Parousia, (or coming of Christ).

In other words, simply because we may expect Jesus at any time does not mean we neglect our daily duties.

If you think this is far-fetched you only need to go back to the mid-part of the 19th century when some people felt that Jesus was to return at a certain time. Many people actually quit jobs, they left

family and friends and essentially just hung out waiting for Christ to return.

These folks were called the Millerites, after the name of William Miller, a Baptist preacher who convinced many that Christ would return around the year 1844. Jesus obviously didn't come and Miller continued to be associated with the Adventist movement.

Though his followers were eagerly awaiting His return, they missed the point that they were to be actively serving Him and being light in a dark world until He comes back, which means your daily activity isn't to cease, it's to be all that more of a means of glorifying God.

And in the case of some of these Thessalonians they may have used the excuse that since Christ was coming back soon, there was no reason to be actively pursuing responsibilities in this world.

This, by the way, could cause real divisive problems within a church especially if those who took such a course were doing it with an attitude of being "more spiritual" by living in the attitude that Christ would soon return.

Of course there is another alternative to this passage. There may have been people who were just naturally lazy and idle and who needed to be admonished. But, Paul tells us that we, as brothers and sisters in Christ, should not neglect this kind of encouragement as long as it's done with an attitude of love and not taking a holier than thou attitude.

Paul continues by saying, "encourage the faint-hearted." (Vs. 14)

The NIV says, "encourage the timid". The word timid or faint-hearted is interesting in the Greek because it's made up of two words: *ologos*, which means little or small, and *psuche* which means, soul. And so the compound word is literally "small-souled" or "little-souled."

This is not to suggest that some Christians have smaller souls than someone else and are therefore not capable of being bold in Christ. It has more to do with how we express what we possess in Christ.

All Christians have the Spirit of Christ. It's an either or proposition if you know the Lord. You don't get a little of the Holy Spirit, you have Him all. We might liken it to a race car driver who has a 500 H.P. engine under the hood. In the hands of someone like a

Michael Andretti that car can perform in ways that allow the horse power to be totally utilized.

But you give that car to Barney Fife and it will never get up to speed, unless Barney takes the time to learn what he possesses under that hood and becomes familiar with the way it handles and what it can accomplish.

Some Christians are content to coast in life when in fact God wants them to soar in the power of the Spirit. This is why it's essential to consider what we possess as believers in Christ Jesus. What we possess is eternal life in Christ and the Spirit of God who can empower us to serve the Body of Christ and reach out to a lost world with the message of hope in Christ.

There are many timid or faint-hearted drivers, in a spiritual sense, and they need to be encouraged that they serve the living Almighty God of the universe who has all power and authority.

Robertson in his Word Pictures in the N.T., says, "local conditions often cause some to lose heart and wish to drop out, be quitters." Some people just can't seem to handle the trials or cope with the responsibility of being a child of God.

Paul would suggest that these type of people have no excuse despite their feelings. It is sinful behavior. But he says, encourage these people.

Don't dump on them, come alongside of them and help them see Christ more clearly and the hope of His salvation and the nearness of His presence even in trials. And encourage them that the Spirit of God can empower them to be responsible servants of the Most High God, and they need not fear.

This, by the way, can only be done as we have personal contact with people which is why the fellowship of the saints is so important. This is why God commands His people to come together for worship and fellowship.

The writer of Hebrews says in HEB 10:23-25 "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

This is the context in which Paul is addressing the Thessalonians. He essentially says, 'You Thessalonians ought to be encouraging one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.' (The Day of the Lord)

Paul then goes on to say in verse 14, "help the weak."

He isn't speaking of the physically weak. He's referring to the spiritually weak. And so, even during those early days of the church there were those weak in the faith. And today many are weak in the faith for a variety of reasons.

Many Christians are not in the word of God, they don't pray as they should, they take worship and fellowship for granted and often avoid it. Spiritually speaking they are still babes in Christ, even though they may have known the Lord for years. The writer of Hebrews touches on this.

HEB 5:11-14 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."

The constant use of God's word is to live by faith according to His word. We will only mature in Christ and be effective servants as we come to Him and His word and submit and obey His will as we ask for His power to accomplish His will.

But, Paul, knowing that some Christians will not take their salvation seriously and seek God diligently, still says, help the weak in the faith.

The word, help, in the Greek is *antechomai* which is defined, to adhere to. We may have a tendency to push these people away in frustration. Paul says, adhere to them like glue and encourage them so that they may grow in the faith to God's glory.

And quite honestly there is only way we can do these things: warning the idle, encouraging the timid or faint-hearted, and helping the weak; it's by being patient with all who are in these categories.

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit. Paul told Timothy in 2TI 4:2 "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--**with great patience and careful instruction.**"

Being patient is going the extra mile; it's willing to be long-suffering even when we see little growth. If you've ever grown roses you know that it takes great care. And often the plant will not grow as fast and produce the kind of flowers we'd like to see.

But, because we're faithful to water and fertilize and prune, knowing that watchful care will eventually produce a beautiful cluster of flowers, we're willing to continue being patient and doing whatever it takes.

It's the same with people. We're often too quick to give up on people, instead of being patient to water, feed and prune, knowing that God causes the growth.

In our patience we must give the truth of God's word in love and come alongside and encourage people who need it. In so doing you are being a faithful servant. But, your patience will only continue if you do it for God and not primarily for men. It is Christ whom we serve and all that we do we must do for Him, to please Him.

One of my favorite verses is one I need to be reminded of often.

GAL 6:9-10 "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

Keep in mind that Christ died for us even when we were sinners. As we walk in His love and patience we display the working of His Spirit in us and the world will see Jesus.

1TI 1:15-17 "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."