

Taking New Territory in Troubling Times, Pt. 11

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Today

*How many of you would rather be known for how you live than what you think?
How many of you would rather be known for your deeds, than your words?*

This is exactly where God is inviting us to make changes, to take new ground today — and there is something God has for every one of us in this passage today.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

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.

- There were major cultural problems facing these new believers.
 - They were located in the largest city in Macedonia; it was a trade center for the first century world; the church was constantly in contact with different cultures whose beliefs were absolutely contrary and antagonistic toward their own.
 - They were facing tremendous persecution for their faith; living in incredibly uncertain times with almost no support or guidance on how to navigate what they were facing.

When Paul has taken all of that into consideration, theology and their specific context — he emphasizes one thing — their personal conduct within the context of relationships in the Church, in the first century world.

PERSONAL CONDUCT

Paul instructs us on how we are to conduct ourselves within three different domains of relationships — how we're to live in relationship to....

THE LEADERS ABOVE US THE STRUGGLING AMONG US THE ENEMIES AGAINST US

THE LEADERS ABOVE US

Paul doesn't clarify whether he's talking about Pastors, or Deacons, or Elders of the Church — but he does talk about, within the Church, how we're to view and treat those who are in any position of authority over us and who are laboring for the Lord.

For us, this would include not just Pastoral Staff, Ministry Directors, and Elders, but also Life Group Leaders and Coaches, Worship Leaders, Youth leaders, Children's ministry teachers and volunteers. In Paul's terms, there are three specific characteristics that he uses to identify what type of Leader he's referring to...

- They labor among us.
- They care for and are in some level of authority over us, they're responsible for us.
- They admonish, instruct and correct us — theologically, morally, socially — how we are to live in accordance with the will and ways of God.
- Not leaders who use their authority as a means to control, or manipulate for self-serving purposes.
- Biblical leadership carries with it the idea of patient, nurturing, care, and correction — like a parent loves a child. That's the idea of healthy leadership.
- It's relinquishing your individual, self-centered desires for the benefit of the whole.
- It's self-denial for the service of others.
- That's exactly what Jesus modeled — that's what our leader looks like.
- That's what we ought to look like, and that's what Paul is talking about here.
- A leader's job is to be with the people, to labor among the people, to care for the people, and to admonish the people.

1 Thessalonians 5:12

And we urge you, brethren, **to recognize** those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

- The root meaning of the word **recognize** is *to see, to appreciate* those who are hard at work, those who lead, and are doing their best to care for, shepherd, and correct you.

1 Thessalonians 5:13

and **to esteem them very highly in love** for their work's sake.

This means to honor your leaders...

- **Doesn't** mean exalt them to celebrity status.
- **Doesn't** mean blind obedience, or unquestioning loyalty
- **Doesn't** mean that you have to personally agree with every decision that they make
- **Does** mean that you consider their position, the complexities and difficulties of leadership, and that you are quick to show grace, kindness, compassion, respect, patience, and understanding toward them.
- **Does** means to have a high view of the role they play in your life personally and in the life of the church body.
- **Does** mean that as they love and serve the body, you are to submit to their leadership, to come under their authority, to listen to what they say, knowing that they must consider the health and well-being of the entire flock
- **WHY?** Because they answer to God on your behalf and they carry that weight of responsibility for every single decision.

1 Thessalonians 5:13

...Be at peace among yourselves.

- Peace doesn't happen unless you work at it. It doesn't just happen by accident.
- Having peace among yourselves is the result of doing the hard work of obeying the rest of vs 12 -13.
- That as leaders care for, love, and labor for the sake of the congregation, and as the congregation holds their leaders in high esteem, recognizing their hard work, and appreciating their leaders — peace is the byproduct.

THE STRUGGLING AMONG US

1 Thessalonians 5:14

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

- This is about people in the Church family, brothers and sisters in Christ, that aren't doing well. They're struggling. They're weary. Exhausted. Fainthearted. Vulnerable. Weak.
- Paul gives us three types of people who are struggling in the church and how we're to serve one another...

1 Thessalonians 5:14

...**warn** those who are **unruly**...

- Reference to those who are idle, lazy, and are causing dissention and disorder within the body.
- They don't want to come under authority, they're causing problems and disruption...
- The word for **warn** in the original language is the same word that's used above for what leaders are to do for the church body as a whole. It's the word **admonish** — to instruct, to make aware.
- Leaders are to admonish the church, and the **church body** is to admonish, instruct, to bring awareness to one another.
- While being lazy and unruly is a sin issue, in this scenario, it's also an immaturity issue. It's a lack of self-awareness.
- Paul tells us that's all of our responsibility as members of ONE body to press into the hard, difficult, awkward, uncomfortable conversations that none of us want to have.

You show me a Church family that avoids difficult conversations... and I'll show you a Church that is immature, dysfunctional, and content on playing religious games.

You show me a Church family that is direct, knows how to have healthy conflict and stay committed to one another... and I'll show you a Church that's ready to change the world.

1 Thessalonians 5:14

...**comfort** the **fainthearted**...

- Burned out, worn down, discouraged, a reference to anxiety and depression, Paul calls us to encourage... to cheer each other up, to bring comfort to one another.
- One of the most tangible places that this happens is in our Life Groups

1 Thessalonians 5:14

...**uphold** the **weak**

- The weak — the sick, the poor, those with low social standing, the vulnerable
- "Uphold" means to support, to help, to take tender care of, to serve, to bless.
- The world that we live in rewards the strong not the weak — Paul is saying to be counter-cultural in how we give preference to the vulnerable among us.
- Inconvenience yourself for their sake
- **Why?** Because this is exactly what Christ did for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:14

...**be patient** with **all**.

- *Have you ever noticed that you don't have to really work at being patient with people you agree with or people that you like?*
- Why does Paul command us to be patient with all? Because he knows that there are people that are a part of your Church family that you don't like very much.
- Paul is trying to develop within the entire congregation a sense of pastoral responsibility.
- Where every member takes seriously the responsibility to care for one another, emotionally, spiritually, practically.
- That we're ALL patient with one another, we give preference to, and bear with one another.

**It's not just the pastor's job...
this is the Christian's responsibility within the body of Christ.
Pastoral care was never meant to be TOP DOWN.
It's meant to be CENTER OUT.**

THE ENEMIES AGAINST US

1 Thessalonians 5:15

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

*This is Paul elaborating on **Matthew 5** where Jesus said...*

Matthew 5:38

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. ⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I say to you, **love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,** ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Remember — the context of this entire passage is about your personal conduct as a follower of Jesus.

So, the question Paul is asking ... Do people in your Church community, your Life Group, your STEPS class... has anyone in the church ever wronged you? Has anyone offended you, or insulted you in the Church body?

- What Paul and Jesus are inviting us out of is the endless cycle of retaliation.
- They tell us not to just abstain from retaliation, but to do good to them. Love them. Bless them. Pray for them...
- You and I, in our own strength, do not have the capacity to love our enemies.
- We don't have what it takes to end the cycle of retaliation.

"Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work."¹

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

When you and I see that we were the ones that drove the nails into His hands and feet — and even though He had every right to do so — He didn't retaliate, he didn't scorn us, he didn't reject us — but instead he looked on us with love and compassion, He prayed for us. He forgave us. He blessed us. He Loved us.

***And when this sinks in,
when the Spirit of God illuminates the depth and the beauty of the Gospel in us....
all of sudden not only do we have the power to overlook offenses,
but also, we're given the power to love those who curse us,
to LOVE those who infringe upon our "Christian liberties."***

¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich; Doberstein, John W. *Life Together* (Harper Collins, 1954)

Conclusion

This entire passage is a reminder that ***our personal responsibility as followers of Christ*** — toward those within and outside the Church — ***is to Love.***

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never fails.

Discussion Questions

1. List all of the leadership positions in the church you can think of. Does each position have the same biblical mandate of patient, nurturing care and correction, like Jesus modeled?
2. Have you been good about, or remiss, in recognizing, appreciating, and esteeming your church leaders?
3. Read aloud 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Which of these commands do you find easy, and which do you find hard? Why?
4. Discuss how Matthew 5:38 is not only talking about theoretical, national-level violence — but is talking about your personal conduct and relationships as a follower of Jesus.
5. What is the ultimate personal responsibility of a follower of Christ?

NOTES