

# Tidbits • 1 Thessalonians 5:14-22

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *Only A Little Ink Left*

1. If you've read the bulletin this morning, you know the title of today's message is "Tidbits"
2. I'm calling it that because of the several short exhortations we find at the end of 1 Thes 5
3. It's like Paul had a lot more to say, but looked in to his inkwell and realized he only had enough ink left to pen a few words
4. So in only 86 words he manages to squeeze in 14 quickie instructions!

### B. *Number Of Words*

1. The number of words in something does not equal it's importance
2. There are only 24 words in the Pythagorean theorem
  - a. The Lord's prayer has 66 words.
  - b. Archimedes' Principle is 67 words.
  - c. The 10 Commandments is 179 words.
  - d. The Gettysburg address = 286 words.
  - e. The Declaration of Independence = 1,300 words.
  - f. the U.S. Government regulations on cabbage sales: 26,911 words
3. In the 9 verses and 86 words before us today, we will find a wealth of insight in what it means to follow Christ.

## II. TEXT

### A. *v. 14*

**<sup>14</sup>Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.**

1. We use the word "exhortation" a lot in the church – just what does it mean?
  - a. the Greek word, *parakaleo*, means to call alongside or near
  - b. as it's used in the NT, it means to call someone's attention to something
  - c. to invite others to take notice and respond
2. As Paul moved to wrap up his letter to the Thessalonians, there were several issues that he wanted them to take note of and work at.
  - a. no doubt he'd heard about these things from Timothy who'd recently arrived with a report about what was taking place there in Thessalonica
  - b. so Paul fires off several quick words of instruction
3. First, he tells them to ***warn those who are unruly.***
  - a. *unruly* is a military word that refers to those who break rank
  - b. these are those who are insubordinate – trouble-makers
  - c. every group has them – people who seem to delight in being a thorn in everyone else's side

- d. it's like they think it's their mission in life to challenge authority and those in leadership
- e. not matter what's going on, they always manage to stand to the side and nay-say
- f. while everyone else is humbly submitting to the God ordained leadership and authority, they're being a maverick – taking pot-shots at everyone else
- g. Paul says they are “out of line” which is literally what *unruly* means
- h. here's one way I see this lived out in a very obvious way every summer at teen camp
  - 1) we divide the students up into family groups
  - 2) and each afternoon, we have team competitions
  - 3) each group is supposed to stand in a line and pay attention to the instructions
  - 4) but there are always those kids who think they don't have to stand in line like everyone else
  - 5) so they hang at the back and mill around, oblivious to what everyone else is doing.
  - 6) I've noticed that when every member of a team is standing in a well ordered line, attentive, and encouraging one another, that team always dominates the other teams
  - 7) the teams that have a couple of unruly kids, struggle to get it together and do anything united or well
- i. what's true at camp is doubly true in a church
- j. unity brings a spiritual dynamic and power that leads to incredible power and effectiveness in ministry
- k. but it only takes a few rank-breakers and rebels to destroy the unity of hundreds
- l. what do we do with the unruly, with the rebels who seem to delight in stirring up trouble?
- m. Paul says we warn them; the “we” meaning all of us
  - j. the warning takes the form of *confronting* them with their error and *cautioning* them about the damage they're doing
  - n. the damage comes by the lack of unity they create that provides the devil an opening to apply his age-old tactic of spiritual warfare called divide and conquer.
  - o. we must close ranks – not get out of line.
- 4. Second Paul says, ***comfort the fainthearted***,
  - a. the biggest threat to the church in Thessalonica was persecution -
  - b. it was official and harsh, and as a result, some were giving up and going back to idols
  - c. Paul calls the church to recognize those who *in themselves* were quitters -
  - d. whose personal strength wasn't up to the challenge of hanging in there in the face of persecution
  - e. he says that the rest were to come alongside those who are small-souled, and provide them the strength they need to make it

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  - f. there's a trick to working out that many athletes know that gives illustration

- to this
- 1) if you lift weights by yourself, when the work gets boring or tough, there's a tendency to quit early
  - 2) but if you lift *with someone else*, you tend to lift longer and do far more weight
  - 3) if you run, you tend to go farther and faster when you run with another
- g. it's human nature to draw strength off the presence of another
  - h. as we live in this world, hostile as it is to Jesus Christ, we will know persecution to one degree or another
  - i. while a handful of people seem to actually thrive and grow in the face of persecution, most just endure it
  - j. but another group are shaken in their faith in the face of persecution
  - k. these are faint-hearted who wither quickly
  - l. what do we do with them – hide them in a closet? Shame them for their lack of courage?
  - n. Paul says that we are to come alongside them bring consolation and comfort
  - o. the faint-hearted often find the courage they need to endure simply by having others show them the unconditional love of God
5. Third, Paul says ***uphold the weak***,
- a. the *faint-hearted* face persecution from without, while the *weak* Paul mentions here fought an inward battle with sin and temptation
  - b. the problem is, in fighting this battle, they were without strength
  - c. these are people who, for whatever reason, keep stumbling and falling in sin
  - d. they hate it, they're genuinely repentant, but in some things they're weak
  - e. God is working in them to give them victory, but the process is slow
  - f. what do we do with the weak, with those who we tend to get disappointed and frustrated with because they aren't making the progress we think they ought to be making?
  - g. we shoot them – right?!
  - h. it's been said that the Church is the only army that shoots it's own wounded
  - i. Paul says we're to “uphold the weak”
    - 1) the picture being that we come alongside and offer support
    - 2) the church IS a support group
    - 3) we offer assistance and the strength that is needed for those who *lack* strength
6. Fourth, the Apostle writes, ***be patient with all***.
- a. the word “patient” would be better translated as “long-suffering;”
  - b. when rendered that way the word defines *itself*
  - c. Paul is saying that in dealing with everyone, *specially* the unruly, the faint-hearted, and the weak, we're not to be easily frustrated or driven to anger
  - d. we're to be long-suffering with them and with all
  - e. have you ever noticed how your patience varies from person to person? Why is that?
    - 1) it varies because we choose to be *selective* with our love
    - 2) people we *like*, we give the benefit of the doubt to and show a lot more

patience with

- 3) people we *don't like*, we simply have no time or patience for
  - 4) Grandpa loves his *own* grandchildren and lets them climb all over him
  - 5) but when the toddler standing in line with his mother at the store grabs Grandpa's trouser leg, he knees the little guy aside and gives the mother a dirty look – "bratty little bugger!"
  - f. patience, my friend – long-suffering, brothers and sisters; as Christians we're called to a *long-term commitment* to one another
  - g. and we must not be selective in the demonstration of our love and patience; reserving it only for our ethnic or age group or people that fit in some arbitrary category
  - h. God is no respecter of persons, and being conformed to His image means that we too are not selective in the demonstration of our love for one another.
  - i. in his book *Swim with the Sharks*, Harvey Mackay tells of the 88 year old President of Japan's largest enterprise, Matsushita Electric,
    - 1) he answered an interviewer's questions on the future of his company.

The interview went as follows:
    - 2) Question: "Mr. President, does your company have long-range goals?"
    - 3) Answer: "Yes."
    - 4) Question: "How long are your long-range goals?"
    - 5) Answer: "Two hundred fifty years."
    - 6) Question: "What do you need to carry them out?"
    - 7) Answer: "Patience."
  - j. God has a long-range goal for each of us – to be conformed to the image of Christ and it will take as many years as we live on this earth to accomplish
  - k. He is patient – and we need to be patient with one another
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7. Now, I need to stop right here and make a very important observation
- a. these 4 exhortations all imply a close affiliation of ourselves with one another
  - b. the words speak of coming alongside one another, both spiritually and physically to provide support and strength to one another
  - c. this can only be done if we're in fellowship with one another, sharing our lives *and* struggles
  - d. what would happen if one of us admitted we were *faint-hearted* this week
    - 1) while at work we quietly said grace at the lunch table
    - 2) and a couple of scoffers made fun of us
    - 3) so the next day, we didn't say grace for fear of being made fun of again
  - e. what would happen if one of us admitted being weak and giving in to sin this last Thursday
    - 1) say this person has a problem with profanity
    - 2) and though he knew it was wrong, he said something really wrong
  - f. how would we react?
  - g. now, I've used pretty mild things as examples; what if the failures were more serious?
  - h. tell me, how can we obey what Paul writes here if people don't have the

- confidence of knowing when they admit their failure and their struggle, they will get the comfort and support they need?
- i. we will never have the opportunity to do what Paul says here unless we're honest with one another – but we will never be honest with one another if we fear rejection
  - j. does God reject us? No!
  - k. does He want to bring us through our failures into victory and holiness ? Yes!
  - l. how will He do it? By His Word, His Spirit, and by His People!
8. Struggling Christians fall out of church all the time because they cannot bear the inner pain and turmoil of hiding their sin and shame.
    - a. they don't have the confidence of knowing they won't be rejected if they confessed their struggle to others in the church
    - b. and eventually the tension between their shame and their sin becomes intolerable, so they bail
  9. When will it change? When will we become what God wants us to be – An imperfect people who are striving TOGETHER toward perfection?
  10. There isn't a person in this room this morning who's achieved sinless perfection; there isn't a person here who's arrived at the state of Practical Holiness.
  11. Why is it then that collectively we act as though we have?
  12. No one here this morning would say they're perfect; but how many of us could then go on to give an example by confessing our sin?
  14. Listen to the words of James 5:16

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

15. later this Fall, we're starting several home and small groups
  - a. we believe it's in that setting that the real work of discipleship and spiritual growth is accomplished
  - b. it's in those small groups that we can be open and honest with one another
  - c. where we can practice James 5:16
  - d. so let me do what Paul does here, exhort you to get involved in a small group, so that you can DO what we are reading here.

## **B. V. 15**

**<sup>15</sup>See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone,**

1. Don't retaliate – don't take revenge
  - a. this is so hard – human nature tells us to get even, to keep an even score with the other guy in the case of injuries and harm
  - b. an old Chinese proverb says, “If your enemy wrongs you, buy each of his children a drum.
  - c. perhaps you've heard the story of the truck driver who dropped in at an all-night restaurant in Broken Bow, Nebraska.
    - 1) The waitress had just served him when three swaggering, leather-jacketed motorcyclists -- of the Hell's Angels type -- entered and rushed

- up to him, apparently spoiling for a fight.
- 2) One grabbed the hamburger off his plate; another took a handful of his French fries; and the third picked up his coffee and began to drink it.
  - 3) The trucker didn't respond as one might expect.
  - 4) Instead, he calmly rose, picked up his check, walked to the front of the room, put the check and his money on the cash register, and went out the door.
  - 5) The waitress followed him to put the money in the till and stood watching out the door as the big truck drove away into the night.
  - 6) When she returned to clear off his plate, one of the cyclists said to her, "He's not much of a man, is he?"
  - 7) She replied, "I can't answer as to that, but he's certainly not much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorcycles out in the parking lot."
- d. following Jesus calls us to rise above mere human nature that itches for revenge to be like Christ who did not retaliate
  - e. Jesus taught, [Matt. 5:38-41]

**<sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’**

**<sup>39</sup>But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.**

**<sup>40</sup>If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also.**

**<sup>41</sup>And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.**

- f. in other words – don't render evil for evil, don't get down in the dirt with those who throw dirt
- g. don't RE-act to evil with evil – instead, ACT out of love
- h. that's what Paul goes on to say here in v. 15 . . .

**but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.**

2. The word *evil* means that which causes harm; the word *good* speaks of that which brings a benefit.
3. Listen, it's simple: In this thing we call Spiritual Warfare, we do not conquer evil by using evil – we conquer evil with Good!
4. We are not wrestling flesh and blood but spiritual hosts of wickedness – your enemy is Satan
6. Retaliation and revenge by giving evil *out* for evil *received* is playing in to his hands
7. If you want real victory – do good and give blessing
8. Paul says that we have to apply this first among ourselves as the people of God, then to all!

### **C. V. 16**

**<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always,**

1. This is simply stated, but has profound depth!
2. To rejoice means to be full of cheer – When? Always – at all times!
3. How is this possible?

- a. we live in a world where bad things happen; where tragedy and unspeakable evil occurs
- b. how can we rejoice always?
- c. is Paul calling us to some kind of blind denial of evil?
- 4. Not at all – he is calling us to see things as they really are; to recognize that over it all God is sovereign.
- 5. I admit, there are things going on in our world that look bad
  - a. I am at a complete loss to explain how any good could ever come of them
  - b. the Holocaust of WWII, the modern Holocaust that is taking place in Sudan
  - c. the mother of 3 young children who dies of cancer or is killed in a drive-by shooting
- 6. I am at a loss to see how any of this could be turned to good
- 7. But while I can't see it – this I know with absolute certainty – one day I and everyone else WILL see the good
- 8. One day all creation will bend its collective knee before God and confess He is righteous and perfect in all His ways and what He did was the absolute best in light of all things.
- 9. Do not let the evil of this age eclipse your knowledge of & faith in God
  - a. He is Perfect in Goodness and He is all-powerful
  - b. though we do not see it from our angle, God is at work from the perspective of eternity, and the great triumph of His love, power, and wisdom will be that what seems like a complete loss to us will be turned into total victory for His glory
- 10. That's why we can rejoice always – we know in the end – it's all good!

#### **D. V. 17**

<sup>17</sup>**pray without ceasing,**

- 1. Means just that – live in the conscious presence of God
- 2. Let your living be continual conversation with the Lord

#### **E. V. 18**

<sup>18</sup>**in everything give thanks;**

- 1. Say that out loud with me
- 2. You know why we can give thanks in the midst of everything? Because of the promise of Romans 8:28 & 29

<sup>28</sup>**We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**

<sup>29</sup>**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

- 3. God uses both blessing and adversity to grow us up
- 4. Faith means entrusting ourselves into His hands and then giving Him thanks, trusting that what happens is ultimately a part of His plan to make us like Jesus.
- 5. This last couple weeks have seen the Ralston family go through some pretty

tough stuff

- a. our vehicles have given us trouble
  - b. our family's been hammered
  - c. there's been some real stress in some important and close relationships
  - d. you know – it's just been a time of turmoil
  - e. earlier this week I found myself being tempted to give in to discouragement; maybe a bit faint-hearted
  - f. then it dawned on me – I was going to be teaching this passage!
  - g. it became clear – God was giving me an opportunity to live it
  - h. so when my car failed the smog test Monday, instead of getting all down in the mouth and mopy, I rejoiced that God was at work in some way to make all this a blessing
  - i. and though I couldn't really be thankful for the failed test, I could thank Him for the fact I have a car!
  - j. discouragement and depression haven't been a problem ever since!
6. No matter what you're going through – there is something to praise and thank God for in the midst of it.

**for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

7. This phrase refers to vs. 16-18
- a. it's God's will that we BE rejoicing,
  - b. *Be* praying,
  - c. *Be* giving thanks

## **F. Vs. 19-20**

**<sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit.**

**<sup>20</sup>Do not despise prophecies.**

1. Just as Paul may have been running out of ink, so I am running out of time, so let me cover these briefly . . .
2. God has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us for service and witness
3. To that end, the Holy Spirit has given us spiritual gifts
4. Here Paul says that we are not to put out the Spirit's fire; we're not to extinguish His work by denying or shunning the gifts
5. Churches seem to move toward one of two extremes when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit – cold indifference or wild excess
6. Unfortunately, in order to *avoid* the wild extreme, some churches quench the Spirit
7. Paul says, let the fire of the Spirit burn; let the Spirit move in your midst
8. Of course we have wonderful instruction about how the gifts of the Spirit are to be used in the body in 1 Corinthians 12-14
9. We need to study and follow what we find there
10. Specifically, Paul says we are not to relegate prophecies to the backwoods; we're not to devalue them by ignoring this important gift
11. Prophecy is a word from the Lord that brings guidance, counsel, comfort, instruction, or exhortation
12. It seems that in Thessalonica because all that was presented as prophecy was in



- fact *not* from the Lord, the Thessalonians had let this gift go dormant
13. We can't let the failure of a few hinder or thwart the work of the genuine
  14. Prophecy is not always and only some grandiose fore-telling of the future.
    - a. it's usually a simple word of instruction or comfort
    - b. and it comes to one person to give to another or to the church at large
    - c. the one who receives it from the Lord still has to step out in faith to speak it  
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    - d. they don't snap into some kind of trance-like state – Paul says in Corinthians that the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets
    - e. if God moves you to speak to someone – step out and follow through
  15. Now, the safeguard on this is found in 1 Cor. 14 where Paul says that those with a proven ministry of prophecy are to judge a particular word as whether it is from the Lord or not.
  16. There is much more we could say on that, but time fails

### **G. Vs. 21-22**

#### **21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.**

1. What is the test we use on all things?
  - a. subjective feelings - church tradition – a throw of the dice – what?
  - b. the Word of God - that's why the Bible is called the Canon – measure!
2. We're to test all things, and if something doesn't measure up, we're to cast it aside while holding on to what is good.
3. Actually, that phrase, “hold fast what is good” was a phrase money-changers used.
  - a. in one hand they would hold a good coin
  - b. in the other they would finger other coins and could thus tell which were counterfeit
4. In one hand we hold the Word of God and as we do, we'll know whether whatever else we're examining measures up.
5. [Speak about experience vs. Word]

#### **22 Abstain from every form of evil.**

5. While we're to cling to what is good, we're to stand *away* from anything that even appears as evil
6. Bill attended a home group at Mary's house and stayed after everyone else was gone.
  - a. in fact, he stayed till 2 in the morning, then left; all they had been doing was talking and praying
  - b. but walking out the front door, he was seen by Mary's neighbor to whom she's been sharing the Lord
  - c. now, let's be frank – it's 2 AM, what does that neighbor reasonably conclude?
7. We can protest and get all worked up about it not being right to judge and all that
8. None of that changes the fact that it was *unwise* for Bill to be staying that late at Mary's

9. Why? Because it violates the very thing Paul says here.
10. Because we claim the name of Christ, the world watches us to see if we're going to live it or blow it – and they aren't rooting for us – they want us to fail because it makes them more comfortable in their rejection of Christ
11. It may not be fair that we have to be more careful of appearances – but it's the way it is
12. Live with it

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. *Gold Or God***

1. Recently I came across this question, "Would you do for GOLD what you're supposed to do for GOD?"
2. In other words, if you got paid to warn the unruly – would you?
3. If you got \$1000 every time you comforted the faint-hearted, would you?
4. If you got \$500 every time you came alongside a weak and struggling believer to pray and encourage them to stay strong and fight the temptation – would you do it
5. If every time someone slighted you and instead of retaliating you did them a good turn and got \$3,000 – would you?
6. Listen – every time we do these things we're treasuring up in heaven a reward that makes these amounts paltry in comparison

#### **B. *Serving God***

1. Many people say they want to serve God
2. In these verses, Paul gives us the essence of loving and serving God – we serve God by loving and serving others, specially those in the household of faith.