

A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians Week Four

1 Thessalonians 5:15-2 Thessalonians 1:4

Day One

15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. 16 Be joyful always;

v. 15 – Almost all Paul's letters follow the same format. The first half of the letter is theological or doctrinal; the second half is practical. This letter is no exception. As Paul ended this letter, he presented a "do" list for the Thessalonians. Here he instructed that no one should back a wrong with a wrong. Wow! That's a hard one. It's so difficult not to react to an insult with an insult, or a wrong deed with another wrong deed.

Paul's standard was that we are to try and be kind to everyone, not just those who are kind to us. But of course, Paul didn't teach anything that Jesus hadn't taught as well. Remember: Jesus is our model and He certainly fulfilled this verse and gave us guidelines of how to do the same:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48).

Take verse 15 and the passage from Matthew above and do a quick check. **Are you being kind to everyone, even those who are your "enemies?" If not, where do you need to repent and follow God's agenda and not your own?**

v. 16 – This is a simple, straightforward verse—"be joyful always." One could ask: **What part of "joyful" or "always" don't you understand?** Being joyful must be a choice or Paul would not have commanded us to maintain it. Joy isn't based on circumstances; it's based on position—being in Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Rejoice *in* the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4).

We rejoice not because we love everything that is going on in our life, but because we are experiencing everything in our life while we are in Christ. We rejoice "in" the Lord. **Are you "in the Lord?" If you are, then are you rejoicing? Why or why not? What are you prepared to do about it?**

Day Two

17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt.

v. 17 – Paul urged the Thessalonians to pray continually. How can one fulfill that command? I find myself talking to the Lord all day. I'm not praying every minute, but I am asking God for help, insight, wisdom and direction. There is a classic book entitled *Practicing the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence. He urged his readers to cultivate a sense of God's presence in everything they did, even menial tasks.

I do, however, think there should be planned seasons of prayer with some fasting. **How is your prayer life? Are you happy with its quality and quantity? If not, what can you do about it realistically?** If you aren't praying regularly, don't set a goal to pray an hour every day. But perhaps you can pray for 5-10 minutes, two or three times a day. Start there and establish some patterns and discipline, then increase as you have some success.

v. 18 – Paul did not write to give thanks *for* all things, but give thanks *in* all things. There's a big difference between the two. There are some bad things that happen for which you should not give thanks. But while going through them, you can be thankful to God that He is in control, that He will work for good in those things and that you are alive. Being thankful in all things also keeps you open to the fact that, while the thing you are going through is not good, you may not see everything that you need to see at this point in time. An attitude of gratitude allows God to reveal to you His plan in the midst of difficulties. It's another way to practice the presence of God mentioned in the previous verse.

vs. 19&20 – In my experience, the Spirit can work in ways that make us uncomfortable. I have seen some so enamored with the work of the Spirit that they tolerate the bizarre without any questions. Then I have seen others so paranoid that something may happen that is emotional or out of their control that they legislate what can and cannot happen where spiritual things are concerned—both in their personal and church lives.

I think the answer lies in a balance between the two. We should be open to however the Spirit wants to move, but we must judge what has happened and is happening. We cannot have contempt for the ways that God may move amongst us and yet we must judge the prophecies and other spiritual gifts that must and should operate when God's people assemble. And those who operate in the gifts must be open to the evaluation of spiritual people who give them feedback and input concerning their spiritual gifts and how they manifest.

I'm always concerned when there is prophecy and it isn't judged and evaluated. Don't *ever* receive from someone else what they believe God is saying to you without taking

time to evaluate it and ask God for His perspective and interpretation. Don't *ever* relinquish the control of your life to anyone apart from God and His Spirit. At the same time, don't just sit back if you determine that God has spoken to you through someone else. Now you must act and see what your role is in making it happen.

Day Three

21 Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil.

v. 21 – Paul urged the church not to be naïve where spiritual things are concerned. He wanted them to check things out and make sure the thing they experienced was from the Lord. It is possible to be deluded and deceived where spiritual things are concerned, as we have seen from past studies. It never hurts to pray, seek counsel and pray some more, especially when it comes to prophecy that was mentioned in the previous verse.

Paul warned of this danger on several occasions:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Timothy 4:2-5).

I pray regularly that God will keep me from error. As I teacher I pray that my material may be relevant and helpful. I don't want to pursue dumb things that will draw attention to me and not to Jesus. I also want people to grow as a result of my work. The more in have studied the Word, the more restricted I have felt as I teach and interpret, guiding others through God's word. Yet while I have restricted myself to the Word, I have been freed to behold the wonders therein:

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law (Psalm 119:18).

v. 22 – I'm not sure that Paul was referring to the usual "evils" as we interpret them: lust, greed and such. I think the context here is the evil that comes from people who introduce strange doctrines and unbiblical emphases. Paul instructed Titus:

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned (Titus 3:8-11).

At the end of the day, I can't be responsible for anyone else but me. I must develop a ministry philosophy that takes into account what, how and who I will teach. It must also encompass who I will teach and what my values are. **With that in mind, isn't it time that you developed a ministry philosophy? Do you have ministry values?** Spend some time today writing them down.

Day Four

23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

v. 23 – God is the one who works in our lives to make us conform to the image of Christ. While we submit to leaders and those who work among us, we must never lose focus that only God can make us the person we need to be. And He is the God of peace. That means God is peace Himself—there is no turmoil in or around Him. He also gives peace and is the source of our contentment and joy. And He is the great reconciler, who can even make our enemies be at peace with us:

When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him (Proverbs 16:7).

And God is our sanctifier—He makes us holy and useful for His purposes. Notice that Paul wanted the reader to be sanctified in spirit, soul and body. God is working in your life to perfect all three areas and not just your spirit. **So is your body being sanctified? How about your soul—the emotions, mind and thoughts?** God wants to do a complete work in you and not just get you saved. Once you are saved, there is still plenty of work to do on your speech, thoughts, eating habits, and your ability to relate to others.

v. 24 – God is faithful, oh so faithful! What He promises, He will do. I love the hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness,” especially the line that states, “There is no shadow of turning in Thee. Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not.” God will sanctify you—change into a new and better version of who you are—if you allow Him to do so. And even when you resist, God is working to break down your resistance:

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

Can you thank God today for His faithfulness? Perhaps you should list some of the ways that God has been faithful. For the 31 years I have served Him, God has never abandoned me financially, although there were lean times. God has watched over and provided for my children as well. He has maintained my health and the health of my family. Oh, great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me. **If you know that hymn, why not stop and sing it right now?**

Day Five

25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

v. 25 – Paul was constantly mindful of his need for prayer support. He wasn't too shy or humble to ask for prayer. He was more specific concerning what he wanted them to pray for on two other occasions:

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should (Colossians 4:2-4).

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

Paul was always concerned about his mission and the message. What is your mission? Do you have adequate prayer covering? I have a place on my website where people can sign up for a monthly prayer letter that I send out. I only want people praying who want to pray, so that is why they must go through some trouble to register. So at this point, I have about 50 people who pray. **What can you do to increase your prayer support?** If you would like to receive that monthly prayer letter, you can register at <http://www.purposequest.com/pq-prayer-list.htm>.

v. 26 – To the western mind, the thought of a kiss between believers, especially between men, is a foreign concept. When I travel to the Middle East and some parts of Africa, a kiss is much more accepted. **But what was Paul saying here? What is the principle we should apply?** Paul always saw the believers as family, worthy of some special greeting. We shouldn't just show up for a church service or fellowship time without trying to “connect with” and greet other saints, recognizing our relationship with them. Today we could hug or shake hands and I think we would be living in the spirit of what Paul meant here.

So are you connected to the people with whom you worship and fellowship? Do you see them as special? Do they know you? Do you know them? And do you go out of your way to greet the brothers and sisters, acknowledging your relationship with them through the Father?

v. 27 – For some reason, Paul felt that he had to give a solemn command for the letter to be read to everyone. Perhaps there were some in leadership who were holding divergent views, especially about the resurrection, and they would have wanted to suppress Paul's message. Or maybe Paul wanted to make sure that they proactively distributed the letter to all the believers in the region.

v. 28 – Paul finished his letter the same way he began: wishing grace on the readers. Oh that we all would have the same goal: that contact with each of us would result in grace for others from start to finish. I am writing this in St. Louis, where I spoke at a church for the first time. I was praying as I came, “Lord, help me to be a blessing to the people. Help me to connect. Don’t let me put them under a burden or confuse them. I want to challenge them, Lord, but I want to thank you that I came when it’s all over!” **Is that your goal when you encounter others? Do people run to you or from you when they see you coming to give them their “holy kiss”?** My goal is to have people run to me and to want to hear what I have to say. By doing this, I think I am walking in the spirit of the apostle Paul.

Day Six

1:1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

v. 1 – Paul opened with a greeting from Silas and Timothy. One of Paul’s governing values was to travel with a team. He was seldom alone, especially in the early days before he went to Rome and was under house arrest there. I think there is wisdom in teams for both ministry and business. **So do you know who your team is? What role do you play on the team? What are your strengths? If you are the leader, what are you investing in your team members to make them more effective and successful? Do you feel like you have to lead at all times, or can you follow someone else as they function in their gift or strength?**

We are a bit too infatuated with the strong personality leader in the modern world. Yes, Paul did great things. **But could he have done as much if it wasn’t for the others around him? And what about you? Are you waiting for that “strong leader” to come along and save your company or ministry? Are you that strong leader, trying to be all things to all people, having all the answers?** I have a favorite saying: “All of us are smarter than one of us.” I also like to say, “All of us are more spiritual than one of us.” If you believe those statements, are you living them in every day life?

Paul always gave credit, however, to the “top team” made up of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What Paul did, he did for God, directing the people to God, so they could enjoy their fellowship with God. I have been recently challenged to relate all my teaching to Jesus, just like Paul did. I realized that I had preached whole messages and never mentioned Jesus’ name once. I am making a conscious effort to change that.

v. 2 – Paul blessed the church with grace and peace, but he knew he wasn’t the source for that blessing. It wasn’t in his power to grant the grace and peace he wanted them to have. So he again turned their attention to the Father and the Son, who were the sources of the church’s blessings. I just returned from a ministry trip, and I could sense the love that God had for the people. I tried as best I could to help them sense and appreciate that

love, and to be a source of grace and peace from God for the people. I'm not sure how effective I was in doing that, but that was my aim.

I go to many churches where the people greet one another, saying "Grace and peace." I wonder if they mean it? I also wonder if they are people that God can use as bearers of His grace and peace? **How about you? Do you want to be a source of God's grace and peace for others today? How can you manifest that blessing to others? To your supervisor? Family? Fellow workers? Brothers and sisters in Christ? To whom can you extend grace today?** Perhaps it is even to someone who isn't worthy of God's grace. If so, give it to them anyway! Maybe you'll meet someone who is troubled or in distress. Then give them God's peace, the peace that passes all understanding! If you do, you will be walking not only the spirit of Paul, but also in the Spirit of Jesus!

Day Seven

3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. 4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

v. 3 – The Thessalonians distinguished themselves by excelling in faith and love. Both faith and love are action words; they are not doctrine words. **Are you faith and love growing? How can you measure that to know for sure?** When I started my business, I determined to help as many people as possible. That is why I started my website, along with The Monday Memo and this Bible study. I have invested hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars to do all this. Why? Because I wanted a practical expression of faith and love. And it has been great! I have learned so much and received so much in return.

What can you do to manifest your faith and love? You can't base this on feeling or convenience. It has to be a conscious decision to pursue excellence as a follower of Jesus. And Jesus isn't asking you to do anything He wasn't willing to do:

People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak" (Mark 7:37).

v. 4 – Not only did the Thessalonians excel in faith and love, but they did it in the midst of persecutions and trials. They didn't wait for their circumstances to improve before they decided to do good deeds. They obeyed God in spite of their own situation. **What could you do today if you stopped looking at the conditions you are in? What if you decided today to be radical for Jesus?**

Yesterday I met with a young man who had requested a counseling session. Normally I charge for such meetings, but I gave it away to him. I also bought my pastor lunch and listened and counseled him concerning some church management issues. Today I will go serve at a college for which I teach and serve on the board of directors. And there were

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times when doing that has taxed my time and resources, but I want to excel in faith and love. I challenge you to have the same attitude and make it your aim to focus on what you can do for Jesus today and every day, regardless of how you feel or what you are going through. **Can you do that?** I hope you find it in your heart to say yes.