

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15, Week 10
 Sunday, November 12th, 2017

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

¹²We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

¹⁴And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

What does a perfect church look like? Does it exist? As long as Believers live this side of Christ's return, our churches will be filled with imperfection because we are imperfect people. However, this does not mean a church body shouldn't strive alongside one another to be all that Christ calls her to be. This will not come easily or naturally to us. While our justification comes from the shedding of Christ's blood at Calvary alone (Romans 3:23-26), living godly lives will demand striving and effort from us (2 Peter 1:5-10). Will we grow tired from the unyielding call to perseverance?

While grit is unquestionably valuable and necessary for a Christian soldier, it will take more than just guts to say *no* to the temptations vying for our affections and allegiance. But praise be to God, His will for us is our sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3) and by His divine power He's given us what we need to live a life of godliness (2 Peter 1:3). "Because of the promise of the new birth (1 Peter 1:3), the promise of God's protecting power (1 Peter 1:5), and the promise of God's enabling power (2 Peter 1:3), believers can 'participate in the divine nature,' that is, become more like Christ (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 2:20)."¹ If each individual member of the Body of Christ is becoming more and more like Christ, the inevitable result would be a Church, while still flawed, excelling in the work of the Lord. This was Paul's heart for the believers in Thessalonica and beyond. His passion and zeal for their continued obedience, endurance and faith in the Lord was undeniable. Thus, as he approaches the end of his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul gives further instructions for the church on how they can best function within the church and represent the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Gangel, K. O. (1985). [2 Peter](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An*

12We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13a)

Paul gives no indication that the Thessalonians were living in such a way that demanded a reproof of some kind in the way they were treating their church leaders. Perhaps, it was the amount of time he had spent doing ministry with people that gave him the predisposition to warn the believers against such characteristics as those presented in 4:12-13. Sadly, there are times when church life can look muddled. As stated previously, we are imperfect people and messy people make messes. Paul gets to the antidote for this in vv.13b-15.

It is important for us to take note that Paul is obviously talking to the “rank and file members of the Thessalonian church”² because they are differentiated from leadership, whom they are told to respect. However, the functions listed in the text are not limited to full-time ministers alone and therefore extend the application to those within the church who serve in various ministry positions. “In fact, Paul’s letters in general demonstrate a remarkable sameness regarding tasks and character traits expected both of the leaders of the church and the congregation in general.”³

When it comes to how we regard those over us in the Lord, whether it is those in actual pastoral positions or consistent laborers within the church, Paul presents two imperatives for our behavior. Those two requests asked of the congregation were that the leadership be treated with (1) respect, and (2) that they be esteemed highly. These two actions combined together sought to advise the church to recognize and value the leadership who ministered amongst them. The alternative attitudes would have been for the congregation to respond with ingratitude or with combative spirits.⁴ Paul called the believers to a kind of behavior towards their leadership that was above quarreling and naysaying. Controversy and antagonism are to be replaced with high esteem. The congregation is not to “despise their leadership as if they were dispensable, nor to flatter or fawn on them as if they were popes or princes, but rather respect them.”⁵

Why?

The likelihood that Paul had taught the Thessalonians on the virtues of avoiding quarrels and divisiveness in general like he had elsewhere (2 Cor. 12:20; Rom. 13:13; Rom. 16:17-18, Titus 3:10) would seem likely. So why would he choose to emphasize here about specifically avoiding this conduct towards church leadership? Paul’s charge to *respect* and *esteem them very highly* was surrounded by the belief in their *labor* among the people. The New American Commentary (NAC) states that the term for labor is “broad enough to include all sorts of ministry activity. The laborer in the church, (whatever specific task is involved) who has consistently exhibited a willingness

² Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time*. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT) and Stott, John R.W. (NT), 1991. Inter-Varsity Press. The Bible Speaks Today Series.

³ Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time*. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT) and Stott, John R.W. (NT), 1991. Inter-Varsity Press. The Bible Speaks Today Series.

to do the hard work of the ministry, is one who has earned the respect of the congregation (1 Cor. 16:15-16; 1 Tim. 5:17).⁶

While John R.W. Stott suggests that the clause, “*those who labor among you,*” “conjures up pictures of rippling muscles and pouring sweat,”⁷ some have mindlessly suggested that ministry work is not *really* work. If interactions with lazy laborers have undermined our perceptions, let’s look to the Scriptures for evidence that honest work in the Lord requires a travailing tenacity. Moses was responsible for leading a people who were in a *constant* state of grumbling when things didn’t go their way (Exodus 15-17). Joshua was commanded to lead the Israelite army in battle, conquering land for their possession – a task so great that even by the time he was advanced in years there was still much more to occupy (Joshua 13). Ezekiel was assigned the task of acting out a message before God’s people that required him to lie on his left side for three hundred ninety days and his right side for forty (Ezekiel 4). During the days that Jesus walked the Earth, His request to the disciples to move to a desolate place for rest implies the exhaustion the day’s work had demanded- only for the apple cart to be upset and His plans altered to be the host of a party of five thousand instead (Mark 6:30-43). On top of the toilsome labor of tent making combined with countless physical sufferings, our beloved Paul said he carried *daily pressure* or a concern for the spiritual state, of all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28). Scripture is unremitting of evidence that true authentic work in the Lord can be a tough grind. Yet, the called laborer continues with the forethought of 1 Corinthians 15:58 in mind,

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Jesus himself demonstrated and taught on leadership in the Scriptures; therefore, those that labor in the Lord are accountable to the Lord. Those entrusted by Him for these positions are called to the task of a humble servant (Mark 10:42-45). They are under people, not above them. Yet, sometimes we suffer with *authority issues* because this is *not* what we’ve seen. Maybe we’ve watched a person in leadership abuse their position or use it for personal gain. Or maybe we’ve perceived such a gross lack of humility that left little desire in us to impart any kind of thoughtful appreciation.

We can rest in knowing that the Lord is fully capable of humbling the proud (Proverbs 15:25). Let’s not act as if He could use *our* help in that process. If we are struggling to respect and esteem those in church leadership, let’s not resort to the opposite attitudes than what Paul urged for, or fall into a trap of stirring up discord among other believers. Could we instead see it as an opportunity for earnest prayer and heed the resounding call in Scripture to *be at peace* (1 Thess. 5:13; Rom. 12:18; Heb. 12:14)?

For further study compare 1 Samuel 19 with 2 Samuel 1 & 9.

Consider David’s response and behavior towards Saul.

Draw parallels to our lesson.

⁶ Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

⁷ Ibid.

13b Be at peace among yourselves. 14And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 15See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

The clause in v.13b, *be at peace among yourselves*, seems a bit out of place, sort of like finding a Skittle in the M&M jar. The exhortation to *be at peace* certainly holds tremendous value, but whether it is to reflect the relationship between a congregation and its leadership or if it is to project on to Paul's further instructions in v.14-15 is unclear. The NAC declares it is unlikely that the decree to "live at peace" makes its beeline to vv.14-15. However, since both vv.12-13 and vv.14-15 relate to relationships within the church body "live in peace" may have been placed in the seam between these two sections because of the potential for conflict between each of these groups and the congregation as a whole.⁸

**See
Colossians
3:12-15**

Christ's church is made up of many parts with different functions, all which exist to edify - build up - the body as a whole (1 Cor. 12:4-7). If we hold to our above interpretation that Paul was speaking to the larger assembly of believers then the instructions to *warn the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with them all* also applies to the entire congregation. It's not fitting for the church member to merely be a pew sitter. Moreover, the deep-rescuing, bondage-breaking, delight-restoring, and life-altering love of Jesus compels those that have experienced it to lend a hand to their brothers.

We gently warn the idle with love from a desire to hasten their remembrance that the *one who works his land will have plenty of food but whoever chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty* (Proverbs 28:19 CSB). For when we work, we should do it with all our heart because in it we are serving the Lord, not man (Col. 3:23). We encourage the fainthearted to study Christ who endured such hostility from sinners (Heb. 12:3) so not to grow weary, while simultaneously declaring His deliverance of us from a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7). We get shoulder-to-shoulder with the weak, helping them to see their weakness as an opportunity to experience His grace (2 Cor. 12:9-10). With the people and in the situations that try our nerves, we are patient because we think back on the patience Christ has had with us (Rom. 2:4).

Having this privileged position of being in the Body of Christ is an upward call and one that resists the opportunity to repay evil but instead chooses to do good – offering spectators reason to consider this other-worldly deed (Matt. 5:16). The way of Christ usually carries with it a prospect for glorious exchange. Good for evil. Peace for anxiety. Faith for doubt. Trust for fear.

A Cross for sin.

In Him, for Him and because of Him we lunge onward to this high call in Christ to do good, and not just to those who don't know Christ, but especially to *one another*.

⁸ Ibid.