

The Gospel and Community

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[0 : 00] Well, good to see you everyone. It is Father's Day. Father's Day makes me nostalgic and! I think of years gone by. Is this a little loud? Let's turn this down a little bit because! I'm only going to get louder. In years gone by, especially when I was growing up, I grew up in the country and I grew up on a property away from a village which was away from the big town. And I did feel isolated from the rest of the world. And I loved sport and music, especially music, but I didn't have a whole lot of access to it apart from the radio and I heard a lot of music, all different kinds of music from all different eras. And I hated a lot of it and I loved a lot of it. And one thing that I got told was really great, was music from the 60s, especially by a band called The Beatles. Anyone ever heard of them?

Okay, Tony just glared at me from the back corner. There are some people who love The Beatles, like Tony. There are some people who love The Beatles fiercely, but I didn't love it. And my uncle found out, my uncle Neil, who is someone I love dearly, and grew up knowing that he was very good to me and was there for me like my dad was, even if he lived in a different state. And one day he gave me an album. He said, I know you don't like The Beatles, but maybe you'll like this. And he gave me John Lennon's anthology. John Lennon is one of The Beatles, and he is the guy who wrote Imagine. Ever heard that song? So, mainly because someone had taken an interest in me and shared something with me, I think I grew to like John Lennon just as much as I like The Beatles maybe even more. And I used to love the song Imagine. Imagine is this song that invites us to imagine the world as one at peace. Lennon thinks that some things have got to end for peace to come. Things like war or religion. The idea of heaven and hell has to be done away with completely. The question of what our world needs most is one that we often disagree with. But in Lennon's time, everyone would have said the world needs peace. If you watch the news, even if it's only once a month, you might agree. The song Imagine has done well in helping people consider that we need change. Maybe even consider changing themselves. Maybe even consider pursuing peace with what they can do and control. But as effective as that song is, the world is far more effective at creating war. Nations and peoples, marriages, friendships, all trend towards conflict. This world seems at war with itself. And the older I get, the more battles I witness against pain, debt, division, and death.

[3 : 48] Peace doesn't seem to grow or come nearer. The world only increases in complexity and brokenness.

And the song Imagine is not enough. I listen to it now and I get a sense of bitterness when I listen to it. Even frustration. Because the peace that it makes us crave when we hear it.

The peace that we long for when we watch the news or experience the hardship of this world. We can't find it. And as you get older, it's harder and harder to imagine it.

But the peace the world hungers for does exist. Anyone can witness it. And all they need to do is go to church.

Where Christians experience the peace that all people long for. And you might be shocked that I've just said that.

[4 : 59] You might scoff. But Paul is going to show us in 1 Thessalonians 5, how our relationships to one another in Christian community display the peace of God by the very power of God.

And we'll be navigating through Paul's encouragements to build up Christians. That's where we just left last week's passage. Encouraging one another and building up one another.

And Paul is going to bring three encouragements to us. In our relationships, in finding peace, and fighting the battle for Christian community.

Answering the question, can Christians together really show peace to their world? When my wife and I first became part of this church, 20 or so years ago, we noticed that some people referred to each other as uncle and auntie, who we knew were not related at all.

And we thought this was beautiful. Because older members of the church, or people who journeyed a long time with one another, had uncle and auntie as this lovely family title of respect and connection.

[6 : 30] And as we've grown up in this church, and had children of our own, we've taught our children to call some of you uncle and auntie. Because you've helped us raise our children.

You've helped us grow. And you continue to encourage us. You're family to us. Paul starts our passage today, calling Thessalonian Christians, brothers and sisters.

You may not know me at all. My name's Nick. I'm one of the pastors here at church. You might have only ever seen me online.

You might have clicked through and met me right now. But if you're a Christian, I'm your brother. Isn't that amazing?

Isn't that amazing? If you're a follower of Jesus, we are family. For being saved by Jesus means we are made family.

[7 : 32] And like no family you've ever known, because our Father loves us perfectly. And we're in a family for all eternity. It's an unbreakable family.

But if we are honest with ourselves, we rarely treat our church family at the love level of our household family.

Paul means what he calls us. We should be experiencing good, deep, sibling family relationships as Christian family.

Look around the room. Are you committed in love to these people? Your sisters and your brothers. Or do you tolerate Sundays?

Pretending to be at peace. Paul has two encouragements for you, brothers and sisters. Each is for us all, so that we might live as God's family together to build his community of peace.

[8 : 51] Let's have a look at what he's encouraging us family in. First, is to acknowledge, in verse 12 and verse 13, hold in highest regard a certain group of fellow believers.

Acknowledge can also mean respect or appreciate, in verse 13, literally means esteem them exceedingly. So who are these people?

They are those who work hard among you and those who care for you in the Lord and admonish you.

They are those taking the lead over you as a Christian, who are laboring over your growth in faith. Who are those people to you? What's interesting is Paul doesn't list any titles for these leaders, but only qualities.

[9 : 56] And, he says in verse 12, such a leader is among you. Not distant or uncaring or lazy and only sometimes here.

Instead, no, they're family level close so that they know you and know your needs and where you need to grow in your faith.

They are those working hard, toiling over you and literally straining to exhaustion over you as they care and speak truth into your life.

who comes to mind in your life who is such a leader to you? It may be a Christian friend, a parent, a group leader, or even a pastor at your church.

Paul does not ask that we ignore or mistreat those people, nor treat them like princes or popes, but to show appreciation and affection to them in keeping with their work to serve and grow us.

[11 : 10] That's the first encouragement. And then, in verse 13, Paul moves from asking, sorry, in verse 14, Paul moves from asking, in verse 12, asking us to respect and love our leaders to urging, in verse 14.

Perhaps he imagined the church would struggle more with this second encouragement. For Paul calls all believers to admonish, encourage, and help our sisters and brothers who are idle, the disheartened, and the weak.

To know which of those your brother and sister are the idle, the disheartened, or the weak. We need to know them.

Imagine discovering your friend, your Christian friend, is devastated, struggling, faint of heart, and you walk up to them with a strong warning, a loud voice, a firm push in a certain direction.

They may break. The American preacher and writer, John Piper, says that the admonishing of the idle versus encouraging and helping the faint-hearted and weak is like a line between tough love and tender-hearted love.

[12 : 44] Both are love, but we need to know each other so we know how to love. And then we must learn how to love each of these in particular, the idle, the disheartened, and weak.

So let's have a look at each group. First, who are the idle? Someone not doing something? The person you ask to do a favor who doesn't show up?

Paul likely means those who are part of this church in Thessalonica that are not participating in the life of the family in some way. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, which, spoiler alert, we're going to get to in a fortnight.

We're going to start exploring that second letter. Paul, in that letter, warns of a threat the idle have begun to pose, the church. The idle have become disruptive and no longer holding to Jesus' teaching.

Some scholars say that the idle likely misread the day of the Lord, which we've heard about in the previous weeks. They've misread it as already come.

[13 : 57] And so they're no longer working to serve one another or functioning in the life of the church. They're dividing and disheartening those around them. So Paul says in that second letter, keep away from that as if the situation gets worse between letter one and letter two.

Christians, we are urged to admonish the idle so that they do not become wayward. Admonishing is to me and maybe to you a strange word.

Maybe it's not something we ever really do or know that we do. But what I've found that it is, it's a kind of big brotherly warning against behavior and its consequences, against bad behavior.

And it seeks not to create an enemy, but to deliver truth closely as to a friend. Christians, we have the gift of Scripture to open in those moments with our sister and our brother in friendship.

for it's the same word that we would take to them that the idle have walked away from or misinterpreted.

[15 : 20] So that should be opened again as we admonish them to call the idle wanderer back to active participation. Secondly, who are the disheartened?

disheartened or faint-hearted, which is in the other translations, it literally means small souled.

Small souled. Someone struggling to wrap their arms around and hold on to the promises of Jesus.

As if they can only see the situation unfolding right in front of them and missing out, maybe even blind in that moment to the hope beyond their present day that Jesus offers.

Again, John Piper says, it's like their capacity to feel the greatness of God is small. Their understanding and embrace of God is narrow.

[16 : 29] how might you encourage the disheartened? One example of an encouragement could be that you open up this scripture, Ephesians 1, 18-19.

This is an encouragement to the small of soul. To know the hope which God has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance, and his incomparably great power for all who believe.

The encouragement is, God himself will grow your capacity to see his greatness. Scripture promises that that will increase.

So how could you partner with God in regularly bringing word that encourages you to those without courage?

And thirdly, who are the weak? These could be weak physically, emotionally, financially, even just intellectually.

[17 : 45] It's wide open. Weakness of all kinds. all Christians are urged to help any Christian in any way.

Now, in our city, in Chatswood, there is a strong hesitation toward helping. As a city, our reflex is to self-protect against doing anything hard, especially something already outside our plans.

But I've seen people in our city do whatever is needed, drop everything for those they love when those are at their weakest.

Paul is urging Christians to help our family like that. And the other side of our fear is that we will run out of capacity to help.

Should we always help until we break? In Acts 20, verse 35, Paul says, I showed you by this kind of hard work, we must help the weak.

[19 : 08] Remembering the words of the Lord Jesus himself, said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. John Piper explains, we don't drain out into misery as we help encourage and admonish, but serving one another fuels our joy in Jesus as we practice the love of Jesus to one another.

will you challenge your fear of capacity and hardship to help?

Trusting that you will discover joy that is uniquely found as you serve and help in Christian community.

We aren't left without help from Jesus. to help the weak. How willing are you to warn, to encourage, to help Christians in this room, even those you haven't met yet?

Don't misunderstand me. These encouragements sound hard and I want us to get a sense of that hardness first today.

[20 : 42] And Paul knows even if you work hard at this, you will feel like giving up. Not just because serving one another is hard, but also because of how your help might be received.

Have a look at the end of verse 14. be patient with everyone or be long suffering with everyone.

Another translation. Who are you naturally patient with? Your mind just might have just gone blank.

But maybe you're naturally quick to patience with your friends, your blood relatives, someone you deeply love. But if you're like me, be patient with everyone because they're impossible.

Everyone? Many of us are teachers or coaches or tutors. Anyone work in a school? Anyone teach children?

[21 : 53] Anyone teach adults? Anyone coach? Are you a gym instructor? Anyone? No one's putting up their hand for the last one. How often have you taught something that is immediately forgotten that you have to reteach and then it's ignored and then you repeat the cycle over and over and over and over and over?

You might know a Christian who only ever gets maybe tiny little tastes of God once a week in a sermon or in a song or in a moment with you and you may never see change in them ever it seems. How long are you willing to bear with them on the journey alongside you following Jesus? Patiently never give up on anyone.

Why? Because every one of us already needed someone to be patient with us for our idleness for our faint of heart for our weakness as we live the Christian life.

I'm not standing here today without the patience of Chris David Steve actually a few Steve's actually there's been a few Steve's who've been very patient with me Johnny Dan Sam my parents my family those who have loved on me through my life so many more that I just even my uncle who gave me a CD without patience Christians do not grow changing our patterns of belief and behavior take time Christian community must grow in unworldly patience for the wayward the disheartened and the weak among us so now we come to the heart of our passage today have a look at verse 13 and how it finishes live at peace with each other the most impossible feeling of Paul's encouragements is go and live in peace with each other it's about as useful to us as the song imagine but a community living out the two encouragements

[24 : 39] Paul has just led us through can be at peace together peace between people is built by those who patiently labor to see their brothers and sisters flourishing following Jesus while those turn and respect those who lead them under God there are two encouragements from today in our human strength we cannot create this kind of peace in our churches we need God to bring his peace to us and make his peace through us this week I had the pleasure of watching the movie gladiator two gladiator one was incredible has one of the best musical scores ever written even even just thinking about that movie

I can hear that melody in my head and it's moving it's wonderful this movie was a little more just about war and battle and fighting and it starts with an impending battle between these countless looking number of Roman ships coming in from the sea towards this big city where there's an army defending on their walls on the ocean and it's the African city of Numidia and the battalion leader there called Hanno on the screen yells to his soldiers to inspire their rage at Rome he says they have no lands but the ones they've stolen wherever they go they leave destruction and call it peace and everyone laughs what are they laughing about why does this make the Numidians so mad they're laughing at what was called the

Pax Romana which is Latin and it is this famous promise that Rome boasted! This peace of Rome was created by conquering fiercely taxing those who survived and culturally enslaving Thessalonica was a city under Roman rule the Thessalonian church were freshly aware of the cost of

Christianity's challenge to Rome's peace believers had died as soldiers enforced Pax Romana the peace of Rome so if you look in your Bible earlier in this chapter Paul uses quotation marks to point out Pax Romana have a look at verse 3 of our chapter today while people are saying peace and safety destruction will come

Paul is leading a battle cry like Hanno in Gladiator 2 scoffing at the false peace of Rome but instead of calling us to fight against Rome Paul reminds us of a battle for peace against an even worse enemy the battle to peace is not against Rome but it is humanity's war with God over sin look down to verse 9 it's in the word wrath all sin is a declaration of war against God destined for wrath is the inevitable outcome of all who sin all have sinned and fought fallen short without someone to fight for us we will never have peace with

God but that is not the outcome for Christians God has not destined us for wrath look at the verse for God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ instead of wrath we have not have to go fight Rome but have a peace with God through salvation in Jesus for Jesus won that victory for us by surrendering to God's wrath in our place on the battlefield of our sin Jesus gave up his perfect peace with God for a peaceless human existence and a shameful death on a

[29 : 59] Roman cross the full force of God's wrath towards us was poured out on his head Jesus came to fight a war against our peaceless future without God he surrendered his victory and received our defeat and for our part of this exchange we need only receive Jesus to receive peace with God for our humanity's core this is actually the peace we are looking for peace with the one who made us peace and only Christians can find it peace from Jesus is the foundation of Christian community so how do we live out that peace together

Jesus must do it among us we receive power to create an increasingly peaceful community of faith from Jesus through the Holy Spirit in a letter to another city Galatia Paul wrote the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self control the Holy Spirit is where our patience for one another comes from not from our own strength it's a promised fruit of the activity of the Holy Spirit in Christian community the pressure to patiently pursue peace it isn't in your nature to carry but it is achieved by

God's power the Holy Spirit is what Jesus calls the helper in John 15 that he will send us and send Christians to bear witness about all the promises Jesus made and how he fulfills them all and will one day fulfill them completely the Spirit helps us by bringing us an undaunted hope only the Spirit can bring that an undaunted hope that fuels patience for his people and brings them peace together and Paul hopes that we will fight we will fight for such a community and for that fight he commands us to put on armor in verse 8 of our chapter today that of a kind we might not expect because it's not chain mail to stop a Roman arrow or to wear when we fight one another so that we might not get too many injuries instead it's a spiritual armor of faith and love we wear over our hearts and a hope for the salvation of

Jesus that we have and is to come over our minds we put on this armor when we discover and remember Jesus we wear this armor as the spirit speaks to us as we open our Bibles as we sing of Jesus worth as we talk of him together as we encourage one another with the Bible open between us and as we live it out and witness that together more and more the fighting colors of our forgiven king appear on the chest of everyone in the Christian community so that our city can see something is different our city can see and understand as we love our leaders to grow us and as we seek to grow our sisters and brothers in our final verse verse 15 we're going to see how our city gets a glimpse of the peace of

God in our midst the verse starts with make sure nobody pays back wrong for wrong we should look like a community not of retaliation towards one another or towards our community but a community marked by forgiveness forgiveness you see how forgiveness not paying back wrong for wrong even to forgive speaks to a culture where if you make a public mistake you get cancelled and songs seem to make more of an impact than people forgiveness is the great sign of peace that our church must show to our city Jesus taught us to pray for the power to forgive we just shared it in the prayer before we read this passage forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us we ask for [35 : 43] God to put into our own hands what we've already received from him power to forgive from the forgiveness that he gave us first to forgive might be the greatest good that we can do for one another always strive to do what is good for each other says Paul and he calls us to do the greatest good forgiveness!

do do you see how this passage ends with the overflow! of the Christian community the world hasn't received yet forgiveness from sins peace from God but they get to see it as we forgive those who sin against us even our enemies is that the kind of community you see here in this church that you participate in in the life of this church is that the community the Holy Spirit is stirring a desire to fight for in you brothers and sisters we are family Jesus has gathered us to live our peace together drawing our strength from the spirit and our relationship of perfect peace with God until the day Jesus returns and we're as Paul says caught up together with him we will have to fight for peace with one another so I'm not going to sing it but I am going to ask you to imagine imagine fighting for peace with those who work hard to help you grow in your faith imagine fighting for peace in your church family tender loving and tough loving those among you as you take strength and patience from the spirit brothers and sisters our city longs for peace but can't get it so imagine you go to them in your friendships at home at work with those you love and testify to the joy of Christian community or are you one among us today who are not yet my brother and sister in Jesus imagine joining a Christian community that offers what we've just heard about only Jesus offers you peace the peace all people long for peace with God peace with one another as a band comes up let's pray heavenly father would you empower us by your spirit to give us patience with one another let us draw from the peace we have with you to be at peace with one another and may the peace of our community overflow and be visible even in forgiveness as we do good to all people in our city and would joy overflow as we are thankful how Jesus provides us that peace amen