

1 Thessalonians Ch5v12-15 - Healthy Church

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[0 : 00] All right. Well, good morning, everyone. It's good to see you.

! Just want to highlight again our Good Friday service at 11 o'clock.! Just a slight typo in the new sheets at 11. And, yeah, do come along to share if you want to take part.

There's opportunity to read and pray as we remember the death of Jesus for us. And then we'll be meeting next Sunday as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

So let's turn in our Bibles, please, to 1 Thessalonians. We're almost at the end of our study. Okay. We're going to read from 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 12 to 15.

So it's a short section, but it's jam-packed. Lots of good things for us to consider this morning. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, starting in verse 12.

[1 : 26] Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for 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 and disruptive. Encourage the disheartened.

Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong.

But always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Lord God, we come to you as the true and chief shepherd.

[2 : 49] Lord God, we pray that you would be our teacher this morning. And that we would be those who listen carefully to your word.

So that we who are weak may be helped. And we who are disheartened might be encouraged.

Bless this time together, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. So, what's the health of the church?

Well, recently I had to go to the doctors for my six-monthly check-up. Bloods were taken. I did find some. Five tubes in total.

And for good measure, they sent me away with a blood pressure monitor. One of those devices that you wear for 24 hours. And it goes off every hour, day or night.

[3 : 53] So, not much sleeping that particular evening. Thankfully, with the results all back, my cholesterol was good. I can eat cream buns again. And my blood pressure hasn't blown.

I am, according to the doctor, healthy. I'm in good shape. But tell me this. How do you measure the health of the church?

Is it the size? Is it the amount of programs that we have going? Is it our talented musicians? Or is it the quality of the coffee we serve?

How do you measure the health of a church? Well, as we come to the close of this letter, we'll see what a healthy church looks like.

This morning is part one. And then in a couple of weeks, we'll look at the rest, which will be part two of a healthy church. But before we look at the health of the church, we first need to know what is the church.

[5 : 02] No point in talking about the health if we don't know what the church is. So let's have a look at that. The local church.

Look at verse 12. Now we ask you, brothers and sisters. We see the same again in verse 14.

We urge you, brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters. And in fact, it's repeated down in verse 25. Brothers and sisters, pray for us.

Verse 27. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. In fact, this term is found 15 times in the letter.

It keeps repeating. So who are the brothers and sisters? Well, just go back to chapter 1, verse 4, where this phrase appears for the first time.

[6 : 07] Chapter 1, verse 4. For we know, brothers and sisters, loved by God, that he has chosen you.

Now, I want you to notice, I'm quite sure in your Bibles, after brothers and sisters, you might have a little letter. In my Bible, it has the letter B.

And if you go down to the very bottom of the page to the notes, if you look along the corresponding letter, it'll say something like this. The Greek word for brothers and sisters, Adelphoi refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God's family.

Do you have that? Yeah? Okay. So, brothers and sisters, we want to know who they are. They are believers, people who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sin, both men and women, who are now part of God's family.

You see, it's a reminder to us that the church is a gathering, not of just people, but of people who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who trust him.

[7 : 29] We're members of a family who've turned from self and are trusting in God's Son, Jesus Christ. So, first, we're brothers and sisters, part of a family.

But more than that, we're brothers and sisters who are committed to each other. So, look at chapter 4 and verse 9. Now, about your love for one another.

Chapter 5, verse 11. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up just as, in fact, you are doing.

Chapter 5, verse 13. At the end of verse 13, live in peace with each other.

And we see the same in verse 15. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do good. What is good for who?

[8 : 42] For each other. You see, you can't separate being a Christian from the church. If you claim to be a Christian, then you should also be identified with a local church.

A family of brothers and sisters who have responsibilities to love, encourage, and do good for each other.

It's like our biological families. I have a brother and a sister. And what makes us brothers and sisters is that we have the same father.

But more than that, it's our relationship to our father that unites us to each other. No one else gets to be called my brother or sister in a biological sense.

That's what makes us family. Well, if you're a Christian, God is your father. And because you have a relationship with God the Father, you become part of God's family.

[9 : 50] You enter into a relationship with brothers and sisters who also trust and look to God. So here's a summary of what I think a local church is.

It could be more, but it's at least this. A local church is a family of brothers and sisters who believe in Jesus, which is expressed in baptism and committed to each other, which is identified through membership.

Well, you say, well, I didn't read anything there about baptism or membership. You just talked about brothers and sisters and being committed to each other.

Where did you get baptism and membership from? Well, let us go to Acts chapter 2. So go back to Acts chapter 2.

And we'll see the pattern that there was in the early churches. People heard the gospel, the good news about Jesus, and their response to it.

[11 : 00] So Acts chapter 2, verse 38. Peter is the preacher.

He's the speaker. Chapter 2, verse 38. Peter said, Well, how did the people respond?

Look at verse 41. Those who accepted his message were baptized as a sign of their trust and their commitment to Christ.

And about 3,000 were added or included to their number that day. Well, included to who?

Added to who? The church. The local church. They became members of the local church. So you see, we are a church of brothers and sisters who believe in Jesus, which is expressed in baptism, committed to each other, which is identified through membership.

[12 : 28] You see, knowing who our brothers and sisters are is crucial to being a healthy church. So now that we know what a church is, what does a healthy church look like?

Well, we're going to look at two things. Love for leaders and care for church. That's how we measure the health of a church. Love for leaders and care for church.

So look at love for leaders. Let's go back to Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 12. Let's read from verse 12.

Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you. Verse 13. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

Who's he talking about? Well, he's talking about the leaders of the church or, as sometimes is referred to, the elders of the church. The leaders are those who are appointed by the church and are accountable to the church.

[13 : 44] And their responsibility is the spiritual oversight of the church. And their work, their hard work, is seen in two ways.

Did you see it there in verse 12? Those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord, and who admonish you.

So first, they are those who care for you. Now we've got a wonderful example of what that care looks like if you go back to chapter 2 and verse 7.

The care that the leaders have for the church. Chapter 2, the middle of verse 7. Paul is speaking.

He says, Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well.

[14 : 55] A nursing mother feeding her infant child is a beautiful picture of the kind of care we are to expect from our leaders. A leader is those who will watch out, protect, feed, nourish.

It's caring for the spiritual needs of the church family. So leaders are to care for you. And they were to admonish you.

Again, we have a good example if you look down at chapter 2, verse 11. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children.

Encouraging. Comforting. And urging you to live lives worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

A good father will watch out for his children. So picture the scene. A little toddler who goes running out in front of their father.

[16 : 06] They're just running and darting wherever they please. They can't see the danger or the trouble. The father at times needs to correct the little one.

To warn them, to steer them on the right path. So they don't run out on the road, but keep to the pavement. Leaders admonish. They correct.

Encouraging, comforting, urging. Not that way, this way. Ensuring that the church is in good health.

Go back to chapter 5, verse 12. So we ask you, brothers and sisters, the church, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, the leaders, who care for you in the Lord and admonish you.

So this caring, this admonishing, must be done in the Lord. In other words, the church belongs to the Lord.

[17 : 15] It's not my church or your church. It's God's church. So the leaders do not impose their own authority. Rather, they are to represent the Lord's authority.

We don't enforce our own will. Instead, we teach what is God's will. This is a healthy church. It's like a parent, a mother and father caring for and admonishing their children.

It's giving the spiritual nourishment and correction that a church needs so that they grow and mature and become all that God wants us to be.

It's speaking his truth, the authority of God's word for the blessing of God's church.

Now, the church has a responsibility to the leaders. If that's what the leaders are to do is to care and admonish, the church has a responsibility.

[18 : 18] Verse 13. Hold them, the leaders, in the highest regard, in love because of their work.

Now, that's quite a statement, isn't it? Hold your leaders in the highest regard. Now, let me clear about this.

That doesn't mean you're to treat your leaders with celebrity status and send pictures around and say how wonderful they are. It doesn't mean that if you meet me in the town or one of the other leaders in the town, you don't go, oh, hello, Johnny, is there anything I can do for you?

No, it means to deeply respect their role. Why such respect for your leaders? Well, and I say this carefully, and I want you to hear this carefully.

The reason why we hold our leaders in the highest regard is they are the most important people in your life.

[19 : 27] Yes, they are. They are the most important people in your life. Why? Because they are responsible for your spiritual health. If you were physically sick and you took a turn, where are you going to go to?

The hospital, to A&E, to the doctor. Why? Because of your physical health. You want to be looked after and cared for and made well and make sure that everything is okay.

You are not going to go down the road and say to the plumber, I have got a bad heart. Or to the electrician, there is something wrong with my leg. No, you go to the doctor because they are going to care and provide what you need.

Well, the leaders are there to provide for your spiritual health. To make sure that you are prepared and ready to meet the Lord, as we looked at last week.

You see, one day, as a leader, as a pastor, and indeed the other leaders of this church, will one day stand before God.

[20 : 37] And it says we will have to give an account for every single person who has been entrusted to our care. I am responsible.

Hold them in the highest regard, verse 13, in love. So how do we love our leaders?

Well, I am going to suggest three ways in which we can love. Here is the first one. Become a member.

You see, if the leaders are responsible for caring for and for admonishing the church, if they are to provide and exercise spiritual oversight, then the leaders have to know who they are responsible for.

So does that mean we are responsible for everybody who arrives at a Sunday service? What if they come for a few weeks and don't show up for another few months?

[21 : 45] Who are we to care for? We need to know. And the way we can know is to identify yourself with the local church.

To become a member. To commit and say, I want you to care for my spiritual health. I want you to hold me accountable.

I want you to support me and teach me. I want you to love me and watch over me. So how do we love our leaders?

Well, by becoming a member. second way to love your leaders. Submit to their authority.

Gosh, that's a big one, isn't it? Do I really have to submit to their authority? Well, the authority that leaders have is not to be used to demand their own wants.

[22 : 49] No, the leader's authority comes from God. God. Now, to help us see this, this is important, go forward in your Bibles to Hebrews.

Hebrews. So you get 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and then Hebrews.

Hebrews chapter 13, right at the end. Hebrews 13, verse 7.

So here, in writing to the church, the author says, chapter 13, verse 7, remember your leaders.

Why do we need to remember them? They spoke the word of God to you. Now look at verse 17. Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.

[24 : 11] Now, can you see the connection between verse 7 and verse 17? The leaders spoke the word of God to you and you're to submit to their authority.

They're not two different things but one of the same thing. the only authority that a leader has is to teach and apply God's word.

We don't make things up. It's in the teaching and the application of God's word. That is what we're all called to submit to. And as the church, they are to hold the leaders accountable to God's word.

So if the leaders drift from God's word and don't teach what the Bible is saying, then it is the church who must hold the leaders accountable. So how do we love our leaders?

Submit to their authority because they are teaching the word of God to you. Third way to love. Seek out their counsel.

[25 : 17] Let's go back to chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians. Leaders have been provided to watch out for you and to protect you.

So it makes sense that we should seek out their counsel. So ask the leaders. Would you come and visit? I have something I need to talk over.

Something I need to pray about. I'd like your input input. To listen to what the Bible has to say. Now that doesn't mean to say that the leader's words is perfect.

But it does mean that there is learned wisdom that will help you as you respond to challenging circumstances and make decisions. They are there to watch over.

To care. To care for the spiritual health of the life of the church. So verse 13. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

[26 : 28] Live in peace with each other. And I am so thrilled. I am so thankful that there is peace amongst the church.

Between the leaders. Between one another. Between us all. So let's keep working this out together. Holding each other accountable and fulfilling our roles to one another.

Love your leaders who care for you and who admonish you. So that's the first sign. The first mark of a healthy church.

Here's the second one. Care for your church. church. You see as brothers and sisters all of us we have responsibilities to each other. Verse 14.

And we urge you brothers and sisters warn those who are idle and disruptive. Encourage the disheartened.

[27 : 31] Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Well isn't that what the leaders are for? They're the ones who warn, encourage and help.

Yes all of that is true but it's also the responsibility of the whole church. Look at verse 14 again. We urge you brothers and sisters.

So we're all responsible for the care of the spiritual needs of one another. We are all to watch out for each other.

I need you to hold me accountable. I need you to ask me how I'm doing in my faith, how I'm doing in my relationship with God.

So how do we care for the church? Well, here's five ways in which we can care. First, warn the idle.

[28 : 31] Verse 14. Warn those who are idle and disruptive. You see, the idle or the lazy have a very simple motto in life.

Live to be served. They're consumers, not givers. Church is a place I come to to get what I want and if I don't find what I like, well, I'll go somewhere else.

And if I don't like that, I'll go somewhere else. There's a danger with that kind of approach. There's no accountability, no responsibility. It's spiritually unhealthy.

God gave to us brothers and sisters. He gave to us a family who can care for us and lead us and direct us on the right path. So, care for each other by warning the idle.

Second, encourage the disheartened. Perhaps you're discouraged today, discouraged by people's lack of support, fed up with not being thanked for all the service that you do.

[29 : 47] Maybe you're tired from helping and serving others. Maybe you've become disillusioned with where your life is at. And in those moments and in those times we can begin to doubt.

God doesn't care. Nobody cares. God doesn't hear my prayer. God can't love me. And what we long for in those moments is for someone to bring some wise encouragement, reminders of God's truth, promises from God that yes he does love us and it's a steadfast love.

He's never going to let us go. And he does see and he does know. What we need is someone who will listen to our cries and will come alongside and pray for us.

So maybe there's somebody who is disheartened today that you can encourage, care for each other as we encourage one another.

the third way, verse 14, is to help the weak. Now we all experience weaknesses. We can be overwhelmed by anxiety.

[31 : 07] We can become overcome with fears. We even get bogged down and weighed down by our past sin. We all know that dark feeling of sinking and drowning under the pressures and strains of life.

Well, try harder and do better is not the answer. We need to get alongside the weak and support them and carry them.

Rather than abandon them, we walk their path with them. We help them to collapse into the loving arms of God.

So is there someone weak today? Weighed down by past sin, overcome by anxiety and fear?

But we can help them by speaking truth of God's word. Let us care for each other by helping the weak.

[32 : 11] faith. And fourth, patient with everyone. How quick we are to write one another off.

Maybe there's someone who you know who's drifting back into sinful, harmful habits. It's easy just to give up and go, well, I've tried, and just dismiss them.

Well, rather than judge and disapprove, instead of wagging the naughty finger at people, we respond with patience. Why should we put limits on God's grace and mercy?

Does God put limits on his grace and mercy towards me? No, we show people again the path of repentance and faith. We lead them on the right path, and we go again.

So is there someone who you're feeling, well, not going to bother with them, I've tried. No, let us be patient with each other.

[33 : 20] And then finally, verse 15, which kind of wraps up the way in which we can care for one another. Make sure, verse 15, that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

Now, here's where the church excels and models the goodness of God. We live in a culture where people pay back. You wrong me, I'll wrong you.

You withhold forgiveness, well, I'm not going to forgive you. We're good at bearing grudges. We remember. We remember what they said and how they hurt me and what they did and how it upset me.

But not the church. Verse 15, we strive to do what is good, making sure that we don't pay back wrong for wrong.

Always doing what is good. Not for me. how will it help me or how will I feel. But how will it bless and help the other person.

[34 : 42] You see, isn't that how Jesus has treated us? Remember what he said? I am the good shepherd.

shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Here is the one who is the true leader, the perfect shepherd who cared for us by giving of his life to death on a cross, by paying for our sins, who corrects us when we drift away and gently by his Holy Spirit leads us back.

Jesus is exceedingly good. He encourages the disheartened. He helps the weak. He sustains you by his grace, pouring out his grace in abundance.

He strengthens you with his power, equipping you. As scripture reminds us, a bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

Jesus is patient with us, never giving up, always forgiving. He doesn't pay back wrong for wrong. Instead, he remembers our sins no more.

[36 : 04] As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us. Isn't Jesus good? And how much we need to experience the goodness of Jesus, because that is what we're called to do, brothers and sisters, in all that we're saying this morning is, let's bring each other back to our chief shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, who cares for us well, and only does what is good for us.

let's turn back to Psalm 95. I just want us to close with this this morning. It's how we began our time together.

Psalm 95. 95. starting at verse 6.

6. Come, let us bow down in worship.

let us kneel before the Lord our God, for he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

[37 : 45] Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are the good shepherd who cares for us intimately and personally.

Father, we entrust ourselves to you afresh today and ask that you would encourage us and strengthen us.

Help us to listen to your voice, to your word, that we would not go astray, but that we would listen to your gentle voice, for you care for us, and you correct us, and you do only what is good.

Father, help us, me, and Alex and Ralph and Jonathan. Help us to be the leaders that you call us to be.

Help us to care for the church. Help us to admonish the church. Help us to love our leaders.

[39 : 10] Help us to do all things in love. Father, help us all together to encourage one another and build each other up in the faith.

Help us to do that today. Help us to do it through the week, for we need one another. Lead us back to Christ, we pray, our name, we ask all these things.

Amen.