

June 17, 2001 by Steve Brandon



Relationships with Others

1 Thessalonians 5:13b-15

Three Observations Relationships with All Relationships with Some

When I was a little boy, I remember learning the following song in Sunday school:

The church is not a building;
The church is not a steeple;
The church is not a resting place;
The church is people.

It may be simple, but it is exactly right in its theology. The church isn't merely a building or a place where people can come and rest. The church is people. We are in a section in 1 Thessalonians which deals with "Life in the church." In 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22, Paul instructs the Thessalonians with respect to all aspects of church life.

In verses 12,13a, Paul deals with how the people of the church ought to relate to the leaders of the church. (We dealt with that last time).

In verses 13b,14,15, Paul deals with how the people of the church ought to relate to each other.

In verses 16-22, Paul deals with how the people of the church ought to relate to God.

With respect to the text before us (verses 13b-15), we find that it is really quite simple. There are no difficulties in this text. It is straightforward. As a result, I have had a difficult time actually coming up with a message for you this evening, because it is so simple. However, let me exposit these words for you and press them to your conscience.

We will begin with the last phrase of verse 13.

1 Thessalonians 5:13b-15

Live in peace with one another. And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.

When we begin to examine the text before us, we notice that there are essentially seven commands of action in this passage. Allow me to point them out for you.

#1 - "Live in peace with one another" (verse 13).

#2 - "Admonish the unruly" (verse 14).

#3 - "Encourage the fainthearted" (verse 14).

#4 - "Help the weak" (verse 14).

#5 - "Be patient with all men" (verse 14).

#6 - "See that no one repays another with evil for evil" (verse 15).

#7 - "Always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men" (verse 15).

With these commands, Paul is attempting to guide the people in the church as to how to act. He instructs them with how they ought to conduct themselves with one another. He describes how their relationships ought to be characterized with each other.

Furthermore, in this text, in verse 14, he "urges" their obedience to these commands. Paul, as their spiritual leader, is once again, seeking to guide the church in the way it ought to go.

You remember that Timothy had returned to Paul to report how the church was doing. You remember that the church in Thessalonica was doing good. They were on the right path. They were doing the right things. Paul was very thankful to the Lord for that happened to the Thessalonians.

When Paul came and preached to them the saving message of Jesus Christ, they responded by receiving the gospel of God, repenting of their sins, and turning to God from idols. Furthermore, their salvation was proclaimed throughout the surrounding areas of Macedonia and

Achaia.

So when Paul comes in this passage and gives them these commands, he is coming as the loving pastor, seeking to direct the people in the church to behave properly toward one another.

Let's notice a few things, before we begin to examine each of these commands individually.

Three Observations

First observation:

Notice that each of these commands are commands of interaction.

You can't go into your closet and live these lessons out. They require your proximity to others in the church.

When Paul says, "live in peace with one another" (verse 13) you don't do this by secluding yourself and pretending there is peace. No, you do this by constantly being with others in the church in a manner that is characterized by unity and oneness, rather than strife and contention.

When Paul says, "be patient with all men," (verse 14) you do this by being with one another and demonstrating in your life a degree of patience.

When Paul says, "seek after that which is good for one another and for all men," (verse 15) you do this by being with others. You cannot seek after the good for one another by being apart from each other. This requires your constant interaction with others.

So, I would press upon you all, this evening, the priority of being with one another. Rock Valley Bible Church needs to be more than a Sunday evening church. We need to do what we can to be with one another throughout the week.

It has been a frustration of Yvonne and myself that we have been so far from you all. We are so much looking forward to moving to Rockford and making our home like grand central station, a place where you all are present and visit often.

As we develop strong relationships with each of you, may I encourage each of you to develop strong relationships with each other. Whatever it takes to be with each other, be with each other.

- Create opportunities to do things together.
- Longest day of the year party with the Brandons (every June 21st).
- Fourth of July party at Bowman Part (every 4th of July)
- Those of you who like to go to ball-games, go to ball-games together.
- Those of you who like to golf, golf.
- Those of you who like music, go to symphonies together.

Now, for some, that will be easy. Particularly, it will be easy if you have similar likes and dislikes. But, what is unique to the body of Christ is that our interests (Jesus Christ and His precious saving blood) ought to transcend all other worldly interests. Those in the church ought to interact with each other. There is no room for exclusion or exclusiveness within the body of Christ. I believe that God purposely has made the body of Christ to be diverse that we might be forced to realize where our unity lies. It doesn't lie in our own interests, but in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Second observation:

Some of these commands are universal and some are specific.

In other words, there are some commands here that ought to characterize all of our relationships within the church. But there are other commands that ought to characterize some of our relationships. For instance, here are the commands that ought to characterize all of our relationships:

- #1 - "Live in peace with one another" (verse 13).
- #5 - "Be patient with all men" (verse 14).
- #6 - "See that no one repays another with evil for evil" (verse 15).
- #7 - "Always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men" (verse 15).

The commands that ought to characterize some of our relationships are found in verse 14:

- #2 - "Admonish the unruly" (verse 14).
- #3 - "Encourage the fainthearted" (verse 14).
- #4 - "Help the weak" (verse 14).

To say it more succinctly, relationships with all should be characterized by all of these ...

1. Peace
2. Patience

3. Kindness
4. Goodness

Relationships with some should be characterized by one of these ...

1. Admonish some (if unruly)
2. Encourage some (if fainthearted)
3. Help some (if weak)

Third observation:

3. These commands are general commands of Christian living.

There is nothing special or mind-boggling that Paul brings out in these verses. Each of these commands are clearly communicated elsewhere in Scripture. Paul doesn't here reveal anything special to Christian living. He doesn't expose some great trick, or new insight. He merely repeats the old.

The words of our text this evening sound very much like Romans 12:14-18. It has the same "ring" to it ...

Romans 12:14-18

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

These same commands are duplicated many times in Scripture. I took each of these commands and found five other verses in the Bible that said the same thing (I arbitrarily stopped at five, I could easily have continued on). I will demonstrate this when we go through each of these characteristics.

Now that I have given you some general observations on these commands, let's dig into them a little bit. In doing so, I want to stress how universal each of these commands are.

Relationships with All

Relationships with all should be characterized by all of the following characteristics.

1. Peace (verse 13)

Mark 9:50 - "Be at peace with one another."

Romans 12:18 - "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

2 Thess. 3:16 - "Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all."

2 Cor. 13:11 - "live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

Heb. 12:14- "Pursue peace with all men."

In light of this evidence here, it is a shame that a common characteristic of churches is that there is contention and strife. The world knows of churches that have split into two different groups of people for sinful reasons. I have heard others speak to me against the church, because it cannot get along with each other.

The peace spoken about here is not like an Indian Peace treaty, where we simply agree not to attack. Neither is this peace a peace where people in the church are permitted to keep their distance and "agree to disagree."

Look closely at the verses above. We are told to "pursue peace" (Heb. 12:14). It should be our goal to create the unity in the bond of peace within the church (Eph. 4:2). If Christ Jesus created peace with Jew and Gentile, He certainly can keep and maintain the peace with us. For, as the Scripture says, "He Himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:14).

2. Patience (verse 14)

1 Cor. 13:4 - "Love is patient."

Eph. 4:2 - "with patience, ... be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Col. 1:11 - Paul prayed that the Colossians would be "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience."

Col. 3:12 - "Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

Gal. 5:22 - One part of the fruit of the spirit is patience.

I recall listening to the radio recently and hearing a psychologist introduce the term, "hurry sickness," by which he meant patience. However, in turning patience into a "sickness," he was taking away our culpability. But we must realize that patience is the art of concealing your impatience, which is sin. When you don't have patience, you have sin.

God continues to express His patience every day by demonstrating His mercy to us. As Peter wrote, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter. 3:9). Our God is longsuffering. The disciples of a patient Savior should be patient themselves.

John Plowman, in his simple wisdom, has said, "grin and bear it is the old-fashioned advice, but sing and bear it is a great deal better. ... The best remedy for affliction is submitting to providence. ... What can't be cured must be endured. ... If we cannot get bacon, let us bless God that there are still cabbages in the garden."

When something comes upon us and we are tempted to impatience, we must seek to change our perspective. Like the woman, who's car was stalled at a stoplight. She tried to get it started, but nothing would happen. The light turned green, and there she sat, angry and embarrassed, holding up traffic. The car behind could have gone around, but instead the driver added to her anger by laying on his horn. After another desperate attempt to get the car started, she got out and walked back to the honker. The man rolled down his window in surprise. "Tell you what," she said. "You go start my car, and I'll sit back here and honk the horn for you" (Rowell & Steffen, *Humor for Preaching & Teaching*, p. 95).

When tempted to impatience, we need to think of God's patience. Paul admonished those who are quick to pass judgment in this regard when he wrote, "do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). We need to think like A. W. Pink, who wrote, "It is truly amazing that He does not instantly strike dead those who so brazenly defy Him" (A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 64).

3. Kindness (verse 15)

Romans 12:17 - "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone."

1 Peter. 3:9 - "Don't return evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead."

Proverbs 20:22 - "Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you."

Proverbs 24:29 - "Do not say, 'Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me.'"

Luke 6:28 - "bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

I find it amazing how often this theme of "not paying back evil for evil" abounds in the pages of Scripture. Notice once again, however, that Jesus is our model for ethical behavior. We have seen that Jesus is our peace and that God is patient with us. Let's look at how Jesus didn't repay another evil for evil.

Peter writes, "while being reviled, He did not revile in return. While suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). We need to "consider Him who has endures such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that [we] may not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:3).

4. Goodness (verse 15)

Romans 12:21 - "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Luke 6:27 - "Love your enemies, do good to those who curse you."

Luke 10 - Parable of the good Samaritan.

Gal. 6:10 - "Let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

2 Tim. 2:24 - "Be kind to all"

Again, the example of Jesus is perfect. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ... I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11,14). As Jesus walked upon the earth, He spent much time healing and teaching others. He displayed nothing but good in all of His ministry. He was sinless in this regard.

This isn't something that we don't know. Even our children know this. I was speaking with one of my children this afternoon and she was having difficulty in being good. I asked my child, "who was the best boy that ever lived?" My child knew that it was Jesus our Lord.

May God fill our hearts with goodness.

We have seen what our relationships with all should be characterized by. Now let's focus our attention to our ...

Relationships with Some

With reference to verse 14, Tedd Tripp has written, "differing conditions in the hearer require differing forms of speaking" (Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, p. 104). This describes exactly what the apostle Paul sought to communicate as well.

Paul writes, "Admonish the unruly; encourage the fainthearted; help the weak" (verse 14). Notice that each of these situations describe somebody in trouble and distress. The unruly are rebellious and out of God's will. The fainthearted and weak are powerless and need help.

1. Admonish if unruly

2 Thess. 3:15 - For those who are dis-obedient to the instructions of Paul, he told them "do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

Matt. 18:15 - "If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private."

James 5:19 - "If any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins."

1 Cor. 4:14 - Paul modeled this. Writing a letter of rebuke, "I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children."

Proverbs 25:12 - "Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprove to a listening ear."

Romans 15:14 - "I am convinced that you yourselves are ... able to admonish one another."

The Greek word used here for admonish is *nouqetew*, (*noutheteo*), which literally means, "to set in the mind." It is a word that describes a verbal rebuke, which is aimed at correcting false behavior. The word for unruly is *ataktouV* (*ataktous*), which describes those out of step or out of line.

Picture with me a classroom filled with children. All of them are attentive to the teacher except for one, rebellious troublemaker, who seems to resist every instruction of the teacher. When everybody is asked to stand, this child remains seated. When all are asked to repeat something after the teacher, this child is silent. When the children are told only to use a little glue for the art project, this child dumps the entire bottle of glue on the paper and refuses to clean it up.

Those in the church can act this way as well. When the leaders are seeking to lead the church in one direction, those who are unruly will resist the plans of the church. This is true whether they are actively rebellious or passively apathetic to the cause. When characters are like this in the church, Paul encourages us to verbally reprove such an individual. They need to be dealt with in a harsh manner.

We must note, that the harshness isn't for casting them out, but rather to call them in for the good of all. John MacArthur has said that these individuals need to be told to "get with the program" (John MacArthur, *Anxiety Attacked*, chapter 6). This is not only for their own good, but it is for the sake of the whole body as well. Notice Paul's tone in 2 Thess. 3:15 for those who are dis-obedient. He said, "do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

2. Encourage if fainthearted

Heb. 3:13 - "Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Acts 14:22 - To the young churches, Paul was "encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'"

Luke 22:32 - "I have prayed for you (Peter), that your faith may not fail."

Matt. 6:30 - Jesus encouraged His disciples, "If God so arrays the grace of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?"

Gal. 6:1 - "If a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."

Those who are fainthearted are literally, "small souled" or *oligoyoucouV* (*oligopsychous*). This is the only time in the Bible that this particular word is used. However, on several occasions, Jesus used a similar term to describe His fearful and cowering disciples. He called them *oligopistoi* (*oligopistoi*), which is "little faith." When a storm arose on the sea, the disciples were of little faith (Matt. 8:26). When Peter was walking on the water, but began to doubt, Jesus called him a man of little faith (Matt. 14:31). When the disciples were hungry and wondering where their next meal would come from (even after seeing the multitudes fed), Jesus called them men of little faith (Matt. 16:8)

We need to encourage these people. We need to come along side of these people, put our arms around them and feel with them. We know how parents hug and hold their children, when they fall and hurt themselves. So the picture here.

Within the church, there are those who are fearful and cowardly. There are those who want their church to remain static and similar and comfortable. But, when the church seeks to engage upon something new, they fear the unknown and resist the change in the church. They are not rebellious, but fearful. They need to be comforted. As Jude calls us, we must "have mercy on some who are doubting" (Jude 22).

3. Help if weak

Romans 14:1 - "Accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions."

Rom. 15:1 - "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength."

Heb. 12:12 - "Strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble."

Acts 20:35 - "Help the weak"

James 1:27 - "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress."

When the Bible describes those who are weak, it may use the word in several ways. It may mean, "weak in faith" (like Romans 14:1; 15:1 above) or those who are physically weak (as in Heb. 12:12; Acts 20:35; James 1:27) above. In either situation, we are to help them in their infirmity.

For those who are weak in faith, we need to help them. In Romans 14, Paul describes those who are weak as those who think that they need to limit their diet to each vegetables only (14:2-4). We are to help them by accepting them and not passing judgment upon them (14:1). Similarly is the issue of sabbath days (14:5-6). We need to accept those who are weak and seek not to offend them in things which are of no importance.

For those who are weak in body, we need to help as well. Ministry to shut ins and those who are sick are of vital importance for this verse.

Conclusion

With these seven admonitions, we really see a picture of the church. Here is my dream someday. I would love for a visitor to come to Rock Valley Bible Church and after the service, come up front here and ask me about the church. I would like to put my arms around this individual

here and point out how all of these relationships exist in the church.

I would point over here to my left and say, "These two people had a major conflict, but in Christ Jesus, today they have peace with each other. Look how they sat near one another this morning and are fellowshiping now."

I would point over there toward the back and say, "Look at these two people. They are neighbors. This one has been patiently witnessing to the other for years. Finally, in the Lord's mercy, the other has come to faith. They are right now in a discipleship relationship with the older in the Lord patiently instructing the new believer."

I would say, "Look here in the front. There are three families that are seeking to reach out to Rockford's West side. They volunteer down at the mission and are seeking to help in any way they can in that most difficult area of the city."

Then, I would point out to my right and say, "See those two people talking there? I know that he is being confronted with his resistance to our most recent church planting effort. He would rather see a large building being built and has become resistant to the things that we are doing. He is being exhorted to keep the unity of the church by joining up in our plans."

Noticing the returning college student, I would tell our visitor, "See Joe? He has been having a difficult time during his first semester in college. The professors are trying to rip apart his faith. Right now, his faith is weak, but see all of his friends around him? They are seeking to encourage him in the faith and pick him up."

Pointing to the back again, I would say, "See the two ladies praying together? The one was most recently widowed. The other had recently reached out to her and loved her. She is really going through a difficult time right now. The church has been helping her with all types of things to help her during her difficult time."

That is a picture of the church. All of our relationships are characterized by peace, patience, kindness, and goodness. Some of our relationships have been characterized by admonishing, encouraging, or helping, depending upon the need of the moment. May God grant for us to see Rock Valley Bible Church become this type of church.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 17, 2001 by Steve Brandon.
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