

The Heart of a Healthy Church

1 Thessalonians 5: 12-15

We are getting close to the conclusion of the first letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church. He has covered much with them – seeking to encourage, admonish, and challenge them in their faith. Thessalonica was not a perfect church, but she was fruitful for the Lord. The modern church would do well to look to her example.

As we continue in [Chp.5](#), Paul has once again shifted his focus. From the latter part of [Chp.4](#), through the opening verses of [Chp.5](#), he has dealt with the rapture of the church, the end times, and the church's responsibility to be aware and committed during the time leading up to the Lord's coming. Our text today is certainly needful in the latter days; but in reality, these verses paint a picture of what the church ought to resemble at any time.

This passage offers wisdom regarding the overall health and well-being of the church. I want to consider the [challenges](#) Paul reveals concerning: [The Heart of a Healthy Church](#).

I. A Word Concerning the Pastor (12-13) – Here Paul speaks to them concerning the role of the pastor among the church. He reminds them of the importance of this role and their attitude regarding the pastor. The pastor is not a lord or dictator over the church, but God ordained the office of pastor and that office is to be viewed with respect and humility. First, he spoke of:

A. Their Labor (12a) – [And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.](#) We know he spoke of the pastor because he referred to [them which are over you in the Lord](#). The first attribute of the pastor Paul mentioned was his labor. This involves more than just working or laboring among a people. It goes beyond a simple job or task. The word has the idea of *“laboring to the point of exhaustion, and then to keep on laboring, even when one has become weary; to toil to the point of weariness; to work beyond what one is capable of doing.”*

- Paul does not reveal that to receive sympathy or in arrogance. He is simply revealing the heart of God's man for the work he has been called to do. Paul's commitment to the church was not limited by physical weakness or weariness. Even when his body was tired and he didn't feel like doing anything else, he continued to labor among them.
- I know there are lazy preachers today who only seek to benefit themselves, but a man of God who has his heart right, devoted to the church and its work, has no problem laboring among the church. He will go beyond what others would be willing to do.

B. Their Leadership (12b) – *And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.* Here Paul deals with the leadership of the pastor. He is the under-shepherd, the leader of the church. Now, as I said, that doesn't imply that he is lord over the church or a dictator of the church, but God has placed the pastor in a position of leadership. He will give account to God for the church he pastors. *Heb.13:17 – Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

- God will honor those who support and encourage the leadership of the pastor. It isn't something that man devised in recent years, but the God given order of the church. *Heb.13:7 – Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*

C. Their Love (13) – *And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.* This is actually making reference to the pastor's labor again, but it also reminds us of the love involved. The church is encouraged to love the pastor for the work he does. A pastor that is loved and supported by the congregation he serves will be more beneficial and fruitful in ministry.

- I think the love of the pastor for the people is also evident here as well. If a man is working and laboring among a congregation, he is doing so with a heart of love. A pastor who doesn't love the church will not be very active in labor, but a man who loves will be compelled to labor earnestly for their benefit.

II. A Word Concerning the People (14) – After Paul reminds them of the work of the pastor and their obligation to each other, he then directs their attention to the responsibilities the church has for those around them. He reveals several groups the church is to have a love and concern for. First there is:

A. An Obligation to the Defiant (14a) – *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly.* Paul reveals a biblical principle that is often overlooked and neglected in our day. The church is obligated to warn the unruly. We are obligated to sound the alarm and seek to lovingly correct those who have strayed. The word *unruly* is actually a military term that speaks of "*one who is disorderly; out of ranks, or subordinate.*" It presents the idea of an officer correcting a soldier who has disobeyed orders or is not marching in line with his company.

- This is little done in our modern society, but it is needful and beneficial. We have a biblical obligation to warn those who are walking out of line. We are to admonish those who are living purposely outside the will of God. We ought to encourage fellow believers to submit their lives to the Word and will of God. [Col.1:28 – Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Ez.33:6-7 – But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. ^{\[7\]} So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.](#)

B. An Obligation to the Discouraged (14b) – [comfort the feebleminded](#). This speaks of those who are “*fainthearted, weary in their faith, almost ready to give up and abandon the work.*” These are to be [comforted, calmed and consoled](#).

- Oh, how we need to be mindful of that need in our day. We all know those who were once committed to the Lord and active in church, but for some reason they grew discouraged. They became fainthearted and faded away. We are obligated to reach out to those who are weak and comfort them. We need to encourage and support them in their time of weakness.

C. An Obligation to the Dependent (14c) – [support the weak](#). We know that we are to support and encourage those who are weak, but this actually reveals much more than is commonly perceived in this passage. Those who are [weak](#) speaks of “*those who yield easily to temptation; easily led astray; those who are burdened, discouraged, or defeated.*” Clearly this is more of a spiritual application than that of a physical nature.

- Paul ministered in a day of gross sin and immorality. The early believers were faced with all manner of temptation and opposition. It was not uncommon for some to yield to the temptations that were so prevalent. Many were led astray by the teaching of false doctrine. Due to the intense opposition they faced, many were discouraged and defeated spiritually.
- We too find ourselves in a society that closely resembles that of Paul’s day. Temptation, false doctrine, and apostasy abound. Many believers find themselves exhausted and discouraged by the constant bombardment of the world. Those who are strong in the Lord need to support the weak. The idea of [support](#) literally means “*to cling and hold to; to hold up and support.*” We must be there for them, standing alongside them, supporting and holding them up. [Gal.6:1 – Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Rom.15:1 – We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.](#)

D. An Obligation to the Different (14d) – [be patient toward all men](#). The church had likely handled Paul's instruction pretty well up to this point, but now he adds a final obligation that is much harder to embrace. Not only were they to care for and support those of like faith, they were to show patience toward all men. That includes those who had never been saved, those who had no desire for the Lord or His church, and those who were difficult and different. In essence the church is obligated to the world.

- We are instructed to [be patient toward all men](#). That has the idea of "*longsuffering, steadfastness, persevering with patience.*" Sometimes we have difficulty with patience toward those of like faith, and especially toward those who offend us or speak harshly toward our faith and Lord, but we must express godly patience toward them as well. We need to understand that they have not received what we possess. We cannot abandon them or refuse to share our faith. We must be willing to go again and again if that is what it takes.

III. A Word Concerning our Principles (15) – Paul concludes this thought with an exhortation regarding our attitude and behavior among men, basic principles of the faith. He speaks of:

A. What is to be Expected (15a) – [See that none render evil for evil unto any man](#); It is within human nature to return that which has been given. When we are shown love and appreciation, we feel compelled to return that same love and appreciation. However, we are often tempted to return evil or anger for the same.

- This is not what God desires or expects. The Christian is expected to rise above the temptations of the flesh and render loving-kindness for evil. Even when we are mistreated or wronged, we are to show love and godliness. There is never a time when it is acceptable for a Christian to lash out or seek revenge. We need to express the love of God rather than the hatred and anger of men. [Rom.12:19 – Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.](#)

B. What is to be Embraced (15b) – [but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men](#). We are to always seek and follow that which is good and godly. Notice this isn't reserved for those of like faith, although it is expected there as well, but it is to be embraced and shown to all men. A church that is filled with love will be a prosperous church, while a church that is filled with wrath and strife will struggle and fail. May we be known for love and compassion rather than anger, vengeance, and ill will. [Rom.12:18 – If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.](#) [Gal.6:10 – As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.](#)

Conclusion: Paul had spoken to the church in Thessalonica regarding their spiritual health and well-being. God has spoken to us through His Word. We too need to embrace the great truth that is revealed in these verses.

How are things among us? Are we mindful of the needs of others? Are we willing to come alongside those who need support and help? Are we really appreciative of the contributions of others? [Prov.18:24 – A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.](#)

Is there a need in your life today? Has God revealed an area that you need to address? If so, now is the time to seek Him. I pray that our church will be a healthy church made up of strong, committed, and compassionate Christians!