

AM 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 How to be a Gospel Church

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[0 : 00] So please turn with me to Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 5.

In my previous visits to the church, I've been looking through this letter, and we've reached the final chapter of 1 Thessalonians.

And this final section of the last chapter. So let's read these verses together. Amen. 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. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, 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.

[1 : 30] Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Do not quench the spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything. Hold fast what is good.

Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

[2 : 44] Amen. I want to turn your attention this morning to this final section of the Apostle Paul's letter. To the Thessalonians.

In it we find some very important lessons about how to be a gospel church. A gospel church, as we were saying to the children a few moments ago, is a family of God's children.

The church is the family of God. Now there are many word pictures used by the New Testament to speak about the church of God. Sometimes it's pictured as a city.

Other times it's pictured as a kingdom or a commonwealth. Sometimes it's pictured as a body. Sometimes as a household. Sometimes as an army of soldiers.

But family. Family is the picture that the church is presented as here in this passage.

[3 : 52] Now why do I say that? Because the word family isn't actually used. Well did you notice when we read through the passage how frequently the word brother appears?

Verse 12 We ask you, brothers. Verse 14 We urge you, brothers.

Verse 25 Brothers, pray for us. Verse 26 Greet all the brothers. And verse 27 Have this letter read to all the brothers.

Five times at least This word brothers is used in these verses. And I think it's important that we don't miss the point the important truth that the church is the family of God.

It is a brotherhood to whom belongs both brothers and sisters. The brotherhood or family is made up of all of God's children who have been born again of his spirit and adopted into his family.

[5 : 08] Is that how we think about the church? You may be familiar with Isaac Watts' hymn based on Psalm 122 How Pleased and Blessed Was I One of the verses says My tongue repeats her vows Peace to this sacred house For there my friends and kindred dwell For there my friends and kindred dwell Do you think about the church in the same way as the Apostle Paul thought about the church?

I ask that question because how we think about the church makes a massive impact on how we act and behave because thinking always leads to action Right thinking leads to right behaviour Wrong thinking leads to wrong behaviour And this is why the Bible places such emphasis on the central role of doctrine of teaching and instruction Or to use Paul's phrase at the opening of his letter to Titus The knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness Or as one of the versions translates it The knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness There is this connection between knowledge of the truth and godliness of right thinking and right behaviour

And we as Christian believers belong each and every one of us to the family of God and we are brothers and sisters to one another and that has massive implications for us Paul has already in this letter chapter 4 verse 9 urged the Thessalonians to love one another with brotherly love and he also urged them to encourage one another chapter 4 verse 18 and in chapter 5 11 to build one another up to love one another to encourage one another to build one another up this is what members of a family do they love they encourage they build one another up within the family and isn't that a beautiful picture who would not want to come to a place where there was love and encouragement and the building of one another up mutual edification and every gospel church should be a place where mutual love and encouragement and edification takes place and I think

I need to underscore another aspect of this at this stage sometimes we say to ourselves take a mental note note to self something important here well here's a note to self to underscore and that is the term frequently used in this epistle one another one another and I want to emphasize this because it is so important to grasp this for the right functioning of the church because the whole family every single member of the family is involved in this love in this encouragement in this building of one another up in other words it's not the task of the minister it is not the task of the elders it is not the task of the deacons it's not the task of that person or this person or the other person it is the job of everyone of us all the duty of all it is the responsibility of all and there are no exceptions to this rule love one another with brotherly love encourage one another build one another up

John F Kennedy was inaugurated as president of the United States on the 20th of January 1961 and before I proceed let me just say that was before I was born so I've read about it in books I've seen it on TV I've heard it on the internet but in his inauguration speech he uttered a most memorable sentence right at the end of his speech ask not what your country can do for you ask what you can do for your country let me paraphrase those famous words ask not what your church can do for you but ask what you can do for your church love one another that's what you can do encourage one another that's what you can do build up one another that's what you can do again going back to

[11 : 52] Isaac Watts' paraphrase of Psalm 122 my tongue repeats her vows peace to this sacred house for there my friends and kindred dwell and since my glorious God makes thee his blessed abode my soul shall ever love thee well now let's turn our attention to this passage in a little more detail as we work our way through it and as we do so and as we become a little more acquainted with Paul's teaching here we shall notice that there is a single overarching theme that runs through this passage and brings together what at first sight may seem like rather disparate and unrelated instructions this portion of 1st

Thessalonians is not a collection of random instructions and commands no no there is a clear theme running through these verses and that theme is life in a gospel church life in a gospel church so let's take a careful note of a number of the features that belong to a gospel church the first thing I would have you notice is that a gospel church has pastors I use that term broadly because I know that your gospel church here does not have a pastor currently but it has pastors nevertheless a body of men whom the New Testament elsewhere speaks of as elders overseers or pastor teachers now look at verses 12 and 13 of chapter 5 here

Paul says we ask you brothers to respect those who labour 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 now we can draw out several things from these verses the elders the overseers the pastors Paul says are over you in the Lord in other words they have been appointed according to the mind of Christ to a position of leadership but that leadership you notice is qualified by the term in the Lord their leadership in other words is to be modelled on the teaching and example of the Lord Jesus Christ and you remember how he himself was among his disciples as one who served and he also taught didn't he that the greatest among the disciples would be the disciple who would serve all the others the second thing we notice is that the elders overseers pastors are those who labour among you and admonish you and this phrase speaks about hard work and toil that's what the term translated labour means it's the kind of work that leaves you tired out and exhausted at the end of the day hard work and toil remember what

Paul said about his own work when he was in Thessalonica look at chapter 2 and verse 9 for you remember brothers our labour and toil we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaim to you the gospel of God our labour and toil working night and day among you and you notice here that admonition is part and parcel of the ministry of the pastor the elders the overseers the pastor teacher admonition always in the new testament goes alongside teaching one admonition is negative teaching is more positive but the two together are essential for our growth in the grace and knowledge of the

Lord Jesus Christ such elders overseers pastors Paul says here are worthy of respect and should be highly in fact very highly esteemed in love because of their work and if we are on the receiving end of an admonition from the elders or the pastor it should be received graciously as a word from the Lord for our spiritual good and growth and grace there are things in all our lives that ought not to be there and the wounds of a faithful friend help turn us away from those things that we are maybe blind to ourselves but they see and if delivered graciously will help us to become more like our

[17 : 57] Lord Jesus Christ and so this is to be received in such a way that the peace of the church will not be disturbed then in the second place a gospel church is a fellowship in which loving caring concern is exercised toward every member of the fellowship I look at verses 14 and 15 for this where Paul says and we urge you brothers admonish the idol encourage the faint hearted 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 here as we've seen previously in our studies are mentioned three groups within the church the idol the faint hearted and the weak and each of these groups needs to be helped needs to be ministered to in ways that will promote their onward progress in the

Christian life but notice who is to do this no doubt the elders will exercise their ministry towards these groups but notice that here the exhortation is addressed to the brothers and verse 15 carries this phrase that highlights the importance of mutual ministry one another so putting this together within a gospel church all are to be treated and handled with patience and long suffering and forbearance I think the kind of mutual care that is described here is not to be likened to a 100 meter sprint but more like a marathon event we don't dispense our service to someone and if they do not respond instantly within well how quick did

Usain bolt run the hundred meters what nine point something seconds then we just write them off no patience long suffering forbearance this isn't a sprint it's a marathon we have to take the long term view there has to be patience shown to all and there's absolutely no place within the fellowship for repaying anyone evil for evil but conversely we are always you notice that word we are always to seek to do good to one another and to everyone one another I presume means those within the fellowship and family and to everyone that means those outside the fellowship and the family and then the third feature of a gospel church is it is a place where

God is worshipped look at verses 16 to 22 and also verse 27 I'll include that in this section Paul says rejoice always pray without ceasing give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you do not quench the spirit do not despise prophecies but test everything hold fast is good abstain from every form of evil I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers now in these verses we have contained the elements of Christian worship that takes place in every gospel church and what are these elements praise rejoice always always the apostle says so when we come together as a church we do so with songs of praise to

God who has saved us through our Lord Jesus Christ Paul's words here rejoice always are an echo of the Psalms think of Psalm 95 oh come let us sing to the Lord let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation or think of Psalm 100 make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth serve the Lord with gladness come into his presence with singing my friends this is how a gospel church worships God rejoice always God forbid that our services should be morose or gloomy or joyless praise my soul the king of heaven to his feet thy tribute bring ransomed healed restored forgiven who like thee his praise should sing when we think about these things how that would transform the way we sing a little soul preparation before the service would go a long way to helping us come into his presence with gladness and with singing prayer but not only praise features in worship so does prayer and Paul says here pray without ceasing this is an echo of the

[24 : 21] Lord's teaching isn't it in Luke chapter 18 verses 1 to 8 where he taught his disciples that they ought always to pray and not to lose heart pray without ceasing prayer is both secret and public in secret the Lord says when you pray go into your room and shut the door and pray to your father who is in secret and your father who sees in secret will reward you openly but here Paul is addressing the brothers the brotherhood the fellowship and he's saying pray without ceasing do you remember how our Lord in the sermon on the mount gave us a pattern prayer which begins with a phrase that reminds us that prayer must mark every corporate worship service our father give us this day our daily bread prayer includes thanksgiving and here

Paul says give thanks in all circumstances now he doesn't say you notice give thanks for all circumstances but give thanks in all circumstances do you remember how he wrote to the Romans explaining how we can do this because we've got the theology the doctrine the instruction and we know we know that for those who love God all things work together for good Romans 8 28 and if we know that if we really believe that then we can give thanks in all circumstances you remember the wonderful evidence of faith and trust in God that

Joseph showed in his great statements in Genesis 45 and 50 when he revealed himself to his brothers who were terrified in his presence and he said to them you meant it for evil but God meant it for good prayer thanksgiving and then listening to the word of God is another feature of gospel church worship look at verses 5 chapter 5 verses 20 to 22 and also 27 here Paul says do not despise prophecies but test everything hold fast what is good abstain from every form of evil and then he adds I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers let me boil this down very simply and say prophecies here I think equates to preaching it's not to be despised but he adds test everything hold fast what is good abstain from every form of evil

I think he's saying to us here be like the Bereans those people to him Paul preached the gospel in Acts chapter 17 and we read in that chapter verses 11 and 12 now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica they received the word with all eagerness examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so many of them therefore believed so when you hear preaching be like the Bereans take out your Bible test the preaching you hear against the word of God is it in accordance with the scriptures if it is hold fast to it and believe it with all your heart and seek to obey it in your life but also notice what Paul says in verse 27 and here he's not speaking about prophecies or preaching he's speaking about his own letter that we're reading from and he puts the Thessalonians under the most solemn obligation he says

I put you under oath before the Lord you can't get more solemn than that that this letter be read to all the brothers you see his letter was different from the prophecies or the preaching his letters was or were the word of God the prophecies the preaching was the exposition of the word of God coming from somebody who was not inspired by the Holy Spirit in the same way certainly as the apostles were who wrote and gave us scriptures there's a difference between listening to preaching and listening to the word of God being read or reading it yourself this is the word of the living

[30 : 31] God not some man's exposition of the word of God do you remember what Paul said in this letter about his preaching among them during his visit to the city some perhaps five years before this letter was written chapter 2 verse 13 these words are very enlightening very revealing he says and we also thank God constantly for this that when you received the word of God which you heard from us you accepted it not as the word of man but as what it really is the word of God which is at work in you believers he gives God thanks that when he brought the word of God to these people they recognized it because of the working of the spirit in their minds and hearts they recognized it as the word of God and they accepted it as such as it ought to be accepted and that is something to give

God thanks for because it is the gift of God that enables us to recognize and to hear his voice and to see and understand his word so the word of God in its entirety is to be accepted and believed and loved and obeyed and it's essential that this word be read in gospel churches but let us note also this one further point a little phrase tucked in like a sandwich filler in the middle of these instructions Paul says do not quench the spirit I think these words are almost like leaven that leavens the whole lump and this phrase permeates through this whole section

I think of 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 we may quench the spirit in other words we may snuff out the spirit's light as well as the spirit's fire by failing to obey any or all of these apostolic instructions failing to respect and highly esteem and love the elders or overseers or pastors that will quench the spirit failing to play our part in admonishing encouraging helping one another within the fellowship of the family of God that will quench the spirit failing to rejoice always in our praises of

God yes that will quench the spirit failing to pray without ceasing that is sure to quench the spirit feeling to give thanks to God in all circumstances will also quench the spirit and failing to listen to and obey the word of God read and preached will quench the spirit it will snuff out the spirit's light and it will extinguish the spirit's fire and therefore my dear friends how vitally important it is for us every one of us to heed the instructions that the apostle has given to the Thessalonian believers and finally you'll notice that

Paul never tells the believers to do anything without also praying to God on their behalf because he knows and we know surely no amount of preaching and teaching will accomplish anything will achieve anything if the Lord himself does not work in hearts by his almighty grace and power and so Paul prays at the end of the letter now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit body and soul or soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ what an all encompassing prayer that is because really Paul's prayer there encapsulates everything that the apostle has written in this letter for the benefit of these young believers in Thessalonica and what is the likelihood of success and so he adds to his prayer he who calls you is faithful he will surely do it you see

[36 : 35] Paul has prayed for something that he knows to be the will of God because he said in chapter 4 verse 3 for this is the will of God your sanctification and so he can pray with confidence knowing that he's praying for something that God wills that God desires there are many things that we don't know does God desire this does God so we make our prayers subject to the will of God but in this he is absolutely clear in his mind God's will is for the sanctification of these people I've given them instructions and commands on how to live as a gospel church these are for the sanctification of God's people but instructions and commands are not enough we need to pray and so he turns to God and he prays that God would sanctify them completely through and through in body soul spirit and that they may be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord

Jesus Christ he prays to the one who is faithful who's made his will clear I've taught in response to that will and I now pray in accordance with that will and God will surely do it what a note to finish our studies in this passage God will surely do it let us pray our heavenly father we give you thanks and praise that you have revealed to us your will for our salvation we thank you that that encompasses so many aspects of our life in this world and we pray that as we have meditated upon your word this morning we might see a little more clearly what you want us to be what you want us to do as believers in the family of

God and as members of a gospel church write these things upon our hearts and may we look to you and pray that you would sanctify us through and through and keep us and make us blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ we ask these things according to his will in Jesus name Amen Amen Thank you.