

Wisdom for All Ages and Stages of Life

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First Things

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

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This morning, it is a privilege to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Thessalonians 5, a little bit toward the end of the New Testament. I know that today, particularly a day that we recognize mothers and later today graduates, it's a day where we have lots of guests and visitors and such, and I want to welcome those of you that are new to us today to a journey through the book of what we know as 1 Thessalonians. Now today, as we make our way toward the end of it, really we're finding ourselves in that place where it's almost like we're summarizing all that we've studied. So if this is your first time, I promise you're not going to be behind or left out of the message. But what we know as 1 Thessalonians, as we've been walking through it for several weeks and months, has been so strategic and so timely in our lives, because this is the very first letter that the Lord gave us, the church, through the Apostle Paul. And the reason that's strategic is because today, when you use the term Christian or Christianity or even the word church, there are so many different opinions, so many different preferences, so many different expressions, in fact, over time, we've had debates that have led to divisions, confessions, and creeds and all these things, and so really what 1 Thessalonians has allowed us to do is recapture who we, the church, were always called to be.

Today in chapter 5, as we turn to verse 12, kind of taking all that we've learned and studied, what we're about to see is the wisdom of the ages, and it's not just wisdom that oftentimes, as we read in a moment, that hopefully your mom imparted unto you, but this is wisdom for all stages of life. In fact, one of the things that we discover is that whether we're young of age in the home or we're leading our own home, we need God's wisdom for our life. And so as we turn to verse 12 of chapter 5, we discover that there are some things that maybe we need to remind ourselves of today. It says,

12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. 14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. 15 See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. 16 Rejoice evermore. 17 Pray without ceasing. 18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of

God in Christ Jesus concerning you. 19 Quench not the Spirit. 20 Despise not prophesyings. 21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. 22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Now you may not recognize it, but I'm sure that most of us at some point growing up, our moms paraphrased that in their own words to us on a multitude of occasions but today, as we allow ourselves to be reminded of God's plan for our lives, I thought I'd take a little bit of liberty and what I want to do today is I'm going to summarize for you, I'm going to account for you six of the ideologies, the philosophies that this world is propagating to us, and then see how the passage that we just read pushes back against and communicates what is really true versus that which is being propagated by the world. Now today I will share with you, these are my six observations. This is what the world is trying to sell you and convince you not only to agree with, but to celebrate.

What is the world "pushing" upon us today? Well, the first thing I've observed is the world is stating that to self-identify is the pinnacle of human existence. We have now made it to a point, thanks to technology, science, and other things, that it doesn't matter how the Lord designed us to be in this world, we can create our own identity. There are those that are displeased with God's way of fashioning them so they have "identified" as the opposite of or different from. There are even those today that have gone to great extremes, they're not just fans of the animal kingdom, there are people in our world today who are identifying as a part of the animal kingdom and claiming they're not even a human, but they are of that sort.

Now in a world where it seems like we have such freedom and liberty to identify as we so choose, can I be transparent today and say I'd like to self-identify too? Now I know some of you are getting a little nervous for a moment. Don't be. I want to identify as a 67-year-old man. Now some of you who are about two decades older than I am going, "You really don't want to do that." But I do, and here's why: because at 67 years of age, I can withdraw all of the Social Security that I've invested and they're telling me by the time I get there, it won't be there anymore, so if I identify as a 67-year-old man, I can go ahead and get what is due me in spite of what the age is. And by the way, just in the event, and by the way, can you hear the sarcasm coming out? What would happen to me if I went down to the Social Security Administration and said I want to identify as a 67-year-old man? They would do what we refuse to do in our courts, in our legislation, in our schools. They'd say look at the birth certificates.

See, today we've said identify however you want. What does the Bible say? Look in verse 12 at the very end, "those that admonish you." You know what it means to be admonished? Corrected. To be admonished means to be instructed. To be admonished is to say it doesn't matter what you want to be, this is how God has made you and God has designed you and this is what the Bible says is true in spite of what you personally believe, think, or "agree or celebrate" with.

Now on the other hand, if you'll notice in verse 13, it says and be also at peace among yourselves. Now not only can you tell today is going to be a very politically incorrect

message, but let me state this, and I think this is for myself and for all of us: if you're a Bible-believing believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have to agree with what scripture says in light of what the world is propagating but you don't have to be angry about it. You don't have to be mad about it. What does it say? Admonish one another, but then in the next verse it says but make sure you have peace with each other, and can I give a public service announcement to those that are listening out there? You know that it is absolutely possible, even though the world tells you it's not, did you know it is possible to have differing opinions and still get along? It's possible to have completely contrary philosophies on life and still be at peace with one another.

The second thing the world is propagating is that we should have a society that rewards the rebellious and overlooks the obedient. You know, some weeks ago, an individual who used to possess one of the highest offices in the land, the former Speaker of the House, made this statement in regards to an individual who was walking through the court processes, "He has every right to prove his innocence." Well, time out, I thought I lived in a different country than that. I thought we lived in a world where you were innocent until you were proven guilty. Not in today's culture. See, in today's culture, we reward and excuse the rebellious, but we overlook the obedient.

Notice what it says here in verse 14, "Now we exhort you, warn those that are unruly." Don't excuse them. Don't rationalize them and don't justify or celebrate them. It says, warn those who are unruly, much like moms have warned us throughout the days that if all of your friends jumped off a cliff, would you go too? They're warning us this is not a wise decision. This is not good. And here's what's happened: because of our culture excusing this, we've actually made it to where you're punished if you're obedient and you're celebrated if you're rebellious. The Bible is contrary to that. It says, "No, no, no." We should warn those who are unruly because ultimately, and we'll face this in just a moment, it's not just about the benches or the judges they stand before or a panel, but eventually we've got to stand before God.

Which leads to the third thing. Now again, all of these could be independent messages of themselves, but time will not allow. The third thing the world is propagating is this: make sure that you lower the bar so that everybody is declared the winner. We have raised a generation that expects a trophy after every contest, and that participation trophy better not be smaller than the trophy of the winner. Now for those of you parents, grandparents, and those that are involved in sports and competitions, let me give you a little insight lest you have forgotten: you can be attending three-year-old soccer, okay, and by the way, you say three-year-old soccer, it's ants on a chocolate bar, that's all it is. Let me give you some insight: at the end of the game, they know the score. They know how many points they scored. They know how many points the other team scored. And they know how many points they scored on themselves. That's three-year-old soccer. Okay? That's just what it is. But we have become a culture that says if we can't all become what we want to be, back to that self-identification, just lower the bar. If we struggle academically, make the test scores lower. If we struggle physically, just eliminate the minimum requirements.

Interesting what the Bible has to say in verse 14, "comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." What's the Bible stating there? The Bible is stating that whether we identify or like it or not, God has his standards and we don't have the right to lower them. See, we've become a culture today in regards to our relationships to each other, our relationship to him, that has become famous for saying, "Well, I know what the Bible says, but I don't think it really means that." You know what we're doing? We're lowering the bar. And so if people aren't coming to church as much as they used to, or maybe people aren't believing like they used to, what do we do? We say, "Well, let's just lower the bar. It doesn't have to be Jesus only to go to heaven. You can believe what you want to be. It doesn't have to be just a man and a wife in marriage. Make it anything you want, just don't quit attending." We've gone to meddling now, haven't we?

But what does he say? Comfort the feeble-minded. Support the weak. Those that don't see it God's way, you don't lower the bar to them, you go and invest your life and show them why God has the bar set there in the first place. You show them why his standard is what it is. You show them that even though they may not comprehend, understand, or want to, that God has his reasons for a reason. In fact, the Bible makes it very clear, his ways, they're not our ways. His thoughts, they're not our thoughts. So we don't have the right to say, "Well, if we don't like what he's thinking, we'll just change his thoughts."

It leads to the fourth point that if you find, this is the world's opinion, if you find yourself in a position where those that subscribe to the scripture, those who subscribe to biblical Christianity are at odds with you, by all means, claim that you're a victim. The victimization of anybody who disagrees with you. Have you noticed today that our culture has done this? We have placed everybody into two groups. You're in the right group or you're in the wrong group. You say, "Well, how do you know what group you're in?" It depends who's in charge. It's the golden rule. Whoever has the gold makes the rules, right? And let me go ahead and just cut to the chase here: if you are a believer in Jesus Christ and you subscribe to whatever the Bible says the Bible means, then you are now in the wrong group when it comes to the culture and so those whose lives don't match up with what you proclaim and what you preach and what you believe, all of a sudden claim, "Well, that's hate speech. You're a bigot. You just don't understand my emotions and my feelings." We're going to talk about feelings in just a moment. Oh, and we're going to camp out there for a minute.

So what does the Bible say? Notice what it says in verse 15, "See that none render evil for evil." You know what that means? Believer, Christian, it's never right to do wrong. It's never right to do wrong. And we live in a world today that so lowers the bar that they want to drag you into the mud of their life and "fight it out." It says do not render evil for evil. That's why in Ephesians 6 it says when all things fail, just stand. Don't give up any ground, but don't sink to their level. And last time I checked, we just sang victory in Jesus, not victimization in Jesus. We may not be the largest group, we may not be the loudest group, but thank God, aren't you grateful you're in the right group from God's perspective?

The fifth thing we see in our world today is that no matter what happens, you need to make sure and blame others and never take personal responsibility. That's right, it's always somebody else's fault. You know what the world has forgotten? The world has forgotten that when you point the finger at somebody else, there are three pointing right back at you, okay? But this is our culture today. In fact, and I understand there's a legal means to this, but when's the last time one of these celebrity cases or even local cases go before the judge and somebody actually declared they were guilty? I mean they've got video footage, audio footage, they've got everything there, it's always, "Don't blame me." And then they try to skirt things toward and against somebody else.

What does it say here? Notice what it says in verse 17, "Pray without ceasing." You say, "How is praying without ceasing the antidote to not taking personal responsibility?" Because one of the problems, one of the reasons that humanity likes to blame everybody else is they spent more time with their thoughts and feelings and not enough time with God. Let me remind you, at the very beginning of your Bible, there's a man by the name of Cain. Cain did not come before God the way he was supposed to, so what did he do? He blamed his brother. He blamed God. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. I mean, it is perpetual in humanity, but if you go back, all of them were not in the presence of the Lord when they fell into those traps. The more time you spend on your face, the more time you spend in the word of God, the more you're going to realize how messed up you are. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." The Bible says all of our deeds are like filthy rags. The Bible says none of us are good, no, not one. One of the problems with the blame game is we spent so much time listening to voices other than God's, we begin – listen – we begin to believe our own headlines and God's headline is real simple, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." That means that we ought to take and shoulder some blame here and quit trying to pass the proverbial buck.

Which leads to the final one. I wish I had about two hours at this moment. I have but a brief moment to express this last thing. See, we talk about self-identification, we talk about rewarding the rebellious, we talk about lowering the bar, claiming to be a victim or blaming others, but the final statement – now this is the world – your feelings are of greater value than any set of facts or evidence. That's what the world's preaching. The world is declaring to you and I, "It doesn't matter what the evidence is, it doesn't matter what the facts are, the question is how does that make you feel?"

Now I'm going to speak on behalf of God and I think I've got 66 books in his Bible to give evidence to what I'm about to say: God don't care about your feelings because the facts are the facts. When Cain came to him and said, "Hey now, we've got a problem," God didn't say, "Well, let's sit down and talk about how you feel about this." What did God say? He said, "Make it right or sin lies at the door."

Now here's where it gets interesting. Look in verse 19. It says, "Quench not the Spirit of God." How is that an antidote or an antithesis to this? Because according to the gospel of John, do you know what the three functions of the Holy Spirit in your life are? To convict you of sin, convict you of righteousness, and to convict you of judgment. And when we

start saying, "Oh but my feelings," I've got news for you, it doesn't matter how you feel, God's word says what God's word means and if you've fallen short, you've fallen short. The Holy Spirit is to convict you of sin, is to convict you of righteousness, and listen to this, is to convict you of judgment. What does that mean? I've got news for you: you, myself, and all of the human race, from Adam and Eve to you and me, that one day when you stand before God, an acceptable answer when he pronounces your eternity in hell is, "I just don't feel like that's appropriate." It's not an acceptable answer. Or, "God, you don't understand, I don't feel that way about this." The problem is that his Holy Spirit has been convicting you of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Those are the facts. That's the evidence.

But the world tells you just go with how you "feel." "I just feel that, you know, it doesn't matter what religion you're a part of as long as you're faithful." Can I share with you the evidence of what we call the law of non-contradiction? Did you know that two things cannot be opposite of each other and both be right? Let me give you a hint: you can't be a married bachelor. It's impossible. At the same way, you can't have Jesus be right for some, Buddha right for others, and Mohammad right for other folks. Can't do it. You say, "But I just feel as long as people are sincere." I've got news for you: Jesus said, "I'm the way, the truth, the life, and nobody comes to the Father but by me." So therefore, it doesn't matter what you feel. C. S. Lewis, the great apologist, made this statement, "Jesus was either a lunatic, he was a liar, or he was Lord." But if he is Lord, nobody else can compete with that title.

So it says, do not quench the Spirit. Notice the next statement, "Despise not prophesyings." You know what the Bible declares? The Bible declares this, that one day when you breathe your last breath, you're either going to heaven or hell. You say, "Well, I don't feel those should be the only two options." Doesn't matter. That's what God has put before us and either you believe in Jesus and go to heaven, or you go with your feelings and you go to hell. You say, "Well, that just, I don't feel that." It doesn't matter how you feel. In fact, Jesus made it very clear. He talked about hell twice as much as he did about heaven.

It says, do not despise this and finally look at verse 21, "Prove all things." You say, "Prove all things?" This may sound counterproductive, but it's not: everything that I've stated the last few moments, go and prove it for yourself. You know one of the beautiful things about scripture? 1 Corinthians 15 says that Jesus came and he lived according to the scriptures. He came and he died and he was buried according to the scriptures. He rose from the grave according to the scriptures. And when the Bible says according to the scriptures, that means prophecies that were made hundreds and thousands of years in advance.

And when it says prove all things, for those of you that may question, those of you that may feel contradictory toward what I'm stating today, go ahead and look and one of the things that you'll discover is time and time again, the only thing that will keep you from subscribing and believing in what God has said is how you feel about it. You just don't feel that's the way it should be. You don't feel that God is being fair. You don't feel that it

should be set up that way. I've got news for you: his ways are not your ways. His thoughts are not your thoughts.

So let me end with this. The Bible states we've all sinned, that we are deserving and worthy of a place the Bible calls hell. None of us can fix it or change it so God himself comes down and he lives the life we couldn't live, dies the death we should have died, and says, "If you believe on me I'll fix the whole thing." Now I've got news for you: it doesn't matter how you feel about that, that's a good deal and the facts and the evidence are that he, according to John 3:16, so loved you he gave his only begotten Son, that if you would believe in him, you wouldn't have to perish but you'd have everlasting life. Let me give you some motherly wisdom today: when you breathe your last breath, make sure you believed in Jesus and you end up in heaven and not go with your feelings and end up somewhere else.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Today as we come to this time of our service, this time of decision, maybe you're that person today, maybe it was not willing, maybe it was unconscious, but maybe the Holy Spirit revealed to you you've fallen into the world's trap, you've listened to those loud, voluminous voices out there. But today the Spirit of God took the word of God and showed you that it's not about identification, it's not about feelings, it's about facts and evidence and the facts are that we've all sinned and that Jesus is the only means of salvation. Romans 10:13 says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe today that's you. Right in this place, in this room, watching online, listening on the radio, whoever calls on the Lord will be saved. Now let me remind you what that verse doesn't say. It doesn't say whoever becomes a Baptist. It doesn't say whoever checks off a box. It doesn't even say whoever repeats a certain set of words in the right order. It says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. Maybe today you're that one who needs to call out, cry out to God. It's not about the words that you use, I would use, somebody else would use. It's not about doing it out loud or to yourself. It's about humbling yourself and admitting what the facts are, you've got a sin condition only Jesus can fix.

If you're this morning needing to be saved, desiring to be saved, just cry out. Maybe your heart's cry would go a little something like this, "God, today I recognize I've got a sin problem. Lord, I've got a sin problem that I can't fix myself that only Jesus can solve. So God, today I believe. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf, lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that when he allowed himself to be nailed to his cross, he was bearing the pain and the punishment of my sin, my rebellion. And God, today I believe that three days later, as we sang in the songs today, when he rose from the grave, he made it possible for my sin to be forgiven, my soul to be saved. God, today in light of all that we studied, I don't have the answers to all the problems and the issues and the struggles out there, but there's one thing I know, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. The best way I know how. I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who cried out to Jesus. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us, we're going to stand and sing

together. Let me just invite you, step out, step forward. We've got a team of people who would love just to hear your story, to pray with you. We've got a room set aside no matter how much time it takes. Or maybe today you're like those two young ladies, already believers, but needing to profess it publicly. Maybe you need to follow in believer's baptism. Maybe you're like those each and every time we gather who say, "This is our family of faith. This is our church home." Or maybe you just need to be prayed with or prayed for. Let me invite you in a moment as we stand after I pray, just to come forward. We'd love to be a part of that in your life.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you in light of all that we are subjected to, in light of all that this world tries to saturate us with, God, thank you that your truth stands above and alone above it all. So God, today help us to respond to your voice and your word and not anything else. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.