

*1 Thessalonians 5:14-15***PREFACE**

Last week I suggested the following order to the passage before us—vv12-22 of Chapter Five; it addresses our responsibilities within the church family to

1. our leaders (vv12-13)
2. the members of the body (vv14-15)
3. oneself (vv16-18)
4. public worship (vv19-22)

In our last session we examined the responsibility of the body to esteem those the Lord has put in place over us as our shepherds—principally, pastors and elders. In this session we look at our responsibilities of the members of the flock to each other. This would include the pastors and elders—in both directions: giving and receiving—along with everyone else.

Some early church fathers assigned the responsibilities and behavior of these two verses specifically to the church leaders, as a counterbalance to the esteem they were to receive in vv12-13. But Paul addresses *both* to the “brethren,” which includes everyone. In support of this interpretation, Paul, in his letter to the Romans, and in a passage clearly addressed to everyone in that church, says essentially the same thing. But let’s begin with our passage.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15.

Now compare our passage—especially v15—to the passage in Romans.

Read Romans 12:17-18.**v14**

We urge you...

Note the difference between how Paul opens v12 and v14. In our passage last week it was a request; he was *asking* the members of the church to behave this way. Now, in v14, he uses a stronger word.

urge^{nasb, niv, esv}, **exhort**^{kjvs} = *parakaleo* = from <G3844> (para) and <G2564> (kaleo); to call near, i.e. invite, invoke (by imploration, hortation or consolation) :- **beseech**, **call for**, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give) **exhort** (-ation), **entreat**, pray.

Guzik: To exhort [**urge**] is to tell someone what they must do, but without sharpness or a critical spirit. It is not rebuke or condemnation, but neither is it merely a suggestion or advice. It is urgent and serious, but associated with comfort.

No one I read ventured an opinion on just *why* Paul uses a stronger word for the flock’s behavior toward each other, than he does for the flock’s behavior toward the shepherds. Perhaps it is because he imagines it is easier to esteem a leader than it is to minister to or admonish a peer, so he presses a little harder for the latter.

admonish the unruly/idle

“Unruly” is the best translation of this word, but a case can be made for “idle,” which at first glance seems too tame a word. “Admonish” is the same word we ran into in v12.

noutheteo = from the same as <G3559> (nouthesia); to put in mind, i.e. (by implication) **to caution or reprove gently** :- admonish, warn.

Those we are to admonish or warn are the

unruly^{nasb, kjvs}, **idle**^{niv, esv} = *ataktos* = from <G1> (a) (as a negative particle) and a derivative of <G5021> (tasso); **unarranged**, i.e. (by implication) **insubordinate** (religiously) :- unruly; **undisciplined, out of order**, out of place.

Idleness is often the root cause of a life without order and discipline. The Greek word is a military term. If we think of the church as a company of soldiers, marching in formation, the rows and ranks in neat order, working together, the one who is unruly is the one out of step; as he meanders about at personal will, he destroys the order of the company, his mind wanders, he cares little for the integrity of the group. In this he is selfish, unfocused, idle.

Sidebar: Back in the late sixties, when I was in boot camp, our company commander had a rather demonstrative way of “admonishing the unruly”—those who broke the marching formation by being out of step with everyone else. He would come up behind the unfortunate soul and knock him upside the head, or slam his hands down on the poor boot’s shoulders. That, of course, is *not* what Paul is saying we do in the church.

This is addressed to everyone in the church, not just its leaders—but including them.

Robert L. Thomas: The only ones excused from the obligation to warn are those in need of warning.

encourage the fainthearted

encourage, comfort^{kjvs} = *paramutheisthe* = from <G3844> (para) and the middle of a derivative of <G3454> (muthos); **to relate near, i.e.** (by implication) **encourage, console** :- **comfort**.

fainthearted, feebleminded^{kjv}, **weak**^{niv} = *oligopsuchous* = literally, “small-souled” or “small-spirited.” The KJV “feebleminded” is a poor translation; these are individuals who, by nature or experience, tend to be timid and lack courage—*not* necessarily chronically stupid.

Some individuals *are* chronically fainthearted, and they need understanding brothers and sisters in the Lord to come alongside for encouragement. And I wonder if Paul was inspired for this thought by a reading of Isaiah 35.

Read Isaiah 35:3-5. (prefer NASB or ESV)

The writer to the Hebrews not only quotes Isaiah 35:3, but he connects this with Paul’s overarching theme of discipline and order in the church.

Read Hebrews 12:7-13.

This gives us a broader definition of what form this “encouragement” might take. Especially with the KJVs “comfort” we could think that our response to the fainthearted should be a consoling, “There, there...” But when you add in the passage from Hebrews, along with the broader context of this passage in Paul’s letter, one gets the idea that there are times when some “tough love” is called for. Encouragement can take a number of forms, including discipline or rebuke.

Sidebar: More than once in our class, individuals have admonished or rebuked me—usually gently—for something I have said. Though there may have been an immediate wounding, the result for me, in every case, was one of encouragement, and maturing growth.

help the weak

This refers not to those who are physically weak, but those who are morally or spiritually weak. They need our help.

help, uphold^{nkjv}, **support**^{kjv} = *antechesthe* = from <G473> (anti) and the middle of <G2192> (echo); **to hold oneself opposite to**, i.e. (by implication) adhere to; by extension **to care for** :- **hold fast**, hold to, support.

This help, too, can take many forms. To the Romans Paul said that one form of help to the spiritually weak should be a sacrificial giving up of some of our rights for their edification—

Read Romans 15:1-2.

—and to not be judgmental of them.

Read Romans 14:1-3.

Why us?

Ulrich Zwingli, leader of the Reformation in Switzerland, offered a pithy and succinct reason why such responsibilities are not always to be left in the hands of church leaders, but to *all* in the church.

Zwingli: Everyone is known by his neighbors better than by his minister, from whom much is concealed.

be patient with everyone

Instead of interpreting this as a separate injunction, which is perfectly valid, I prefer to see it as an all-encompassing modifier of the first three; that is,
admonish the unruly—with patience
encourage the fainthearted—with patience
help the weak—with patience

patient = *makrothumeite* = from the same as <G3116> (makrothumos); **to be long-spirited**, i.e. (objective) **forbearing** or (subjective) **patient** :- bear (suffer) long, be longsuffering, have (long) patience, be patient, **patiently endure**.

All things are to be done with patience and understanding. Admonishment, even helping the weak, without brotherly kindness and patience can seem harsh, judgmental, even dictatorial, and ultimately off-putting.

Read v15.

See that no one repays another with evil for evil,

Linda and I recently watched, again, the *Godfather* trilogy. I can think of no better *negative* illustration for the church. In the Mafia culture no offense goes unanswered: in-kind, or even upgraded. In the church, *God* is the one who deals with evil. This is as it always has been. Moses speaks of it in his song in Deuteronomy 32, in speaking of the enemies of Israel.

Read Deuteronomy 32:32-43.

In Christ this is extended further. In the economy of His church, we do not just refrain from taking vengeance, sitting in the corner grumbling about the Lord's delay. No, instead of repaying evil with evil, we are to repay evil with blessing.

Read 1 Peter 3:8-12.

Starke: To requite good with evil is devilish; to requite evil with evil is heathenish; to requite good with good is commendable; to requite evil with good is Christian.

but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

If one reads this a few times, one realizes that this is no soppy call to just be nice to each other. [The NIV is dramatically insufficient with this verse; it is far too weak.]

always seek^{nasb, esv}, **always pursue**^{nkjv}, **ever follow**^{kjv}, **always try**^{niv} = *pantote* = from <G3956> (pas) and <G3753> (hote); **every when, i.e. at all times** :- alway (-s), ever (-more).

diokete = **a prolonged (and causative) form of a primary verb dio** (to flee; compare the base of <G1169> (deilos) and <G1249> (diakonos)); **to pursue** (literal or figurative); by implication **to persecute** :- ensue, follow (after), given to, (suffer) persecute (-ion), **press forward**.

This is active and persistent; we are to *at all times actively pursue* that which is good for others.

Lange: We must pursue that which is good, it does not naturally belong to us; the evil, on the contrary, comes of itself.

And if I may be so bold as to take further issue with the NIV, this entails something far more intricate and profound than simply "try[ing] to be kind." This verse is not a call to do to others what *they* will interpret as good and pleasant, but *that which is for their ultimate benefit*. "Christians must diligently endeavor to produce what is intrinsically beneficial to others." (Thomas) This may be something that is initially unpleasant, but ultimately for their—and everyone's—"good." And Paul says this should be extended to those outside the community of believers: "for all people."

These two verses—indeed, these last four verses—are profoundly unselfish. Paul portrays a body of believers—Christ's flock—that is respectful, caring, giving, patient, forgiving, generously gracious. This is a high standard in this corrupt, self-absorbed world—a standard that was set by the flock's Great Shepherd at the cross.