

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

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Date: 27 June 2020

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- [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.

The leaders lead the way in the work of the entire body. Paul returns to the concern he raised earlier in chapter 4 verses 11-12 about idle members of the community who are sponging off others.

[4 : 12] They should be admonished and taught to be self-sufficient. Those whose hearts were failing them were to be encouraged. How? Probably by focusing on the future coming of Christ.

In chapter 4 verse 18 and chapter 5 verse 11, Paul had already charged them to encourage each other in this manner. The weak must be assisted as they have their need.

The vision here is of a congregation in which people and their leaders are very attentive to each other, recognising and ministering to the various needs of people in different situations. They are instructed to show patience with all.

Patience is one virtue whose absence makes it difficult to practice any of the others. People are difficult. They can be resistant to correction. They can be unresponsive to encouragement.

And our efforts to help them can often seem futile and fruitless. It is only with a loving patience that we will persevere with them. Without patience, community is almost impossible.

[5 : 11] The Thessalonians then must minister to and nurture each other in these ways. The Thessalonians are warned against repaying evil for evil. Christians must reject the way of retribution, perhaps particularly important for a church that is undergoing forms of persecution.

They must seek to do good. They don't merely refrain from evil, but positively seek out creative and appropriate ways in which they can do good. We might be reminded of Jesus' teaching concerning the fulfilment of the law in the Sermon on the Mount.

The law is fulfilled in proactive and transformative love, not in mere sin avoidance. Paul's instructions here are similar in form to those that we find in places such as Romans chapter 12, verses 9 to 18.

1st. 2st. 2st. 3st. 5. 6. Reading Paul's staccato list, Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances here, we might recall the ways that he has already exemplified these practices in this letter, in his own way of behaviour.

For instance, chapter 1, verse 2, We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers. Always, for all of you, constantly.

[7 : 16] And chapter 3, verses 9 to 10, For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day, that we may see you face to face, and supply what is lacking in your faith.

All of these charges involve a call to consistency. Always, without ceasing, in all circumstances. As we are people determined by realities, principles and truths deeper than our situations, we won't waver in the same way as others do.

The Thessalonians must live holy lives as temples of the Holy Spirit. They need to value the words of prophets, testing what they say, discerning and holding fast what is good, and discerning and rejecting all forms of evil.

[8 : 34] Paul began the letter with grace and peace, and now he ends it with them. He directs the Thessalonians' attention once more to the much-awaited day of the Lord's coming, and now calls for God to establish them in the blamelessness of holiness to which they are called.

They are also instructed to greet each other with a holy kiss as a sign of close familial affection, and to have the letter read aloud to the entire congregation.

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