1 Thessalonians 5 (Part 2) :12-28 • Final Comments

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On Sunday mornings we're going through the New Testament. We're in 1 Thessalonians. And in fact, we're going to finish 1 Thessalonians today. We're in verse 12, and we're going to read through the end of chapter 5, so I invite you to follow along as I read through these verses, it goes like this,

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)

And that's where we stop, let's pray.

Father, as we study through these verses this morning, we ask you to minister your grace here in this place. We pray that you would fill us with understanding and insight. We pray that you would enlarge our hearts to receive all these things today and to apply your word. When we do that, Lord, we gain stability in our lives. And we pray for that stability as we put into practice the Word of God. Use this time, my Father God, in Jesus precious name, amen. Amen.

It's fairly common for the Apostle Paul to get to the end of one of his letters and I don't know if he kind of looked and realized that he was running out of scroll or something like that, but he would often end his letters with a flurry of quick exhortations pertaining to the Christian life. And honestly, any one of these exhortations that he gives in these final verses could be its own message. I could take an entire teaching to go through any one of these particular things, but I won't do that. I'll try to be as brief as Paul was here as he goes through these.

But you'll notice that here in verse 12, he begins with an exhortation to the body of Christ concerning of how we view and how we respond to people who are in positions of leadership within the body. And in verse 12, he says, "*We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you...*" And I want you to take note of the fact that he highlights three ways that people are in a position of leadership and doing that work in the body of Christ. You'll notice — and let me put these up on the screen just for those of you that take notes — this might be helpful.

- Those who **LABOR** among you
- Those who are **OVER** you
- Those who **ADMONISH** you

He speaks of those who labor among you, those who are over you and those who admonish you. And those are specifically important definitions of church leadership. And I want to just talk very briefly about each one of them.

The first description, he says, are those who labor among you. And by this, we understand that leaders are not just recognized by their title. They're recognized by what they do. Okay? He says, those who labor. He says, I want you to esteem highly those who labor, those who do. I am not saying that there's anything wrong with titles, as long as they're accurate.

In the body of Christ, we've kind of gotten off course, I think a little bit when it comes to titles. We give out titles in ways that I think we shouldn't, he's the pastor of maintenance. Huh? Does that mean he ministers to the brooms and mops? I think we've taken the title pastor and we've been a little free with it, to be completely honest with you. And we lose sight of what those even mean because the title pastor refers to someone who is actively shepherding the flock.

This can be a little difficult for me to talk about this because I'm essentially talking about myself, but one of the fundamental jobs of a shepherd is to see

that the flock is fed and nourished. If a shepherd doesn't know how to feed the flock, he's not going to have a flock for very long. So, he either needs to be a teacher himself or he needs to have people around him who are good at that sort of a thing. And that is one of the fundamental roles of somebody that way.

But next, Paul refers to those who are over you. Did you catch that? And we recognize leaders by their function of being over the fellowship in the sense that they're, they have a position of headship. In fact, one of the titles that is given to those people in positions of leadership is overseers. That's a biblical term, one who watches over. And so Paul speaks of that, those who are over, and again, this is just someone who is invested with the authority to lead, and to oversee the fellowship.

And finally, Paul speaks of those who admonish you. Interestingly enough, the Greek word admonish is one single word. It means to put in mind or to remind, and that's what somebody does when they admonish, but the idea carries with it the strong idea of a warning, to admonish is to warn. I'm trying to think of another word, oh, caution, that's another good word to caution you. Paul is reminding us in the body of Christ that we need to be esteeming those who have that responsibility. And we've all had people in our lives who have warned us at times and cautioned us and we're better off for it. By the way, that's not always very easy to do, to admonish someone.

But Paul says in verse 13 that we are to esteem them, but not just to esteem them, we are to esteem them in love. He says, *"*...(and to) *esteem them very highly in love* (and then again, and this is important) *because of their work*." And we come back to that idea that it's not just about their title. It's about what they do. Remember, salvation is free, that's not based on works. But the esteem that we have for our leaders is based on works. We esteem them because of what they do.

And then he moves on and he gives probably the shortest excerpt. Well, one of the shortest exhortations in this whole list at the very tail end of verse 13, he says, *"Be at peace among yourselves."* And this is a very simple exhortation to allow the peace of Christ to rule in our relationships. Let there be peace, let there be peace. He's simply saying, let there be peace among you.

And if only it were that simple, always, right? Unfortunately, peace requires both parties who want to be at peace because if one of the parties doesn't want to be at peace, then you're probably not going to have peace. And that's one of the reasons why Paul said what he did in Romans chapter 12. Let me put it on the screen. He says,

Romans 12: 18 (ESV)
If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

And that's really kind of an enlargement of what he's saying here in 1 Thessalonians, as far as it relies or depends on you. It's not always going to be possible to be at peace with everyone because someone may not want to be at peace with you. But as far as you are concerned, let your desire be to live at peace with people.

Just because they've decided to be unruly, and just because they've decided to be a stinker about whatever's going on, that doesn't mean you have to reciprocate. As far as it depends on you, live at peace, right? Because you're only going to answer to the Lord about your side of the equation. You're not responsible for what the other person does or doesn't do or says or doesn't say. You're responsible for what you do and what you say. And that's the important thing to remember there.

He goes on, verse 14, *"And we urge you, brothers* (here's this word again)*, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with* (all of them) *them all*. And this is kind of a reminder that different people require different sorts of responses. When you look at this, he begins by saying, *"...admonish the idle..."* And that's what it says here in the ESV.

Now, if you have a different translation on your lap, you're going to see a different word that's used in this verse. Let me put up on the screen for you. This is really kind of interesting.

- ESV and NIV: **idle**
- NKJV and NASB: **unruly**
- CSB: **irresponsible**

The ESV and the NIV translate this word "idle." The New King James and the New American Standard Bible translate it "unruly." The Christian Standard Bible, which, by the way, is a fine translation by Holman, translates it "irresponsible." The New Living Translation says the word is "lazy," and it's all the same Greek word. Here's what's interesting about this Greek word. It appears twice in the entire New Testament, once here and once in 2 Thessalonians. That's the only place it shows up.

It's not like we don't know what it means, but sometimes when we translate words literally, we don't always get the perfect explanation of that particular word. But it was used in Greek culture to describe a soldier who refused to stay in rank. Paul is using it to describe people in the body of Christ who were lax in

their work and in their service. He said that such people needed to be warned. Now you might ask yourself the question, how are we supposed to apply that necessarily today because we're in different circumstances than the early church.

You guys do know that the early church lived communally, right? You thought the hippies came up with communes? Well, no, the early church was the first, well not the first, other cultures lived communally, but the early church in the first century lived communally. It wasn't necessarily something God told them to do. And it didn't always work very well. In fact, it came with all kinds of problems.

And one of the problems that came along with communal living, and by the way, communal living means basically you take everything you have and you share it. You share it willingly. By the way, that's not the same thing as socialism or communism. Communal living is you do it because you want to. Communism says you share what you have because you have to. Okay, that's the difference, just in case you were wondering.

But whenever you get people who kind of come together and say, we're going to just put all of our money in one pot and we're going to share it. And if you need some, here's some. And when we sit down to eat, we have a communal meal and it doesn't matter. We're all going to share together. Well, unfortunately, that tends to kind of attract people who see that as a free ticket to eat whenever they want and to get what they need and to kind of sit back and take advantage of the benevolence of the entire group. And that was happening in the early church. It was happening to the extent that Paul had to eventually make some rules about communal living.

And you'll notice he says here, you need to warn those people, but you do notice he doesn't tell us what to say. To understand how they were warning those people, you actually have to go to 2 Thessalonians. So obviously this was a problem there in Thessalonica. Let me put it on the screen. This is what they would do. He said,

2 Thessalonians 3:10 (ESV)
For even when we were with you, we would give you this command. If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

And that was the rule, and that was the warning. The warning to people who were taking advantage of the benevolence of the entire group was: listen, if you don't work, you don't eat!

Now, there are some who see this kind of rule that Paul laid down in the early church as basically lacking compassion. Some people might even say that it's inhumane to say such a thing to someone. Well, the fact of the matter is, and I wish we would learn this as a nation, when you take away the impetus from a man to work hard, to provide for himself and his family by just giving him things, you take something very important away from the man. It harms him more than it ultimately hurts him. We're not talking about people who can't work here. There was great compassion and grace for people who could not work in the early church, and there ought to still be today.

We're talking here about people who are able-bodied but they're lazy. That's one of the reasons the New Living Translation translated that word as "lazy." It's a rule of thumb that has great wisdom attached to it right from the Scriptures, and it's something that we, as a nation, really need to learn from.

Next, you'll notice he tells us to encourage the faint-hearted. The word "encourage" is also translated as "comfort" in some Bible translations. These are people, and you know who you are, who are by nature given to fretting and worrying about life. They belong to the lifetime club of over-thinkers anonymous. They're constantly thinking themselves into a black hole most of the time. These are the kind of people that should not be left alone because when they are alone with their thoughts, they get swallowed up by them, and their thoughts become the means of just sucking them into worry.

They need people to come alongside them and very lovingly slap them upside the head. Encouragement comes in all shapes and sizes, you guys. It's like, sweetie, I need to encourage you. Quacko, you know, sort of a thing (gives hand gesture of hitting someone on the head). But I'm just joking. Encouraging and comforting, it is necessary for those who have that natural tendency to worry. We need to do it with great patience.

Finally, Paul says that we're to help the weak. Now, he's speaking not of people who are weak in their body. Paul is talking about those who are weak in their faith. The idea he's giving here is that we need to help them to guard against falling back into sin and into slavery because their faith lacks strength.

And these are people who are just kind of a little bit wishy-washy in their faith, and they need to be strengthened. They need to be—have people come alongside. But you'll notice that all of these character traits, or personality types, or whatever you want to call them, require patience. He says with all of them be patient.

Let me just say this, not everybody is gifted in the Lord to work with people who are lazy or timid, or weak in the faith. Not everybody can do that. There

are some people who just lack the ability. Typically, when you have people who are like visionaries, and these are the people who—and we need these people by the way in the body of Christ.

Visionaries are people who are always looking down the road and saying, we need to go there, and they help us, they help us to see our way. But those people usually aren't gifted to work with people on the day-to-day kind a basis where they're struggling. And when you ask those people to do tasks like helping someone who's timid, they just don't have the ability. So we have to learn to plug people in who have those particular giftings.

One of the big challenges for me as a pastor over 30 years of pastoring at this church was plugging people in where they shine the brightest and learning the lesson that when I plug people into the wrong socket, they fritz out because it's just not the right sort of a fit for their gifting and that sort of thing.

Anyway, verse 15, he goes on, he says, "*See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to* (anyone) *one another and to everyone*." Now this may sound like just kind of a general sort of a statement. But this was a very important reminder being addressed to a church that was being persecuted by some mean-spirited unbelievers. And this is a word that might be applicable to the church today. There are people who want to do us wrong. There are people who want to do things and say things against Christians and against Christianity.

But Paul is reminding us that never ever justifies our action of returning that same thing back to them. It just—we're not allowed to do that. They may want to do us harm, they may want to do things against us, but we may not do the same to them. We are instead to do good, and not just to people within the body of Christ, but to everyone, that's what Paul says here.

Do you remember how he described this to the Romans when he wrote to the Romans? Up on the screen from Romans chapter 12. He says,

Romans 12:19-21 (ESV)
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." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he's thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

What an important reminder for us in the body of Christ, just as so important. Next verse 16, you see how we're doing quick little shots of information here.

He says, *"Rejoice always..."* Two words, we could do a whole message on this: *"Rejoice always..."*

What do you think about when you read those words when you, I mean, in the Bible, you'll come across this, you're reading 1Thessalonians yourself: "*Rejoice always..."* What does that mean? I mean, does it sound too difficult? Does it sound impossible to rejoice always? And I can understand if somebody were to say, yeah, I don't know, I think Paul was a little out to lunch on that one. You might say, I don't think that's possible.

I would say to that person that they have yet to experience a connection with Jesus that is so intertwined that His Holy Spirit helps us to navigate the dark times of life in such a way that, rather than sinking into an emotionally debilitating low, which is far too common among believers, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to keep our head above water, to keep breathing, and to keep looking up. Those of you who have been through the deepest and darkest seasons of life, you know what I'm talking about. Some others don't, but that's okay, you probably will.

There is a great need, dear brothers and sisters in Jesus, for us to connect ourselves with our Savior in such a way that He keeps our head above the water. Because you can't do it on your own. There's just no way. If you try, you'll fail, and you'll go under every time. That's not a dig to you personally, it's just the reality of our human life and the difficulties that we face, and the darkness that we fight against, both spiritually, physically, and emotionally in this fallen world.

How in the world do you navigate what happens in a fallen world? Holding Jesus's hand, that's all I can say. But not just holding His hand, allowing His heart to so infuse yours with His presence. I mean really truly focusing on Him to the point where He is that buoy in your life that keeps you above the surface of the water. It's the only way, it's the only way. So rejoice always.

Now, one of the reasons that Paul can tell you to rejoice always, knowing as he does, we don't always experience good things in this life, is because Paul is truly telling you that there's something to rejoice in even in the times of sorrow and in the times of difficulty. You might say, well, what in the world can I rejoice in in a time of difficulty? Well, listen to how he explains it to the Romans. On the screen, in chapter 5,

Romans 5:2-5 (NIV)
...we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us…

Paul writes, *"...we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces* (good things in our lives. I threw that in there. He mentions them) *perseverance;* perseverance gives way to character. Character gives way to hope. And he says, *hope does not disappoint us…"*

We know, we know that these things bring about godliness in our lives, and therefore we can rejoice even in the midst of sorrow. Because God is faithful to use those things in our lives in a positive way. I hope that gives you hope. I hope that enables you to rejoice, even in the difficult times. Lord, you're teaching me lessons. This is hard. It's okay to say that to God. This is hard and I don't like it. But you know what? I rejoice that I'm not alone. I rejoice that you're going to use this in my life. I rejoice that there are days coming that I will see the benefit of all that you have allowed me to endure in this life. I rejoice in that. It doesn't mean we're happy for the hard stuff, it means we're happy that we have a God in our life who makes it mean something for the long haul.

Next Paul covers prayer by just simply saying, *"...pray without ceasing…"* And this is another one of those interesting statements like rejoice always. It's Paul, are you not in the real world? I mean, how can you do that? Well, obviously you can't bow your head, close your eyes, and fold your hands all day long.

Sue and I kind of have this running joke, we'll be driving along somewhere, and we'll stop and, or not stop, but as we're driving along, we'll just decide we need to pray about something. And so I'll say, honey, let's pray. So we're going down the road and we just start praying and I'm praying and she's praying and then we go, amen. I drive for a second and then I say to her, should I not have closed my eyes then? And that's kind of just this running joke. She keeps laughing, so I keep saying it.

So, obviously you can't close your eyes sometimes. Maybe you're at work, and you just need to pray. So you pray. You don't have to say, excuse me, I need to go run to the bathroom. And they're like, again? Just pray where you are. You pray. You learn to do that. And frankly, when you develop a more conscious awareness of God's presence in your life, it's interesting how it becomes easier to just start talking to him throughout the day, wherever you are, whatever you're doing, driving along, doing this, going to work.

I remember, I can't remember his name. Oh, evangelist neat guy, ministered to people in the inner city, wrote a book. The cross and the switchblade, what was

it? Huh? David Wilkerson. Thank you. Do you know where he said his most effective prayer place was? The bathroom. Yep. Yeah, he said, I just really meet the Lord in the bathroom, and we're all, that's too much information.

Just pray. Just be with the Lord. Pray without ceasing, right? I'm not saying anything against the importance of your prayer closet. It's wonderful when you can get away and close the door behind you and cut out all the distractions. But again, that's not always possible. So there's great value in developing that moment by moment relationship with the Lord where you're just talking.

And since he's talking about prayer, Paul goes on to say in verse 18, *"...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" Now you'll notice the language. He doesn't say, give thanks 'for' all circumstances. He says, give thanks 'in' (very significant word) all circumstances. And why can we do this? How can we do this? We can do it because we serve a sovereign God who is Lord of all circumstances. Right? He's Lord of every circumstance, even the rotten ones.

We, what does the Bible say, acknowledge Him in all of your ways. Do you know that means all of your circumstances? Acknowledge the Lord's presence in all of your circumstances, acknowledge Him, God, you are still on the throne, even in the midst of this, you are still the Lord of my life. I'm acknowledging you in all of my ways.

So he says, give thanks in the midst of them. We do that because we know that God loves us even when we, our circumstances are ones of failure. We can know that he still loves us, and we can give thanks for that. We know that He is the one who accepts us when we least deserve it. And so we can give thanks for that. And we know that He's the one who helps us even when our circumstances, negatively speaking, are of our own making. Did you hear me? Even when our circumstances are of our own making.

In other words, you got yourself there by your own bad decisions, wrong choices, stubborn heart, whatever the thing might be. God still loves you and wants to help you. We have reason to give thanks in all circumstances.

Now in the next couple of verses, you're going to see that Paul is aiming these more away. He's turning away from the individual Christian. Now he's going to talk to the church, to the assembly of believers. You ready? Here we go.

Verse 19, quick, quick exhortation: "*Do not quench the spirit*." "*Do not quench the spirit*." The word quench means to put out a fire in essence. In fact, the NIV

actually renders this phrase: "*Do not put out the spirit's fire*," which is really pretty accurate as far as what Paul is saying.

And this can happen in more ways than you and I can shake a stick at. We quench the Spirit whenever our actions or whenever our attitudes are such that they are contrary to the flow and activity of the Holy Spirit among us. In other words, the Holy Spirit is a wonderful gentleman. I don't know if you've learned that. He's very tender. The Holy Spirit is very polite. He is. He's got wonderful manners. And when we become unruly, and when we become prideful, and when we become brash, and when we start pointing the finger at people, and we quench the Spirit. We can quench the Spirit.

Pride quenches the Spirit. Unforgiveness quenches the Spirit. Fear quenches the Spirit. Unbelief quenches the Spirit. Remember, you ever wondered in some of those biblical references why Jesus and even Peter and some would put people out of the room when they like to raise somebody from the dead or something like that.

Remember Peter did that when Dorcas. This woman had died, and he came up into this upper room, and the women are all, oh, she was such a great lady. And they're showing him all the things that she made and gave them. And they're just, oh, we loved her so much. And he said, why don't you guys leave? Why don't you guys just go? Oh, okay. And as soon as everybody's out of the room, Peter gets down on his knees and he begins to pray. And he raises, and the Lord raises her up. And he takes her downstairs and shows her to the women.

And yet you ask yourself the question, why did he clear the room? Because unbelief can quench the Spirit. And there are so many things that goes—the list goes on. But the reason that we have to take care not to quench the Spirit is because we are wholly dependent upon the Spirit for everything we do as a body, as a group, as the church.

Guys, do you understand? I couldn't even begin to do what I do without the Holy Spirit. I'm lost without the Holy Spirit. You are lost without the Holy Spirit. We need him. We need him for worship to make sense. We need him for our fellowship and prayer to make sense. We need him for the ministry of the Word of God to make sense.

I would be a blathering idiot without the ministry of the Spirit. We need Him here in our service. So don't, he says, don't quench the Spirit. Because guys, I don't know if you're aware of it, but without the Holy Spirit, do you know what's left? The flesh. That's what you get when you chase the Spirit out of the

room, you get the flesh of man and people, the flesh of man cannot bring about life. It can only bring about death. The Spirit gives life. Jesus said the flesh counts for nothing. (John 6:63) And believe me, I've been in some church services where the Holy Spirit was not allowed to be there, and it's a very sad thing.

Next to the fellowship, Paul says in verse 20, "*Do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast what is good.*" Now, if you have a new American Standard Bible on your lap, your Bible says, "*Do not despise prophetic utterances…*" which is a very clear way of saying what Paul's talking about. He's not saying when you read the book of Isaiah, don't despise that. He's not talking about past prophecies. He's talking about words of prophecy that are given now.

And Paul wanted the church to not walk in an attitude of condescension and disdain toward prophetic utterances in the church. And the reason he's saying that is because God has gifted certain individuals in the church to speak prophetically. And if we stop respecting the gift, we miss what the Lord wants to bring into our midst as He speaks to us.

Now, I have to tell you that there are some people who hear this and they object to it. And they object to it on the basis that they believe that biblical revelation in the form of prophecy has ceased ever since the completion of the New Testament writings. And they'll say, well, I don't believe in prophecy today because you see the Bible is closed and the Word of God is no longer being spoken in that way. Well, I want you to know something. I believe that too. I believe that revelation is closed. I believe that the Bible is done being written and I believe that people are not adding to the Word of God.

And that is the reason why Paul tells us here: *"*...(to) *but test everything* (and to), *hold on to what is good*." Because how in the world are you going to know what is good? You have to measure it by the standard of God's Word. It's the Word of God that is the measuring stick to help us to know if we've heard something that is true and genuine and from the Lord.

Now I'm kind of doing the little devil's advocate thing with you, so bear with me. Some people will say at this point, well, now wait a minute here, if the Word is our measuring stick, in other words, if the Word of God is the last word, then why would we even need prophecy at all? I mean, isn't the Word enough? If the Word is what we measure everything by, then why don't we just focus on the Word and let that be enough?

And the fact of the matter is the Word is enough, but there are times when the Holy Spirit wishes to personally speak into a situation, into the hearts of God's people with a word of exhortation or a word of encouragement to the body of Christ based upon the circumstances that we are currently in. And we've seen this happen several times over 30 years here at Calvary Chapel.

But each and every time it's happened, we have to test it to make sure it is in keeping with the fidelity of God's Word each and every time. We never listen to somebody who says I have a word from the Lord, and just accept it hook line and sinker. We don't do that. We always test it by the Word of God. The Word of God is the standard. But what we don't do is we don't drop kick prophecy to the curb using the excuse that it's not for today when there's nothing in the Bible that says that it's not for today, nothing. There is nothing in the Word.

You guys know how much I believe in God's Word for 30 years. I've been teaching through the Bible, Genesis to Revelation. I love God's Word and to the point where, I mean, I hang on every word just like you do, but that doesn't mean we can take any aspect of the gifts of the Spirit, not the least of which is prophecy, and just explain it away and say, well, I don't think that's for today.

Well, it doesn't matter what you think. It's what the Bible says. The Bible does not say that it has passed away. What it says is we got to walk in smarts and wisdom, and test everything. Well, I don't want to test everything. It's just easier to say it doesn't exist and maybe so. But we're going to miss a whole lot of what God wants to say to his church. Because He has words of exhortation and words of grace and love and encouragement. And again, we have been the recipient of many of those words throughout the years and it's always encouraging. It always leaves you with a sense of, yes, Lord, yes, thank you for that reminder. Thank you for your love for me. Thank you for your power. Thank you for reminding me that you are able, just it's beautiful.

Verse 22: "*Abstain from every form of evil.*" We need to remember that everything good—it comes from God. Evil, on the other hand, is a distortion of good and it must be avoided by us at all costs.

We're living in a world where, what God calls evil, the world is calling good. What God calls good, the world sees as evil, and we have to know the difference. And Christians, our kids better know the difference. Our kids need to know the difference between what is evil and what is good. Biblically speaking, not your opinion, not the world's opinion, what God's opinion is on the matter.

Otherwise, we're just going to get sucked into this whole compassion shtick that the world likes to throw on us. Well, if you love people, you'll never, ever tell them what they're doing is wrong. Really? Is that what you see Jesus doing in the Bible? I saw Jesus loving people, big time, loving people, but I also heard Him say, go and sin no more. (John 8:11) Why? Not because He didn't love them, but because it was wrong and it was hurting them.

Sin hurts people. It harms them. And if we're not willing to say that's wrong, that's not love. That's like seeing your child getting ready to put their hand on a hot burner on the stove and just saying, well, I love you, so I'm not going to say anything. That is ludicrous! And yet, the world wants you and I to treat other people that way. If you love people, you will never tell them what they're doing is wrong. Sorry, that just doesn't fly.

The Bible tells you and I to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and that's where we mess up. That's where we mess up you see, because we haven't always spoken in love. We've had the truth. We didn't have the love. And we ended up hurting people and using the truth as a sword to cut them, and not to restore and heal them.

Paul now offers his final prayer for the believers. Verse 23, he says, "*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 the Lord Jesus Christ. [24] He who calls you is faithful, he will surely do it.*" We talked about sanctification earlier in our study of 1 Thessalonians. And I talked to you about that movement that The Holiness Movements that have come and gone in the body of Christ, and how they get off track when they start seeing sanctification or holiness as something you've got to do, you've got to do it. You better be sanctified.

Did you notice what Paul says here? He's praying, may the God of peace sanctify you. And then he ends that little prayer by saying, He'll do it. Did you catch that? He'll do it. He'll do it. He will do it. He's not putting some kind of a big burden on them. You better live a sanctified life or else. There's nothing like that going on.

Now may the God of peace sanctify you completely, body, soul, and spirit. And He'll do it. He's faithful. And you know what sanctified means, don't you? Set apart for something special. I like to use the example of a wedding dress. A dress is a dress for a woman and she wears—she may wear dresses every day, but her wedding dress is set apart for use on a special day. And God is telling

you that you have been set apart not for a day, but for Him. For Him. You are to be sanctified to live as if you are special for Him.

And again, I want to just emphasize just so we don't get weird, verse 24, this is probably one of those verses you ought to underline in your Bible: "*He who calls you is faithful, he will surely do it*." Just remember this and you can even write maybe in the area next to your Bible that, I can't sanctify myself. And then just circle those words or highlight him. He will do it. Only through His power can you and I be sanctified.

Finally, Paul says, "[25] *Brothers, pray for us*." Because leaders need prayer too. In fact, sometimes even more. Do you know that Satan guns for leaders? Do you know that he guns for, don't think if you're not a leader in the church, don't think you're off the hook because if you are a family man, you're still a leader? And that's one of the reasons why Satan guns for leaders, because he knows that if he can strike the shepherd, the sheep will be scattered, right?

Satan knows that principle. And that's why he goes after leaders. Leaders in homes, leaders in churches, because if he can strike them, he can shipwreck those who are being ministered by them. Children sometimes will just go wacky when their parents get struck and they go wacky. And Christians many times will shipwreck their faith because a pastor or a leader goes wacky.

So Paul says, "*...pray for us.* [26] *Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss* (except during a pandemic)*..."* Actually, the holy kiss was a common form of greeting, and it is to this day, in the Middle East. So, I would have a hard time with that.

Verse 27: "*I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.*" Paul just simply wanted to make sure everyone heard the message that was being given here. And he ends by saying, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*" Oh my, how we need to have God's grace in our lives, don't we? So many Christians are living without it. What a tragedy. God's grace makes all the difference.

Let me just say this. If your Christian walk is laborious and burdensome, you need God's grace. If your Christian walk is a delight, it's probably because you understand and are walking in God's grace. But if the Christian life to you is ugh, then you need God's grace.

Here's what people do, though. When the Christian life becomes burdensome that way, they'll just say to themselves, I've got to try harder because obviously I'm not getting this. And I see these other people, and they seem so happy, and I

want to be like that. So I'm going to work harder at this and it gets worse. It doesn't get better. It gets worse.

But what you're seeing in other people who have a smile on their face and who genuinely have a delightful walk with the Lord is that they've discovered grace. Grace changes everything. In fact, there's a book in our bookstore with that title if you need to understand grace, I encourage you to go buy it. *Grace Changes Everything* is written by Pastor Chuck Smith. But to understand the grace of God is to put the lubricating oil in your walk with the Lord, whereas otherwise there's nothing but friction, and heat and difficulty.

But when we understand grace—I had a guy write to me just over the last 24 hours, and he said, pastor, I don't think I truly understand repentance. I don't know that I've really repented. So would you help me to understand repentance? And I'm learning to understand why people are asking questions.

So I wrote him back and I said, I'd be happy to correspond with you and help you to understand what biblical repentance is all about, but I want to ask you this question. Why are you asking? Because it sounds to me based on your letter that this is becoming a work that you have to measure up to in order to earn your salvation.

And he came back, and said well yeah, he says it says in Luke and he quoted one verse, unless you too repent, you will perish. (Luke 13:3) He didn't mention the context. He didn't mention who Jesus was talking to and why that statement was made. He just simply quoted the passage.

And I said, ah, okay, here's where we're at. This guy took one verse, latched onto it, and he became fearful. I have to do this, or I am not saved. I don't want to perish. So pastor, I guess I need to find out what repentance is really all about because I don't want to perish.

Do you see and understand, Christians, that we can take any aspect of what God's Word tells us to do, and we can turn it into a work by which we earn our salvation, anything could be water baptism could be repentance. Good grief. Jesus said, unless you take up your cross and follow me, you're not worthy of being mine. Okay, now, we've got another work you got to do in order to be saved. It is only through the eyes of grace that those scriptures can be understood.

And I wrote him back and I said, my brother, we repent because God gives us the grace to repent. He is through His Spirit, through His power that we are

given the grace. But I said, you need to understand that literally the act of turning from your old life and walking toward Jesus, that is the essence of repentance. And we do that by God's grace.

And he wrote me back and he goes, so salvation is truly by grace alone, huh?

I said, yeah, that's right. You got it, by grace through faith. And that alone, not of works, so that no man may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9) We need grace, amen.

Let's stand together. I'm thankful for Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. And we will go on to do his second letter to the Thessalonians, Lord willing, beginning next week, unless we hear the trumpet, which would be just okay with me.