

1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

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[0 : 00] Well, what a way to close a letter. Paul finishes with a flurry of words.

A barrage of imperatives. Fifteen in number. And if you add the participles that come with a command-like force, it is as if a shotgun has gone off at the closing of 1 Thessalonians. It is an energetic conclusion. And it contains all the energy that his heart had earlier in the letter with this repetition of desire and longing to see you, that I might see you, that I could be with you. And likewise, in his close, he just fires rapidly. The sheer number of things said in these brief verses seem at first reading to defy a simplicity of structure. It's almost as if he's just launching out everywhere. And we know that when there is imprecision of voice, it belies an indefinite aim.

[1 : 33] And when we read these verses for the first time, we wonder how and what holds them together. It's almost as if just commands strewn around the floor.

In fact, that's the way I thought of it earlier in the week. I thought of something that we do in our house. I call it a five-minute walkthrough. It's that moment in the day when things are literally everywhere.

And this worked much better, by the way, when my children were little. They actually enjoyed it. They thought it was a game. But now, if I call for the five-minute walkthrough, they know what it means.

Everybody lines up behind Dad at one end of the house, single file. And I just point at things that are strewn or that need to be put away.

And it doesn't have to be your own. Those shoes there get to Mom's closet. Those shoes there get to my closet. The newspaper. And then the kids just go.

[2 : 40] And they have to return. After they put the thing away, they have to come back right away and get in the back of the line. And it just goes like this. Well, when you read 12 through 28, there are so many things on the floor.

You wonder how to put it all together. But take another look. It'll need your eyes on the text. There are clear, three in number, movements that hold His words.

Verse 12, We ask you, brothers. He's going to ask them something concerning the right attitude that they are to have toward their leaders.

Verse 14, And we urge you, brothers. And now He's going to urge them godly actions toward one another.

Then verses 19 through 22, this bundling of imperatives where He wants them to pay attention to the manner of their corporate worship.

[3 : 55] And after He brings all of those things together, He explodes into this final prayer and then His closing words and benediction.

So while at first glance it appears as if it is just a laundry list of things that need to be sorted in no particular order and with no clear reference point, nothing could be further from the truth.

Verses 12 and 13, He asks for the right attitude in the congregation toward those who lead them. Let me read it again.

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Be at peace among yourselves. I was at a wedding yesterday and a fellow pastor asked me what I was preaching on and I said, well, it's the close of 1 Thessalonians.

[5 : 01] Perhaps I won't get by the first two verses because it tells everyone to love their leaders. I said, I'll just spend the whole time there. Of course, you know, it was only in jest. But here it is, a request for those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.

It's a surprising triplet of functions which indicate that in this early moment, remember Thessalonians is the first letter we have of Paul's.

Before the offices are solidified in the pastorals wherein the church knows of its elders and its deacons.

Long before the codification of that, it appears that Paul in his church planting work, even in a very short period of time, having only been in Thessalonica for six weeks to eight weeks at most, had appointed leaders and we see here the functions, not the titles, the functions of their work.

Threefold. They are those who labor among the Thessalonians and who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you in the faith.

[6 : 20] Great, great phrases outlining the role of leaders in the church. I think today of our own elders and deacons.

Those who were nominated by this congregation for leadership. Those who were tested in character, conduct, and in the content of the gospel.

Those who were voted by the congregation and confirmed as the leaders. They have a role collectively of labor, of oversight, and of instruction.

This word labor is the word of toil. It's a good thing for those who are involved in leadership in the church to realize that your work is one of labor.

What does a pastor do all day? He studies his Bible and sits behind a desk. Is that really difficult work? Well, it is difficult work.

[7 : 32] Paul used this word earlier in the first chapter to reference not only his work on their behalf, but his entire manner of life. He said, I've labored among you night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you.

In Colossians, he actually connects this word to the ministry of the word. So he is toiling with the energy of the Holy Spirit on their behalf that he might present everyone mature in Christ.

This labor was connected to his work in bringing people to maturity by proclaiming him. This proclamation work.

Great, great indicator of church leadership. The second mark there says that our over you, the whole notion of oversight today just as a wrinkle in the American fabric.

It doesn't matter whether we're speaking of the civic arena or the educational arena or the familial arena or the ecclesial arena. The American spirit of acquiescence and respect and highly esteeming those who have authority is certainly unwound at almost every turn.

[9 : 00] And at some points, rightly so, but as a spirit, it is in opposition to what the Lord would have, particularly in his own family.

It was years ago when Lisa was in the midst of discussion with another, a few other women in the neighborhood and was talking about how we're raising our children to respect authority.

The very notion undergirding society of a respect for authority under the rule of law and the other parent almost aghast saying, well, that's not what we're trying to do at all.

We want our children to question it at every point. Well, I understand healthy inquisition, but a spirit in the heart of a person that does not know how to esteem or respect those who are over them moves contrary to Paul's conclusion here in the letter.

In the church, he says, we ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you. That is, they correct, they instruct, they pull up alongside you, they put their arm around you.

[10 : 16] At times, they put their arms on your shoulders and say, look me in the eye, you need to be going a little stronger way. Hey, how do we receive those moments?

really, if you look at the end of this letter, it's how do you create a healthy church family? He closes on this note, not knowing when he will return to them, and he says to the congregation two things, respect them, verse 12, esteem them very highly in love, because of their work, and then third, be at peace among yourselves, which I think that last phrase is almost two directional.

He wants the entire church, congregation towards leadership, leadership towards the congregation, to be at peace. Want to be in a growing church family?

Well, he asks for a right attitude toward leaders. Respect, proper esteem, in love.

Be at peace. He moves on then, and collects and bundles a number of commands, but under a different heading.

[11:54] not a right attitude toward leaders, but he now urges them to have godly actions towards one another. Take a look, 14 through you could say all the way through 22, but I'm going to say through 18.

And we urge you brothers, and here's the litany, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all, see that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. I ask you to have a healthy attitude toward leaders.

I urge you to demonstrate godly actions toward one another. I love the first one especially, admonish the idle or the unruly or those who are disorderly in their lives, who are beginning to walk a road that will lead to ruin.

He says, admonish them. In other words, it isn't just the leadership of the church. The church ought to be protecting, guarding, admonishing one another.

[13:12] See something a little askew? Well, I sure hope somebody addresses that with so and so. Well, admonish one another.

Hold one another on the straight and the narrow, particularly those who are disorderly. And when you look in the Thessalonian context of the entire corpus, the two letters, the disorderly actually were slovenly at life.

They were not working. moving. They just wanted to keep moving and doing as little as possible. It's not the gospel way.

So he says, admonish the idol. Encourage the faint-hearted. What a wonderful word. Faint-hearted. The weak of heart.

You could think of it either in terms of their will in a Hebraic sense or their courage in a Greek sense. Those whose will wants to do the right thing but gets overrun by cares and discouragement.

[14:29] Or perhaps the level of courage, especially when you think of the persecution that was coming in the Thessalonian church.

The affliction, the isolation for having been affiliated with Christ and His sufferings. And he says there are those in your midst who need encouragement.

Think of Barnabas. He was actually given a name. He was the son of encouragement. There ought to be a dozen in our midst who are known for their way of life in the family as providing encouragement to the faint-hearted.

Hey, it's tough outside those doors. There's plenty of reason to be discouraged. So when one comes into church and into the family of God, it ought to be marked by encouragement and thirdly by help.

the weak. Almost entirely in Paul's letters, the weak refers to those Christians who have a weak conscience regarding the freedoms that are actually theirs in Christ, but they're not actually able to live under it.

[16:00] Well, there are those in our midst who are weak in this sense. And the word there is to help, to give assistance, to come alongside, to love.

What a great mark of a healthy family. And then he says this, be patient with them all. Isn't that the case? Believe me, says Paul.

Go try to admonish your brother in Christ. Set yourself toward encouraging those who are ever in need of lifted hearts.

Begin assisting the weak in conscience. Well, you're going to need patience. Don't you love that little close in the discourse that Jesus has with Peter?

Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me? Peter, do you love me? Three times. Yes, Lord, I love you. Yes, Lord, I love you. Yes, Lord, I love you. Each time. Well, then feed my sheep.

[17:11] Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. Why three times? I think Jesus knew in some part that his body, his people, his family was going to require a concerted effort on his part to stay at it.

To be patient, Peter. You love me? Demonstrate it by your love for them. Do you love me? Demonstrate it by your continued love for them.

Do you love me? Yes, I love you. Demonstrate it. You'll need it. Because they're not always easy. That's the way we are.

It's human nature. And so, as he's closing, he is urging them on to godly actions toward one another.

Verse 15, see that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. I mean, limit the bad stuff that is going on.

[18:20] Turn the other cheek. Seek to do good. Believe the best. hope all things for those you are walking through life with.

And then the staccato like phrases of 16 through 18. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

I love that rejoicing always. The whole nature of rejoicing. It's almost doubling back in dance. That's the way I understand rejoicing.

when my children were little I would sit in the living room in my own chair and we would be raising a song of praise and family worship and when they were really little they would run around the chairs and back and they would circle and sing and circle and sing.

They would rejoice. They would double back in dancing. Rejoice always. Be like that in the congregation.

[19:25] double back in your dancing. Such has been the goodness of God to you. Pray without ceasing. We've spent our whole day in song on this very theme.

And it is my prayer that we would be in time a congregation that is contagiously in prayer not in prayer merely reactively to circumstance.

That we would be a praying people. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Proper attitude toward your leaders, godly actions toward one another. Pay attention to your worship. Verses 19-22 Do not quench the spirit.

Do not despise prophecies, but test everything. Hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. It's interesting that while the spirit lives within us, we are able to quench him in our worship.

[20:41] worship. If we don't walk with him, to go with him in worship.

Do not despise prophecies. We still, even to this day, don't know as much as we would like to know about the early church and this gift of prophecy, although 1 Corinthians 14 certainly begins to outline for us that they were words almost spoken ad hoc extemporaneously that would edify others concerning the faith.

It certainly was not a prophetic word as the Old Testament prophetic voice which would say, thus says the Lord. And it was certainly something that was exercised in the congregation by both men and women.

And it was certainly something which needed to be tested because not everything that was said ad hoc extemporaneously within the context of a gathering was to be held on to.

But he says don't despise it. Don't despise it in your community groups when someone who hasn't studied the text a minute before coming in and you the leader have given yourself to seven hours of preparation and in one moment they have a word of insight that actually you never saw, never would see, never did see, but the Holy Spirit gave them to see and to articulate and to edify the whole.

[22:11] Don't despise that gift. Exercise it and yet test it and hold fast to what is good and abstain from every form of evil.

Those are the three closing words words that create a vibrant church in Paul's mind. Right attitude towards leaders.

Right actions toward one another. Continued attention to worship. And look, they fall, they close off this entire section that we've been studying the past weeks.

So do you not remember the close of chapter three where he wanted to establish their hearts blameless in holiness before God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, he says, if I could see you face to face, I would want to supply what was lacking in your faith so that there would be a readiness at his return.

[23:26] And now he's been instructing them in chapters 4-1 through 5-22 concerning how to be ready at the return. And this is really the last sequence of three things in order to prepare for that.

The first one was in chapter 4-1-8 where he said abstain from sexual immorality. God's called you to holiness. I want you to be presented before God at the coming of Christ holy.

What is it going to require for you? What is lacking in your faith? Well, you will need to abstain from sexual immorality. But then verses 9 and 10 of chapter 4 they were to demonstrate brotherly affection because that prepares them for the return of Christ.

And then they were to make it their ambition to live quiet lives for that would prepare them for the return of Christ. And then they were to give great affirmation that those who were already dead in Christ will be at no disadvantage at the coming of Christ.

And then chapter 5 1 to 11 he told them to remain alert. And now today he finishes that first sequence that run of five things to be ready for the return.

[24 : 41] Abstain from sexual immorality. Demonstrate brotherly affection. Make it your ambition to live a quiet life. Give great attention to the hope that is yours for those who are dead in Christ.

Stay alert until the day of Christ. And now we ask you brothers have a right attitude toward your leaders. Godly actions toward one another. Attention to your worship.

And when you do all these things you'll be in a state of readiness. and then look at this his prayer of 23 and 24 after he's got the congregation all ready to run the race the things that will make them holy at his return he says 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 I want to make you ready for his return here's the things you need to get after stay after live this way and by the way he will sanctify you completely and he who is faithful will do it that wonderfully comforting conclusion and with that he's done he's imparted everything they need to know even if he never has opportunity to return to

Thessalonica again and so he concludes pray for us greet one another with a holy kiss read these words and may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you what a letter what a wonderful letter it opened he was thrilled with their continued acceptance of God's word he was constrained to demonstrate the depth of his affection for them and he was eager to establish them blameless at the coming of the Lord knowing all the while that the work is God's and he will do it and accomplish it in you our heavenly father as we conclude this letter we ask oh

Lord that we would be made ready for his return for we know that this was Paul's expressed desire in his final prayer for the Thessalonians we know that this readiness for his return was the goal of his coming to them we know that it was the substance of his prayers for them we know that it was the content of the instruction given to them we know that his joy his hope was wrapped up in them and we know that the reality of the gospel which they had believed was the same gospel that would prepare them and so as we have seen him give himself to them we pray that your word would live in us with thanksgiving in Jesus name amen

[28 : 21] Jesus name amen amen