

Guidance For Godliness

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Date: 26 August 2012

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[0 : 00] Thessalonians, I hear that it's been going very, very well and we look forward now to Paul who's going to come and speak in just a moment, but we're going to read that first.

First Thessalonians chapter 5, which is on page 1188, on page 1188, First Thessalonians chapter 5, verses 12 to 28, it's perhaps, probably reads a little bit higgledy-piggledy, it's kind of like a whole load of things thrown together, but Paul's going to make sense of it all, aren't you Paul?

Good man, we look forward to it. So let's read from First Thessalonians chapter 5, starting at verse 12, it's on page 1188. Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.

Hold them in the highest regard, in love, because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle.

Encourage the timid. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Make sure that no one pays back wrong for wrong.

[1 : 39] But always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not put out the Spirit's fire. Do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good.

Avoid every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who called you is faithful. And he will do it. Brothers and sisters, pray for us.

Greet all the family with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the family. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

[2 : 51] Paul, I'm going to come up and I'm going to pray for you. I'm going to ask you a couple of questions first. Some of you know Paul, some of you might not.

Paul McFarland? That's correct. That's right. Tell us your relationship with the lady you've brought with you today. This is my betrothed on the second row. We'll be getting married at the end of September.

So I think Kate cooked at the Cargilline Church weekend before. So you probably all know her.

Well, we're all still alive, so that was okay. And just tell us what you're doing at the minute.

And as far as you can tell, what the next year will be for you. Well, I've been down since September, I suppose, full time in Middleton Evangelical Church. And I've been working as assistant and youth pastor there.

So it kind of varies. I suppose there's different things to do in the role. Some preaching, a lot of youth work. Some evangelism work as well. And for the next year, I suppose I'm going to be down for sure until September 2013.

[3 : 57] The end of September 2013. And then after that, I suppose, just see what God has in store. And just take it from there. And when you say down? Down from the north.

Oh, right. It just depends. Well, if you hold the map, it looks kind of down, you see. Oh, okay. Yeah. All right. You don't look down on us, though, do you? Oh, the fancy is going. Anyway, it's good to have you here today.

I'm going to pray for you and for us and then pass over. Father, thanks so much for Paul and Kate being with us here today. And just as we prayed for Graham and Justy, we pray the same for Paul and Kate later on in September.

Bless them, we pray. Equip them as they seek to serve you together. And we pray for Paul now as he speaks. Fill him, fill us with your spirit.

Speak to us afresh through him that we may be encouraged, built up, and brought closer to the kind of people that you call us to be.

[5 : 01] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thanks very much, Paul. Well, if you want to just keep your Bibles open there, as Johnny says, the passage has got lots of different things in it.

So it's really important that you're just following through as we go through it, because otherwise you probably will get lost. It's most likely my fault, but I'll just blame it in the passage. So anyway, it's 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 12 to 28.

What page number was it? 1-188. So if you keep that open. Now, I think originally it was supposed to be someone else who was speaking today, but they made some sort of lame excuse about having a 50th wedding anniversary and all this kind of thing.

Even though I'll be peeling the spuds for his dinner. But no, then I was told what the passage was on. It was all about holy kisses and that kind of stuff. So I think I maybe drew the short straw, but I'll give it a go anyway.

So anyway, whenever you look closer at this passage, you actually find out it's really full of important instructions and guidance. The temptation as we read it is to just skim through and see as if it's just Paul trying to give some kind of a few things to wind down so that the ending isn't so abrupt.

[6 : 14] But really suppose that you get so much here in such a short section because most of it doesn't really need much explaining. It's just a series of statements one after the other.

Now, earlier Paul has talked about the day of the Lord and other topics, giving explanation and reassurance and encouragement where it was needed. And here it's basically just like, this is how you should act.

I'm reminding you, you should know it, but now just do it. And also why he puts these instructions at the end is because it's the ending really that leaves the flavor, isn't it?

That's why a dessert is sweet and not bitter. You don't want to be walking out of the restaurant with your face all screwed up because it's not going to be the best advertisement to whoever's walking in. Or that's why whenever you have a coffee, they usually leave a little sweet, just a little note for the kitchen.

They usually leave a little sweet or a little mint so that the fragrance afterwards is nice and sweet and not coffee breath. Now, the flavor of the letter, as it finishes here, is almost rushed.

[7 : 18] It's like, don't slow up. Keep going. Follow my instructions. The day of the Lord is coming, so press on. Now, it might be helpful to divide the section into three as we go through it and just look at it, you know, as we follow through the verses.

So, I just split it up like this. Verses 12 to 15 is corporate life. It's instructions for the church. Verses 16 to 22, personal devotion. And 23 to the 8 then is closing blessings.

Now, there's going to be a good bit of overlap. Those aren't strictly all just what the verses are made of, but it's probably easier to divide them up that way just to look at it. So, firstly then, verses 12 to 15, we'll look at that and call it corporate life.

Now, there's going to be a bit of overlap, but how believers act individually is going to have a huge effect on how the fellowship acts and how the fellowship gets on the corporate health of the community.

But Paul's focus here is definitely to build up the church as a group. It's a bit like a rally cry before a battle. It's like he's rousing the troops to be united and to be strong under their leadership.

[8 : 29] And that's how he starts. He starts with the leadership. Notice how, though, whenever we look at it, he doesn't actually say anything to the leaders themselves. He just says it to the church.

Now, these Thessalonians, they didn't have any problem with Paul. They clearly respected him and they held him in the highest regard. Some commentators even think that the people maybe even have held Paul in too high a regard.

They were very dependent on him. In chapter 3, verses 6 to 10, you probably looked at it another time. We read of Timothy's report back to Paul and how they couldn't wait to see him. They maybe even, some people say, they maybe even idolized him a little bit.

That's why he writes, whenever he writes, he writes the whole letter pretty much from the first person plural. He writes we all the time. Paul, Silas and Timothy. And he only uses the word I three times in the letter.

Twice to assure them that he personally wanted to see them. And then once at the end of the letter here, to hold them to an oath to read the letter to everyone. But in other words, really, even though he personally longs to see them, the reality is that the whole Christian church shouldn't be dependent on just one man.

[9 : 38] Thessalonica had its own leaders and its own elders. And Paul is saying that in the midst of idleness and some false teaching about end times, these people, your leaders, continue to work hard among you.

Now, it's pretty typical, I suppose, whenever we think of, you know, maybe we've heard in the news or throughout history, different doomsday cults and different cults. Now, sometimes the leaders can be very lazy.

They just expect to live in everyone else's generosity and they just talk about what's going to come. Now, Paul says your leaders work very hard. And they make it their effort to admonish you.

Admonish means to give a pretty firm kind of instruction or a bit of a rebuke or a warning. And they admonish them, and Paul says, to hold them in the highest regard because of their work.

Now, you can see how they might have found it kind of easy to love and respect Paul because he's something of a hero to them. You know, he's somewhere far off. He's doing the missionary thing.

[10 : 38] He's away in Corinth or traveling throughout the known world, preaching the good news. But their own leaders were just very much like real, down-to-earth, normal people. And they were the ones that had the hard part of working hard with the people and rebuking them and counseling them and breaking their backs to try and get rid of this false teaching.

And Paul says it's all hard work. So make it your effort to love them, he says. Accept their admonition. In other words, if your leaders tell some part of your life or your behavior or your attitude isn't what it should be, then respect them for having the guts to say it, he said, because it isn't easy.

It can be an emotional as well as a physical drain and sometimes a spiritual drain also. Leaders carry burdens. They work hard, Paul says. So hold them in high regard.

And at the end of verse 13 he says, live at peace with one another, if you just keep your eyes in the passage. Live at peace with one another. Now when leadership, I suppose this follows all naturally, because when leadership doesn't exist, or where it gets undermined, people just get lost, don't they?

Now this is a, maybe can be seen as a very negative view of humanity, but it's biblical. In the world system, different ideologists like Noam Chomsky, if you read about politics or anything else, they promote views like anarchy.

[12 : 00] I see somebody chuckling now. So anarchy. Now anarchy is defined as the absence of government or authority and the absolute freedom of the individual regarded as a political ideal.

Now perhaps your understanding of anarchy, a little bit like mine, was just to think that it's another word for disorder or chaos, but it's actually a view that people hold, and many people think it's a nice way that the human race can operate.

Without authority, we can just have freedom, and we can all get along together. But in reality, it doesn't work. It doesn't work, because humans are sinful, and when there is no state authority, there is state chaos, isn't there?

And where there is no church authority, there is also chaos and disorder. Now the way to have freedom and peace isn't to throw off the yoke of leadership. It's the opposite.

It's submission and respect and love for leadership. There was people in the church in Thessalonica, I'm sure you read about it and heard about it in the different sermons, but they were very much anti-authority.

[13 : 04] They weren't respecting the views. And Paul deals with these people even more strongly in the next letter, these anti-authority people. But what they were demonstrating, they were demonstrating that they didn't just want to get rid of the church authority, they were actually rejecting God's authority.

Verse 12 says, Paul describes them as these leaders who are over you in the Lord. The concept of church humanity without church authority isn't a Christian concept.

Now healthy relationships in church can happen unless people have a healthy view of church itself, including its leadership. So in verses 14 to 15 then, Paul moves on in the passage very naturally from relationships with the leaderships to relationships with one another.

Now the first group Paul mentions is the idol. They're in deliberate contrast to the leaders who are hardworking. The idol in the church here, we know that they had a bad theology. Their different end times view was causing them to give up their jobs and be sponging off the more generous and wealthy believers in the church. But Paul says here, he says, that the church is to warn them.

[14:17] Final chance. We get the impression here even from the last few verses that the leaders had already been warning these people and admonishing them. They had been admonishing them and warning them in the church from the leadership perspective.

But Paul says here, part of your respect for your leaders and part of your holding them in a high regard is to basically, you to warn them as well. Is to repeat what the leaders teach among the fellowship.

To teach it and repeat it to each other. To warn what the leaders warn and to teach what the leaders teach. a really cute story was one of the youth was telling me one time that they were thinking of downloading a film without paying for the copyright and one of the other ones said to them, they said, remember what Paul said because a week or two ago before that I had just given a talk on music and mentioned very briefly about copyright and piracy and that kind of thing.

And so the challenge for me, I suppose, was that sometimes people actually take some of the things I say seriously. But it's also nice to see that in their context they were respecting what their youth leader was telling them and they were teaching it to each other.

They were teaching what their leaders taught. Now Paul says here, you, as a church member, following the teaching of your teachers, teach it to one another.

[15:44] Repeat it to one another. You see, I actually got to the point in the next letter, chapter 3, that Paul says, don't even eat with these people. But you see, if they had have been rebuking each other and warning each other in the community, it might not have got to that stage.

You see, I suppose whenever we think of authority, in the state context, political authority, they use this force to respect the law. The church authority, there is no police, there is no force.

But it's basically, it's our responsibility as church members to encourage one another and rebuke one another and make sure, just as we were doing before the prayer time, to see each other, how each other is doing in our own walks and in our own fellowship and make sure that we encourage one another from week to week.

Now that doesn't mean that we're being judgmental. It's about being sensitive to each other's weaknesses and building each other up for the growth of Christ's church. Because right after this very warning to the idol, what does he say next?

Paul says, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Now it's a difficult balance. But as we seek to live in love with one another and grow as a church or as local churches, it can't be ignored that our relationships with each other as believers are incredibly important.

[17:08] We're to look out for each other's health out of genuine concern and genuine kindness for each other and the other person. It is like a family. It might sound like a bit of a cliché sometimes, but we have to see each other as brothers and sisters and as part of the family who all need our help and encouragement and most of all, lots and lots and lots of patience.

When we're patient with each other, what we're saying is that basically, in spite of all our faults and all of our feelings, I'm not giving up on you because I love you. That's what we're saying when we're patient.

And that means when we get hurt, whether it's when we're insulted or ignored or sidelined or we just think that someone's being a little intrusive or disrespectful or doesn't understand it, then give them the benefit of the doubt and instead of trying to vindicate ourselves like we like to do as human beings, Paul says in verse 15, always try to be kind to one another inside the church and even outside the church and work or whatever environment we find ourselves in.

That's the instructions that he leaves the church community with as he finishes his letter. So then, verses 16 to 22. Now the second section in verses 16 to 22, you could say, concerns personal devotion or the individual's relationship with God.

Now it's going to have a huge effect on the community or the church life as well, obviously. How we are in our personal walk with Christ is going to affect the church community.

[18:45] Now just previously in verse 14, Paul has said that the weak and timid aren't to be abandoned. I suppose in a work context sometimes or in a teamwork, sometimes it's all about trying to get the strongest group forward or whatever else.

The church is completely different. You look at it more like a family. The weaker to be encouraged, they're to be helped. And I suppose but really, as we try to encourage one another and try to help one another in the church context, ultimately, to some degree, it still comes down to the individual, doesn't it?

You see, someone could try and encourage you all day long but they can't force you to be joyful, can they? If you don't cheer up, you'll just force whoever it is that's caring for you to just be completely exhausted.

Eventually, they're going to run out of encouragements or helpful comments or even Paddy the Irishman jokes and they're going to give up trying to cheer you up because they'll be exhausted. Paul says, be joyful.

It's a decision. It's a decision when you get up in the morning that you're not going to focus on all the consequences of sin in your life and in the world around us but instead, going to focus on God, on Jesus, on the forgiveness and the redemption that we've had through Jesus, the adoption, the acceptance, the eternal life and everything else that we have received because of trusting in Jesus' death for us.

[20 : 16] Be joyful always. All the time, Paul says. It's a decision. Now, you might think it's easy to say that. It's easy to just turn out the words be joyful, be happy.

Especially for me, I suppose, as a stand at the front but, you know, I don't know what people are going through. Maybe I get it easy but ultimately, it's God that's saying it.

Just as Jesus says, don't worry. Don't let your hearts be troubled. Even though he knew he was going to be crucified, go to the cross and suffer and die for the sins, our sins, he could say, don't worry.

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Now, Paul, he certainly didn't get it easy either. He suffered so much and he didn't just think it was just some kind of ideal that people should aspire to try and be joyful.

He's telling them it's the way it should be. Make a decision to be joyful always because it is a decision. Now, it's the same as the decision which he says in the very next breath.

[21 : 17] He says, pray continually. Now, God knows where we're headed. He knows where we're going. He knows what we need for the journey. He knows it all. Now, without constant communication communication with him, we just get lost in our own personal lives.

Now, the church body is going in a direction. God knows the future of each local church. He knows the future of his universal church. But just as he knows the future of that and the church prays as a body, so we also have to pray individually.

We have to make it our habit to pray continually in our own lives so that we can be sure that our own personal and private lives aren't going further and further away from where they should be and aren't going further and further away from the way it should be in church.

Sometimes we can find ourselves going to church but we're in a completely different place in our own personal lives from where we should be or where we feel we're kind of putting on where we are in the church community.

Within the church community, sometimes it can seem all very good. Privately, in our own hearts, we know the reality is that we can get cold, can't we? And really then when it comes to it, when it comes to contributing to what other people need to helping them, to trying to build them up, we don't have so much to contribute.

[22 : 31] We don't have so much that we can say to help them because inside we're not the place where we should be either. Now our prayer lives form the heart of our spiritual lives.

Now the very most fundamental thing that shows someone believes in God is that they pray to him. Isn't that right? Now if you're not praying it's either because we don't believe that God is really there or else underneath it all we believe that there's no point in praying because God is powerless to do anything about it.

We say that there's no point. Well without giving an in-depth discussion or explanation about how or why prayer works or why we should pray, Paul just says here, he says, pray and don't stop praying. Keep on praying all the time. And if you can't think of what you can pray for, Paul even gives us an example in the next statement. He says, to give thanks in all circumstances.

We don't need a lot of wisdom for that. Sometimes we complain even. We even make a complaint that we don't know what we should pray for. Well instead of complaining we should just be giving thanks for everything that comes into our heads.

[23 : 35] Every good gift that comes down from God we can give thanks to him for. Every conceivable thing that's good in life is worth giving thanks for. Sometimes we try and make it our purpose to try and seek out some kind of magic plan that God has for us or somehow somewhere in the future that's going to be the consummation of all our dreams and it's going to be the answer to all our problems.

But really what we should be just doing is giving thanks for the way things really are right now. And we can do that because we pray to a God that we really believe in.

A God who is in control. A God who knows what his will is for us. That's not someplace somewhere down the line where somehow we'll get fulfillment. It's knowing that God has us where he wants us and he has placed us in churches where we can love him and serve one another.

God's will for us is to live lives of devotion to him to be living worshippers. And the next statement actually it just follows on from that.

It's a statement about having a heart of devotion and worship. Do not put out the spirit's fire or do not quench the spirit. And this relates back to the image of God's presence in the Old Testament just as at Pentecost to God's presence being represented by fire.

[24 : 55] Now in the Old Testament in the tabernacle or in the temple the fire on the altar just burns continually 24 hours a day 7 days a week all year round.

Leviticus 6 verse 13 says God says this he says the fire must be kept burning continually on the altar. It must not go out. What does verse 16 to 18 say?

Be joyful always pray continually give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Whenever we refuse to be joyful when we ignore to pray when we're ungrateful to God it has a smothering effect.

It's smothering to other people and it's definitely smothering the reality of God's spirit in our lives God's presence in our lives. Don't put out the spirit's fire in your life.

Don't refuse God the worship that he is due. Verse 20 then do not treat prophecies with contempt.

Now it seems kind of strange in the context of false teaching but a common in a lot of the churches particularly here in the New Testament was this idea that I suppose tongues was a superior gift and prophesying and plain old boring teaching from the Bible could get a little bit drab.

[26 : 17] Prophesying now whenever we think of prophesying prophesying has two elements there's forth telling and there's foretelling now prophesying always has the first aspect every prophet throughout the Old Testament throughout them all always forth tells now that's the primary meaning of what it is to be a prophet or to prophecy now foretelling is to tell God's truth to the people who are present that hear it they're saying this is what God's saying they're prophesying or they're preaching now foretelling on the other hand is more about the future for example whenever I say Jesus is coming again I'm foretelling I'm not saying that whenever Paul talks about prophesying here he's simply just talking about this but certainly in the context this is certainly what he has in mind the prophecies of Christ's return he has been talking about and prophesying about through the entire letter both in foretelling about the future and foretelling about how God wants the believers to live this is what he's talking about he says don't treat it with contempt these false teachers were ignoring the teaching and the prophecies about Christ's return

Paul says instead hold on to what is good and reject what is evil likewise we should be continually reminding ourselves of the reality of the prophecy that Jesus is going to return and we must live in light of that now moving on then finally and briefly just to the last few verses verses 23 to 28 now Paul ends his letter thinking about that prophecy that we're just talking about of Jesus' return and he adds a final prayer for the Thessalonians that they would be ready for that day and then whenever we think of prophecy one of the biggest tragedies is that people get so caught up in what will happen or what might happen is that they ignore or they reject the whole purpose why the prophecy was given the prophecy was given so that we might be prepared individually and as a church community not by buying tin beans and dried fruit and gold and guns and storing it up in a basement somewhere that's well off but that we might be holy

Paul says so that we might be sanctified made holy through and through thoroughly holy basically he's saying and that our whole spirit soul and body would be kept blameless for when he comes that every aspect of our being would be focused on being ready and not be ashamed when Jesus Christ returns may seem like a big ask but the encouraging thing is that we're not on our own verse 24 the one who calls you is faithful and he will do it we began the journey with grace and we're going to finish with grace Jesus is the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end the author

and the completer of our faith so just as we keep reading and praying and seeking to have an attitude like Jesus one that gives the father the glory that he has due by living lives of worship we can be certain that he'll bring us to the end and we'll be ready to meet him whenever he comes we all need grace none of us will ever get to the point in our lives where we don't need grace that's why in the next breath

Paul says brothers pray for us he's no specific and the reason is probably that he has all the same problems and all the same concerns that everyone else has with a few more added in as well we know but he needs grace too earlier in the chapter he expressed his concern for them and his desire to see them to come and to see them and he's not above loneliness either and this is where the most awkward bit of the passage comes in verse 26 greet all the brothers with a holy kiss no I'm joking for us really I suppose whenever we're missing folk we might even write say at the end of the letter or something give so and so a hug for me or something like that it's the same thing really he misses them and he cares for them and the holy kiss doesn't mean a kiss that's not sleazy or a kiss that's not impure or that kind of thing he's not saying give them a pure kiss like the one on the forehead or something he's basically just saying give them a kiss for me and make it a holy one because they're my brothers in Christ who I love very much

J.B. Phillips he comes up with some nice paraphrases and he translates this one as he says give a handshake all round to all the brotherhood brothers pray for us greet all the brothers with a holy kiss I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers or to all the families sorry I've got I think I've got the 1984 edition no one is to be left out either by sparing them the difficulty of hearing the hard parts of the letter or by denying them the encouragement that it would be to hear a letter from their dear friend Paul but the way he says it is just really affectionate promise me that you'll have this letter read to everyone won't you would you promise me that and then he closes his letter by saying the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and can I just take the liberty of saying then as 1 Thessalonians comes to a close the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you too Amen Thanks Johnny Thanks very much Paul and please do talk to him afterwards if there's anything you want to follow up with him but that's encouraging our final song of the time and really to be the way entrust the way it gets and I'll adjust our Auft it's Christmas and finishes when you lean up your father and itmän like