

## **“Life in the Church”**

*November 12, 2017*

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

### I. Introduction

Paul was coming to the end of his first missionary letter—a letter to brand new Christians in a brand new church in a pagan culture. Paul’s favorite name for believers was *brothers*. In 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians he used this word 24 times. Paul saw each local church as a family made up of brothers and sisters in the Lord. Each member was born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and they were all part of God’s family.

Church should be an important part of every Christian’s life—**Hebrews 10:25** says, **“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”** The child of God needs a church family if he is to grow, to develop his gifts and to serve God. Because the church is made up of redeemed sinners who are still battling the old sinful nature, problems can develop within the family of God. So as he brought his letter to a close, Paul emphasized a number of things that were essential for a happy, thriving church family. These are things that would make any church more spiritual and bring glory to God. Paul began his description of Life in the Church by describing the relationship between leaders and people.

### II. The Relationship between Leaders and People

Without leadership, a family, as well as any other organization, will fall apart. The same is true for the spiritual family—a church. God has ordained leadership for the local church. It is true that as **Galatians 3:28** says, we **“are all one in Christ Jesus,”** but it is also true that Jesus through the Holy Spirit has given gifts to people and then given those people to the churches—**turn to Ephesians 4:11-16**. Just as the flock needs a shepherd, a church needs a leader and leadership. As he wrote about the relationship between leaders and the church, Paul first gave some of the responsibilities of those in leadership.

## A. The Leaders' responsibilities to the church

### 1. The responsibility to work hard. Paul wrote, "Respect those who work hard among you."

The 1<sup>st</sup> responsibility of leadership is to work hard. Leadership in a church is not a matter of privilege. It is hard work, never merely a place of honor. All church leadership, and especially spiritual leadership, is a great responsibility, a difficult task, and often a self-sacrificing effort. The battles and burdens are many, and sometimes the encouragements are few.

The Apostle Paul was a prime example of a hardworking, conscientious leader or shepherd—back in 1 Thessalonians 2:9 he wrote, "Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you." This toil included working as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3) to support himself so that he would be an example to believers of one who worked hard and did not unduly burden anyone. Anyone expecting to be involved in the leadership of a church needs to expect to work hard.

### 2. The responsibility to exercise authority. Paul then wrote, "Who are over you in the Lord."

The 2<sup>nd</sup> responsibility of leadership is to exercise authority. Too often authority is seen as power rather than a responsibility. In the church, the authority given to leaders is not a matter of personal power, but of moral responsibility to lead and to guide under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The phrase "in the Lord" emphasizes that true leaders are not self-appointed; their authority is from God. Equipped and appointed by God, it is their duty to lead the church for God's sake, and never because they want power, prestige, and some type of advancement in their own careers.

### 3. The responsibility to give instruction. "Who admonish you." Paul used the word "admonish" which is more than teaching information, it is instruction for the purpose of correcting and changing people. The 3<sup>rd</sup> responsibility is to give instruction. It is teaching with an element of warning, designed

to direct individual Christians and the church to holy living—as Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 4:14](#), “I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.”

In his later letters, e.g., 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul will compile a list of church officers and their duties, but here in 1 Thessalonians is the earliest description we have of the responsibilities of Christian leaders in the church—to labor, to lead, and to teach. As they carry out their responsibilities, Paul gave 3 responsibilities for the church to the leaders.

## **B. The Church’s responsibilities to the leaders**

**1. The responsibility to appreciate them.** The New American Standard version of [1 Thessalonians 5:12](#) says, “Appreciate those who diligently labor among you.” This a better choice than NIV’s use of the word “respect.” The 1<sup>st</sup> responsibility is to appreciate them. The thought is that believers are to know their leaders deeply and respectfully and to value their service. It’s not healthy when a church family takes its leaders for granted and fails to pray for them, work with them, and encourage them.

**2. The responsibility to love them.** “Hold them in highest regard in love because of their work.” The 2<sup>nd</sup> responsibility is to love their leaders. As brothers, the leaders are “among us”; and as leaders, they are “over us in the Lord.” This could be a very strained relationship apart from true Christian love. Paul is saying that believers must have high regard for their leaders in love, not because of their personalities or the favors they can give, but because of their work.

**3. The 3<sup>rd</sup> responsibility is to live in peace with each other.** The concept of believers living in peace with each other is found throughout the New Testament. For the relationship between a congregation and its leaders to be peaceful, the church needs to submit to its leaders as they lead. Such submission, if done in a God-honoring way, will eliminate conflict, strife, and discord and will promote peace, harmony, and effective ministry within the church. In spite of their limitations, God’s spiritual leaders should be respected and obeyed—unless it is obvious that they are out of God’s will.

Whenever one finds division and dissension in a local church, it is usually because of selfishness and sin on the part of the leaders, of the members or both—turn to [James 4:1-3](#). Selfishness on the inside leads to strife on the outside. It is only when we submit to one another in the Lord that we can enjoy His blessings and have peace in the family.

### **III. The Responsibilities of Christians in the church family**

Within any family, including the Christian family, there will be those with problems. It is up to the entire body of believers, not just the leadership, to minister to one another. Paul continued the responsibilities of Christians in the church family by writing how one ought to treat those with special spiritual problems and needs.

**A. First, warn the idle.** The word *idle* really means “*careless, out of line.*” It refers to anyone who does not perform his duty or follow through on his responsibility. It was also used to describe disorderly behavior. Paul urged the spiritually healthy believers to “*come alongside*” such a fellow Christian and warn them that they are pushing against the edges of acceptable Christian behavior.

**B. Second, encourage the timid.** The *timid* or the fainthearted are those who lack the boldness to accept a challenging new ministry, fear change and the unknown. They want a risk-free ministry that is traditional, safe, and absolutely secure. Such people need to be encouraged. Instead of scolding the timid or trying to shame them, others must get close to them and speak tenderly. They may need to be reminded that the trials of life will help them to grow and make them stronger in the faith. [James 1:2-4](#) says, “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*”

**C. Third, help the weak.** The weak could be those who are fragile in faith, beset by doubts. The weak Christians were afraid of their liberty in Christ. They lived by rules and regulations. Some weaker believers have such sensitive consciences over their past sins that they perceive things as sin that are not

sin at all—turn to [1 Corinthians 8:7-9](#). In Thessalonians, Paul was commanding the stronger Christians to come alongside the weaker ones, establish close personal relationships with them, and provide them doctrinal instruction and encouragement toward righteousness and away from sin.

**D. Fourth, “Be patient with everyone.”** It is easy for Christians to become frustrated, angry, or discouraged with some of the chronic problem Christians, so Paul gave some wise counsel: **“Be patient with everyone.”** By everyone, Paul meant all those people with whom the strong Christians might easily become impatient. People who barely grow at best, who never keep pace with everyone else, who are easily distracted, or who are generally undisciplined in the means of grace can try the patience of the strong. With such as these and with everyone else, Paul said to be patient.

**E. Finally, don’t “pay back wrong for wrong.”** Because we are all works in progress, believers are capable of harming one another—sinning against one another in a variety of ways, such as attacking one another with wicked words, including gossip and slander, excluding someone from fellowship or ministry opportunities, or influencing someone toward sinful behavior.

Paul instructed the Thessalonians on how to respond to such wickedness in others in the church: don’t pay **“back wrong for wrong.”** In [Romans 12:19-21](#) he wrote, **“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. 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.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”** There is absolutely no place among Christians for retaliation or personal vengeance. The only one who has the right to retaliate is God.

Paul wrote that the proper response when sinned against by fellow Christians is not to seek revenge, but to **“always be kind to each other.”** Turn to [1 Peter 2:19-23](#). Paul wanted the Thessalonians to respond to hostility with genuine acts of love: **“always try to be kind to each other.”** The welfare of every Christian, even those who have seriously offended others, was to be the Thessalonians’ primary

concern. And that concern was also to extend beyond the church “to everyone else,” Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

#### IV. Conclusion

There is a two-part conclusion for today’s Scripture. First, for the local church to function as God intended and to receive His blessings, its pastor and the church leadership must be responsible to labor among the people, exercise authority over them, and provide instruction to them. At the same time, the people have obligations to appreciate the pastor and the leadership, to love them, and to peacefully submit to them. When both fulfill their respective responsibilities, the church becomes the unified, joyful, peaceful, and healthy flock God intended it to be. Faithful leaders and faithful people ministering together bring honor to Christ, the Head of the church, advance the kingdom of God, and give Him the glory.

As I thought about Tabernacle Baptist Church and considered Paul’s teachings, the words that Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:1 kept coming to mind: “Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.” I may be biased but we are a unified, joyful, peaceful and healthy flock. We are faithful leaders and faithful people ministering together to honor Christ. So, using Paul’s words, “Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more,” i.e., DON’T STOP!

The second part of the conclusion deals with those having needs that come into God’s flock called Tabernacle. As we serve God together, we will continue to grow as individual Christians and as a Church. As the church on the side of the road, and as we have already seen in the past, God will send us spiritually needy and even problem sheep. We must continue to deal with them in a loving, patient, but truthful way, helping them to grow and to remove sinful entanglements. Instead of by-passing or ignoring the issues, we need to deal with them, as shepherds and sheep alike we need to warn the wayward,

encourage the timid, help the weak, being patient with everyone, and returning good for evil. As Jude wrote in [Jude 1:21-23](#), “Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear-- hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” In closing, turn to [Matthew 25:31-40](#). Keep up the good work.