



1 Thessalonians

Christian Conduct & The Lord's Return

1 Thessalonians 5:12–15

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Introduction

After addressing the topics of the Rapture and Day of the Lord, Paul now begins to bring his epistle to a close. But there are still several lingering issues that Paul wishes to address. We will see these in the latter half of chapter five.

Exhortations Regarding Other Christian Responsibilities (5:12–22)

Paul typically includes a series of miscellaneous responsibilities at the conclusion of his epistles. While these may appear like a hobbled together list, they are no less important than the topics Paul has already addressed. There is a great deal we can learn about sanctification and Christian conduct in these verses. Paul lays out responsibilities toward three groups of people in this section: Christian leaders, other people, and God. We will address the first two groups in this study.

Responsibilities toward Christian Leaders (vv. 12–13)

As we consider the relationship between believers and Christian leaders, we must recognize that this is not the first relationship that Paul has addressed. Consider the other relational responsibilities that Paul has charged the Thessalonians with:

- 1) 4:1 — Toward themselves, personal purity
- 2) 4:10 — Toward other believers, a loving attitude
- 3) 5:12 — Toward church leadership, proper respect
- 4) 5:14 — Toward the weak, edification and comfort

There is an emphasis throughout on personal relationships. Regarding church leadership, Paul is urging the Thessalonians to have a proper attitude toward their leaders.

Respect for Christian Leaders (vv. 12–13a)

Paul's request in verse 12 begins with a plea or entreaty to follow this instruction. The action the believers were to take toward their leaders

was one of giving proper recognition, respect, and appreciation toward their leaders. This consideration is to be given to those who:

- 1) Labor among you — The word labor means to feel fatigue, to work hard, to toil, and to be wearied. Those who engage in the leadership roles of the church are toiling and wearying themselves for the spiritual benefit of the church. As such their labor should be recognized and respected.
- 2) Are over you — This phrase implies leadership. It speaks of those who have rank or a presiding function. Many times in our culture, you will hear of leaders being challenged and mocked. It is true that leaders are still fallible sinners. But those who have attained Christian leadership positions have presumably done so because of godly character, faithfulness, and hard work. Proper leadership should have an inherent level of respect accorded to it.
- 3) Admonish you — The word admonish carries the idea of cautioning or warning someone through instruction. Godly leaders will call our attention to things and warn us of dangers and pitfalls. Our society has a built-in knee-jerk reaction to rebel against authority, especially when someone tells us, “no!” But in this case, these admonitions are given for our good. Just as a father warns his child not to touch a hot pan on the stove, so also we should be quick to obey our spiritual leaders. They look out for our souls (Heb 13:17)!

The primary application of this would be toward men in pastoral and other leadership offices such as deacons. But we could also extend this to anyone exercising authority in the sphere of the church, e.g. worship leaders, Sunday school teachers, etc. God has set leaders over the church to accomplish the three things above. Consider how you have been helped by such spiritual leadership in your life. Verse 13a gives us the proper response toward these folks. They are to be esteemed:

- 1) Very highly — This is the highest form of comparison possible. It means “exceedingly abundantly” or “beyond all measure.” Notice some similar uses of this phrase: Paul prayed night and day *exceedingly* for the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:10), and God has the *abundant* ability to accomplish more than we ask or think (Eph 3:20). That is a very great abundance indeed!

- 2) In love — Esteem is to be given willingly, not out of constraint. Love does not need to be told what to do. Giving esteem should be a natural overflow of a person’s heart.
- 3) Because of their work — Keep in mind that God has called leaders to this role. Each member of the body of Christ has been gifted for service within the body. This means that no one person is better than another. But within the body, God has given some to lead, and their work is to be esteemed and respected. Don’t take their authority lightly!

Living in Peace with One Another (v. 13b)

Because of the placement of this statement relative to the previous instructions about leaders, I understand them to be related. It is possible that there were strained relations between the church leaders and the people in Thessalonica that led to strife. Our aim should be to have peace reign in our relationship with church leaders. After all, peace is one of the qualities that sets believers apart from a lost world that is full of strife.

Responsibilities toward Others (vv. 14–15)

In verses 14 and 15, Paul gives a string of six imperative commands that we are to follow in our relationships with weak believers and all people generally. Notice the six actions we are to take as believers:

- 1) Warning — This term carries the idea of cautioning, reproof, or instructing. These warnings are to be directed toward anyone who is unruly: the disorderly, disturbers of the peace, idle, lazy, insubordinate, or anyone else “out of line.” This also comes up in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 10–11. Who is doing the warning? In this context, it is all believers. But consider first some prerequisites to this type of activity:
 - a) Romans 15:14 suggests that those full of goodness and godly knowledge are able to admonish. Make sure you are able.
 - b) Galatians 6:1 tells us that those who are spiritual are to be involved in the restoration of a sinning brother. Problems will only increase if you have one unruly brother trying to deal with another unruly brother.

Another question we should ask ourselves is what the warning is

about. In this context, it is understood that unruly person is to be warned to act in an upright manner.

- 2) Comforting — Some people might be burdened by a heavy load. In these cases, comfort and encouragement are in order. This can be a fatherly kind of comfort (1 Thess 2:11) or comfort for a mourner (John 11:19, 31). The term fainthearted means “discouraged.” In a literal sense, it conveys the idea that someone feels small on the inside. This is not necessarily because of something we have done. Sometimes it is because we are facing a “Goliath” in our life.
- 3) Upholding — This means helping or supporting someone. The weak are those without strength. In this case it could refer either to those who are physically or spiritually weak. There are many such cases mentioned in Scripture: those spiritually weak in matters of salvation (Rom 5:6); a spiritually weak brother who is offended by eating meat offered to idols (1 Cor 8:7, 10); Paul, who was a man weak in presence (2 Cor 10:10); or a wife, who is called a weaker vessel (1 Pet 3:7). Whatever the case, believers should strive to uphold the weak.
- 4) Being Patient — Starting with this command, Paul expands the recipients to “all men.” For many of us, we could stand to learn the lesson of more patience. God was patient with us when we were living in unbelief and rebellion against Him. So must we be patient with others in love (1 Cor 13:4; 2 Pet 3:9).
- 5) Seeing — We are called upon to “see” or “recognize” a situation and not repay evil for evil. It is all too easy to seek revenge and paybacks. But revenge is not ours to seek (Heb 10:30). We are to respond in love.
- 6) Following — The opposite of repaying evil for evil is seeking good. We are to always pursue this, in every circumstance! This is true for those inside the church and those without. Here the same priority is given as in Galatians 6:10 — first the household of faith, then all!

Conclusion

As believers, we are called to proper relationships with those around us. Consider how you might improve your relationships by living respectfully, peaceably, and seeking good for all!

~AWB