

October 8, 2023

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

12 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, *13* and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. *14* And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. *15* See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.



Transforming Grace
1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

BIG IDEA: Let Christians live as those who are awake, living together with affection for each other in Gospel community in constant expectation of Christ's return, and having all natural desires under Christ's control.

OUTLINE

1. Those who labor among you in the Lord
2. Tough and Tender Love
3. Hold fast and rejoice

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“Paul shifts the focus of his letter to community conduct. As is typical for Paul, he concludes his letter to the Thessalonian church with a litany of appeals established on the truths of the gospel he has set forth throughout his letter. The imperatives of the Christian life—what we are called to do as we follow Christ by faith—are founded on and flow from the indicatives of the Christian life—who we are in Christ by faith. Moreover, every imperative in the Christian life is provided to us as a gracious admonition from God so that we might glorify him and enjoy him as we live the free and abundant life we have in Christ—who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). adapted from the ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible

Praise to Jesus. Praise God for the men and women in leadership that He has placed in your life. Take time to reflect on the many people that God has used in your life to sharpen you, encourage you, challenge you and care for your soul in the name of Jesus.

Repentance through Jesus. Who in your community (family, church, school, work, neighborhood) does it seem impossible to follow one of these commands with, but that God is calling you to pursue? Confess whatever it is to God. Examine your actions, your emphases, your tone, and your motives.

Consecration for Jesus. Commit this hard season, person or circumstance to Jesus. Ask the Lord Jesus to open your eyes. Pray for your leaders and seek to live at peace with one another.

DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon discussion questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Reread 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. What are the two main responses Paul commands from the church family? What do they mean?
2. The New American standard translation uses the word “appreciated” in verse 12. Other translations use the word respect, recognize, acknowledge and honor to translate this Greek verb, which is basically “to know.” What do you think Paul is getting at with this word? How would a church family do this?
3. Which one of the four forms of ministry described in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 do you find yourself in most need of receiving right now (admonishment/warning, encouragement, help or patience)? Explain.
4. Which one of these four commands do you find most difficult to obey? Why?
5. Who in your community (family, church, school, work, neighborhood) does it currently seem impossible to follow one of these commands with but that God is calling you to pursue?
6. Read Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Peter 5:1-4 and discuss as a group. What do these texts say about the role and responsibilities of an elder/shepherd? What is the role of the flock?
7. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:13, what does it mean to “esteem them very highly in love because of their work?” How would one do that? What difference would that make for both the church family and its leaders?
8. The very last phrase of 1 Thessalonians 5:13 says “Live in peace with one another.” How does this relate to the dynamic between church leaders and congregation? What is Paul’s point?
9. If you are a church leader, what particular challenge and encouragement do these verses of 1 Thessalonians hold for you?
10. If you are a church member, what do you appreciate most about your leaders? What could you pray for them in response to this passage?

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. This passage is in the section of this letter in which Paul gives the Thessalonians instructions for living. It is crucial that you and your children understand how we can live as is commanded in the Bible.

- a. Ask your children if your family car could run on water instead of gasoline. *(No, a car cannot run on water because it is designed to run on gas.)*
- b. Ask your children how we can follow God's commands as Christians. *(God has made us to center our whole lives on Him. We can only live faithfully when we are filled with Holy Spirit as believers in Christ. We must trust in Christ to lead, guide, and direct us.)*

2. Who is Paul referring to in verse 12 when he wrote, "those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord"? *(Paul is talking about the leaders of the church, which would have been the elders. We see throughout Paul's missionary journeys that after people come to faith in Jesus that Paul and the other evangelists would make sure to appoint elders to lead the church. See Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5 for specific examples of elders being appointed.)*

- a. Take time to talk to your children about the elders of our church. Their names are often printed on the back of the bulletin. Take time to pray for them.

3. What does Paul say that the church leaders do in verse 12? *(He wrote that they labor or work among you. They also lead and they admonish. We know from Jesus' teachings and from Paul's that church leaders are to be servants of the people and are to preside over the church in such a way as to point all to Christ. To "admonish" means that church leaders are to connect God's Word with people's lives and specifically to confront sinful behavior.)*

4. How can you show "respect" (verse 12) to your church leaders? *(We can respect them by praying for them and by following their vision for the church. We can also show respect by following what Paul wrote in verses 13 and 15, "esteem them very highly in love...always seek to do good to one another and to everyone".)*

5. Verses 14-15 are commands for the Thessalonians and for us to follow in our relationships with each other in the church. Which of these commands is the most difficult for you to do? Which comes the easiest for you? Make sure to pray for you and your family to seek the Holy Spirit to empower you to live this way.

Scriptures for further study:

John 13:35

Galatians 5:22-26

Hebrews 13:17

FOR STUDENTS

1. How do we/can we acknowledge and recognize those the Lord has placed over our lives?
2. What are ways we can grow in showing respect to those the Lord has placed over us?
3. Do we acknowledge that when our pastors “admonish” (to warn or advise) us, they do so out of love and duty? How ought we respond if/when this occurs?
4. In verse 13, what does it mean to “esteem them highly in love,” and why is it important to “be at peace among yourselves?”
5. How can we be intentional to respect and live out the imperatives of this passage (v.14-22), when being taught, corrected, rebuked, or admonished by those who the Lord has placed over us?
6. What do you appreciate most about your church leaders? What could you pray for them in response to this passage?
7. What is one thing you can do this week to show your love and esteem for a leader (or co-leader) in your church?

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. Our culture prizes individual autonomy, thus to many people the concept of giving someone else “authority” over us has a negative feel. But when we become believers, we not only submit to the authority of God, we also submit to those whom God places in positions of authority over us.

Question: Given the qualities of a true spiritual leader as mentioned in verse 12 (i.e. working hard, showing loving care and oversight, admonishing/lovingly correcting), why would it be beneficial for you to welcome such authority over you?

2. God not only gives directions for how leaders are to oversee church members, He also gives directions for how lay members are to treat their leaders. They are to show them respect, and to hold them in highest regard. Paul even coins his own superlative “beyond-exceeding-abundantly” to describe the kind of esteem these leaders should be shown.

Questions: 1) What are some ways you can remove any disrespect? For example, is there any carping criticism you can eliminate? 2) What are some positive ways you can show more respect?

(See also Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 5:17)

3. In our passage, Paul gives a list of practical exhortations to all the members of the church, both leaders and lay people alike. These include things such as: live in peace with each other, warn, encourage, help, be patient, be kind. These imply action and intentionality on our part.

Question: What are some ways you can be more proactive in promoting the peace, unity, and overall health of relationships in our church?

4. Paul ends by urging the believers to “always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.” (verse 15) This is a tall order! Christian love is to be constant. Christian love is to be shown even to those we might feel like paying back for their wrong. Christian love extends not only to Christians in the church, but “to everyone else” (outside the church as well). Wow, I think we’re going to need some supernatural grace for this assignment!

Reflection: Take a moment to think about at least one or two people (by name) to whom you need to show more kindness. Ask God for the desire, strength, and grace to demonstrate that kindness.

A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica



Sunflowers, Vincent Van Gough, 1888

About the artist and painting: In 1888, the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh moved to southern France with a dream. He wanted to establish an art community where painters could live, work, and inspire one another. One of his mentors, a man he deeply respected, Paul Gauguin, agreed to come and live in this community. As a symbol of his thankfulness and happiness, Van Gogh painted a series of sunflower paintings and hung them in his room. The sunflower meant to reflect his surprising joy towards achieving a dream.

The apostle Paul was probably not an artist but he did produce a letter expressing his surprising joy, his thankfulness, and happiness. This letter was his “sunflower” to the church Thessalonica. It’s Paul’s verbal painting of Gospel Gratitude. What are things you a most grateful for in your life? Has the Gospel taken root in your heart? If so, what fruits of gratitude are being produced and overflowing in your life as a result of Jesus?

In his opening words from Paul to the Thessalonians, he writes:

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,
3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same faith, hope, and love that made a difference in the lives of believers then can make a difference in your life now. **“I’m excited for what God has in store for us First Presbyterian Church, as the Spirit washes us in these words of Gospel gratitude. May Christ be our hope for the world to come, our faith for today, and our love for a lifetime”** Pastor Bill Pardue

The purpose of 1 Thessalonians:

“A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica”

"The purpose of 1 Thessalonians is for Paul to convey to the Thessalonians how encouraged he is by the good report about them and to deal with other aspects of the news brought by Timothy." - Cara, 1 and 2 Thess. 22-23

Paul writes to express his GRATITUDE for the firm faith of the church and their expression and commitment to brotherly love. At the same time, he desires to see the church grow in holiness and provides information and encouragement concerning the hope we have in the certain and imminent return of Jesus Christ.

"The concern Paul had for this congregation was so overwhelming he decided to send Timothy back to the city to 'strengthen and encourage' the believers in their faith and to 'find out about' their faith...1 Thessalonians was written after Timothy arrived in Corinth to report his findings to Paul...He brought good news of the faith, love, and steadfastness of the congregation despite hardships. - Green, PNTC, 52.