

1st Thessalonians

"It's All in the Family"

(1st Thessalonians 5:12-28)

Some Context: Paul's favorite name for believers was brethren. He saw his audience, the called-out ones in Thessalonica as family. Each one was born again by the Spirit of God and possessed God's nature, now having the ability to desire Christ in their life. It is tragic when believers do not see the local church as important. No family is perfect. Every believer still has a sin nature that coexists with their new nature. Likewise, no local church is perfect either. But that is no reason not to be part of the local church. First off, God's word tells us not to forsake assembling (Hebrews 10:25) and Acts 2 gives a wonderful picture of how the first church devoted themselves to God and each other. Believers in Paul's time and today need to do the same. Any child of God needs the church family if he is to grow, develop their gifts, and serve God. It is within this truth that Paul closed his first letter to the Thessalonians. In his closing Paul identifies and describes the essentials of a thriving church family and how our local churches glorify God.

The Text: ¹² We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵ See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil. ²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. ²⁵ Brothers, pray for us. ²⁶ Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. ²⁷ I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. ²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (ESV)

Family Leadership (5:12-13): Without leadership the family falls apart. God has ordained an order for the family: The father is the head of the home, the mother stands with him in love and cooperation, and the children obey their parents. To disturb this order is to ask for trouble. Just as the family has a God-ordained order, so does the local church. Paul discusses the responsibilities that the brethren have toward their spiritual leaders: (1) accept them, (2) appreciate them, (3) love them, and (4) obey them.

Family Partnership (5:14-16): The purpose of the local church is two-fold; (1) fellowship, encouragement, and support among believers, sometimes referred to as discipleship, and (2) fellowship of believers in ministry and outreach, sometimes referred to as evangelism. Family members must learn to minister to one another. The older more mature members must teach the younger members and encourage them in tough times. The spiritual leaders are

supposed to equip the members to do the work of the ministry. This all-important work is difficult and laborious, but also essential and rewarding. Paul, in an effort to help the spiritual leaders of the Thessalonian church, and the body as a whole, identified some special members who need spiritual help: (1) The unruly or the idle (careless and out of line), (2) The feebleminded or the fainthearted (This has nothing to do with mentality but rather the outlook. These are the ones that easily give up when times are tough.) and the weak (Those that had not grown strong in the faith, often they are uncomfortable with the liberties that they have in Christ.) Discipling each of these requires patience and self-control on the part of the spiritual leader. Spiritual leaders must watch their motives (Do not be vindictive but seek to do good). Spiritual leaders must be joyful always keeping the big picture in mind (God loves us!). Look at these four spiritual characteristics that Paul has mentioned: (1) love (v13), (2) joy (v16), (3) peace (v13) and (4) patience (v14). Then compare these to the identified fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. These characteristics cannot be manufactured in the natural man. They become part of our personality as we yield to the Holy Spirit and permit him to control us.

Family Worship (5:17-28): There are five elements of the worship ministry of the local church: (1) Prayer (v17), (2) Praise (v18), (3) The Word of God (v19-21), (4) Godly Living (v22-24), and (5) Christian Fellowship (v25-28). Regarding prayer, Paul says that we are to pray without ceasing. To pray without ceasing means "constantly occurring" not continuously occurring. Think of Nehemiah. The Book of Nehemiah begins and ends with prayer and in between Nehemiah often sends up quick prayers to heaven to ask for God's help. Palm 37:4 tells us that God knows the desires of our heart. Psalm 10:17 and Psalm 21:12 remind us that he responds even when we are silent.

Secondly, regarding praise Paul calls us to give thanks to God. We use psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to express our thankfulness to him (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16). Ephesians points to our being filled with the Holy Spirit while Colossians points to our being filled with the Word of God. We need both! The Spirit applies the Word of God to our lives as expressed in our praise to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Additionally, regarding the word of God Paul lays down principles that are applicable for then and now, even though how the Thessalonian church and the local church today heard from God by different means. Without the Word of God there is no certain revelation from God. 2nd Timothy 3:16 reveals that Scripture are the very words breathed out by God. Paul provides three admonitions to the Thessalonians (1) Do not quench, (2) test everything, (3) Hold fast to good. At that time, the written word of God was incomplete. Consequently, the Holy Spirit gave prophecy, often manifested in tongues and gifts of knowledge. If the church restrained the speakers, they might be guilty of quenching the Spirit. On the other hand, if they believed everything, they might be obeying false spirits. Today we have a completed word of God. But the admonitions still apply. If we fail to seek to understand, and do not give Scripture its due diligence, we can become lazy Christians, and miss what God has for us.

Furthermore, regarding Godly living, Paul provided a "do" and a "don't." Paul had told the Thessalonians to live expecting Jesus to return at any moment. Expecting to see Jesus is a great motivation for holy living. In Godly living we become more and more like Christ. Paul speaks from both a negative and a positive aspect; abstain from evil and be blameless in your sanctification. There are three aspects of Sanctification: (1) Positional, (2) Practical, and (3) Perfect. The positional aspect occurs at conversion. The practical aspect we experience throughout our Christian walk. The perfect will come when we receive our heavenly bodies and are freed from any connection with sin.

Finally, regarding Christian fellowship, we must remember that the saints must minister to each other. The Holy kiss that Paul speaks of is what we do during our "stepping out to greet one another" time during our Sunday service. We need to have a close connection with those believers with whom we routinely rub shoulders with. Notice how Paul establishes the importance of the word of God in Christian fellowship. It should always govern our conduct.

Next Week: Easter Sunday – Breakfast in the Gathering Lounge