

**While I'm Waiting  
(Week 10)  
1 Thessalonians 5:12-15  
"The To-do List... Part One"**

**Introduction**

**Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up.** **Galatians 6:9**

As we have learned the course of this study, The church at Thessalonica was only a few months old when Paul wrote them his first epistle. He had not been able to stay there with them as long as he would have liked. And that, I believe, is the reason that he so carefully prepared this letter for them. He wanted to make sure that he was perfectly clear about everything so that those who had not been brought up on sound doctrine all their lives would be able to completely understand what he was telling them.

We, who were "raised up" in church, take a lot of things for granted in our understanding of spiritual things. After all, when you've been taught Biblical truths for your entire lifetime, then it goes without saying that this would give you some advantage in spiritual acumen, as opposed to someone who had only heard the message of the gospel a few weeks prior. To the Thessalonians, everything "Christian" was brand new. And this is the reason that they had sent Timothy back to Paul with so many questions. The word "disciple" actually means "learner", and that is exactly what the Thessalonians were... They were learners. And Paul made it his personal mission to ensure that every last one of them received sound tutelage. So, at the end of this epistle, he gives them a to-do list!

When I was in my teens, my mom began to work outside the home for the first time. I had two younger brothers, and as the oldest child, I was given additional responsibilities to see to it that things were taken care of around the house. I had to look out for my brothers, see to it that all the livestock were cared for, and even do some of the cooking and cleaning around the house. When I was a young child, I had been exempt from such duties and was in fact, up to that point, blissfully unaware that these things had to be taken care of in any kind of daily routine. In short, there came a point in my young life, when I had to start growing up. And part of that new reality was coming to grips with the sobering realization that a lot of hard work comes with maturity.

Each day, before they left for work, my folks would go over the list of things that they expected of me. Sometimes those lists were quite long and exhaustive. Other days not so much. But one thing was certain. My mother and father expected everything on those lists to be done when they came home later that evening, or there would most certainly be consequences.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul repeatedly emphasizes that Christ is returning for His Church. And when He comes, He is expecting to find us faithfully taking care of the things that He has left for us to do. In fact, we will all stand before the judgment seat to give an account for our works to The LORD Himself.

**For we must all appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.** **2 Corinthians 5:10**

As Paul closes his first letter to the Thessalonians, he also gives them a long "to-do list" to obey as they await the return of Christ. In **verses 5:12-28**, we see twenty separate commands that he gives to the church. His exhortation makes it plain that the body of Christ is to always function in complete unity and holiness. We are to care for one another with a love that is genuinely concerned for the welfare of each one, and also seek to please God in all that we do. We can see from his closing words, that Paul truly believed that love must be the defining characteristic of the child of God. In every circumstance, our proper response is to love: to *Love Our Pastors*, *Love Those Who Get Out of Line*, *Love the Fainthearted and the Weak*, and **"always pursue what is good for one another and for all"**. Let us look together at this first portion of the Church's "to-do list" that we are to obey in order that we be found worthy at LORD'S return.

**Love Your Pastors (vs. 12-13)**

**Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you in The LORD and admonish you, and to regard them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13**

At the risk of sounding extremely self-serving, it is my pastoral duty to inform you that as the Church of Jesus Christ, you are to love the shepherds that He has called to watch over you! There are many different words used to describe the role of a Pastor in the Greek. *Episkopos* (**1 Timothy 3:1**), meaning “overseer”, describes the way that the pastor is to direct the affairs of the church. And another “pastor word”, *Poimen* (**Ephesians 4:11** translated “pastors”), which literally means “shepherd”, describes the way that pastors are called to watch over and protect the flock. These are but two of the words that we are given to describe the role of a pastor.

Paul admonishes the church at Thessalonica to “give recognition” to those who were charged with their care. The word used actually means “to come to know by experience”. You see, the church at Thessalonica wasn’t very old. And when Paul and his companions came to them, there were no Christians there. So, when the Apostles were forced to leave town in such a hurry, the men that they left in charge hadn’t been believers any longer than the rest of the flock! But God, in His sovereign election, had gifted some of these new converts to take on the role of pastor in the fledgling church. I imagine that this may have caused a few in the church to say, “Why should he be in charge over me? I’ve been a believer just as long as HE has!”

The truth of the matter is... I personally would never trust a pastor who started out wanting to be one! God calls men to lead, and those who are truly humble before Him would never presume to do so unless they had been commanded to do so. When we ordain someone, we lay our hands on them and affirm that we also sense that God is calling them to the work to which they are being ordained. It is a confirmation from the body that we see God’s calling upon their lives. In other words, we have gotten to “know them” by examining their walk with God, and therefore, we are able to confirm that God has in fact done a work in them and has equipped them to perform the task at hand. Remember, God does not call the equipped, but rather, He equips those whom He has called. Just because those pastors in Thessalonica did not have a long history of walking with God did not mean that they had not been chosen to lead. Paul admonished the Thessalonians to closely examine their leaders, so that they would in fact know that God had chosen them and set them apart for service.

After they had seen the confirmation of God’s calling, the Thessalonians were instructed to love (agape) their pastors and hold them in high regard. It’s not that we view our pastors as superior. In fact, they have been chosen to serve us. But we are to hold their office in high regard and to love them for the service that they do. Paul says that we are to love them “because of their work”. The word he uses for “work” is a word used to describe *exhausting and difficult toil*. Trust me, being a pastor will wear you out at times. And no one in their right mind would actually say, “I want to be a pastor when I grow up!” I have never met a single person who could do the work of a pastor in his own strength. It is a spiritual task that requires the Spirit of God to enable them. And that is what we all must respect and love.

Paul goes on to tell the Thessalonians to **“be at peace among themselves”**. When you have a congregation that loves and respects those who are called to lead, you have a church that is much less likely to have division. The church is not a democracy, and it is not a dictatorship. It is a Theocracy, and those who are called to lead will have the attitude that Paul himself shared with the Church at Corinth.

**Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.**

**1 Corinthians 11:1**

This is the kind of leadership that every church needs. Paul uses the word “*proisteme*” to describe “those who lead you in The LORD”. The word means to “set before”. God calls men to be set before His people, to teach them by example how to live for Him. I pray that this is the kind of pastor that I can be. So pray for me as I try to follow Christ and stand before you as an example. I may not always do it correctly, but even so... you still have to love me!

**Love The Unruly (vs. 14a)****And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle...****1 Thessalonians 5:14(a)**

The word that Paul uses translated “idle” in the CSB is “*ataktos*” in the original Greek and is translated as “*unruly*” in the KJV. The word was often used in Greek society to describe a person who failed to show up for work, or for a soldier who broke ranks. In the context of Paul’s previous statements regarding the child of God being “**clothed in the armor of faith, love, and hope**”, it is likely that he is speaking here of those who are not living in a manner consistent with that of a faithful soldier of Christ. We are commanded to live in such a way that we are ready for the return of Christ at any moment. Those within the Church, who do not live in this state of preparedness, have in fact “*broken ranks*” or have not “*shown up for work*”, when it comes to the things of God.

Churches are filled with people who claim to follow Christ, while in reality they are doing nothing for the kingdom. Paul commands the Thessalonians to “warn” those who are not marching in step with our LORD’S commands. The word he uses here does not speak of a “harsh warning”, but rather, a gentle encouraging for them to do what is right. It is our responsibility as believers to encourage those who are not living in obedience to The LORD’S commands to return to holiness. In fact, this is not just the responsibility of the preacher, but all of the congregation.

**Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a GENTLE spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted.****Galatians 6:1** (emphasis added)

The fact is, that from time to time, **ALL** of us need a course correction. Just imagine what the Church would be, if we loved one another enough to look out for those who have strayed from the right path. We tend to want to write people off, when they are in the wrong, but Paul tells the Thessalonians to warn them, rather than shun them. Needless to say, it takes a lot more love to try and correct an error than to give up on the errant one. I have yet to meet the “perfect Christian”, but have you ever noticed how we tend to excuse our own disobedience, all the while condemning others for theirs? We most certainly desire rivers of grace for ourselves, but many times we only offer a “trickle” of it to others. Love wants to see people restored.

**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.****Matthew 5:9**

Love finds a way to make things right. Agape love reaches out to those who are “*not showing up for duty*” in order to lead them back into the ranks of the army of God.

**Love The Fainthearted (vs. 14b)****...comfort the discouraged...****1 Thessalonians 5:14(b)**

The KJV translates this, “**..comfort the feebleminded**”. The word actually has nothing to do with mental acumen, but rather, a lack of courage. “*Fainthearted*” would be a much better translation. Within every church are those who do not possess a certain boldness of faith. They are fearful, afraid that they might hurt someones’s feelings or that others would not like them if they boldly shared their faith. Like politicians, they choose their words carefully so as not to offend any particular constituency.

But the plain truth is that now more than ever, we need Christians to boldly proclaim the gospel. This world is wicked beyond measure and is increasingly so with each passing day it would seem. Sinners need to be warned before it is too late. And if the devil can’t stop people from believing in Christ, then he will certainly do all that he can to stop people from speaking His Name!

The church at Thessalonica knew all about persecution and peer pressure. So it should come as no surprise that there were many in the church who were fearful and reluctant to take a stand for Christ, when doing so could cost them everything. But they were expected to be a bold witness none the less. Paul gave instructions to the church that those who were timid should not be written off, but rather, encouraged into boldness. Those who are discouraged among us need to be comforted (*paramytheomai*). The word means *to draw close and give helpful and wise counsel*.

This is also the way that we are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are facing **ANY** type of discouragement. We come alongside them and give them comfort. We empathize, rather than criticize. Those who are strong and bold in the faith often need reminding that not everyone is the same as they. There are many who seem to need more encouragement in order to overcome the anxieties of their hearts. Never look down on those who seem weaker, for they may have something to offer that no one could have imagined. After all, nobody thought that the humble shepherd boy David would have been qualified to be a king! Not even his own father. But God saw something in him that no one else could see. And He encouraged Him to become all that He was destined to be. God doesn't quit on us, even when everyone else does. Probably my most favorite verse in all of scripture in reference to Jesus is this one:

**He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not put out a smoldering wick, until He has led justice to victory.** **Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:20**

And what does that verse mean? It means that Jesus will not “kick someone who is down”. And neither should we. Encourage the fearful, so that they too can be strong in The LORD.

#### **Love The Weak (vs. 14c-15)**

**...help the weak, be patient with everyone. See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for ALL.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:14(c)-15**

In Paul's letter to the Romans, it is abundantly clear that those he considered to be of “weaker faith” are actually those who are convinced that by becoming more legalistic that they are more pleasing to God. For instance in **Romans Chapter 14**, Paul commands the believer to **“welcome anyone who is weak in faith...”** (**Romans 14:1**). He goes on to describe the one who is weak as those who are convinced that some things are sinful even when they are not. I've been in churches where they believed that if you weren't “King James Only” in your preferred *Bible* translation, or you didn't wear a suit and tie to church, then you were sinning against God. Make no mistake, legalism is a sign of weak faith, not strong faith. But sadly, the legalists actually have convinced themselves that their faith is stronger than pretty much everyone else's! This is what makes the legalist so very hard to correct, or even endure.

So, how are we to act toward the legalistic believer, who seems to enjoy pointing out every perceived flaw of his brothers and sisters in Christ? With patience, according to Paul. Patience isn't always easy for the Christian, but it is always required. In fact, it is one of the “proofs” that we are controlled by The Spirit of God (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

As we read the words of Paul to the Thessalonians, it becomes clear to us that we are called to love; not just love those who think and act exactly like us, but to also love those who are different. One thing I've learned about “church folk” in all these years of ministry: We ALL have our quirks! As *The Bible* says, **“we are a peculiar people”** (**1 Peter 2:9 KJV** and yes, I know that is not exactly what he meant by that verse). But in spite of all our quirks and differences, we are to **love** one another unconditionally. We don't retaliate when we are wronged. We love. We don't just think of ourselves first. We love. This is the mark of a true believer.

Paul concludes this section of “love commandments” by saying:

**See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all.** **1 Thessalonians 5:15**

Now, I would like for us to consider this for a moment. I've been in the ministry for a lot of years now, and I cannot recall a single "fist fight" or a murder within the churches I've attended. So just how prevalent is this "*repaying evil for evil*" in the church anyway? Answer: Very!

You see, many of us, when we are "wronged" or even if we perceive we have been "wronged" by a brother or sister in Christ, rather than do what the LORD commands us; *to go directly and talk TO that person*, we prefer to go to someone else and talk ABOUT that person. Make no mistake. This my friends is EVIL. So many problems could be solved within the church, if brothers and sisters could simply communicate with one another. If you spend any amount of time around other people, sooner or later, someone will hurt you. It's just a fact. But how many of these situations could be resolved by honest communication? I would hazard a guess that the answer to this question is "most of them".

But instead, we often choose to tear one another down by gossiping about them to others, rather than boldly confronting the problem the way that Christ commanded. Make no mistake. Not handling these situations in a Godly manner, according to the scriptures, is by very definition, "*repaying evil with evil*". Let me offer some sound advice here: If a real or perceived hurt is not worth going and talking to the one who has offended you, then it is not worth talking about with ANYONE else. In just a moment of wicked gossip, we can ruin a person's life and reputation irreparably. The tongue is a deadly weapon my friends. Our words can be as destructive as any weapon of war.

***So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how a small fire sets ablaze a large forest. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among our members. It stains the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.***

***James 3:5-6***

More evil destruction in this world has been set ablaze by the tongues of men than by anything else. Let it never be said that we, as children of The Living God could not control our tongues. "Christian gossip" is an oxymoron. For to wag our tongues about one of our brothers and sisters in as un-Christian as it gets. For we have been given the Holy Spirit to live within each of us, and the very fruit of that Spirit is both love and "self-control". If you truly love your brother in Christ, then talk **with** him and not **about** him. This is a discipline that is "*good for one another and for all*". So love. Love enough to be at peace with everyone. Warn those who need warning. Encourage those who need encouraging, always doing what is best for one another. Let it be said of us, that we, above all things, knew how to love each other.

And let all of God's people say... TRUTH!!!