

Learn to Discern

LESSON 4 – AN EXHORTATION FOR PEACE
1 THESSALONIANS 5:14-15
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Be at Peace Among Yourselves

- ▶ As we continue this week to Learn to Discern we will take a look at a well known passage of Scripture found in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-22. In this passage we discover a quick listing of things that are expected and commanded of us as we live the Christian life.
- ▶ The context finds Paul writing to the church at Thessalonica, a church within a major and influential free city. This church was struggling as Paul had been evicted from the city (Acts 17:5-10) and was now separated from them. Further there were false teachers who were trying to mislead the church about the second coming of Christ, teaching that those believers in their midst who had died had not gone to heaven because one had to be alive when Jesus returned in order to be with Him! They were in much need of learning how to discern and know the truth.

Be at Peace Among Yourselves

- ▶ In chapter 5 Paul sets the record straight about the second coming and as he closes the book he exhorts the congregation: “recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.”
- ▶ He has encouraged them to love and honor the elders who shepherd them in the church. And as we see, the greatest way that the church can show gratitude and love for their pastors is to be at peace within the Body! Indeed, there is no greater gift that a congregation can give their pastors than to be at peace and to walk together in love and harmony.

How to be at Peace

- ▶ And then Paul tells them how to be at peace. There are a few things they needed to be ready to do in order to fulfill this exhortation. Verses 14 and 15 set out Paul's guidelines for maintaining peace in the church: "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all."

Warn the Unruly

- ▶ He starts in verse 14 by telling them that they must be ready and able to warn the unruly. The term used for warn means literally to reprimand. This refers to a willingness to confront a brother or sister in the Lord! But there is no connotation of anger, hatred, or vengeance. This is giving a firm and loving reprimand to one who is “unruly.”
- ▶ The term unruly has two common uses in the Greek language. The first usage denotes marching out of ranks. It is as if you were in a line of soldiers marching and you got out of step – you stumbled and fell out of ranks. Not only would you ruin the formation, but you would likely trip up others behind or beside you.

Warn the Unruly

- ▶ Another usage refers to those who do not show up for work. Have you ever had that happen? A co-worker does not show up for work. It puts more work and stress on everyone else.
- ▶ Here then we see that the first step to maintaining peace in the church is for the church to be willing to warn those who are out of ranks or who are not showing up for work! Reprimand them. Warn them. Lovingly guide them back into line. This of course is a help to them and to the church as a whole.

Comfort the Fainthearted

- ▶ Secondly we see that Paul tells the church to “comfort the fainthearted.” To comfort here means to “speak calming words” and the term fainthearted means literally “those who are discouraged.” It is an interesting word which at its root speaks about one who has a “small mind in matters of faith.” It is to be like the disciples when Jesus rebuked them for having only a little faith. To be discouraged is to be small minded when it comes to trusting God! And when that happens in the church we are to comfort the discouraged. To speak calming words to them.
- ▶ What words would those be? Well, remember our discussion about Ephesians 4:29? We are to not let any corrupt communication proceed out of our mouths but only that which is good for the use of edification that it might minister grace to the hearers. This means simply that we are to speak God’s Word to them! If this is a failure of faith then they need more faith and stronger faith and we know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). So when one in our midst is discouraged we need to minister to them with the Word of God.

Uphold the Weak

- ▶ Then Paul tells us that the next step to maintaining peace is found in upholding the weak. To uphold here means “to support or to pay attention to” and the weak refers to “newborns.” These are new believers who need to be helped and disciplined as they learn to feed themselves from the Word! They need attention and support just as any infant would.
- ▶ Often, we do pay attention to newborn Christians until they get plugged into a program or Sunday school class and then we lose track of them. Too often churches that report large numbers of converts cannot find those converts a year later! Why? Because they failed to uphold and support them. We must pay close attention to new believers. Guard them. Pray for them and with them. And teach them. Remember, no matter how old physically a new believer is, he is still an infant and in need of attention and help.

Be Patient with All

- ▶ Remember to from our discussions about milk and solid food that there are those who should be mature teachers of the Word but who because of their lack of discernment are still infants – they still need the milk of the Word. These too must be supported and encouraged to grow up in the Lord.
- ▶ As Paul continues in this list, we see that we are to maintain peace in the church by being patient with all. The term for being patient can be literally translated to have a “long spirit.” It refers to making a large sacrifice, to suffering long, and to bearing an offence without striking back. And how true it is that in order to maintain peace within the body we must be patient with all!

Be at Peace Among Yourselves

- ▶ I also love that the word all here means just that. ALL. We are to be patient with everyone. No one is exempt from our patience. Whatever they do, we are to be long suffering. We are to be calm, cool, and forgiving. If they sin against us 7 times, or 7 times 70 times, we are still to forgive them. How can this be possible? If we are truly and really loving them then we will do this – there is no maybe about it.
- ▶ To truly love our fellow believers, the members of the Body of Christ with whom we fellowship, we must be willing to warn them, comfort them, support them, and be patient with them. Notice there is no mention of self here. True Christian living knows nothing of self – it is a life spent and poured out for Christ and His Bride!

Evil for Evil

- ▶ The summary points again from 1 Thessalonians 5:14 made it clear that we are to warn the unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, and be patient with all. As we do these things, we must also keep 1 Thessalonians 5:15 in mind.
- ▶ “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”
- ▶ Remember that the word evil means “that which causes harm.” And we know from experience that people will hurt us and we will hurt them! It is inevitable in relationships between fallen beings. We will hurt and be hurt. Even as we are growing. Even as we are being sanctified. Believers will have disagreements with other believers.

Paul and Barnabas

- ▶ Paul and Barnabas provide an example where even an Apostle and his traveling companions can have a fall out, a disagreement that is so sharp that two people go, for a time, their separate ways.
- ▶ Imagine then as we are striving to encourage one another to peace how we will react when we are confronted – rightly or wrongly – by those who are walking along with us. In truth we must learn not to react! We must instead respond. To react is to undertake a reflexive course of action at times without even thinking. If we think we are about to be hit we move to block the blow or even to prepare to hit back. Yet if we are walking in the Spirit we must be ready to respond. To make a calculated move in response to an action. Someone starts to try and hit us and we dodge the blow – we move out of the way.

Respond vs React

- ▶ Here we see that as we work to learn to respond instead of react we must keep in mind this command: See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone.
- ▶ No matter who it is, if someone is evil toward us, seeking to harm us, we must not react in such a way that has the intention of harming them back or harming them instead. We must never plot evil against someone who has hurt us. That simply is not the Christian thing to do! For if we are to keep the peace within the Body, when another member of that Body harms us we must forgive, love, and work for reconciliation. We cannot allow ourselves to hold a grudge, become bitter, or brood and plot getting them back.

Pursue what is Good

- ▶ The verse goes on to tell us that we are to always pursue what is good both for ourselves and for all. Pursue, chase after, desire what is good – that which promotes health. Do we work toward having healthy relationships even with those people who rub us the wrong way and irritate us? Do we make it a point to always pursue what is good for all?
- ▶ It is easy to pursue what is good for us, right? But in truth, the things that are really good for us will be good for others also. So if we are pursuing something and think it is for our good but it will bring harm to another, then it really is not good for us or for anyone.

Discernment

- ▶ See where discernment fits in here? How can we know if we are rendering good or evil toward someone if we cannot tell the difference between good and evil? How can we pursue what is good for others if we do not even understand what good is?
- ▶ No wonder the world is confused. The world teaches us to look out for number one, but in the mean time not to infringe on anyone else's rights. You've doubtless heard the phrase – "Well, it did not hurt anyone else." Or even those who engage in evil thinking that as long as it only hurts them then it is okay. How ludicrous. How selfish! How undiscerning.

Think and Seek to Understand

- ▶ We must not render evil for evil but instead pursue what is good for us and for others. Today, if you are hurt by someone, think about your response! Deny your flesh. Delay your reaction. Think through your response. And render good even to those who render evil to you! The Bible tells us that then it is that we will overcome evil with good.
- ▶ Next Lesson – Finding the Will of God – 1 Thess. 5:16-18