

## 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 Answers Smorgasbord of Final Instructions

**Introduction:** Today we are on the home stretch, but this final text is much easier read than done.

**1. What attitude should a church have toward its leaders (5:12-13)?** Unlike Rodney “I get no respect” Dangerfield, an elder should get plenty of **1)** respect and **2)** esteem.

**What does the word respect mean (5:12)?** In English it means a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievement. The Greek is *oída*, which primarily means to know, to be intimately acquainted with, to stand in a close relation to, to understand (BAGD, p. 556). The KJV renders this as “to know”. Paul could have been telling the church to take the time to get to really know its leaders. “Respect” is almost a forced translation (Best, p. 224). Each local congregation in the first century was relatively small. New Testament leadership really is based on relationship.

**Elders:** It is interesting that Paul used the word leaders and not elders. The apostles left town quickly and had not been back. It is possible no elders had been officially appointed.

**How did Paul describe church leaders in 5:12?** They are those who **1)** labor among you and **2)** are over you in the Lord and **3)** admonish you.

**2. What labor do church leaders do among the church (5:12)?** See Acts 6:2, 4, 2 Corinthians 11:28, Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Timothy 5:17. The Greek for labor, *kopiaō*, means to grow weary, to toil. Part of the reason the church is to respect its leaders is because of the hard work they do in equipping, disciple making, leading and teaching.

ESV 1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor (*kopiaō*) in preaching and teaching.

A brother who is not a leader may work hard at his job and on his marriage and in rearing his kids. An elder does all that too, plus he has the added burden of caring for the church.

ESV 2 Corinthians 11:28 . . . . apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

**3. In what sense are church leaders over you in the Lord (5:12)?** “Over” (1Th 5:12) is from *proistēmi* has two meanings. It literally means to stand before someone, either **1)** in the sense of directing or **2)** in the sense of protecting and caring for (Rienecker, p. 602). Thus it can mean “be at the head of, rule, direct” or to “be concerned about, care for, give aid” (BAGD, p. 707). Given the tenor of the rest of the New Testament concerning leadership, Paul may have meant the latter rather than the former (Best, p 225). In any event Paul’s choice of the word *proistēmi* shows the servant nature of church leadership. Church leaders are to direct the church with an attitude of care, aid and concern. Church leaders really are to be ministers who serve the church through management.

The NAS here says the elders “have charge over you”. This fits nicely with Hebrews 13:17 which says that church leaders are “keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.”

**4. Church leaders are to admonish the church. What does admonish mean (5:12)?** In English, to admonish means to warn or reprimand, to speak to someone in a way that expresses disapproval or criticism. The Greek is *neutheteo* (as in Nouthetic Counseling) which means to warn or exhort. It refers to the correction of those who are in error (Rienecker, p. 602). Neuthetic Counseling, for example, is so named because it is explicitly rooted in scripture and helps the patient to identify sin issues and to take responsibility.

Some people chaff at being involved with a smaller congregation because they do not want the scrutiny that comes along with being in a church where everybody knows everybody else. Many people want a church where they can be anonymous, coming and going without being challenged. They want glitz and glamour, but not accountability. Such impersonal gatherings are arguably not church meetings at all.

A wimpy Casper Milquetoast personality could never qualify to serve the church as a leader because he lacks the backbone and disposition to confront people when they need it. Some men were called into the ministry by their mothers. Others evidently enter the ministry because they can't cut it in a secular job. Being in the ministry can be the easiest job in the world (if you are an eightball) or the hardest (if you are obedient to the calling).

**According to 5:13, how should the church view its leaders?** The church is to esteem its leaders in love. A church could very easily take its leaders for granted. Many a Western house church has failed precisely due to lack of qualified leaders. Don't take them for granted!

**What does the word esteem mean (5:13)?** Esteem has to do with admiration. The Greek is *hegeomai* (2233) which means to consider (Rienecker, p. 602). Thus, consider them highly.

**5. According to 5:13, why should a church esteem its leaders?** See *1 Timothy 3:1*. A church should esteem its leaders because of their work.

**NAS 1 Timothy 3:1** . . . if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.

It used to baffle my Dad why anyone would want to be a politician. It is a thankless job and most of what you hear from constituents is griping. Thomas Jefferson said, “I have no ambition to govern men. It is a painful and thankless effort”. Serving as an overseer is similar. It is a lot of work that often goes unappreciated or is even resented. Paul says the church is to be sure to esteem its leaders because of their work.

**What level of esteem are church leaders to receive (5:13)?** They are to be esteemed “very highly” and in “love”.

**6. With respect to what might Paul have written, “Be at peace among yourselves”**

**(5:13b)?** Compare *Hebrews 13:17*. Perhaps this hints at some type of tension between the church and its elders. There is to be peace between the elders and the church! Based on *Hebrews 13:17* if there is an impasse over some situation, the church is to yield to the opinion of its elders (it takes two to fight):

ESV **Hebrews 13:17** Obey (*peitho*, be persuaded by) your leaders and submit (*hupeiko*, to yield after a fight) to them . . .

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**\*\*\*How did Paul urge the church to deal with the idle, the fainthearted and the weak (5:14)?**

The church was to admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak and be patient with all three groups. No church is perfect. In every church there will be a minority who need special attention. Although early churches were small enough to meet in a Roman atrium, they were not micro churches. They were big enough to have a large contingency of strong believers who could help the minority of weak believers. A major weakness of modern Western house churches is that they are so small it does not take but one or two dysfunctional people to overwhelm the whole church. If a majority of the church is idle, fainthearted and weak then perhaps it is more of a mission or ministry than a true church.

**7. In what sense were some of them idle (5:14)?** See *4:11-12, 2 Thessalonians 3:10*.

Evidently some of them were not gainfully employed. The Greek, *ataktos*, was primarily a military term used of a soldier who is out of step or out of rank. It was then used more generally of whatever is out of order (Rienecker, p. 602).

ESV **1 Thessalonians 4:11-12** . . . work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

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

The church should help support those who cannot work (due to illness, injury or infirmity), but not those unwilling to work. Instead, the idle were to be admonished to labor. The church's compassion must be tempered with tough love and yet with patience.

**Word Study:** Patient (5:14) is from *makrothumeo*; *makro* means long and *thumeo* has to do with heat. A patient person takes a long time to get hot.

**8. How can the fainthearted be encouraged (5:14)?** Perhaps these people were fainthearted due to the persecution or the deaths the church had suffered. They can be encouraged by prayer, Scripture reading, attending Bible studies, one on one meetings, pep talks, support, a listening ear, etc. Everything done to encourage them must be with patience.

**9. What kind of help do you suppose the weak needed (5:14)?** The help provided would depend on the type of weakness. There is no end to areas a person could be weak in: familial duties, money management, child training, weak in faith, etc. As in dealing with the idle and fainthearted, it takes much patience.

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**\*\*\*\*According to 5:15, what is something we should not do? See Romans 12:19.** We should not repay evil for evil. The temptation is great to get even!

**ESV Romans 12:19** 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."

**Interesting Grammar:** "See" is in the second person (you see) and no one is in the third person. The combination of these two conveys the idea that the whole church is being held responsible for the conduct of each individual member in the area of retaliation (Rienecker, p. 602). We are to hold the revenge seeker back.

**10. Instead of repaying evil, what should we always seek to do (5:15)? See Romans 12:19.** We should always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

**ESV Romans 12:19-20** 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 is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

**Example:** Sri Lankan church planter Muralee Kanagalingam was beaten by a mob in a small village. When asked by the police if he wanted to press charges against the man who incited the mob, he declined. The man was appreciative and apologized for his actions. Muralee later helped him find employment. He is still not a Christian, but he no longer opposes the Gospel.

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**\*\*\*\*What three things are we told to do in 5:16-18?** We are to **1)** rejoice always, **2)** pray without ceasing and **3)** give thanks in all circumstances.

**Word Study:** We are to pray "without ceasing" (5:17). The adverb for "without ceasing" (*adialeiptos*) referred to that which was continually and repeatedly done: the uninterrupted necessary payment of hard taxes, a continual uninterrupted cough and a sustained military attack (Rienecker, p. 603).

**11. What reason did Paul give for always rejoicing and giving thanks in all circumstances (5:16-18)?** The reason given is because it is God's will that we do so.

**God's Sovereignty:** It takes confident trust in God's sovereignty to rejoice and be thankful in all circumstances. Paul did not write that all circumstances are good. Many are evil. Yet by faith we are to rejoice and give thanks. Some greater cosmic purpose is accomplished even by situations that are the result of sin.

*Do you have an unreasonable and overbearing boss?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

*Is your husband an insensitive blockhead?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

*Will your employer only employ you 30 hours a week due to Obamacare?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

*Is your house about to be foreclosed on?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

*Are your grown children not turning out the way you had hoped?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

*Has our government been taken over by socialists?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

*Do your colleagues think you a fool for believing in intelligent design?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

*Does no one listen when you share the Gospel?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

*Did you get a bad report from the doctor?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

*Is your business failing?* Rejoice, pray and give thanks.

This is where the rubber hits the road. Either you trust God in all things, or you don't. How you respond to your circumstances tell it all (what's down in the well comes up in the bucket).

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**\*\*\*\*What caution did Paul give the church concerning prophecy (5:19-22)?** The church must be careful not to quench the Spirit by despising prophecy. Instead it must be tested.

**ESV 1 Corinthians 14:39** . . . earnestly desire to prophesy.

**What is New Testament prophecy (5:20)?** See 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, 31. A prophecy is the gift of speaking for God (Rienecker, p. 603). It can be in the form of divine revelation about the future, or the secrets of a person's life, or a word of encouragement.

New Testament prophets are much less authoritative than Old Testament prophets (compare the harsh penalty for error in Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:20-22 as opposed to 1 Corinthians 14:29 or here in 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). The Old Testament prophet is roughly equivalent to a New Testament Apostle (rather than a New Testament prophet). It would seem that New Testament prophets were less important than New Testament teachers (compare 1 Corinthians 14:5a, 31 to James 3:1).

**12. Why might a church despise prophecy?** Evidently there were a lot of false prophecies and the church tired of dealing with them. It is quite easy for an immature or unhinged person to fancy himself a spokesman for God. One impassioned false prophecy I have heard repeatedly since the early 1970s is that a nuclear holocaust is imminent (40 years later is imminent?).

**13. What important check on prophecy did Paul give in 5:21-22? See 1 Corinthians 14:29.**

Any and all prophetic utterance is to be tested. Prophecy and judgment are always to go hand in hand. Further, a known unstable person should not be allowed to vex the church with his unending deluded prophecies. One of the duties of elders is to protect the church from unstable people and to help judge prophecy. The presence of discerning elders and the certainty of judgment will prevent many spurious prophecies from ever being given in the first place.

**NAS 1 Corinthians 14:29** . . . let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.

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**\*\*\*\*What prayer/blessing did Paul offer for the church (5:23-24)?** He prayed for their complete sanctification and that they be found blameless at the coming of Jesus.

**Word Study:** “Coming” (5:23) is from *parousia*.

**14. What basis did Paul have for expecting them to be found completely sanctified at Jesus’ coming (5:22-24)?** The God who called us to be His own is faithful and will surely accomplish it in/for his church.

**Trichotomy:** A trichotomy is a splitting into three parts. Based on 5:22, man is composed of three parts: spirit, soul and body. Exactly how spirit and soul are different is never really explained in Scripture. The soul is your conscious self (mind, will, emotions). Some say the soul is your organ of God consciousness; it is what enables you to have fellowship with God. It is your capacity to know God. On the other hand, Paul may simply have used these three terms to refer to the totality of human nature, using several terms for emphasis (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2311).

**What statement in 5:23 implies Paul expected the Thessalonians to be alive at the coming of the Lord?** There is nothing that has to happen before Jesus returns. Paul knew Jesus could come at any time and expected Jesus within their lifetimes. Similarly Jesus could come at any time in our lifetimes and we must be expecting His return.

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**\*\*\*\*What request did Paul have in 5:25?**

**15. What would have been good prayers to pray for Paul (5:25)? Compare Ephesians 6:19, Colossians 4:3-4, 2 Thessalonians 3:1.** It is interesting that Paul offered no specific requests. Missionaries are not super human. They have health problems, problems with their kids, problems learning the language, personnel problems with other missionaries, personal self discipline problems, experience culture shock, they get discouraged, etc. They need our prayer! Here is what Paul asked for elsewhere:

ESV **Ephesians 6:19** and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

ESV **Colossians 4:3-4** . . . pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ . . . that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

ESV **2 Thessalonians 3:1** . . . pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored . . .

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**\*\*\*\*What often neglected greeting did Paul command in 5:26? We are to greet one another with a holy kiss!**

**What is a holy kiss (5:26)?** The kiss was used in the ancient world as a form of greeting (Rienecker, p. 604), much as the French still do today.

**16. Why don't modern churches obey 5:26?** If ever anything in the Bible were cultural, this is it! The equivalent today would be a hand shake.

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**\*\*\*\*17. How did Paul show the importance of having this letter read to all the brothers (5:27)? See Colossians 4:16, 1 Timothy 4:13.** He put them under oath.

**What does it mean to put someone under oath (5:27)?**

ESV **Colossians 4:16** . . . when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

ESV **1 Timothy 4:13** . . . devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture . . .

**Who are all the brothers (5:27)?**

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**\*\*\*\*18. How did Paul conclude this letter (5:28)? Compare 1:1.** He concluded it with a benediction/prayer similar to as at the beginning.

**So What?**

**19. Of all the exhortations given in 5:12-28, which did you most need to hear?**

**20. Why do you think Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians?** What was his purpose/goal? One reason in writing was to encourage the church while they were enduring persecution. Another was to explain why he had not been back to help them. A third reason was to set a Christian standard for holiness. A fourth was to give them instruction regarding the dead in Christ.

**What smorgasbord of final instructions did Paul have in 5:12-22?** (*List each by verse*).

5:12 - Respect & esteem church leaders, 5:12.

5:13 - Be at peace among yourselves, 5:13.

5:14 - Admonish the idle, encourage the faint, help the weak, be patient with all, 5:14.

5:15 - Don't repay evil for evil but instead do good to all, 5:15.

5:16 - Rejoice always, 5:16.

5:17 - Pray without ceasing, 5:17.

5:18 - Give thanks in everything, 5:18.

5:19 - Don't quench the Spirit, 5:19

5:20 - Don't despise prophecy, 5:20.

5:21 - Test everything, 5:21.

5:22 - Abstain from every form of evil, 5:21.

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

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