

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

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Paul summarizes what sanctified living looks like for the Thessalonians. They should support their leaders, be at peace with one another, help those who are afraid or are immature, and live life full of prayer with a joyful attitude.

Just before he concludes his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul concisely sounds off on a variety of exhortations to show examples of ways to live out the broader principles he has addressed already—ways in which to pursue sanctification, to excel in love, and to lead a humble life of hard work (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 3-12). He makes a *request of the Thessalonian brethren*, asking them to:

—*appreciate those who diligently labor among you.* These are other believers who *have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction*, so apparently Paul is referring to the elders and teachers within the church. He asks that the Thessalonians *esteem them very highly in love because of their work*. These church leaders were possibly bearing the brunt of the persecution in Thessalonica and were putting more on the line by shepherding the other believers. Regardless, Paul knew how much *love* and appreciation meant to a minister of the *Lord* when received from those to whom he ministers.

It is possible that this group who *diligently labor among the Thessalonians* were assigned to the Thessalonians by Paul. It is also possible that they were appointed by Paul from among the brethren there. In either case, Paul asks the Thessalonians to *appreciate* them. This Greek word translated *appreciate* is usually translated as some form of “know” or “perceive.” The idea seems to be to recognize them. To be aware of them. Not only to be aware, not overlook, but to *esteem them very highly in love*. Not because they are necessarily lovable. But because of appreciation for *their work*.

It seems that if Paul has to tell the Thessalonians to make sure to notice their leaders, then their leaders are working as servants, not insisting on being the center of attention. It also seems they have adopted a humble posture, since Paul asks the Thessalonians to be intentional to *esteem* them. This *esteem* is to be done *in love*. The word translated *love* is the Greek word “agape” which is used in scripture to refer to a love of choice based on values (1 Corinthians 13).

—*Live in peace with one another.* This is the result of believers living lives of faithful obedience to God, that they serve one another’s interests more highly than their own, and thus reach a state of harmony (Philippians 2:3-4). Love sets aside competition or division among believers, and seeks to attain *peace with one another*, because everyone is looking out for the good of others, and seeking the approval of God through the obedience of faith, rather than seeking their own interests.

—*We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly.* In that same vein, if there are *unruly* believers stirring up conflict, Paul urges the *brethren* to *admonish* such people. Paul desires that they be given a chance to repent of their divisive behavior and work toward the *peace* which Paul sets as the goal for the church. A loving warning from other believers can help restore disagreeable people back to selfless fellowship (Galatians 6:1). This is of course in the best interest of the *unruly*. To live a life of self-seeking is self-destructive (Romans 1:24,26,28).

—*encourage the fainthearted and help the weak.* Those who are struggling in the face of persecution in Thessalonica need *help* from their brethren. This might be *help* from any believers who are not experiencing persecution, or it might be *help* from those who are more mature, or have a greater gifting of faith and are more courageous to stand strong. This whole letter from Paul is meant to be an encouragement to all the Thessalonians, commending them on their perseverance in the faith and their reputation for love, reminding them of the hope of Jesus's return (1 Thessalonians 3:8, 4:18), and exhorting them to continue to encourage one another in their sanctification in Christ.

—*be patient with everyone.* Here Paul includes one of the manifestations of Agape love, to *be patient*. Patience is choosing to continue to engage with someone in spite of annoyance or irritation. Paul might have included this shortly after exhorting the Thessalonians to *encourage the fainthearted* and to *admonish the unruly* believers since both activities are typically accompanied with annoying circumstances.

—*See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.* Again Paul warns against division and self-seeking. If someone does an *evil* thing, and their victim *repays* them with *evil* recourse, then *evil* has been doubled, not destroyed. God is the judge, and will cause all things to be set right. When we try to do God's job by judging, we create more problems than we solve.

Paul gives the Thessalonians a new way to deal with being wronged: *always seek after that which is good*, not only for *one another* (believers in Jesus) but *for all people*. This includes everyone, even those who are persecuting the Thessalonians. This concept of repaying evil with goodness is taught elsewhere by Paul and by the Apostle Peter (Romans 12:21, 1 Peter 3:9), and finds its source in Jesus Christ's teachings to "turn the other cheek" (Luke 6:27-36). It is actually a way to win the conflict. As Romans states:

"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD"
(Romans 12:20, quoting Proverbs 25:21-22).

—*Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to face all circumstances with an attitude of joy. This repeats a theme that echoes throughout the Bible. For example, in James 1:2, James exhorts his Jewish believing disciples to consider even difficulties as joyful. Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us that Jesus had joy in what He was intending to accomplish in doing the will of His Father, even while enduring

rejection and death. Jesus did so because He recognized that in following the will of His Father, He would gain the amazing rewards of His Father, and therefore “despised” the massive rejection He received compared to the amazing reward He sought (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Here Paul points to God, that it is His *will*, His plan for us, to always *give thanks* to Him *in everything*, in all situations, and to be in constant communication with Him, to *pray without ceasing*. If we *pray* to God and give Him *thanks* regardless of what life throws at us, there is cause to *Rejoice always*. None of the suffering on this earth will compare to the glory that awaits believers when we enter the presence of God (Romans 8:18).

To *pray without ceasing* could mean that Paul encourages us to not give up praying, to continue on regardless of whether we are seeing the answers we wanted. It could also mean that Paul encourages us to be in an attitude of prayer throughout the day, as Nehemiah apparently was, since he said a silent prayer prior to engaging with his king in a manner that could have cost him his life (Nehemiah 2:4).

—*Do not quench the Spirit*; The word *quench* is translated from the Greek word “sbennymi” which connotes the idea of snuffing, suppressing, or extinguishing a fire. The Holy Spirit is often associated with fire (Matthew 3:11, Acts 2:3-4), He indwells all believers and acts as a Helper and a Teacher (John 14:26). Here Paul is warning against the potential all believers have to essentially drown Him out, to ignore His leading in our lives. To stop listening, and therefore to lose the power and benefit of the Spirit.

Both the Spirit of God and the flesh of our old sinful nature are always present within us while living this life. The Spirit and flesh contend with one another. We choose which to follow each time we make a choice (Galatians 5:16-17). It seems that when we continually choose the flesh, at some point the voice of the Spirit is quenched, and we lose the benefit of His guidance. This is a dreadful loss, and Paul warns against it.

—*do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.* Lastly Paul encourages the Thessalonians to be attentive to God speaking to them through *prophetic utterances*. They should not *despise* or discredit them. However, all believers should *examine everything carefully*, making sure that all teaching and preaching correspond with scripture. Paul urges them to make a simple but powerful choice, to *hold fast to good*, and to *abstain from every form of evil*.

The idea of *prophetic utterances* likely refers primarily to those who speak what is true, admonishing the believers to advance in their sanctification. The term “prophesy” is often associated with telling of future events. A true prophet would always be correct, showing that he had gotten his information from God. Speaking the truth of God also has a prophetic application when speaking of learning lessons from the past, or making applications in the present.

Biblical Text

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. 16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.