Study 8 Community – Leader Guide

**INTRODUCTION**

We are all part of communities. Some are created with instant membership, such as our families, and those groups will expand, shrink or change during our lives. Many of our communities are entered into by choice—our companies, extracurricular activities, clubs and organizations. And each community has its set of leaders, members, expectations, and rules. Without some sense of structure in a community, communication and the entire focus and impact of the community breaks down.

In our study this week, Paul reminds his readers in Thessalonica in four powerful verses that there is also a structure to the Christian community, and there are expectations for conduct and behavior for all members of this new faith. As we explore this week’s passages, think about 1) how you might have received this message as a new convert to Christianity just twenty or so years after the death of Christ, and 2) how we can learn from the same message today?

**Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (ESV)**

*12We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*

**Discussion**

Q. Who is Paul referring to in Verse 12, those who are “over you in the Lord”?

A. Church leadership (deacons or elders)

Q. Why would Paul feel it necessary to ask the readers to respect and hold church leaders in high esteem?

A. The early church was struggling in a society that didn’t have the structure of Jewish law or organized religion. Admonishment is never easy, even in Christian love. New believers may have questioned the authority of church leaders to give this type of feedback and guidance.

Verse 13 says we are to “esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” Other words for esteem are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (nouns or verbs: highest regards, respect, admiration, honor, revere, favor). Church leaders answer the call of God to lead His people. **Ephesians 4:12** tells us Jesus ascended “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ…” Timothy reaffirms this desired church conduct in **I Timothy 5:17**, saying “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”

**Discussion**

Q: What are some ways we can show our church leaders our highest regards, respect and admiration?

A: This may be more challenging during a pandemic, and there’s an opportunity here for us as a church to get creative in our small groups and make concerted efforts to put words into action. Challenge your group members to find ways to esteem our church leadership, and act on them!

And let’s not skip over the last sentence in verse 13. *Be at peace among yourselves*. How soothing and tranquil (and needed) does that sound? This is not only how we want to be in relationship to one another, but another way to honor our church leadership. Think of other communities: can a general lead the army if the majors and the colonels aren’t getting along because of something the corporal said about the sergeant? How does a teacher lead a classroom if students aren’t paying attention, too busy arguing about yesterday’s lunch or tomorrow’s quiz? How much more tension is there in the home when siblings aren’t getting along? When a shepherd looks out over his flock, he too can be at rest if they’re peacefully grazing and not battling it out amongst themselves for food or water. So it is also with church leaders when their flock is at peace with each other.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 (ESV)**

*14And we urge you, brothers,* ***admonish*** *the idle,* ***encourage*** *the fainthearted,* ***help*** *the weak,* ***be patient*** *with them all. 15See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always* ***seek to do good*** *to one another and to everyone.*

Paul is now calling the brothers, the church body, to action.

Q: List the verbs in this passage and discuss what’s being asked of the body of Christ.

A: Admonish, Encourage, Help, Be Patient, See, Seek. Christianity requires action on the part of all believers, it is not a spectator religion.

In this passage then, not only are church leaders are to admonish followers, but followers are to admonish “the idle.” The Greek translations for idle here is *ataktos* meaning undisciplined or insubordinate, so Paul may be addressing more active disruption in the church than simply a passive lack of involvement.

Q. Define admonish. How are we to admonish each other?

A. To warn or reprimand…to advise of something to be avoided…to urge someone earnestly.

We’re often afraid of admonishing others, afraid of being seen as holier-than-thou or butting in to what’s none of our business. And we would be right to heed those possible perceptions. Admonishing done with prayer and God’s counsel ahead of time is an act of love and concern for a fellow Christian and should be communicated as such. Whenever in doubt, seek the counsel of a church leader—it might be our own perceptions that need adjustment as well.

Paul continues his instructions to the church with references to evil that we can find repeatedly throughout the Bible today:

**Proverbs 20:22** Do not say “I will repay evil”; wait for the Lord, and He will deliver you.

**Romans 12:17** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

**Romans 12:21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**1 Peter 3:9** Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

It may be easy to think of evil as a far greater sin reserved for far greater transgressions (degrees of immorality: troublesome, bad, evil, etc.) but sin is sin and verse 15 applies to our daily lives. The world’s great philosophers and theologians have long since debated man’s struggle with the causes of and relationship between good and evil, but the Bible’s instructions are clear: evil is not ours to repay.

Q: What are some of the ways we can avoid repaying evil for evil?

A: Prayer, walk away, cool down, share with an accountability partner or small group, keep the Word close at hand and in our hearts

Q: “Always seek to do good.” Is that possible? Always? Just as we need to watch out for the pitfalls of not repaying evil (avoiding the negative), we need to be cognizant of opportunities to do good (affirming the positive). What are some ways we can remember to always seek to do good?

A: Pray to be ready to respond to opportunities, get involved at church or with civic/faith-based groups, recognize that need comes in all shapes and sizes and our goodness can help fulfill it.

**SUMMARY**

The young church in Thessalonica was struggling. Paul, unable to visit in person wrote this letter of encouragement to provide hope, guidance, and loving support. As a leader of the early Christian church, Paul was chosen by God to build a new community of believers. Against the odds of persecution in a foreign land, Paul embraces his brothers with love, kindness, hope and reminders of what it means to be a Christian.

As you continue in your Christian walk this week, take time to recognize the community you’re in, and what active role you need to play. Who in our church community, neighborhood, workplace, or city needs our prayer, or our words of encouragement, or our admonishment? Ask God for direction and discernment that we, like Paul, Timothy and Silas, would do His will.

Sources:

Bible.org Study Bible Commentary Series, 1 Thessalonians 5

Bible.com

ESV.org, ESV Study Bible 1 Thessalonians 5 (Crossway)