

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Pattern to Follow"

1 Thessalonians 5:15

Introduction

1. This final chapter of the book is filled with helpful doctrine and practice. The first 11 verses relate to the day of the Lord as contrasted with the time of the rapture (4:13-18). The opening "but" indicates a change of subject.
2. Care and respect of church leaders is patent (vv. 12, 13). Leaders are called upon to help in the local assembly (v. 14). Admittedly, all the members of the body of Christ ought to relate to one another properly, but this is particularly true of those who have leadership responsibility.
3. The salient fact of being patient toward all (v. 14) is dramatically pursued. Indeed, a positive attitude and action are expected in personal relationships. All in the local assembly, most assuredly the leaders, are called to a specific direction. Here it is:

1. ATTENTION

The subject of this verse is not open to an optional treatment. It is something which demands strict personal concern. This is not a watchfulness over others, but a watchfulness over oneself. The verb "looking diligently" (Heb. 12:15) bears the same import. Human relationships are not the province of sociology, anthropology, or some other human discipline, but the concern of theology. Right views of the Scripture will give right views of human relationships. "Bitterness" and spiritual "defilement" are dangers which are to be avoided. To land up in such a mess is to fall short of God's grace (Heb. 12:15).

2. RETALIATION

a. People

The pronouns used here have the widest possible application. "None" and "any man" are references which cannot be limited. All believers are included in the admonition, not leaders alone. Furthermore, all men must mean that non-believers are involved in the sort of treatment suggested. A true child of God is to be concerned for his total personal contacts.

b. Practice

The negative is used here with the subjunctive form of the verb, hence purpose is in view. The attention expected will therefore result in an intent NOT to render evil

for evil. The verb means to "give back, recompense, or to pay." Similar statements are found elsewhere (Rom. 12:17; 1 Pet. 3:9). This concept is found in the Old Testament (Prov. 17:13; 20:22). A specific type of evil is mentioned in the Peter passage: railing or the use of abusive language. Therefore, anything which causes injury or works mischief of any kind is to be studiously avoided among the saints. They are to put their attention to it. The idea of exchange is noted by the preposition "for." It means "equivalence" and suggests that a price has been paid. There is a balance on the scales (cf. Matt. 5:38; Mark 10:45; Luke 11:11; John 1:16; Heb. 12:2).

3. DIRECTION

a. Stated

The adversative "but" is very strong. The use of the temporal particle "ever" notes that there are no exceptions. Defection from this is no valid excuse. The concern for proper behavior is unrelenting. The verb "follow" is a present tense imperative. It speaks of earnestness in activity. It is used of evil (Phil. 3:6) and of a good purpose (Phil. 3:12, 14). Other uses in the New Testament relate to hospitality (Rom. 12:13), peace (Rom. 14:19), and a variety of Christian ideals (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22).

b. Explained

In contrast with "evil," the positive injunction here is that "the good" be followed. The definite article specifies the character of activity concerned. The word "good" in this verse means something beneficial in contrast with intrinsic good (v. 21).

c. Applied

This pursuit of the good is as wide as the prohibition to do evil. This is supported by the phrase "both among yourselves and to all." Christians are expected to be those who are the most apt toward good in any situation. Every contact would leave the other person better and not worse in soul, body, and circumstances (cf. 4:12; Gal. 6:10).

Conclusion The exhortation to think positively toward all persons rather than negatively is in the Word. This cannot be denied. It is a principle of the grace of God (Rom. 6:14). While some may label this as legalism, it is clearly an epistle truth. Neglect of proper personal conduct is as unwarranted as corporate misconduct. God give us a passion and concern for doing what glorifies the Son of God and the Word of God.