

Final Instructions – Part I

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

Online Sermon:

http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

Following his discussion on the Day of the Lord (5:1-11), Paul concludes his letter by addressing practical matters related to congregational life and worship (5:12-22).¹ He begins his final discourse by outlining how the church members ought to behave towards its leadership.² Much debate exists over whether these individuals held official church titles.³ Examples include wealthy patrons who converted to Christianity and provided financial support to the church, such as Jason in Acts 17:5-8,⁴ and those who dedicated themselves to serving the saints, like Stephanas in 1 Corinthians 16:15.⁵ Paul likely refers to 'leaders in the Lord,' such as overseers, presbyters or bishops,

¹ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 382.

² Gary Steven Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 219.

³ Gary Steven Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 219.

⁴ Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 426.

⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *1 & 2 Thessalonians through the Centuries*, ed. John Sawyer et al., Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 162.

and deacons.⁶ The author of Hebrews states believers are to “have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account” (13:17).⁷ Like the Thessalonians we “are to



respect these leaders, not simply with verbal honors but by paying careful attention to their spiritual direction.”⁸ Giving the overseer honor is not just because he holds the title of pastor but due to the work that

“God has called and ordained that person to do.”⁹ The pastor in turn is to take his calling seriously, not as one who lords his position of authority over others,¹⁰ but one who refuses to act or stand still when he knows the Lord’s will in any matter. He is called to work, lead, teach and admonish the flock, if need be, in love and the singular desire to seek the praise of God the Father,

⁶ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 1 Th 5:12.

⁷ *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Heb 13:17.

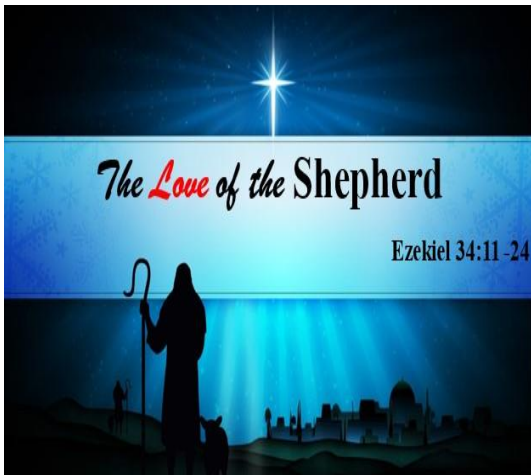
⁸ Gary Steven Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 219.

⁹ Jay E. Adams, *Romans, Philippians, I Thessalonians, and II Thessalonians*, The Christian Counselor’s Commentary (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 212.

¹⁰ Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 150.

rather than praise from the flock! Pastors are far from “autonomous sovereigns,” but they do represent Christ’s authority and with their often lowly and difficult position they carry with it the highest honor (Mark 10:42–45 par.; Luke 22:24–27)!¹¹

While being called to be a pastor sounds honorable, it comes with many requirements that must be met. In Paul’s letter to Timothy, he outlined that a minister must be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable,



hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, gentle, not violent, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, not a recent convert, and of good reputation (1 Timothy 3:1-7). To Titus, Paul added that a pastor should be blameless,

upright, and holy (1:5-9). Peter emphasized that a pastor should not lord his position over others and must willingly pursue God’s will in all matters (1 Peter 5:1-3). Wow! While I strive to meet these criteria, I must admit there are times when I fall short of God’s glory. In these moments, I am in desperate need to confess and be molded and reshaped by the Potter into His likeness. If

the Lord wanted a sinless pastor, only Christ would qualify! With the spiritual gifts I have received, I strive to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, and seek the lost (Ezekiel 34:2-6). I often engage in counseling and resolving church disagreements, tasks that are not for the faint of heart. Forgive me when I forget to bath my words in love, grace, and mercy for I truly am trying to admonish when the Lord asks me to do so but favor encouraging each of you! I share this not to elevate myself, for at the foot of the cross, the ground is level, and we are all equally part of a unified body. Rather, I share this so that you might understand the work the Lord asks of me and to encourage you to pray that I might live my life worthy of the Gospel message.

Living in Peace

To truly obey Christ’s command to be lights to the nations and implore the lost, on His behalf, to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20), the church must first grow in its depth of love for one another.¹² Given that the church is a melting pot of ethnic diversity, various socio-economic statuses, and different levels of spiritual maturity, it is no wonder that Forbes.com lists “pastor” as the fifth toughest leadership role in

¹¹ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 119.

¹² Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 152.

America!¹³ It is easy to love those who look, act, and think like us, but the church stands apart from society because its members have bowed in deep reverence to the Lord, learning



unconditional love from Him. The world recognizes us as Christ's disciples when we celebrate our differences and are even willing to do good to those who call themselves our enemies (John

13:35; Luke 6:32-36). This does not mean Christians are called to ignore sin to avoid internal conflict, thus undermining the truth by which we were set free. Instead, we are to gladly forbear with one another and build each other up in faith as one unified body, bowing to Him who alone has the right to rule our lives.

Reflection. As Christians enter the church on Sunday morning, they bring with them diverse cultural, political, socio-economic, financial, and marital backgrounds. To prevent such a diverse group from fragmenting, the church must learn to emulate Christ's example on the cross, where He gave His life freely and

unconditionally for the sake of many. By understanding that our value is secured in Christ and that our abilities and roles are assigned by God's Spirit, jealousy, and the clamor for positions of authority fall away, allowing the peace that surpasses all understanding to reign within the church.

Admonishing one Another

For Paul, loving one another also entails promptly admonishing those who are "unruly" within the church. This term encompasses any behavior that fosters mischievous disruption, including actions that are seditious, faithless, disorderly, impious, unholy, unsettled, or unstable.¹⁴ The unruly are those who are gifted pew sitters who refuse to serve, opinionated busy-bodies, those who refuse to tithe when they don't get their own way, and seek to undermine the authority of leaders by promoting dissension inside the body of Christ.¹⁵ While many churches today are so afraid of offending someone that they chose to ignore sin and let it run its course,¹⁶ burying the sin under the carpet is not wise for "the path of least resistance is often the path that will eventually bring the most resistance."¹⁷ How many church splits could have been avoided

¹³ Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 155.

¹⁴ Gary Steven Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 221.

¹⁵ Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 156–157.

¹⁶ James Denney, "The Epistles to the Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Bible: Ephesians to Revelation*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 6, Expositor's Bible (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co., 1903), 350.

¹⁷ Mark Howell et al., *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 156.

if only the leadership had acted quickly and disciplined the one(s) who were being disobedient, unruly, and defiant? Does not the “neglect of church discipline diminish the glory of the church”¹⁸ when sin is allowed to reign, and holiness put aside?



Don't we all bring worldly habits, dispositions, associations, and preferences into Christ's church that may be hostile to His character?¹⁹ Shouldn't we, therefore, welcome our

leaders with open arms when they point out any irregularities in our lives that defy the law of Christ? Instead of taking offense, we should, in love, rejoice that iron sharpens iron. When both the giver and recipient of gracious admonishment strive to build one another up in faith and holiness, they act as true brothers and sisters should, united as one body in Christ.

Reflection. Have you ever had a brother or sister in Christ point out one of your sins? Consider how much time they likely spent in prayer before approaching you. Imagine the courage it took,

knowing their own faults, to address a single flaw in you. How did you respond? Did you react with anger, launching into self-justification and condemnation of the person? Or did you humbly acknowledge the sin, thank them, and rejoice that God deemed you worthy of correction? Is this person still your brother or sister in Christ, or did you choose to gossip about them and leave the church? How we react to being corrected tells us much about our desire to be more like Jesus!

Encourage the Timid

Loving one another unconditionally in grace and mercy, as Paul teaches, also requires church members to encourage the disheartened. There are many reasons why believers become timid. Sometimes it is due to a “self-denigrating” low opinion of themselves²⁰ due to having fallen into a life of wayward sin or due to, in their eyes, not accomplishing much in God's kingdom. In other cases, believers become timid due to having experienced personal hurts, persecution,²¹ and tribulations that make them fear the past, the present, and the future. And other times timidity comes to those who busily serve the Lord but allow life's pressures or serving outside their calling “steel their

¹⁸ Daniel M. Gurtner, [“1 Thessalonians,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 625.

¹⁹ James Denney, [“The Epistles to the Thessalonians,”](#) in *The Expositor's Bible: Ephesians to Revelation*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 6, Expositor's Bible (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co., 1903), 350.

²⁰ Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1 Th 5:14.

²¹ Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 158.

joy and stifle their passion!”²² Regardless of the reasons, believers are called to call upon the God of all comfort to aid and teach them how to not only rejoice with those who rejoice but also weep with those who weep (2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Romans 12:15).²³ When a believer endures relentless daily struggles from their friends, environment, and the devil’s arrows of



deception, which undermine their sense of value and worth, they may become so discouraged that, like the publican, they cannot even lift their eyes to heaven in

prayer. As their brothers and sisters, we must come to their aid. We all need to be reminded that, although we often fall short of God’s glory, our value in His eyes remains infinite. God will never leave nor forsake us, and neither should we turn our backs on those suffering and in pain. If even Peter needed encouragement, how much more do we, who have never met Christ and yet believe?

Reflection. Never underestimate Satan’s fiery darts of timidity. He has been a liar since the beginning and is more than capable

of whispering in our ears that we are not worthy of God’s love and have in some way fallen outside of His mercy and grace. Your true value does not come from what others think of you but from a cross that eternally testifies of your infinite worth! You are not forgotten, not forsaken, not a loser but instead a masterpiece of God’s grace capable of placing your hope in Him alone and soaring on wings like eagles (Isaiah 40:31). In the Lord’s strength you will not grow weary but instead run in His kingdom with vigor and the promise that “God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28)!

Help the Weak

Loving one another also means helping the weak amongst us. While Paul could be using the word “weak” to describe those who are physically weak or sick (1 Peter 3:7; James 5:14), the poor, or the outcasts; more likely Paul is referring to those who are spiritually weak (Romans 14:1-6).²⁴ When we were called by Christ we all started out as what both Paul and Peter call “babes.” Paul states that when a person becomes born again, they do not start out as wise children of God who live by the Spirit but remain somewhat worldly (1 Corinthians 1:1-3). Peter states that what keeps believers from

²² Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 157.

²³ Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 157.

²⁴ Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 159.

being holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16) is due to our persistent desire to continue living our old lives of “debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry” (1



Peter 4:3). Those believers who allow sin to rule in their hearts remain weak for they have yet embraced what many theologians call “the complete filling of the Holy Spirit.” Given that

our thoughts and ways often differ significantly from God's ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:8), we should not harshly judge those who are spiritually weaker than we are. Instead, we are called to build them up in the faith. By teaching and demonstrating how to live good and holy lives, we help them grow stronger in the Lord's presence and more aligned with His will.

²⁵ Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 159–160.

²⁶ Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 160.

Be Patient with Everyone

To truly love one another means being patient and forbearing one another. While we expect those who have the Holy Spirit and are of the same body of Christ to have no difficulty in celebrating differences of opinions in love, sadly for



most church attenders this is not the case.²⁵ Though their “anger, gossip, and even false accusations”²⁶

many believers have inflicted incredible harm upon one another!

Since we all fall short of God’s glory and come from different social, economic, and political backgrounds, it should not come as a surprise that the “babes in Christ” quite easily offend each other. When offense occurs, we need to resist the urge to “fight fire with fire by repaying evil with evil”²⁷ but instead are forbear with one another. Ignatius is right to have said, “bear with all people, even as the Lord bears with you; endure in love, just as you now do ... if you love (only the) good disciples, it is of no credit to you.”²⁸ I am not saying that there is no place to admonish the sinful but merely that one should have a “long

²⁷ Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 160.

²⁸ Gary Steven Shogren, [1 & 2 Thessalonians](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 223.

fuse”²⁹ before attempting to discipline another and if vengeance is to be sought it must be left in the hands of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:6). So, let us head Apostle Paul’s teaching and live in peace with one another by admonishing the sinful, encouraging the timid, helping the weak, and being patient with those who occasionally miss the mark of Christ’s holiness!

²⁹ Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 159.