



"Final Instructions"

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-1 Thess 5:11-28 -

11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. 12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in

love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. 15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing. 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies. 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you [is] faithful, who also will do [it]. 25 Brethren, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you. Amen.

It is widely accepted that this letter to the church in Thessalonica was the first "book" written in the New Testament, somewhere around 50 AD. That may only be a bit of trivia for you, however that fact serves as a window into the early church and the culture in which it began and thrived. If that church was able to find footing in what was clearly a difficult first-century Middle Eastern world, what excuse do we have today?

Paul was clearly impressed by the faithfulness of the Thessalonians, probably even more so in the face of their persecutions. He knew that the people there had also been exposed to false teaching dished out from those in opposition to the way of Jesus Christ and the grace of God. They had made it this far, but Paul knew the danger would only increase over time unless this young church continued to mature in its faith. Thus Paul wrote this letter to encourage the Christians in that community, with the goal that they would continue to grow both in knowledge and maturity.

With that in mind, Paul taught the people that any spiritual growth would be advanced by their hope in the eventual return of Jesus Christ. Paul was never interested in simply telling people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, for he knew that what ultimately inspired change was a life of consistently walking in and through the power of God's Spirit. And so to a group of young Christians with questions and uncertainties, Paul offered the hope of Christ's return, providing both comfort in the midst of questions and motivation to godly living.

So the stage was set: the church in Thessalonica had existed long enough now to have begun to endure the same issues and struggles that such churches suffer through in our day. Their main man Paul was being slandered and attacked, Satan had sent false teachers and their false doctrine in amongst them in attempt to distract them from the authentic gospel, from lives of holiness. Persecution, compromise, and discouragement were on their doorstep.

So as Paul begins these “final instructions” by presenting a model of a church united. The picture he has painted over the past 5 chapters is one of a faithful church...one that had several innate attributes. Firstly, it would be a church that has ministers who are faithful and a community that is truly a “body” of Christ ...one made up of people, not just a building with pews. A fellowship founded upon God, standing firm in the scripture, where the supreme gifts of grace and peace are present and active. For Paul, that kind of church was a praying church and one that was fired up to serve Christ and each other! One that was busy about the work of the Lord.

For this reason, one crucial aspect Paul emphasized in this letter and throughout his writings, was the clear call to fellowship and community. This issue can be a spiritual killer if we ignore it, personally and corporately! We can't live the Christian life without one another. We need community and collective association. We need shared lives. We need communion with our brothers and sisters if we're going to live this life in safety and growth. It was important to the church in Thessalonica, and it's critical for us here today also.

5:11

Once again, Paul begins this section with the word “therefore.” Or we *could* read herein, “**therefore**”... “*in light of the imminent return of Christ, ...the brevity of mortal life, ...the judgment of every man before his Creator*”...let us respond in the following manner:

#1; “Comfort each other.”

In its original language, this word ‘comfort’ has far more meaning than what we might initially think. It is more than just a ‘pat on the back’ and a promise to pray for someone! It is more than a ‘hallmark moment.’ This word means to “summon someone for the purposes of addressing him or her... speaking to someone in the way of exhortation, passionate encouragement, comfort, instruction, etc.” It means to “admonish, to entreat, beseech,” as well as the obvious “to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation.”

Those things cannot be accomplished from a distance and never without cost, effort, risk, and probably pain. Active “comforting” demands fellowship, community, participation, and love for someone else besides yourself. And achieving that comfort requires consideration and often acceptance of that intervention by another.

#2; “edify one another”

The English is deeply lacking here also! For this call means “to **build**; as in a house, complete from a foundation...to ‘rebuild and repair’... to ‘find and establish’...to promote growth, in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness, blessedness and piety.” All of that tells us ...as in the call to “comfort,” that this too is not an easy or novice activity! For no one ‘builds a house’ with just occasional passing involvement! This, too, requires passionate participation.

However, such passion is not a problem if we are really in love with Christ, His bride, the church, and each other as members of it. It is not a struggle... *if that is where our “treasure lies.”* Paul has been saying that if we really believe what he has been telling us concerning Christ’s return, we are indeed greatly motivated!

5:12-13

Paul goes on in his “final instructions” to give some direction for the practical living of their faith. This was ‘real stuff.’ Not some philosophy or some esoteric thinking! However, also not some high brow calculus level theology either! Such scriptures are important because, for many folks, faith never finds its way to their hands

and feet. They simply pay it some minor 'lip service' on Sundays. Many of us even now struggle to connect with the things of God...we tend to stand removed and watch like a gawker at a traffic accident.

But not Paul. He wasn't living a religious façade. He was a *Christian*. He was a child of the king; purchased and redeemed. That meant something to him. It meant a particular way of living. One that reflected a "walking in God's pleasure." It wasn't just *something* to him, it was *everything*.

In verses 12 and 13 Paul instructs the Thessalonian believers...and really, *all believers*, to recognize and acknowledge who their faith community leaders are and to "esteem them very highly in love" for their work and efforts in serving the flock. I loathe being a whiner, but this job is not easy! Dealing directly with people is often difficult and frustrating, especially in our modern age of extreme self-centered thinking. They can turn and bite the hand that feeds them in an instant with little or no warning! Pride and self-interest are unparalleled in our current age. We don't want *..and frankly rarely submit to...* anyone being "over us"...even if it is "in the Lord."

We tend to think today that the pastor's role should be to make us feel good, pat us on the head, visit us when we are sick, and give positive affirmation. But Paul says here that the leading and overseeing for the pastor involves warning and correcting the flock. That is not a power trip or an attempt to control people, by Him *or* me! After all, it's often a real pain and a hassle for me to be obedient to such a call, when I would much rather just let you be! This is God's directive for me and for every pastor...even the ones who don't want it and won't do it! What's your part? Yours is to "esteem your church community leaders very highly in love."

This is not a matter of "cult of personality": The church should never revolve around me or the other leaders here, but we should honor those who lead because of the work they do and because God says so. Indeed...respect is earned, but honor is given because of position. I may not respect a certain government official, but I am called to show him honor.

Paul goes on...seemingly in the same vein...to say "be at peace" amongst yourself. This is not the first time he has brought this issue up in this letter. I don't think we are "reading between the lines" to gather that there were quite likely some there in Thessalonica who were not at peace, just as there are many today who wear the Christian 'badge' but spend as much time as possible causing division through bitterness and self-interest. In this matter, they are actively disobedient and sinning. The issue as presented here is actually between believers! It is only through the Spirit that we can exercise the love, humility, patience, kindness, and other-centeredness that God calls us to. But we have to really desire that kind of relationship and actively seek such, if we really expect to achieve a Christlikeness!

5:14

Paul continues in the same thinking, telling us to 'warn' those who are 'unruly.' Please note this verse and remember it. Remember too how I didn't make it up! Note too, that it is not just *my* job to obey this, but it is directed toward the whole of the body of believers. "*Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*" (Romans 15:14)

Paul goes on to call us to "comfort the fainthearted, hold up the weak, and be patient with everyone." Maybe we could go so far as to see this as the 'short course' ministry training, because along with "warning the unruly", in a nutshell, it's all there! We have to be willing to invest in each other, and realize that some folks are simply going to take more attention than others to keep them on the path. People go through hard times and get discouraged. It's at these times that we are to come alongside them and hold them up. There is no 'normal' for

this and no ‘bar’ in which to achieve in a certain timeframe. It would be great if we all matured at the same rate, but there are forces beyond our control that affect our growth. We can but love and encourage each other. God is patient in this manner; should we not also be so giving?

5:15

Correction continues: “*Lay off the revenge and retaliation.*” Such direction can be hard for all of us, because it just seems to be in our human nature...in our flesh, to fight back. There is no magic here on this issue. It’s just a matter of doing it...it’s just a matter of obedience. Again, some of us need to put some teeth into our faith and remember that these simple foundational elements of faith are not to be ignored as trivial and inconsequential.

“*Pursue what is good both for yourself and for everyone.*” I wonder if we really can say that’s how we live our lives. Pursuing what is good for others as well as ourselves? After all, isn’t such the very heart of our faith? Every person over 35 years that has departed from this fellowship, did so with the words “*I want to...I need to...*” on their lips. Many of us might tacitly respond in the affirmative...or to say that we at least “try to.” But I then wonder if we really know or seek to know what exactly IS good for others. We can easily give and assist in real and quantifiable ways...and that can often bring immediate, albeit often temporal, relief and good feelings on the part of the receiver. But it gets much harder and a lot more complicated when what is “good” for another person is uncomfortable for us to deliver. But the fact remains: It says we should pursue what is ‘good’ for others, not what ‘feels good.’

5:16

Hmmm...that one too is easier said than done! Perhaps that’s because we so quickly forget just exactly what it is that we have to be thankful for. Know this: such is not a trivial issue. It affects our very worship, not to mention our everyday attitudes in all that we do. We must actively pursue opportunities to remind ourselves of what we have in Christ...not to mention just the blessings of living in America! Mission trips are good for one thing, serving one another, sacrifice, financial support, and just reading the newspaper can be a very real reminder also! Being here with all of you each week reminds me of how rich I am! But we *need* to take time to rejoice in this life...if only for the sake of remembering our redemption. After all, **we are literally the children of the Creator of earth and sky!**

5:17-18

This is another daunting call upon our lives! Many of us often have trouble imagining how we can fulfill such a task. How can we ‘never stop praying?’ Well, it begins with a real understanding...perhaps an all-new way of thinking, about just what prayer is. Certainly prayer is talking to God. We get that. And we may even grasp that such includes God talking to us in return. But prayer is also a *place*, as much as it is an *action*. It’s not just something we *do* but someplace we *reside*. It’s a close...*a very close*, position to God. It’s a fellowship...a *communing* with our Creator. It’s a state of being in constant communication in Spirit with Him, not just talking. In this place, we find it much easier to always give thanks...always living in the moment of our salvation...in our very restoration. This kind of prayer is designed to consume us. It makes us constantly and starkly aware of who and what we are, and makes all these other things that Paul is asking of us actually attainable.

5:19

“quench” (gr) means to “stifle, to snuff out, to stop.” If we are being asked *not* to do this, it is given then that we actually *have* the power or the ability, to quench the Spirit. Why and how does this happen? Are we stronger than the Spirit of God? No. But in His love and through the reality of our “free will” we can choose to push His Spirit away. To cease to listen. Refuse to respond.

The believer quenches the Spirit's work by: ignoring Him, neglecting Him, disobeying Him, or by simply procrastinating. This is actually one of the 4 major sins against the Spirit of God. The others are: Grieving the Spirit (Ephes. 4:30), Blasphemy against the Spirit (Mt 12:31-33), and lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4).

5:20

Prophecy is both the gift of proclaiming the gospel and of proclaiming future events through the power of the Holy Spirit. Prophecy includes both proclamation *and* prediction. Even though some abuse this gift, we must not minimize it or "despise it."

5:21

Here is a verse that many would like to reject or at least ignore; people and their gifts are to be tested, and those that prove themselves are to be "held fast." We are to measure all things by the scripture, even those that come from the mouths of pastors, prophets, and evangelists! If we simply receive everything we are taught or told on face value, then we stand in great danger of falling into false doctrine and being "led astray."

The same goes with the people themselves. The basis...the "test"...the proving grounds, is the Word of God! How does the person himself or herself "stack up" in light of the written Word?

5:22

The Old King James says to abstain from even the appearance of evil! Certainly, there will always be those who speak wrongfully against you no matter what you do. But we are directed here not to give them a reason if we can avoid it! Paul's point here is that we stay away from the "edge"...the "edge" where the world meets Christianity.

5:23

If you will do the things that Paul directs us here in the latter part of this chapter, then God has made some promises concerning you: One, we will experience the "God of peace." This peace affects us individually and corporately...it "bounds, joins, and weaves together." A peace that brings absolute assurance, confidence, and security to a person's heart. A fullness. A wholeness.

Secondly, we will be "sanctified." This means we will exclusively be "set apart" for him. And note it is *wholly* or *totally* set apart! We are preserved "blameless" **unto** or **"in"** (gr) the "coming of the Lord." Through His grace, and the work of the cross, we are held "blameless". (Philippians 2:15) (Colossians 1:22)

5:24

The promises of God are made manifest in the life of a faithful believer. Please note I said *"faithful"* believer. But this ultimately is not because of us, but rather because HE is faithful, and if we are engaged, then HE is in us and brings *HIS* faithfulness! Our true faithfulness is in response to His, and reflect His presence in our lives. (2Thess 3:3), (Hebrews 10:23), (2Tim 2:13) This is the difference between believing and active trust! Paul says God will "do it." Do what? He will "preserve you blameless." He will hold onto you and never let you go.

5:25-28

This, Paul's last exhortation, is so important. See Romans 15:30 and 2Thess 3:1. For without prayers, we as your leaders...your pastors, must trudge on alone. We are the body of Christ, and we truly need each other. So pray for us as we pray for you!