

Week 8

Day 1

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:12-28** below three times and then follow the instructions:

Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you, and to regard them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Don't stifle the Spirit. Don't despise prophecies, but test all things. Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will do it. Brothers and sisters, pray for us also. Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. I charge you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brothers and sisters. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

1. Circle any words that seem important to you in this passage.
2. Put squares around the verbs (action words) in this passage.
3. Write down three questions that you have after reading this passage:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
4. What encourages you from this passage?
5. What challenges you from this passage?
6. What would you say is the main idea of this passage?
7. Choose a verse or group of verses that you will memorize this week. Write that verse or those verses below:

Day 2

As we come to the end of Paul's first letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul is concerned to leave these Christians with a picture of a gospel church. How should we conduct ourselves together, as Christians, in the community of the church? We could say that Paul has been doing this in the last few sections of his letter, but now Paul turns his attention particularly to life within the church.

Theologian John Stott called this section "Christian Community" or "How to Be a Gospel Church." This is what life should look like because of the gospel. The church is described as a family in the New Testament, and we are to treat each other as brothers and sisters. This concept of the family of God is an important theme for Paul in this section. We have here something like family guidelines for the congregation, and Paul groups these guidelines under three sections regarding congregational responsibility: toward the pastor (12, 13), toward each other (14, 15), and toward worship (16–22).

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:12-13**.

1. What are the two instructions that Paul gives to the Thessalonians about the way they ought to treat the leaders of their church?

2. Who do you think should be included as "leaders" of a church?

3. Do you think that church members in today's society generally do a good job of "giving recognition" and "regarding highly" their leaders? Why or why not?

4. What would it look like for you to give recognition and regard highly with love your church leadership?

In three prepositional phrases, Paul shows what congregations should expect from their leadership. He says:

Leaders work - The Greek word translated "labor" means "to exert energy to the point of weariness or fatigue. It implies that a pastor is not afraid of hard work. Churches can expect their leaders to not work for paychecks or perks. Instead, leaders should see their ministry as a calling. Paul's life was a living testimony to the kind of passion required for ministry.

Leaders lead - Paul's reference to those who "lead you" suggests that pastors assumed a significant place of responsibility within the Thessalonian church. The word for lead in this passage has a wide range of meanings, but more than likely refers to the unique calling to preside over and direct the affairs of God's church. In other words, leaders are to set the agenda and direction.

Leaders admonish - Paul talks about the responsibility of pastors to warn or confront. The word for admonish carries the idea of confronting a sinful habit or warning against bad behavior. This word was always closely tied with the work of preaching, teaching, and applying scriptural truth.

5. What expectations do churches have for their leadership? What expectations should they have?

6. Write down one truth you learned today.

Day 3

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:14-15**.

Paul now turns his attention to the church as a whole and our responsibility toward each other in verses 14, 15. This charge is to the whole family of God, not just to the leadership of the church. These are the responsibilities that we have to one another, and this is a helpful corrective to a view that places too much responsibility at the feet of the church leadership. Paul did give instructions regarding the role of the pastor, but now he is helping us see that it takes the whole body working together to bring true peace.

Paul describes three groups of people who need to be loved. First he says, “warn those who are idle.” The word “idle” here is not the best translation. The word does not mean “lazy,” which is what we think of when we hear “idle.” The word is better translated as disorderly, disruptive, or unruly. These Christians were out of order. Paul called them “busybodies” in his second letter, and he encouraged them to “do their work quietly and to earn their own living”. Such Christians disrupt the peace of the church, and they must be warned, not only for their own benefit but for the benefit of the whole body.

1. What would an idle person as described above look like in today’s church?
How could they hurt the church?

Paul also urges us to “comfort the discouraged.” Beale says that the word “discouraged” literally means “the small of soul.” We know from the background of this church and from Paul’s words that these Christians faced persecution. They could

quickly become discouraged in their faith. Paul is reminding us that in our gospel community, we need the encouragement of our brothers and sisters as we face difficulties and trials. In our church we not only need to rejoice with those who rejoice, but we need to weep with those who weep.

2. Explain a time when you were comforted by someone within the church at a particularly discouraging time?

3. Who is someone who you need to comfort today?

Finally Paul urges us to “help the weak.” We could understand the word “weak” here in a spiritual way and argue that Paul is telling us to help those who are weak in their faith, but it seems that Paul just addressed that concern with the phrase “comfort the discouraged.” Perhaps, then “help the weak” describes Christians who have physical or some economic difficulty. Paul is saying that we must be aware of the physical needs of those in our congregation and seek to help meet their needs.

4. What are some practical ways that you could “help the weak” during this particular pandemic? How can the church help the weak?

5. Write down one truth you learned today.

Day 4

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:16-28**.

In the margins on this page, list all of the commands in this section.

As Paul is finishing this letter, he ends with a string of quick commands on how the Thessalonians should live out their faith in Christ. At first glance, these commands seem to have little relationship to one another. They simply read as a list of general commands. Upon further examination, however, there may be a connecting theme to the commands.

1. What connecting theme do you see in these commands?

This passage does give us some clues as to how the commands are connected. First, all of the commands in this passage are plural - meaning they are intended for the church and not just individuals. As American Christians, we often read passages like this and immediately think of the personal, individual application of the passage instead of the corporate application. If the verbs were written out in our southern vernacular, they would all begin with "y'all." Secondly, the commands concerning prophecies, a holy kiss, and reading the letter to "all the brothers and sisters" were public acts.

Because of these connections, Ralph Martin, an authority of early Christian worship, says that these commands are primarily centered on the corporate worship of the Thessalonians. In fact, he says this section is an example of the elements in worship of the early church. Martin claims that these commands could almost serve as the bulletin for their services.

2. If you were given the task of developing a plan for worship this Sunday, what elements would you include? Why would you include those elements?

3. What do you think is required for a Christian worship service? What is your basis for that answer?

Paul begins with three commands: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances." Paul's commands are probably shaped by the writer of Psalms, and the three acts of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving should be themes in our worship of the Lord.

Paul now moves us toward the importance of God's Word. John Stott titled this section "Listen to the Word of God!" Paul moves from our worship directed toward God (rejoice, pray, give thanks) to our worship directed toward building one another up in the Word. The main issue Paul addresses here is prophecy.

4. How would you define prophecy?

Prophecy in the Bible carries multiple understandings. At times, prophecy is understood as someone foretelling the future. In this sense, God's prophets tell of upcoming events and describe what will come to pass. Another understanding of prophecy is a man of God forth telling the truth that God has commanded. In this sense, prophecy is much like preaching in today's church. A follower of God stands up

under the calling of God to proclaim the Word of God to the people of God. In this passage of 1 Thessalonians, Paul is most likely speaking about the latter understanding of that word.

Finally, Paul talks about the way that we respond to the praise of God and declaration of God's Word. Gordon Fee translates this passage this way: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire. Do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test them all; hold fast to what is good, reject whatever is harmful." Focus on the last two commands in that passage - hold fast to what is good and reject what is harmful. If we receive preaching that is good and is in line with Scripture, we should "hold fast" to it. If the preaching is harmful and not in line with Scripture, we should reject it.

This is crucial in regard to preaching. The preaching and teaching from the pulpit must be biblical. And if the preaching we are receiving is biblical, then we should heed its warnings and follow its guidelines as they are applied to our own lives.

5. How would you differentiate between preaching about the Bible and biblical preaching?

6. Describe a time in your life when you heard God's Word preached and you either heeded a warning or followed a guideline because of it.

Notice the flow of the worship that Paul mentions:

1. Focus on God - Rejoice, pray, and give thanks
2. Focus on God's Word
3. Respond to God and His Word.

Day 5

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:23-28**.

We have come to the end of our study on 1 Thessalonians and have reached Paul's concluding words. Throughout this letter Paul has addressed concerns regarding our doctrine and our life, what we believe and how we live. We have covered practical areas in the life of the church, and Paul has given us several commands about a life of faith that grows and trusts the Lord, a life of love that serves those in the church, and a life of hope that is confident in the future. A life that knows that this life of faith, love, and hope is not an accident. The life of the church is formed by God in the context of the gospel. Faith, love, and hope are possible because of God's promise: *"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Paul came into Thessalonica with the message of the gospel, and he did not have the time to stay there and teach them all he intended; but Paul had confidence in God. God would continue the work and transform these Christians, and God has promised he will continue that work in our lives as well. When Paul wants to encourage us, he ties everything back to the gospel and explains,

"He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it"

1 Thessalonians 5:24

Let us be confident that God will keep his promises. God is faithful, and he will finish what he started.

Take some time to reflect on the entirety of our study by answering the questions on the following page.

1. List three of Paul's main themes in 1 Thessalonians.

2. What do you know now about the book of 1 Thessalonians that you did not know before you started the study?

3. Of all the daily truths that you wrote down during this study, which one is the most impactful for you?

4. What encourages you from the book of 1 Thessalonians?

5. What challenges you from the book of 1 Thessalonians?

6. What has or will change in your life because of this study?