

Living with one another

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[0:00] It's quite a noisy road, isn't it? I don't have a PowerPoint today. I'm sorry if you're used to that. I would probably forget! to click the button along as I go along anyway. I'm not very good at that. It's quite an interesting passage. It's mostly list-based anyway. So if you follow along with where I'm at, you'll get a feel for where we are in the passage and hopefully everything will make sense. So, the sermon today is living in God's family, living with one another in God's family. Dr. J.

Alan Peterson was a writer, a preacher, and an evangelist. He's from the United States. He travelled around the globe and he clocked countless air miles whilst he did so. He was on board his 747 flight back from Brazil when he awoke from his post-take-off nap. He heard the captain speaking over the intercom. He said, we have a very serious emergency. Three of the four engines have shut down and the fourth will shut down very shortly due to fuel contamination.

The cabin staff rushed about inside the cabin. They began the procedures, telling people to sit their heads between their legs, telling everyone to put their seatbelts on and the tray into the upright position. So everyone was sat there in the plane, the heads between their knees, awaiting the inevitable impact. Dr. Peterson was no longer concerned about which in-flight meal he was going to choose, whether he should bother watching the film, or whether he should clear the gutter and go home, or whether he did get the best price when he renewed his car insurance. Instead, in that moment, he prayed. He prayed to God and he thanked him for their relationship. He thanked God for his wife. He thanked God for his children and prayed that they'd be looked after.

When the chips are down and times are at their worst, what are the things that really matter to us? Because those are the things that we turn to, aren't they? When everything's up against us, we turn to our faith, our families, and our friends. Now, to know what Dr. Peterson was thinking in that moment, you can probably guess that he survived. The plane managed to turn back around and make a miraculous landing back in Brazil. And when Dr. Peterson did finally get home to the States, he arrived there safely. He saw his family and he ran and he embraced them and he told them how much he loved them and how much he appreciated each one of them.

Now, we live our lives with our family, don't we? If you look around here now, I'm afraid to say that if we believe in Christ, we're stuck together, aren't we? Each, we've each got our own needs, our own desires, our own quirks, our differences, our desires, our aspiration, with different ages, different backgrounds. There is no other place in society where you're you get such a wide mix of people who call each other brother and sister. So we here, who are believers, have an eternity to live with each other. That's daunting, isn't it?

[3:39] So let's examine how Paul teaches us to live in God's family. So firstly, looking at verses 12 to 14, leadership and love. Firstly, recognize and respect your leaders. Our leaders look after us. They make tough decisions on our behalf. They give their time devoting themselves to the word so they can give us sound teaching. They learn our needs as individuals so they can help us. They can help us for our weaknesses. They can teach us and correct us. The Thessalonian leaders here, they have the same task as they sought to keep the honourable work of the church despite the strong opposition of society around them. We read back in chapter 2 and verses 7 to 8, Paul writes there, instead, instead, we were like young children among you, just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we can help 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. See, Paul here sought to be an example to the leaders of the church by leading by example himself, that the leaders would have the same maternal love for their congregations as he had for them. We're called here to respect our leaders for the godly work that they do. And Paul breaks this down into three parts for us. To those who labour among you, God's, Paul uses in this point the Greek word, verb, which is *kapio*, and that means to struggle, to strive, to engage in manual labour. He uses this also in 1 Timothy 4, verse 10, in the context there of training in godliness. He says there that this is why we labour and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the saviour of all people, and especially of those who believe. Do our leaders not toil to this end for our benefit? Kingdom work is tiring, and we should recognise this and uphold them in our prayers daily. He then says those who are over us in the Lord. And we saw earlier as the shepherds leads and protects their flock. Our leaders lead our congregation, don't they? There is a clear order set in scripture here. On the final day, it is our leaders' responsibility to account to God personally how they led God's church.

church. This is a huge responsibility, and not one that should be taken lightly by them or by us. We should pray for our leaders, that they would be faithful in their work, that they would lead us to Christ, and that on that day they can faithfully account for the work they did for their church, for God's church. And finally, the third point there is those who admonish you. Now, if, like me, you are a younger sibling of two or more, you will be well aware that your older siblings will be very good at pointing out to you when you've done something wrong. Now, our leaders are called to do this very same thing. They're there to counsel us. They're there to see our needs and to correct us in love. Potentially, unlike our older siblings, they might have been doing it for other reasons.

So, for these reasons, we are called to love our leaders for their work, we see in verse 13. We're called to hold our leaders in the highest regard, but not because of their personality or the fact that they have a title or because we like them. It's because they're doing kingdom work.

Paul twice calls us to acknowledge the work of our leaders. And as our leaders seek to lead us in love, we are to love one another also, following that model. We're not to feud and fight with each other, to take each other to court and sue each other as they were doing back then. We're not to grumble and complain when things go wrong or things aren't quite how we like them to be.

[8:17] We're to love one another as our leaders are seeking to love us and as our leaders are seeking to reflect Christ. It is key, though, that we do not make pedestals for our church leaders.

They are to be respected and loved, but not to be elevated beyond their calling. We are all constantly in a battle with our sinful natures. We all know far too well how the devil works to destroy the church that God is building up. So we need to pray daily, don't we, that our leaders would imitate Christ as an example to us to follow. And as our leaders seek to imitate Christ, it's their desire that we would seek and savour Christ ourselves. That we would grasp more each day Christ's love for us and what he has done in our lives to forgive us from our sins.

And ultimately that we would be more like him. Christ, who loved us so much that he came into our world to die an unfathomably brutal death. At the hands of those he had come to see. He bore the incomprehensible volume of our sin until there was no more. It is finished. That we might live through his death.

Jesus died a death of love. Now do we have that love for one another? It's the challenge here. Are we selfless like Christ was?

Or do we want our own way? Are we humble like Christ was? Or are we puffed up and proud? When you're part of the family of God, you labour in love for one another and with one another.

[10:22] Be that serving from the front, running the outreach, working in clubs or creche, or even you might be doing completely in the scenes and you think no one has seen it. God does.

I always remember my old pastor when I lived in Twickenham, a guy called Gerald Hemmings, he used to say that we should have a tea towel ministry. That's a bit weird.

And what he said is because Christ came and he was humble, he was the son of God who created everything, yet he took up his towel and washed the feet of his disciples.

The lowest job you could possibly imagine. And he did this as an example of love to them. However you serve in this church, the goal should be the same.

That Christ be glorified through what happens. So do we pray that our leaders was capio, that they would strive and battle daily that Christ be glorified in this place.

[11:34] Paul is reminding the Thessalonian church at the end of his letter here. And they're reminding us as well that we need to keep praying for our leaders and keep praying for each other because the battle is hard.

We'll look at the second point now. Now many issues arise in the life of the church and Paul here sets out briefly how they should be dealt with.

Obviously it's his closing point of this letter. He's covered things in much greater depth beforehand. And this is the brief reminder to keep doing these things. We remember in Matthew 5, verses 23-24, Therefore, if you are offering your gifts at the altar, and there, remember that your brother or your son leave your gift there in front of the altar.

Go to them and then come for your gifts. Jesus made it clear in this point that we should make things right with each other before we come to worship God.

So how do we live in peace with each other? Are we going to be with each other for eternity? In this earth, how are we going to live in peace with each other? How do we deal with the matters that arise within the church?

[12:57] First, he outlines the idle and the unruly. There were believers in Thessalonica that were bone idle. They didn't work, not because they couldn't, but because they couldn't be bothered.

And it's not fair, is it, that some people do all the work and other people do nothing. And the unruly were those who had to have their own way. They had an opinion or a preference in the way that they did things that had to be adhered to.

Paul clearly says here that these people must be warned. Examine your own heart. Is there a spirit of laziness in you? Is there a spirit of unruliness in you?

It's true, we can always do more, but to do more you've already got to be doing something. Being part of a family is a labor of love.

And isn't that something that you want to be a part of, laboring together? We're surrounded by consumerism, just taking in and absorbing stuff, mindlessly sometimes.

[14:09] We encourage to buy stuff we don't need. We've got no interest in them or how they're made or what's behind it, do we? In the family of God, we're called to not be consumers.

We're told to be involved in the product, if you can call it a product, the preaching of God, the living the life of Christ daily. We're not called to be consumers, and we're called to copio, to strive and struggle daily with each other in that work.

He moved on to the faint-hearted, and there were those in the church that were new in the faith. They loved Jesus. They knew he died for them, but they weren't sure about everything.

They didn't know everything that was in the word at the time. So these Christians, we now have the whole volume of the Bible that we can read together.

We're to get alongside these new believers and talk to them, find out where they're at and if we can help them. I'm sure we can all remember at that time, perhaps we're there now, perhaps it was many years ago, where we were young in the faith, and we had loads of questions.

[15:23] I still do have loads of questions in my mind. And there are people who may have been through the same struggles as you. And there may be people that are going through struggles that you've had. Let's talk to each other.

Let's see where each other are at and help each other through them, through the reading of God's word, through prayer and encouragement. Is this mic okay, by the way?

Did you want me to speak in this? Is that more helpful? Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

Thank you. And thirdly, the weak. There were those who were timid and afraid of speaking out. To these believers, we're to remind them of biblical truths, helping them to focus on the kingdom work that we're all involved with, and to point them to the urgency of the need of the world surrounding us.

We're to be patient for all of these believers, all three proceeding. We should pray for them, pray with them. We should show them all patience and kindness as they work through things.

[16:35] And just thinking really practically, we all have kettles, yeah? We all have tea bags or instant coffee.

Milk or access to, I mean, there's loads of coffee shops in Brighton. We can meet with each other, can't we? We have time. And if you have time, you can use that time. We can call each other on the phone, wherever we are nowadays.

So let's spend time with each other, outside of a Sunday, outside of the midweek meeting. Let's get to know each other and encourage each other and share the sorrows and the good times and the bad times with each other.

We're going to be with each other forever. And share God's word with each other and pray together too. Church is much more than just a Sunday meet and a midweek meeting.

It's about the people. It's about it being in relationship with people and that relationship reflecting the relationship between God and man. So how do we deal with grievances?

[17:43] What goes on? There were those in the church who were suing each other and taking each other to court. This made the issues within the church very public and all it served to do was damage the reputation of the new and growing church in that place.

We should seek, as it says in here, that no one seeks revenge on anyone but as the Bible says, let God be on our side. We're called as believers to pursue holiness and purity, not vengeance and anger towards one another.

We should seek to do what is best in the situation. When we forgive, we mirror Christ. We should be helpful and kind.

Remember the often quoted, love thy neighbor as thyself. We're called to rejoice always. Everyone is looking for that quick fix in life, it seems.

And they're trying to find their joy in all of the wrong places. We're sold this idea that money will make us happy. That celebrity status is something to be revered and attempted to be obtained.

[18:59] That fast cars and big homes will make us happy. For people who believe this, their joy is solely dependent on the good things that happen to them in this life.

So where do we find our joy? Is it with our work? Is it in our homes? Is it our possessions?

The Bible says that real joy is found in Jesus Christ alone. Jesus doesn't rust like a car. He doesn't decay.

He's not fickle. He'll never leave us if our cash flow dries up. Jesus is a constant. It would be pretty hard for the church to rejoice if we were dependent on what happened to us in this life to find our joy.

Back in chapter 1 of verse 6, Paul writes, you welcome the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

[20:13] So we read here that even in the midst of severe suffering that this church was experiencing, that Jesus can bring joy. So we today can rejoice, can't we?

We can rejoice always that despite the things that will happen to us in this life, that God is always with us. We're reminded in Romans 8 and verse 28 that God works for the goods of those who love him.

So whatever the situation that we come to in our life, and we're guaranteed to get both of these good situations or bad situations, we can rejoice always that God is working for our eternal good.

He goes on to talk about prayer and how often do we pray? How often do we attend prayer meetings? How often do we pray with our families?

Paul calls for the church to pray continuously, to have an attitude to prayer that is never ceasing.

When we stop offering prayers to God, it's almost as if we're saying that actually I've got this, I don't need your help anymore.

[21:31] We stop relying on God for guidance and help and we believe that we're no longer dependent on him and that we're the ones that are in control of things. Spurgeon wrote this quote and I really like this quote.

When joy and prayer are married, their firstborn child is gratitude. Do we need to examine our attitudes toward prayer this morning?

Do we want to meet with God's people at prayer meetings? Do we talk to God throughout our lives? Do we display a dependency on God for all things?

Psalms 127 says, If the Lord does not build the house then the builders labor in vain. when we want to see conversions, people coming into the church, hearing about Christ, we desire that growth. We should want to pray to God for that, shouldn't we? And we shouldn't want to pray to him out of ritual or duty because we have to, but out of love because we get to and because what he has done for us in our lives.

[22:53] Moving through to verses 19 and 22, we see that we're to listen to the Holy Spirit. All of us who have accepted Jesus Christ into our lives as our saviour have the Holy Spirit within us.

1 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 16 spells it out clearly to us. I think it was up on the screen earlier. And Paul calls us not to quench the Spirit.

And the language here that Paul uses in Thessalonians is that out of putting out a flame or putting out a fire. Now when you put out a fire the remnants remain, don't they?

You still get some glowing embers but the heat is gone, the flame is gone, the passion is gone as it were. Paul calls us not to let that happen in our lives. That we would burn bright.

That we would be a bright burning light for Christ. Now it's likely at this time that there were those in the church that were abusing their so-called gifts of the Spirit to prophesy various things, perhaps to back up the fact that they were being idle.

[24:06] Or predictions of when they thought Jesus was going to come again. And we saw that, we can see that if we move on to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, men there in that chapter were trying to predict and use spiritual gifts to back that up.

And this is why he calls us here to test any kind of prophecy that comes forward, to test whether it truly is from God or not, or whether or not it's a message that is self-serving for the person that is providing it.

Now all prophecy should agree with scripture, the canon that we have in front of us. If it differs from that, it's not from God. And it should also be for the building up of his church.

So if it fails these two tests, then it cannot be from God. And we shouldn't accept it, as it says here. And it should be rejected. If the message is not from God, then it comes from a false gift that we can see.

Now the Holy Spirit sanctifies us from within, helping us to grow and display the full fruits of the Spirit.

[25:23] Ephesians 4, verses 11 to 13 says, So Christ gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Do we welcome the work of the Spirit in our lives? Do we pray that by the Spirit we would be made more like Christ?

Do we seek to live our lives for Christ, or do we daily grieve the Spirit by our actions, thoughts, and deeds? We should pray that the Spirit that is within us, if we're a believer in Christ, that he would work in us, that he would use us, and teach us what grieves him, that we would be daily more like Christ.

And the final point, verses 23 to 28, is the final greetings to the church before Paul signs off. This is the final encouragement that Paul writes to the church, and firstly he calls them to be sanctified.

God wants us to be set apart for him. He achieves this through the process of sanctification. Paul frequently says through his letters that we are justified through faith.

[26:47] Faith in Christ alone is all that we need to be justified, to be made right by God. But there is no mention of holiness or sanctification by faith.

this is what Paul means here. The work of sanctification is God's work in us, making us more holy and more like Christ.

Sanctification is the process achieved through grappling with God's word, working on and cherishing our relationship with God, and pursuing prayer at all times.

as God works that process of sanctification within us, we become more like Christ, and we become more aware of what grieves the Spirit and what harms our relationship with the Father.

We are called to be blameless, and it's interesting to see the order in which Paul places the three parts of our being here. Now, God performs an equal saving work on all three parts, but one day the body will die and be renewed and we will receive our heavenly bodies, and we are to put the needs of our body after those of the eternal soul and spirit.

[28:08] God has promised us as his children that he will keep us, that he will look after us, and he will preserve us to the end of days, be that the return of Christ, or when we are called home to glory.

We can take encouragement that if our names are written in the Lamb's book of life, it cannot be erased that our justification is secure in the death of Christ.

And going back to my testimony, that is completely true, and you can almost see that being worked out, that once you are saved, despite what you might want to do, if you are saved and your name is written in the Lamb's book of life, there's nothing you can do, because God wants to keep you, and you are his child.

You are justified at that point where you give your life to Christ, and no one can take that. We're able to pray, and Paul, the apostle here, asked for the young in-faith church to pray for him.

The guy that we look to as a spiritual great, he's asking for prayer from a young in-faith church. Paul knows that he needs the Lord's help every single day to keep going, and he knows that he needs the prayers of the Thessalonian church to keep and sustain him.

[29:36] In the same way, we need to pray that our leaders, that the Lord will keep and sustain them as they keep through the kingdom work. Brings us on to holy kissing.

Is Paul saying that the next time you step through those doors that you should expect kisses from the welcome team? You might, but I don't think that's exactly what he's saying here.

Now, it was a cultural thing, not to say that culture overtakes the Bible, but it was what they did back then. Friends would greet each other with a kiss.

That was their custom. The evening standard, Paul recently ran an article on how British people find kissing strangers as a greeting very awkward.

The chuckles around the room makes me think that maybe you were in that study as well. I find it deeply awkward, but that might just be me. Paul is asking that they would greet each other with their customary greeting, that they would do it on his behalf, that they would greet each other with love.

[30:51] So unless you're feeling especially continental, I think we can have a holy handshake or a holy hug on the way out if you prefer. Which brings us to verse 27.

Paul here is clearly advocating that the word of God be read out in full to the church in a language that everyone can understand.

so the word is not distorted. The verses can't just be picked out to be shoehorned in and fit a preacher's requirements. We are very fortunate today that we live in a nation where the word is available in our language.

And we're also very fortunate that we have multilinguists who can translate in Sri Lanka so people can hear the word there as well. So praise God for that. But there was a time in this country when it was only the clergy that had the ability to read the Latin that the Bible was written in.

And they could preach the message whatever they wanted and they'd have no fear of the congregants checking up on them. But now we have the Bible.

[32:03] It's in English. We can all understand it. Check what I'm saying. If I've got something wrong you can come up to me afterwards and you can explain that to me.

And I'll take that on board because it's the whole point of having a test document that we can challenge each other on it. That we can admonish one another and build each other up through it. It reminds us here in verse 22 that it doesn't just apply to the prophecy that we should test but we should test teaching purporting to be from scripture. And we should be careful about where we source our teaching.

Because it's very easy to go online and find a blog or a preacher or comments on Facebook, wherever it would be, and think, yeah, that sounds about right and go along with it.

But that's why we have our source document to come back to, to test whether or not it is really from God. So with that in mind, do we test what we are taught?

[33:09] do we test what we read through the week? Are we spiritual lemmings following the leader of the cliff of poor doctrine?

Are we discerning listeners who test scripture with scripture? Do we test everything against our source document, God's word?

For all scripture is God-breathed, is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Therefore, we should all read and encourage the correct interpretation of God's word that no one is led astray.

Finally, verse 28. It's fitting here that Paul ends his letter as he starts it with grace. the unmerited favor of God which he bestows upon us, not because of who we are or what we've done, but because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Do we deserve grace? No, we don't. That's the whole point. The whole point of grace is that despite our disobedience, that despite all of the wrong stuff that we have done in our lives, that God would pour out his grace, all the more to cover that through Jesus on the cross.

[34:35] God's grace fills us with hope for today and hope for tomorrow and brings us joy. And to quote a commentator called James Denny, he writes, whatever God has to say to us, and in all the New Testament letters, there are things that search the heart and make it quake.

It begins and it ends with grace. all that God has been to man in Jesus Christ is summed up in it. All his gentleness and his beauty, all his tenderness and patience with the holy passion of his love is gathered up in grace.

What more could one soul wish for than that of his grace? It is by grace we have been saved through faith, not by our works so that no one can boast.

By grace we are justified. By grace we are made blameless. We are hidden in the lamb's blood, Jesus, who died on the cross.

By grace we are undergoing that process of sanctification and it is by grace that we can pray in the spirit to the son, to the father and by grace we are sustained by him daily.

[36:01] The saved are the children of God living out his purposes of his family. Let us love each other, love our leaders and encourage each other.

Pray with one another, learn and grow with one another. Keep reading his word and keep testing it that by God's grace his family, his church will grow until the day we meet him.

Amen.