

I Thessalonians

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish

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1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

- Paul comes to the end of this first letter to the Thessalonians like any good parent would, with a list of rules to live by. He lays them out like a string of 11 pearls, which was the practice of the rabbis (see the book of Proverbs). As such, every disciple of Jesus Christ would do well to take each one to heart.
- First, give recognition and appreciation to those who “have charge over you and give you instruction”. Respect your leaders and the purpose for which they are working. In the military, it is not the person you are saluting, but the uniform which bears their rank. Respect is not something given automatically. Respect must be earned. When President Carter wanted to send in a rescue team in 1979 to save the hostages at the US Embassy in Tehran, one name was immediately suggested to lead it, Col. Charlie Beckwith. When Col. Beckwith walked into a room, generals stood. Beckwith was respected for the uniform and rank he bore, but those who knew the man respected him for what he had done, how he had done it, and for the cause he served. He had earned respect. Paul is calling for such leaders in the church and for the church to give them the respect due them.
- Second, live in peace. Our first and primary task is to reach a lost world with the gospel of God’s love, but this is impossible in an atmosphere of contention and hate. It is better for a pastor or church member to leave a congregation than to create conflict and divide it. Barring that such a church needs a time of fervent prayer and heart wrenching repentance.
- Third, vs. 14 points to those in a congregation who need special care. The word for “unruly” may also be translated “lazy” but is most commonly translated as “quitters”. Warn the quitters of the eternal consequences of such actions. Further, we are to “encourage the fainthearted”, literally “those whose souls are small”. And we are to likewise “help the weak”. Those in the church who live in fear do so because they are spiritual babies, spiritually weak and insecure. Like any infant, they need the help and support of those who are strong.
- Fourth, patience is perhaps the hardest part. The Word here is that we are to be patient with troublemakers (not tolerant, but patient), with the unruly and lazy, with the quitters, and with the weak and fearful. All that takes a lot of patience. I think of middle school orchestra directors. That first week of auditions has to be painful. But with patience, love for kids, a love

for teaching, and a passion for music, by Christmas there is something that sounds like music and by graduation it IS music!

- Fifth, never take revenge. Mediterranean culture has always been a shame/honor culture. If someone wrongs another and shames him, honor demands retribution. No, says the Word of God. Paul's words here harken back to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-48). One of the truly unique aspects of the Christian life is following Christ's command to love our enemies.

- Sixth, we are to rejoice *ALWAYS!!* Always covers a lot of ground. In fact, it covers the whole ground. Corrie ten Boom in her book "The Hiding Place", tells how she and her sister, Betsie, were prisoners in a Nazi concentration camp during WWII. Her family was caught hiding Jews in their home, and were thrown into Ravensbruck Camp prison. Corrie and Betsie were able to smuggle a tattered bible into the flea infested barracks, which Nazi officers would never enter. When the passage "*Be thankful in all circumstances*" [\[1 Thess 5:18\]](#) was revealed to Betsie, she insisted they be thankful for everything, and began praying aloud. Betsie thanked God for all things, but when she thanked Him for even the fleas, Corrie disagreed. She hated fleas. They were nasty, pesky little bugs that kept biting her legs, and she would not be thankful for them. However, Betsie persisted, and Corrie succumbed to being thankful IN all circumstances. Later, they heard the Nazi officers refused to enter the barracks *because* of the fleas. The fleas kept the guards out of the barracks. The fleas provided a safe haven for the women to hide from the brutal and murderous abuse of the guards and for them to draw hope from God's Word. Rejoice always...even in the midst of fleas.

- Seventh, pray without ceasing. Prayer, at its best, is an ongoing conversation between a loving Father and His children. There is nothing too big or too small that we cannot take to Him. There is nothing we can confess that He will not forgive. We bring God joy when we pray!

- Eighth, in *EVERYTHING* give thanks. Just like rejoicing for fleas, we are to be thankful in every circumstance. It's hard to be thankful in every circumstance. Corrie at first was certainly NOT thankful for the fleas. Paul may not have been thankful at first for his imprisonment in Rome, but he tells the Philippians that his imprisonment had "turned out for the greater progress of the gospel!" (Phil.2:12). The Word instructs us here to be thankful in everything and moreover tells us that this is the will of God! Why? Because it is the will of God that we TRUST Him in all things! Even in the darkest corner of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, we give thanks! Why? HOW? Because we are not alone! Because HE is with us! Because

He has promised to go with us THROUGH the Valley, out of the darkness and into the light. Hold on to Him and trust Him. This is the will of God.

- Ninth, we are not to quench the Spirit. There is so much God wants to do through His people and He gives us His Spirit to stir our hearts, to help us to see, and then to have the faith to follow Him. But too often we do indeed quench the Spirit by looking only at our resources and not trusting God to provide what we cannot see. We quench the Spirit when God speaks to one who will bring us His message, but we refuse to hear (See the people of Samaria and their response to Amos). We will never be the people God desires for us to be if we only live small, practical lives instead of trusting Him and being willing to let Him work in us so we may work for Him.
- Tenth, we are not to despise prophet utterances, but we are also to examine EVERYTHING carefully. This echoes John's comments in 1 John 4:1. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God...". God has a way of doing new things that invariably seem odd to us. They don't feel right to us. They make us feel uncomfortable. How did Peter feel in Acts 10 when at the Spirit's leading he went to the home of the Roman centurion? When God first called William Carey to take the gospel to India and throughout Asia and the Pacific people thought it was nonsense, a crazy idea that no good right-minded Christian would support. Test the spirits. Do they match up with God's Word? If not, reject such a spirit. But if so, prayerfully give ear to what the Spirit is saying the Christ's church.
- Eleventh, hold fast to what is good, reject ALL that is evil. We are people of light and we are to walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 15-7). By so doing, we show the world something it can never know on its own. We can be what we could never be on our own.