

# 1 Thessalonians 5.11-18 / COB / 12.27.15

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## Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Suppose Earl came up to me and said, “Will, I don’t like your haircut. I think you should grow your hair down to your shoulders. All the pastors in the days when our great hymns were written had long hair, and that’s what I think is right. You can call me old fashioned, that’s fine, but long hair is what I think is proper for a pastor.” Maybe Earl would provide me with a wig to tide me over until my hair would grow out.
- Now I might contrive various ways to counter Earl’s arguments, and I might be personally offended that he is not fond of my shiny bald pate, but – given Earl’s stature in the church, his spiritual maturity and biblical studiousness – should I not consider his thoughts carefully and even appreciate his willingness to lovingly share them with me?
  - Let’s try a more serious example. Last week, Celia called me up and asked me if I was faithfully making time to have fun with my wife. When I told Mark about this, he said, “Good for her!” When I told LeeAnn about this, she said, “That’s right!” [at least, that’s the impression she left]. And really, I agree, “Good for her” and “That’s right.”
  - I appreciate Celia speaking truth in love into my life. She is my friend in the church, so I always appreciate her loving input, even when I disagree with her, even when she makes me uncomfortable with the admonition. And I confess, I had to tell her that I was not doing very well on this issue this month.
  - And you? You come to this church which has a paid pastor, four men who have been lay elders, several others who are spiritually mature servants to the church, and many others who are willing to walk through life with you so you can help each other. Are you open to them speaking truth in love into your life? That’s not the only teaching point for today, but it is one of them.
- † Two weeks ago, we talked about making this church more like the first church in Jerusalem. Today we will look at Paul’s instructions to a church he planted, and see if we can learn from them.
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## Background

- † **[Slide 2: map]** Open your Bible up to 1 Thessalonians 5.11. That’s page #1333 in the pew Bible.
- Paul wrote this letter to the believers in the city of Θεσσαλονίκη. Θεσσαλονίκη is in modern day northern Greece, just south of Macedonia and Bulgaria, on the Aegean Sea. In Paul’s day, it was the capital and largest city of what was then the district of Macedonia, with about 200,000 people, and it was on the main east-west road of the Roman Empire.
  - Paul came to Θεσσαλονίκη on his second missionary journey, preached in the synagogue for three weeks, and planted a church there, but he was run out of town by those who did not respond to the gospel. Not much later, Paul sent Timothy back to Θεσσαλονίκη, to check on how the new church was doing.
- † In response to what Timothy reported, Paul wrote this letter, along with Silas and Timothy.
- He expressed general satisfaction with the church, and encouraged them to persevere in the face of persecution.

- He answered certain charges brought against him by his opponents, and addressed misunderstandings about Christ's second coming.
- And he exhorted them to the higher moral standards of Christianity. Today we will look at part of that exhortation, the part that applies to life together in the church.

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**[Slide 3: 5.11] 1 Thessalonians 5.11 NET: Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, just as you are in fact doing.**

- † So Paul had received a good praise report on this issue from Timothy.
  - "Build up" translates the Greek verb οἰκοδομέω. This is a construction word, but in this context it means to help someone improve their ability to live effectively; it can be translated as to strengthen, to build up, or to edify.
  - "Encourage" translates the Greek verb παρακαλέω, which can mean to exhort, to encourage, or to comfort.
  - So two action steps right away, two life applications: in the church, we should encourage one another and build up one another.
- † What does this look like today? One way we build up people in the church is by teaching and mentoring them. Every believer is supposed to grow to where they can teach others, so keep this as a goal for yourself.
  - More casually, we all help each other grow as we discuss life and scripture together. Have you heard the phrase "iron sharpens iron"? **Proverbs 27.17 NET: As iron sharpens iron, so a person sharpens his friend.** We talk things through so we both grow, we both are edified; we warn and strengthen each other when we see sin, temptation, or distraction in each other's lives; we build each other up to take steps of faith.
  - We exhort each other to take "top line" steps, following Christ and obeying scripture by doing evangelism, pursuing God through spiritual disciplines, learning to live God's way. We encourage each other as people who are accepted and loved, and we comfort each other.
- † But why, why should the Thessalonians or we do this? Who has your Bible open? What is the first word in v.11? "Therefore" [or "So" in NLT]. As a general rule, you should always ask what the "therefore" is there for. So let's look at vv.9-10, just before this verse.
  - **[Slide 4: 5.9-11] 1 Thessalonians 5.9-10 NET: For God did not destine us for wrath but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He [Christ] died for us so that whether we are alert or asleep we will come to life together with him.**
  - Every one of us deserves God's wrath, because we all have forsaken God at times, faltering in our faith or hope, straying from his commands, even willfully. But God does not give us the wrath we deserve. Instead by grace he saves us through Jesus the Christ, the Son of God who came from Heaven to be born as the human Messiah-savior, so he could die on the cross for us, paying the penalty for our sins, so God the Father would forgive us.
  - That is *why* we encourage one another and build each other up. First, we are so transformed by our salvation which results in this forgiveness and in a spiritual awakening as we are born again, that we find we desire to bless one another.

- Second, we have real reason for hope and encouragement, and real content for our edification: Jesus has come, he has redeemed us [set us free], and so we can have intimacy with God now and be assured of going to Heaven when we die, later to be resurrected to new life on the renewed earth at the end of time.
  - This is exciting truth, so we use it to encourage and build up one another. The content of these truths builds us up in knowledge and character, and encourages us emotionally and intellectually.
- † If you study this whole chapter, you find that v.11 summarizes the previous argument in the letter; it also serves as the theme statement for what follows, in the passage we are studying today. So let's read on and see how Paul elaborates on this.

**[Slide 5: 5.12-13] 1 Thessalonians 5.12-13 NET: Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who labor among you and preside over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them most highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.**

- † “Ask” is the Greek verb ἐρωτάω, which means to ask or request, but here with a sense of urgency, to beseech as the KJV has it; to ask fervently, to urge as the NKJV says.
- Paul, Silas, and Timothy wrote to urge the church about how to treat those who are over us in God's family.
- † Notice how you can tell who those people are. They are the ones who labor among you to get the work of the church done.
- They are the ones who preside over you and answer to God for the health of the church.
  - They are the ones who admonish you. “Admonish” is the Greek verb νουθετέω, which means to counsel about how one lives; it is translated as to admonish, to warn, or to instruct.
  - The authors describe most particularly pastor/elders, but I think this also would apply to other church leaders, especially a mentor, small group leader, or ministry team leader.
- † **[Slide 6: 5.12-13 actions]** Now what do they urge the church with regard to these people?
- “Acknowledge” is the Greek verb οἶδα, which usually means to know, but here carries the connotation of to respect, to honor. Other English translations say to respect or appreciate.
  - “Esteem” is the Greek verb ἡγέομαι, which means to regard, to esteem, to respect.
  - So Paul, Silas, and Timothy urge the church to honor and esteem church leaders “who labor among you and preside over you in the Lord and admonish you,” and to do so “most highly in love, because of their work.” That sounds funny, doesn't it, that you should honor me for admonishing you?
- † **[Slide 7: teaching]** How does this look in day to day life? How could you honor pastor/elders and other spiritual leaders for their work of admonishing, presiding, and working among you?
- First, listen to them and consider their teaching, from the pulpit, in printed or internet materials, and in one on one conversations. God swayed your hearts to hire me and God prepared me at one of the best seminaries in the country. I cannot answer every Bible question off the top of my head, but if I come before you with scriptural teaching, you can trust I have carefully

researched, prayed, and thought it through. I would say the same is true for the others who have filled this pulpit since I came here.

- You often will not like what I have to say. But it is not me, it is God who says it in scripture. So regardless of whether what I teach makes you uncomfortable, consider it carefully. The same goes for our other teachers in the church.

† **[Slide 8: care]** Second, value the care and counsel we give you. We work hard to ensure that needs are met here. We provide free in home support, prayer, and encouragement for those recovering from health issues, we provide free spiritual counseling, free mentoring, free ministry training, free immediate prayer and encouragement over the phone, free funeral and wedding services, free answers to all your biblical and life questions that you email or call in to me.

- And we provide free admonishment, warning, instruction, counsel about how you live. Many of you avail yourselves of the related services, but do not want any admonishment or counsel.
- Please understand that part of the role of being a pastor/elder is that I am supposed to get in your face to admonish, instruct, counsel you about how you live. This surprises some of you, but I am delighted that many of you have come to accept this accountability and teaching in your life. You need to fight the instinct to push back, to rebel; instead, consider our words, pray about them, and let the Spirit [not your emotions] guide you as to whether we are correct.

† **[Slide 9: leadership]** Third, accept our ministry leadership. According to scripture, pastor/elders have authority over all the ministries of the church; we also are the legal board of directors of the corporation. Under God and the law, we have authority over every aspect of the ministry. We desire to be inclusive and to delegate responsibility with authority to those who are ready, because that is biblical too. Thus we ask you to respect those people as well.

- While we always want your input on decisions around here, please understand that part of the pastor/elder job is to run the church and oversee all its ministries. We take that role as seriously as the others, because we have to answer to Jesus about the health of the church as a whole.

† So three ways you can respect and honor the leaders of the church. The church planters then added a follow up thought: be at peace among yourselves. If we all coordinate under the leadership of the church, if we have unity in essential beliefs, purpose, identity in Christ, then we will have peace among ourselves. And that will bring glory to God and pave the way to ministry success.

**[Slide 10: 5.14] 1 Thessalonians 5.14 NET: And we urge you, brothers and sisters, admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient toward all.**

† “Urge” is the Greek verb παρακαλέω, which we saw earlier can mean to exhort, to encourage, or to comfort. All the major English translations translate as “exhort” or “urge” here.

- What do they urge the church to do? Four actions toward three different groups within the church who have specific needs.

† **[Slide 11: admonish]** First, “admonish” is the Greek verb νουθετέω, which we saw earlier means to counsel about how one lives; it is translated as to admonish, to warn, or to instruct.

- Whom do we admonish? The “undisciplined”: the Greek noun ἄτακτος, which is those who are without socially recognized constraints, disorderly, insubordinate, living on the bottom line.

- So if someone is part of our church, but that person is choosing to live in sin, is not respecting authority in the church, or is causing disruption, then not only the pastor/elders should admonish that person, so should all of you. We love everyone unconditionally, but love without truth is too soft, just as truth without love is too harsh. So we have to bring truth in love about how to live and interact to those who are not living biblically, not functioning well in the church community, who are as yet undisciplined.
- † **[Slide 12: comfort]** Second, “comfort” is the Greek verb παραμυθέομαι, which means to console or to cheer up.
- Whom do we comfort? The “discouraged”: the Greek noun ὀλιγόψυχος, which is those who are faint hearted or discouraged.
  - Life is hard, and sometimes even mature believers can grow disheartened, can lose focus on the hope that we have, can find their joy and peace robbed by the cares of life. To these people, we offer not admonishment, but comfort. We share truth in love with them also, to refocus them on the hope we have, on the truth that crowds out accusative lies, and on the reasons to be thankful and joyful.
- † **[Slide 13: help]** Third, “help” is the Greek verb ἀντέχω, which generally means to cling to or be devoted to but here has the connotation of to help.
- Whom do we help? The “weak”: the Greek noun ἀσθενής, which can mean the physically sick or weak, but here refers to those who are weak of faith.
  - Some struggle to overcome addictions or other bad habits; some want to change their life but are not sure how; some need to start spiritual disciplines to take steps of growth. We share truth in love with these people, we come alongside them, to help them take those steps that will make them spiritually stronger and healthier.
- † **[Slide 14: patience]** Last, we are to be patient with all these people. It is easy to get critical of someone not as pure and righteous as you are, but remember you once were where they are now.
- Admonish the undisciplined, comfort the discouraged, and help the weak, but be patient toward all. Don’t be judgmental, don’t lord it over them, don’t pressure them out of the church. We are here to minister to such people, to draw them closer to Christ and into becoming mature believers and constructive members of the church. So be patient toward each other.
- [Slide 15: 5.15] 1 Thessalonians 5.15 NET: See that no one pays back evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all.**
- † This is about how to handle conflict within the church [and maybe outside of it too].
- “Pursue” is the Greek verb διώκω, which means to pursue or to strive for something.
  - “Good” is the Greek adjective ἀγαθός, which is something beneficial or helpful.
  - So if someone in the church upsets you, you should not try to hurt them back, rather you should seek to bless them.
- † If we do life together, like the early church did, like the Bible instructs us to do, we are going to step on each other’s toes from time to time. Someone might say the wrong thing to you or say the right

thing in the wrong way or speak truth in love but you don't receive it well; some of us might rub you the wrong way, push your buttons without meaning to [some of the people I love most are most able to irritate me!]. We will have personality conflicts, arguments about how we do ministry, misunderstandings, and any other number of issues. We are fleshly beings and what is evil around us loves to provoke conflict among us. If we spend time together, we will have relational conflict.

- The question is how to handle it. There is a lot in the Bible about that, but here is a basic principle for your approach to life: when someone here hurts you, don't hurt back. It is ok to find someone you trust so you can talk over the situation with an objective third party, but don't complain and gossip. Don't give vent to your angry words with your tongue nor via social media. Don't shun that person, don't be passive-aggressive, don't secretly curse that person.
- Instead, seek to bless that person. Jesus said you should love even your enemies, and you should keep perspective that nobody here, however much you might hurt in the moment, is your enemy. And if you are supposed to love and sacrifice for even your enemies, how much more for your brothers and sisters in Christ?
- So pray that God would bless the one who hurts you, pray for an improvement in your relationship and resolution of the conflict. Seek to talk calmly to bring about that improvement and resolution. And even if there is someone you never grow to like much, you can choose to love that person anyway. Pursue what is good for one another.
- And pursue what is good for all, that is for the church. Pursue peace and unity and teamwork in the church, so we can optimally glorify God, serve Christ, minister to each other, and shine the light of the gospel.

**[Slide 16: 5.16-18] 1 Thessalonians 5.16-18 NET: Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**

- † If we are encouraging and building up each other, if we are working well in teams under the guidance of pastor/elders and other leaders whom we respect, if we are open to instruction from those church spiritual leaders, if we are patiently admonishing those who are still undisciplined, patiently comforting those who have become discouraged, and patiently helping those who are weak, and if we are resolving conflict with love and seeking to bless one another unconditionally, then it is easy to "Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
- We saw back in vv.9-10 that God through Christ Jesus already has made provision for us. God gives us grace, forgiveness, new spiritual life through Christ. His goal is that we could rejoice in our hearts, constantly pray in our dependence on him and devotion to him, in all situations to remember our blessing and thus be thankful.
- What stands between the provision and the fruitfulness are the urgent commands Paul, Silas, and Timothy gave the church in Θεσσαλονίκη.