

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 verses 12 to 28. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil. 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. He who calls you is faithful, he will surely do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. The conclusion of 1 Thessalonians is mostly a punchy series of final instructions. Paul begins by exhorting the Thessalonians to respect their leaders, not just to submit to them, but to honour them and the labour that they perform, and to hold them in the highest loving regard.

They labour among them, they care for them in the Lord, and they admonish them. Paul's primary reference here is not to ministers so much as ministries. The people in question are probably not all ordained guardians of the church either.

[1 : 44] Paul probably has the women who labour in the life of the church no less in mind than the male pastoral guardians. Romans chapter 16 might give us more of an idea of the sort of group of which he is thinking.

The task of the leaders of the church is primarily that of caring for those committed to their oversight. They must protect them from error. They must build them up in the truth. They must unite them in fellowship, and take concern for their needs both spiritual and material.

Earlier in this letter we saw the way that Paul challenges the way that we can set sender, messenger, message, and recipients over against each other, as detached and sometimes in opposition.

In Christ and the gospel, these things are bound together. The messenger of the gospel, for instance, gives himself to those to whom he delivers the message, and he becomes a form of the message himself, as do those who receive it.

Here Paul also challenges some of the ways that we can instinctively regard the relationship between those in authority and those under authority. Rather than chafing at their authority, we are to be thankful for the care that they show, to recognise authority as a good thing, that, far from weakening us, can make us stronger.

[2 : 58] Leaders in the church are not a special higher class of persons. They are our brothers, and we need to esteem them highly and love. We do this not so much because of the mere authority vested in their positions, but because we recognise the goodness and the value of the work that they do among us.

The emphasis is very much on what they do over the offices that they do or do not hold. We submit in love, wishing their labours among us to be fruitful, much as we recognise that they desire that we are fruitful.

The Thessalonians are charged to be at peace among themselves. God has brought us into peace by the sacrifice of his son, and we must inhabit this peace together. Paul gives a series of rapid-fire imperatives to the Thessalonians.

The initial imperatives, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all, might seem to relate especially to the work of those in leadership. However, they are also the responsibility of everyone else.

