

Lesson 9

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

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III. Paul's Practical Exhortations [4:1-5:22]

D. Concerning Various Christian Duties [5:12-22]

After a detailed explanation of events concerning the return of Christ [4:13-5:11], Paul moves on to give details concerning various Christian duties.

1. Duty toward Church Leaders [5:12-13]

¹² Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

In this passage, Paul gives three commands to all Christians with regards to their duties toward Church leaders.

1. Paul commands for the believers to “*respect*” the Church leaders. The word respect means, “to know” and it carries the idea of knowing pastors well enough to appreciate and respect them. Paul goes on to give a three-fold description of the work of pastors:
 - a. *who work hard among you* – Pastors are to be hard working people. The phrase “*work hard*” refers to laboring to the point of exhaustion.

In general, Scriptures teach us that the work of a Pastor includes, but is not limited, to the following: Careful study and teaching of Scriptures, time spent in prayer, meeting and counseling various Church members, taking care of the various administrative responsibilities concerning the Church, evangelizing unbelievers, etc. It is a calling that comes with a great responsibility. Those that faithfully perform these tasks are worthy of being respected.

- b. *who are over you in the Lord* – Pastors hold spiritual leadership over the flock and thus are responsible to God for those placed under their care.
 - c. *who admonish you* – Pastors are responsible to provide appropriate scriptural instruction to those under their care.

Hebrews 13:7 “*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.*”

Hebrews 13:17 “*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you*”

2. Paul commands the believers to highly esteem their leaders for their work’s sake [“*Hold them in the highest regard...because of their work.*” And this should be done with an attitude of “*love*” and not in a grudging manner.

This is not to suggest that believers are to blindly respect and esteem anyone who claims to be a pastor or leader. Pastors, first and foremost, must meet the required qualifications [1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:6-9]. In addition to meeting the qualifications, they must also function in a biblical manner. And when they sin, they too must be confronted [1 Tim 5:19-20; Matt 18:15-17].

3. Paul commands the believers to “*live in peace with each other.*” When individual members submit to godly leadership, there will be peace in the Church.

2. Duty toward Church Members [5:14-15]

¹⁴ *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.* ¹⁵ *Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.*

Having stated the duties of church members toward their leaders, Paul goes on to give the specific duties of church members toward each other.

1. Those that were idle were to be warned [*warn those who are idle*]. There were people in the church that were not working and in addition were also rebellious [idle translated as “unruly” in NASB]. They had to be warned. Paul addressed the same issue of dealing with those that were lazy and causing confusion in greater detail in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12.
2. Those that were timid needed to be encouraged [*encourage the timid*]. These were people who were literally those of “little heart.” They tend to become discouraged very easily and need words of encouragement to endure.
3. Those that were weak were to be helped [*help the weak*]. These were people that were spiritually and morally weak. They easily fall into sin. They get caught up in traditions and beliefs that stunt Christian growth. Such type of immature believers need spiritual help from other mature believers.
4. It is easy to lose patience in having to deal with believers that were idle, timid and weak. Hence there is a need for patience, thus the command to be *“be patient with everyone.”* Patience is one of the characteristics of the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit [Gal 5:22] as the believer walks in obedience to the word of God.
5. After laying the call for patience, Paul commands believers to refrain from the opposite of patience, which is retaliation *“Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.”* Believers are always called to respond with a Christ-like attitude.

Romans 12:17-21 ¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.* ¹⁸ *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* ¹⁹ *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.* ²⁰ *On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”* ²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

1 Peter 3:9 *“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”*

3. Duty toward Self [5:16-18]

¹⁶ *Be joyful always;* ¹⁷ *pray continually;* ¹⁸ *give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Paul goes on to describe the believer’s responsibility toward himself. There are three commands given and all of these are God’s will for every believer.

1. The Christian is to be *“joyful always.”* Joy is not based upon circumstances, but from the fact that one is in Christ. The Bible constantly reminds of the importance of joy to characterize the life of a believer.

Philippians 3:1 *“rejoice in the Lord”*

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

Believers grow in joy as they understand more about God and what he has done, is doing and is planning to do for all his children. And this understanding comes when believers spend more time in reading the word of God.

Psalm 119:111 “*Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.*”

Jeremiah 15:16 “*When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.*”

Joy is also a by-product of obedience. Where there is sin, there will be no joy.

John 15:9-11 “⁹ *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.* ¹⁰ *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.* ¹¹ *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*”

As the believer walks in obedience to God’s word, the Spirit of God produces joy in the heart [Gal 5:22].

2. The Christian is to “*pray continually.*” This does not mean that the believer is to be on his knees in prayer at all times. The emphasis is on the believer having an attitude of persistent prayer that does not give up easily. Prayer is to be an integral part of the believer everyday life.

Luke 18:1 “*...Jesus told...that [we] should always pray and not give up*”

Ephesians 6:18 “*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*”

Colossians 4:2 “*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*”

3. The Christian is to “*give thanks in all circumstances.*” How is it possible to give thanks in all circumstances? By remembering that (a) God is sovereign over all things; (b) God is in control of every situation and; (c) God is working in and through every circumstance of life.

Romans 8:28 “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*”

4. Duty toward the Truth [5:19-22]

¹⁹ *Do not put out the Spirit’s fire;* ²⁰ *do not treat prophecies with contempt.* ²¹ *Test everything. Hold on to the good.* ²² *Avoid every kind of evil.*

Paul concludes this section on Christian duties by giving 5 commands that describe the believer’s responsibility toward the truth.

1. The Christian ought not to “*put out the Spirit’s fire.*” In other words, the Christian is not to quench the on-going purifying work of the Holy Spirit in his life. When the believer resists the work of the Holy Spirit, he grieves the Holy Spirit [Eph 4:30].
2. The Christian ought not to “*treat prophecies with contempt.*” This verse does not teach that believers living in this day and age get new revelations that are outside of the completed Scripture and that those revelations are to be treated as God giving new truths to this generation. During the time of the apostles, God was still in the process of giving his revelation.

Now that we have God’s revelation in full, every Christian is to treat the exposition of the truths as found in the 66 books as final and authoritative for all manner of life [2 Tim 3:16-17]. Hence, the Christian ought not to treat God’s revelation [as found in Holy Scripture] when he reads or hears it in a casual manner. These are words from God, not from man [2 Pet 1:20-21].

3. The Christian ought to “*Test everything.*” He is called to examine all things in the light of Scripture. Even the Bereans were called “*noble*” because of their willingness to examine even Paul’s teachings with the Old Testament Scriptures [Acts 17:11]. In a day and age, where examining someone’s teachings is treated as critical and judgmental, this command makes it clear that all things, especially teachings that are claimed to be from the bible, ought to be examined with the revealed Scripture.
4. The Christian ought to “*Hold on to the good.*” After examining every teaching with the revealed Scripture, the believer is then commanded to firmly hold on to [i.e. embrace whole heartedly] that which is good. It means to apply, not just hear and walk away from it. There is no virtue in knowledge that does not lead to obedience.

Luke 6:46 “*Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*”

5. The Christian should not only hold on to the good but ought to “*Avoid every kind of evil.*” The word avoid can also be translated as “abstain” [NASB]. The focus is for the believer to completely avoid all kinds of evil teaching and evil behavior. The whole purpose of testing everything is hold on to what is good and conversely to avoid everything that is evil.

Amos 5:15 “*Hate evil, love good...*”

Romans 12:9 “*...Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*”

2 Corinthians 7:1 “*Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*”