

March 7, 2021
Sunday Evening Service
Series: 1 Thessalonians
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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SEEK TO DO GOOD FOR ONE ANOTHER
1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

Modern concepts of “church” comprise a very broad array of conflicting ideas. To some people, going to church means attending a formal meeting at which multiple prayers are read, a choir dressed in robes sings an anthem, an organist skillfully plays a classical piece that sounds religious, and an orator stands behind an elevated pulpit and waxes eloquently about the church’s responsibility in current events. Why do people attend such meetings? Ask them and they might tell you it makes them feel good to participate in something traditionally religious.

On the other end of the spectrum, a person’s idea of church might be meeting with a vast array of normal looking people to be entertained by the same kind of music they and their unsaved peers listen to throughout the week. That idea is much like the church gathering a friend told me about where the band played Pink Floyd’s 1981 rock tune *Money* for the offertory. And to make matters worse the pastor complimented them. That is some people’s idea of “church.” Ask the people who gather in such places why they do it and you will probably hear something like, “It makes me feel really good.”

There are dozens of other opinions that fall between those two extremes. But what is church? What is the purpose of church? What is acceptable church? The only way to properly answer questions like that is to check in with the Builder of the Church. His name is Jesus. What is Jesus’s purpose for the Church? What does He say is acceptable? One might begin to answer questions like that by presupposing that whatever Jesus Christ builds is going to reflect His character.

Indeed, the earliest statements Jesus the builder made to the very guys to whom He would leave the first stages of building were things like: *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:9-14).*

Oh! We should expect that church is a gathering of people who make us feel good. Well, yes, sort of. Except that Jesus’s description of feeling good, the means for feeling good, and the reason for feeling good are quite a bit different from those kinds of feelings that emanate from our fleshly hearts that are so prone to being deceitful and downright sick (Jeremiah 17:9).

The true and acceptable goal for us who are part of the true Church must be to be conformed to and wholly identified with Christ. Then, because we are conformed to the Church’s Head, we will love according to His character and standard. In that condition, we will discover that ministry in the Body of Christ is not at all about how I feel. It is about what I think and do that will help others become more like Christ, the Head. In a word, the Lord’s instruction from this text simply requires that we do good for the brothers and sisters in Christ.

Because of the shortness of the text, we have time and opportunity to focus on almost every word of the text. We will discover that almost every word is instructive.

Patient Encouragement (v.14).

We are taught in the opening statement that it is good to urge the brothers (v.14a). Notice who is involved in this work. The plural pronoun “we” most likely refers to Paul, Silas, Timothy, and maybe Luke and others who typically were part of the team. They were servants that Christ chose and equipped to lay the foundation of the early Church. They were not intrinsically better than the people in the church at Thessalonica. Rather, it was just part of God’s plan for eternity that Paul and his friends would be responsible to oversee and

take charge. It was okay that in God's plan, God would communicate instruction through mere men.

The other group in this statement is "you brothers." This word points up the distinction in contrast to people in Thessalonica in general. The brothers (naturally including sisters) were all the people in the church at Thessalonica. God chose for them to hear the gospel through Paul and the team. God drew them into reconciliation with Himself through faith in Christ. They then became the local expression of the Church in Thessalonica. God's plan required that they be taught, instructed, and would respond to the instruction.

What is involved in the call to the people in the Church? The word translated *urge* is that very common word *parakaleo*, which means most basically to call alongside. It is found 104 times in the New Testament. Almost half of the occurrences (50) are Paul's uses. The word has a very broad range of meaning, a full dozen different applications. The array of meanings cover, "to call to one's side, call for, summon, to address, speak to, call to, call upon, exhort, comfort, encourage, instruct, teach, entreat, admonish, beg, beseech, console, encourage, and strengthen."

In this case, Paul entreats, beseeches, calls upon the believers to: 1) Heed instruction; 2) Make a choice; and 3) Take action. That is a typical request for all of us when we receive instruction from God. After receiving God's instruction, we are not the same as we were before receiving it. Knowledge implies responsibility.

Then what did Paul urge the brothers to do? We are to *admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all (v.14b)*. Notice there are four required courses of action. First, we are to admonish the idle. To admonish is warn, especially to warn someone of dangerous consequences if they insist on pursuing their course. It is to instruct or advise regarding proper behavior. Admonition is often not readily or graciously received because, quite simply, it is a fellow human telling you to stop doing something or start doing something. It is a compound word that describes the action of laying down in orderly fashion evidence that appeals to the mind.

This is an ongoing command, that is, to be a characteristic of life in the Body of Christ. This is a fellow Christian coming to you and addressing an area of your life in which you are obviously coming up short. Not regarding another person's opinion but

regarding the standard and authority of God's Word as your habits and chosen lifestyle falls short. We admonish when something is clearly wrong. For example, admonition looks like, "You need to quit taking the Lord's name in vain." Or we might admonish when something is lacking. We might say to someone, "When you joined the church, you publicly acknowledged that you would attend all the regularly scheduled services except for reasons acceptable to the Lord. Get with it." We admonish the ignorant, those who don't know. Like Paul did these Thessalonian believers regarding last times events. We admonish the rebels, those who do know but don't want to do what they know.

Admonitions like that are to be given to the idle. In the church at Thessalonica, there were people who could work but did not want to work. In light of the context, it probably addresses people who were neglecting their daily responsibilities because they were fixated on the Lord's return.

The admonition of this first letter didn't fix the problem, so Paul grew a bit more direct and detailed in the second letter. *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12).*

The second thing we do is encourage the faint of heart. This word means to console, comfort, encourage. Again it is a present tense imperative which describes a characteristic of life in the Body of Christ. Each of us is to be actively encouraging the faint of heart. This practice is quite different from admonish because the circumstances are quite different. Here we are dealing with the *faint*

of heart which translates one interesting Greek word. Literally translated the word means “little souled.” It speaks of people who are timid. They are people who have become discouraged and maybe despondent. Possibly some of the people were reacting adversely (but understandably) to the persecution they faced for becoming Christians.

Sometimes our fellow Christians become discouraged because they cannot live up to what they perceive to be a righteous life. Often we are discouraged with current events, circumstances beyond our control. Find them, comfort them, build them up in the faith, strengthen them with the promises of God.

Third, we are to help the weak. We fellowship with brothers and sisters who are weak. The word means to be unable or describes a condition of limited capacity. But sadly the word does not speak of physical weakness. Most of the time this word applies to moral or righteous limitations. Those uses are found in the secular Greek because this word shows up only here in the New Testament. But, as is often the case, the secular Greek use sheds light on the New Testament meaning. Therefore, we conclude that the weak person is one who struggles with sin. All of us struggle with, wrestle against sin. But some people are defeated by particular sins.

Or picture the new Christian in Thessalonica who previously engaged in many of the typical sins of the pagan Roman culture. Now suddenly, he has new desires to live righteously. But all around him are the temptations that appeal to his flesh. And maybe he even has friends, acquaintances or co-workers who tempt him intentionally or unintentionally. People like that need our help.

We are to “hold them up.” The word means to get over against, to come up beside the person and support them. Picture an injured athlete being helped off the field by his teammates who are holding him up. This is not an emotional tuck under the chin, or an occasional pep talk, or you giving advice out of all your human wisdom. This is coming alongside the person with prayer and instruction and encouragement from God’s Word.

Finally, we are to be patient with all. This is more of an umbrella command. It can mean that we are to be patient with every person in our sphere of influence. Or we are to be patient with everyone in the church. Or we are to be patient with people in these

particular relationships who we admonish, encourage, and help. To be patient is to be long-suffering. The word means to be long in temper or able to hold your temper. It implies a difficult or trying situation.

Relationships with other people can be very trying. In light of these commands and requirements, in light of our very limited experience of success in such matters, we might wonder how Jesus is able to build His Church at all. On one hand, you have all these people in the local assembly who are really not interested in admonishing, encouraging, or helping each other get victory over difficulty and sin in order to become more like Christ.

On the other hand, when you do attempt to admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, and help the spiritually weak, you get stiff-armed. Suddenly, you discover that your sincere desire to help is not appreciated at all. The person who needs admonishing takes offense that you would have the audacity to imply that he or she has a problem. The person who needs encouraging is not only timid toward circumstances but afraid to be open and receive your help. The person who needs help confronting spiritual deficiencies or sin is deathly afraid that if they let you help, you will uncover something that they have kept covered for years.

So, in light of those kinds of responses, it is easy to become impatient and just give up. In fact, there is the temptation to pay back the person who stiff-arms your desire to help.

Not Vengeance But Good (v.15).

Vengeance is not ours. Therefore, the instruction, *see that no one repays anyone evil for evil (v.15a)*. Repayment is vengeance. The problem is that someone has paid you with evil. The word for evil basically means bad. Someone has dealt with you harmfully, incorrectly, harshly, or in a way you perceive to be damaging. Things like that happen very easily in relationships. Sometimes the “bad” is perceived, sometimes it is actual. Contrary to a popular conclusion, perception is not truth. Truth is truth.

The natural, fleshly response to someone handing you a plate full of “bad” is to add to it and hand it back. But repayment, vengeance, belongs to God alone. Consider His promises.

“Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.” For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants (Deuteronomy 32:35-36a). For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:30-31). Therefore, Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

No one has the “repayment” option. The command is, “See that someone not give off bad in place of bad.” Who is supposed to “see” to this? All are to be watching out against that sin (*see that*). When it becomes obvious that someone is being vengeful, we are to intervene by admonishing, or encouraging not to do that, or helping the person to see that it is sin.

So what does vengeance look like if it is obvious? Sometimes a person is so angry he might say something like, “I don’t get mad. I get even.” Or she might confide in her friend that she is going to pay back perceived wrong. More often among Christian people who know vengeance is wrong, the pay-back attitude is kept inside, brooding, festering, making the person bitter. But eventually it comes out in wrong attitudes and reactions, such as passive aggressive behavior. It often takes the form of, “Hi, how are you?” “I’m fine.” But that is the extent of the conversation, because pay back doesn’t allow for communication. That is not to be tolerated in the Body of Christ.

Rather, we are to seek to do good toward others. *But always seek to do good to one another and to everyone (v.15b)*. So what constitutes “good”? Do we determine what is good based on our culture’s opinion? Is good whatever our peers decide it is? Do we conclude the definition of good based on the latest book or blog? Is it entirely up to you and your feelings to decide what constitutes good? Or do we appeal to God’s righteousness as the standard of good, the thing we will always seek for one another?

At the same time, we run the danger of reducing “good” to a list of rules you can check off. We need to learn and understand that “good” is that which conforms to the character of God. And thoughts, actions, reactions that conform to God’s character become more and

more natural to those who are in fellowship with their Savior seeking to be conformed to Him, their point of identification.

I have legitimate concern for Christians who formulate their life-view based on Christian books by Christian authors who scatter a few Bible verse throughout their writing, but spend the bulk of their teaching explaining their human conclusions based on their limited human experiences. I am saddened that people who Christ purchased with His own blood are more satisfied with the perception of peers than with the righteous character of Jesus Christ that can only be discovered in His Word.

Having determined what is good, we are to see that everyone is the recipient of your good. Our goal is *to do good to one another and to everyone (v.15b)*. The command is clear and simple: “Do good to one another.” The most direct application of the command would be to the members of your family. But in light of the context, the next level is to do good to people in the local assembly. Then we need to do good to people in the universal Body of Christ.

But it is even broader than that. We are supposed to do good to everyone. Obviously, that cannot mean everyone in the world. But it does apply to all of our relationships whether at work, in the neighborhood, shopping, driving. And obviously, we do not embrace, coddle, tolerate sin against others. That is not to do good.

Jesus Christ is building His Church just like He promised to do. Therefore, church is not a place to go to be impressed with religious traditions and cold, dead orthodoxy. Church is not an assembly of excitable people who like to have their flesh entertained. Church is a living organism, a body, THE Body of Christ of which He is the head. According to His instruction, in this Body we are to admonish, encourage, help, and be patient with each other. In Christ’s body, we do not tolerate vengeance but rather seek to do good, the character of Christ, for all.