

Read vs. 23-28 • Set Up

1. In studying 1 Thessalonians over several weeks as we have been here on Sunday for the last couple months, we may forget this was originally a **letter**.
2. Timothy had just returned from Thessalonica & reported to Paul how things were going there.
3. They had some questions Paul answers here.
 - a. There was some confusion about the Rapture, so Paul clears it up in chs. 4 & 5 as we've seen over the last couple weeks.
 - b. Timothy also told Paul about some things the Thessalonians needed a little guidance in.
 - c. So as Paul closes out the letter, he deals with them.
4. But as you read the last half of ch. 5, you get the sense Paul was running out of parchment.
5. In just **120** words he squeezes in **15** quick instructions.

Number of Words

1. The abundance of words in something does not make it of greater importance.
 2. There are only **66** words in the **Lord's Prayer**. // **10 Commandments = 179**.
Gettysburg Address = 286 // **Declaration of Independence = 1,300**
U.S. Government regulations on cabbage sales = 26,911
 3. In 11 verses & 120 words, Paul pens a wealth of insight in what it means to follow Christ.
- 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.
1. Paul calls the church at Thessalonica to **honor** their leaders.
 2. We don't know if this was because Tim told him there was a problem, or it was something Paul sensed he needed to say.
 3. Regardless, it's an important reminder.
 4. In v. 12, that word "**recognize**" is better understood as **respect**.
 - a. The word "**labor**" is **hard toil**.
 - b. Paul doesn't call these hard-working leaders of the church 'elders' or 'pastors.'
 - c. Such titles & labels weren't much in use at this time.
 - d. But that didn't change the fact the church had certain people **God had called** to provide leadership.
 - e. With calling comes anointing to fulfill the calling. Where God guides, He provides.
 5. So Paul reminded the Thessalonians of the importance of **honoring** their God-ordained leaders by following them as they faithfully served God by serving His people.
 6. They were to **translate** that respect into **an affection** for them, **not** based on their **personality or likeability**, but on what they'd **accomplished** for the Kingdom of God.
 7. You don't have to "like" someone to have a great appreciation for what they've done.
 - a. I don't know **JS Bach**. Can't know him; he's been dead for 260 years.
 - b. But when I listen to a **Brandenburg Concerto**, I have a deep admiration, even **affection** for Bach for having composed such beautiful music that honors God.
 8. As a follower of Jesus, chances are you'll eventually come across a leader you won't find likeable.
 - a. But they're still effective in service to God.
 - b. Maybe the way they teach or lead worship doesn't do much for you. But others are greatly blessed.
 - c. Paul says, for the sake of the work they do, honor them mightily!
 9. People are different! So God provides lots of leaders; lots of teachers & pastors & different churches & so we can all find a place to grow.
 10. That's why Paul says at the end of v. 13 –
Be at peace among yourselves.
 - a. Ministry must never become a competition.
 - b. We need to call a truce in the church-wars that so often go on.
 - c. CC is not in a contest for 'customers' with Grace Bible, Bible Fellowship, Ventura Missionary, New Life, or Reality.
 11. There's plenty of lost people in VC to fill all the churches many times over.

¹⁴ Now we exhort you, brethren,

1. To exhort means **to call to action**.

2. Paul now launches into a series of quick instructions - warn those who are unruly,

3. **Unruly** was a **military** word; it described those who **broke rank**. They got **out of line**.

a. Just about every group of people has these folk. They're **trouble-makers**.

b. They think it's their mission in life to challenge the authority Paul's just called them to honor.

c. When believers are in unity there's a spiritual dynamic that brings great power.

d. But it only takes one rebel to destroy that unity.

e. Note **who** Paul calls to warn the unruly against getting out of line The "brethren."

1) This isn't something **just** leaders are to do.

2) It's something the entire Body needs to be on the lookout for & deal with.

3) These rebels are already giving grief to leaders. They're not inclined to listen to them.

4) What a rebels hopes for is to gather supporter.

5) When potential supporters are the ones who tell the rebel to knock it off, it's far more effective.

comfort the fainthearted,

4. When Paul wrote this, the biggest threat was **persecution** from civil authorities.

a. The temptation to give up & go back to idols was real.

b. Paul knew personally how hard persecution was to endure.

c. Though made of sterner stuff & would never forsake Christ, he knew there were some who didn't possess the same constitution he did.

d. They'd cave to the pressure & fall away.

e. So, Paul calls other believers to be on the lookout for these faint-hearted souls & rally round them.

f. Athletes know if you work-out alone, when it gets boring or tough, there's a tendency to quit early.

1) But if you have a partner, a work-out buddy, you go longer & do more.

2) We draw strength from the presence of another.

g. Because this world is hostile toward God, we're going to know **some form** of opposition to following Christ.

1) While **a few** thrive in the face of persecution, **most** just endure it.

2) **Some** are so fearful, they consider giving up.

h. **What do we do** with these faint-hearts? // 1) Shame them? 2) Kick them to the curb?

i. No. We come alongside them with the strength they need to endure.

uphold the weak,

5. The **faint-hearted** face persecution from **without**. // These - **the weak**, fight an **inner** battle.

a. Their **moral** strength fails & they keep stumbling in sin.

b. They want victory, but they're weak.

c. **What do we do** with the weak who aren't making the progress **even they know** they should be making?

1) Shoot them? 2) It's been said the Church is the only army that shoots its own wounded.

d. Paul says we're to "**uphold** the weak"

1) If you plant a new tree in your yard, you put 2 stout poles next to it & strap the tree between them.

2) Those poles provide the support the tree needs against the winds that blow until it's roots sink deep enough into the soil that it can stand on it's own.

3) We're to be those supports for the weak who need time to sink their roots deeply into the grace of God.

be patient with all.

6. This is better translated "**long-suffering**."

a. In dealing with **everyone**, **especially** the unruly, faint-hearted, & weak, we're not to be **easily** frustrated or driven to anger.

b. We ought to be long-suffering with others because God is long-suffering with us.

c. God is committed to us for the long-haul. He's not frustrated by our halting & imperfect attempts to follow Him.

d. Some years ago the 88 year old President of Japan's largest corporation gave an interview with a

business magazine.

1) He was asked: "Does your company have long-range goals?" // "Yes." //

"How long are those goals?" // "250 years." //

"What do you need to carry them out?" // "Patience."

e. God has a long-range goal for each of us: To be conformed to the image of Christ.

f. That is the tale all our days here are telling.

7. Don't miss what these 4 exhortations **require**.

a. We can only do these things if we're in fellowship with one another, sharing our lives **& struggles**.

b. And how are we going to know who's struggling unless there's honesty.

c. How will there be honesty unless there's grace?

8. If every time I come to church or my small group, everyone gives the impression they're great, everything's perfect, fantastic; I'm not likely to admit I'm struggling.

9. If everyone else is walking in perfect victory, I'm not telling anyone how I messed up this week.

10. But if what I find is a group of normal people with struggles & challenges similar to mine,

a. And that they can be honest to admit their struggles & others don't pounce on them,

b. I'm going to know it's safe to ask for help.

11. Again: We'll never have the opportunity to do this unless we're honest with one another.

a. But we'll never be honest with one another if we fear rejection.

b. Does God reject us when we confess our sins to Him?

c. On the contrary! He forgives & renews His work to bring us **thru failure into victory**.

d. The means He employs to accomplish that victory are His Word, His Spirit, **& His People**.

12. In James 5:16 we find this -

Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

a. Many **read** that & inwardly say, "If only!" // b. Let's be that.

¹⁵ See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

1. Don't retaliate – don't take revenge.

a. This is difficult because **instinct** pushes us to get even.

b. An ancient Chinese proverb says, "If someone wrongs you, buy each of his children a drum."

2. Paul repeats what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount when He said ... [Matt. 5:38-41]

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

a. In other words, don't RE-act to evil **with** evil. Instead, **ACT** out of love.

3. We don't conquer evil by using evil. Evil is defeated by Good!

4. There's a common phrase that doesn't make a lot of sense; "You gotta' fight fire with fire."

a. Uh, no! Imagine a fireman arriving at your house with a flamethrower instead of a water hose!

b. You fight fire with water.

5. Evil is not overcome by more evil. It's defeated by good.

6. When we return evil for evil, no one wins but the devil.

¹⁶ Rejoice always,

1. Easily said, not so easily applied.

2. This sounds almost like some kind of silly pop-philosophy spouted by someone who's lived a extremely sheltered life.

3. Strange then that it was penned by the Apostle Paul, who not long before this had been falsely-arrested, severely beaten, & thrown into a nasty prison.

4. Paul isn't singing some cheery ditty, "Don't worry. Be happy!"

5. When he set his quill to parchment & wrote the words – "chairete pantote" [kire-etay pan-tahtay] he knew precisely how difficult this was.

6. We live in a world where bad things happen; where tragedy & unspeakable evil occurs.

a. How can we rejoice **always**?

b. Is Paul telling us to ignore or deny the existence of evil?

7. No! He's calling us to see God's sovereignty above & beyond it all.

8. He's calling us to live by faith the promise that God is able to work ALL THINGS together for Good.
9. There are things going on in our world that **look bad**.
 - a. I don't understand how the death of a child could turn to good.
 - b. I don't understand how little boys & girls being sold into slavery in Southeast Asia could ever be the genesis of something positive.
 - c. Or when the young mother of 3 is gunned down in a drive by shooting.
10. But when I find myself perplexed by these things, I turn my eyes to the cross that stood outside the walls of Jerusalem 2000 years ago.
 - a. I look at this scene of utter evil, when humanity took God incarnate & nailed Him up as a despised criminal.
 - b. At consider this moment in time when it seemed evil triumphed.
 - c. And I realize evil is NOT winning. **It is being undone!**
11. I can rejoice at all times because I know **God**, not evil, **has the last word**.

¹⁷ pray without ceasing,
Live in the conscious presence of God, communicating continually with Him.

18 - in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you

1. Not "for" everything, but "in" everything.
2. Because as we just saw, God works all things together for good.

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies.

1. Just as Paul was running out of parchment, I'm running out of time, so briefly ...
2. The Holy Spirit empowers us for service & witness. // To that end, He gives us spiritual gifts.
3. We must be careful to not shun those gifts or let them languish through disuse.
4. People tend to move to 1 of 2 extremes when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit – denial or excess.
 - a. In order to **avoid** the wild extremes seen in some places,
 - b. Other churches over-react & end up **quenching** the Spirit by denying His power.
5. Let the Spirit do what He wants to do. Use the gifts He gives.
6. We have wonderful instruction about **how the gifts of the Spirit** are to be used in 1 Cor.
8. Paul singles out one particular gift – **Prophecy**; speaking forth the mind & counsel of God.
9. We ought not think it odd that Jesus, Who is called "The Logos = Word" would **continue** to speak to us today.
 - a. Indeed, God **does** speak.
 - b. We test prophecy by the Scriptures, because God will never contradict Himself
10. I want to encourage you in your home & small groups to be faithful to share what the Spirit moves you to share.
 - a. There may be someone in that group who **needs** that word.
 - b. They've been praying for God to give them guidance or a word of comfort.
 - c. He may want to use **you** to bring His Word.

²¹Test all things; hold fast what is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil.

1. The test we use is the one thing we know is solid & unimpeachable – God's Word.
2. If something doesn't measure up, we're to cast it aside while holding on to what is good.
3. That phrase, "**hold fast what is good**" was used by money-changers.
 - a. In one hand they held a good coin.
 - b. In the other they would fingered other coins & could tell which were counterfeit because they didn't match up.
4. In one hand we hold the Word of God & as we do, we'll know whether whatever else we're examining measures up.
5. While cleaving to what's good, we're to **stay away** from anything that even **appears** evil.
6. We must walk wisely, realizing while it may not be fair, people are quick to draw conclusions.
7. Because the lost are looking for any reason to disregard our testimony, they'll latch on to the smallest things

that give them reason to believe we're no different from them.

8. So we need to exercise caution to make sure we're steering clear of even an appearance of sin.

1. Paul finishes the letter.

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*.

2. Though he'd just written over a dozen quick little instructions about things they were to do,

3. He knew as they yielded to the Spirit they'd be accomplished.

4. Our growth in grace is less about our effort & more about God's faithfulness.

5. What was true for the Thessalonians was true for Paul, so he says -

²⁵ Brethren, pray for us.

6. As great a man of faith as Paul was, he depended on the prayers of others.

²⁶ Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

7. This was an opportunity for the people of God to demonstrate their deep affection for one another.

²⁷ I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

8. This letter would be delivered to Thessalonica where it would be committed into the hands of the lead elder.

9. Paul intended it to be read to the entire congregation, not just by the leadership.

10. Which another proof the Scriptures aren't meant just for trained clergy; they are for ALL God's people.

²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.

Gold or God

1. I was once challenged by an interesting question, "Would you do for GOLD what you're supposed to do for GOD?"

2. As we end, let's consider that in light of some of the things Paul's set before us today.

a. If you got paid to warn the unruly – would you?

b. If you got \$1000 every time you comforted the faint-hearted, would you?

c. If every time you came alongside a weak & struggling believer to encourage them fight temptation you got \$500– would that ensure your assistance?

d. If every time someone slighted you & instead of retaliating you did them good & got \$3,000 – would you?

3. The fact is, every time we do these things we're treasuring up a reward in heaven that makes these amounts **paltry** in comparison.