

Church Instructions Required

(1 Thessaloninas 5:12-28)

4/10/19; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

Life is filled with warning labels and instruction manuals.

Some require a great deal of our attention.

Some require no attention at all.

Take this washing machine warning label, which instructs the user to not put any person in the washing machine.

And then you may also notice the graphic that shows what the open and closed position looks like..

Now we may laugh at instructions like this, but for some people, it may contain valuable information..

It simply depends on how familiar a person is with a product..

We bought some Christmas lights last year at Dollar General.

The instructions on the side of the box said for outdoor and indoor use only.

Though there may be a 3rd option, I am not sure of what that option is..

Needless to say, life is filled with instruction.

Along the same lines, the Bible instructs and warns its readers all the time.

As we come to the end of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, we are going to be overwhelmed with instructions and warnings...

In fact, we are going to see 21 commands from the Lord to his church from verses 12-28..

Clearly, this section doesn't include everything that a believer must do, but it sure covers the most instruction in the shortest space of any section in the NT.

And the Holy Spirit has really helped us in this section because He essentially separates these commands in the 3 major areas of the believer's life..

The first area will be a believer's relationship to church leadership..

The second area will be a believer's relationship to those in the church.

The third area will be a believer's relationship to the Lord of the church.

We will get as far as the Lord allows tonight in the time we have, but this will take at least another week..

I assure that all of this is of incredible value to believers..

I want you to listen to how a pastor named Ray Steadman describes this final section of 1 Thessalonians...

“I do not understand what has happened to the Christian community. Believers who go regularly to church, and profess to believe the Bible, often seem to go along with practices of the world around them with hardly any consciousness that what they are doing is unbiblical and really wrong.

They lie without hesitation. They evade paying their bills. They cheat on their taxes. They ignore needy people. They fail to keep appointments. They free-load shamelessly. They lose their tempers. They grow critical and caustic. They desert their mates.

If the Apostle Paul were here he would be very concerned about this. To him, the mark of true Christian faith is that it changes everything you do and say. It affects every area of your life. A Christian may no longer act as he did before he came to Christ. This is very clear in the NT.

The letter of First Thessalonians is no exception. The closing verses of Chapter 5, to which we now come, are wonderfully practical guidelines on how to live Christianly, in three areas of life. First, how to act toward the leaders of a church; how to live with other believers, whether at home, at work, or wherever. And finally, how to live toward God and respond to the situations where he puts you.”

In sum, this section is not optional for the Christian.

It essentially defines our life as believers in the church and in the world.

Now, before we jump into these verses, let us remember the context of this letter.

It is written to essentially a group of new Christians who reside in the port city of Thessalonica in 50 AD.

The church as a whole is still very young in that day, but this church in particular was a newborn. having only come to faith recently as Paul entered the city and preached in the synagogue there.

And remember, Paul and Silas and Timothy were run out the city shortly after this church's founding..

So this church was on its own soon after it was established.

But eventually, Paul sent Timothy to them to get a report of how the church was doing..

And Timothy came back with a glowing report of this church's testimony..

They were people of faith.

They were people who loved.

They were people making the Lord's name known in their area..

Now, we also noted this.

As good as the church was doing, there was room for improvement.

In fact, Paul tells them twice in chapter 4 to excel still more in their walk with the Lord...

But as we get to the final section of this letter, Paul now begins to address what we can call some problem areas in the church at Thessalonica..

As we know, no church is perfect.

Every church has warts because every church contains people who are sinners..

The Thessalonian church was no exception.

Though they were surprisingly mature in some areas, they were also immature in others..

And the reason we know that about them is the content of the instruction that Paul is going to offer in these final verses..

While we can't be certain, it seems that there were strained relationships in the church there, so the Lord inspires Paul to offer instruction in the three most important relationships in the believer's life..

And these 3 relationships will form our outline for this section..

So, let's simply begin with the first relationship that Paul addresses and that is the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd..

I. The People and the Church Leaders (12-13)

Let me read verses 12 and 13..

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you [i]appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you [j]instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

As Paul begins to wrap up his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, he turns his attention to the relationship in a church that is the most crucial.

And that is the relationship between a shepherd and his flock of sheep.

Churches move forward when sheep and shepherds cooperate.

Churches move backward when sheep and shepherds disagree.

And churches split when sheep and shepherds fight.

In fact, there is no greater barometer of a church's health that how well do the leaders of a church and the people in the church interact.

When the people lose trust in their leader, a church is in trouble.

When pastors lose trust in their people, a church is also in trouble.

And this may be the reason that Paul begins with this relationship in the church.

Now the Thessalonian church was a young church that had really come into existence at the same time.

For that reason, all were in similar stages of spiritual maturity..

Now that makes for a difficult situation in terms of church leadership.

You see, church leaders are those who stand out in a congregation in terms of spiritual wisdom and maturity..

However, the Thessalonians were mostly like all on the same spiritual mature plane.

So how did Paul go about choosing men to lead this church?

Quite frankly, we don't know the details, but we do know this.

Paul would have set biblically qualified men over this church before he got out of town.

In fact, this was how God established leaders in most of the early churches..

Acts 14:19-23...

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." 23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Simply put, the custom of Paul was to set church leaders in place when he left church.

It is safe to assume that Paul had also done that as he was run out of Thessalonica..

I also think that it is safe to assume that Paul's choice of elders in Thessalonica has created some issues with the church.

And we know that because here Paul is calling for peace between the people of the church and the leaders over them..

Now, before we get into the nuts and bolts of how peace is sustained between people and elders, let me say this..

Disputes between the people of the church and the men who lead the church are so destructive to the church's witness..

Whether the disagreements are petty or serious, there is nothing good that comes out of a church that cannot get along with its leadership and vice versa.

In fact, Jesus tells us that the world will know us by our love for one another.

Sadly, many churches and pastors forget that verse and often set out to get their way.

However in doing so, they lose their way and destroy their mission in the world..

And so many of you here have seen that if you have been around the church for any length of time.

It is always sad and tragic when sheep and shepherds fuss and fight..

Now, how is peace maintained between the people in the church and the leaders over them..

Well, that formula is found right here in verses 12 and 13..

It is literally a two way street.

There are responsibilities for the shepherd to practice, and there are responsibilities for the sheep to practice.

Let begin with the shepherd...

Responsibility #1 of the shepherd is to labor for the church he serves.

You see that in verse 12..

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you [i]appreciate those who diligently labor among you

It is clear that church leaders are called to labor for those they lead.

Now, let's remind ourselves of who the leaders of the church are..

The NT uses really 3 words for define church leaders..

Elder, bishop, and pastor all are words used in the NT to describe church leadership..

Pastors are bishops. Bishops are elders. Elders are pastors..

This is the model of church government in the NT.

As Baptists, we may wonder whether the term deacon fits in this conversation of church leadership..

Without getting into all of it, I would simply say that most Baptist church have men that they call deacons but they actually serve as elders of the church.

Deacon is never used in the NT to describe church leaders who exercise authority.

It is used to describe servants in the church.

But that is another story for another day.

In sum, I would include the Baptist idea of deacons into this instruction for church leaders since most serve as elders in the churches they lead..

Now that we know who Paul is talking about here, again let's remind ourselves that church leadership is called to labor diligently in the churches they serve.

The Greek word for labor diligently is *kopiao*, which was often used for work that included sweat and exhaustion..

Now, there are all sorts of jokes about preachers only working one day a week.

I hear them all the time.

They don't apply to me since I work 2 days a week..

Just kidding.

But seriously, I hear those comments.

I even have people call me inviting me to all sorts of things unrelated to ministry and when I tell them that I have to work, they laugh as if I am lying..

Though I am not here to defend anything I do, I will say this.

Ministry is hard if done right.

Not only does studying occupy much of your time, there are phone calls, emails, text messages, hospital visits, prayers, fellowships to attend...

It does require work and though it may not resemble what people think is work, I assure that the labor wears you out just the same.

My best night of sleep is Sunday and Wednesday nights.

Ministry is exhausting is the shepherd is diligent and disciplined to attend to his flock.

But on top of the labor, church leaders are also called to have authority over the flock...

Look at the middle of verse 12..

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you [i]appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you [j]instruction

To have charge over the church is not meant to call church leaders to dictatorship..

Church leaders don't sit on the hill like the generals of old directing the troops on the battlefield.

Instead, church leaders are on the front lines leading the church into battle..

Leaders may have charge over their flock but they are also the ones yelling charge as the church goes to battle.

To have charge is the idea of being the leader over a group of people, which would include instruction and protection.

In fact, Paul writes that church leaders have charge and offer instruction.

Clearly, the role of a church leader is to teach the flock.

No shepherd would simply allow the sheep to do what they want to do.

Instead, shepherds guide and direct while protecting from predators that lurk in the shadows.

In sum, church leaders have authority over their flocks.

But that authority over the flock is not to be abused.

It is not a tool to lord over people.

Instead, a church leaders authority comes from the Lord and is limited by the Bible.

In other words, I can't step outside the Bible to exercise authority.

It is always limited by the Word of God.

Now let me also add this about the need to instruct the flock.

This is what is being lost in this generation of church leaders.

It is now more fashionable to have 45 minutes of music and announcements and presentations and then stick 15 minutes of preaching on the end.

Look, the greatest thing that happens here each week is the proclamation of God's word in the Sunday school hour and in the sanctuary on Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday evening.

The church today knows less and less Bible than at any time in church history, and the simple reason for that is the lack of instruction that often happens in the pulpits for the past 3-4 decades.

Would I like to take the week off and then grab a short devotional for Sunday and Wednesday?

You bet I would!

But what makes me sit for 8-10 hours on each message I give to you is a commitment to this verse to instruct the flock the Lord has given me.

And that is not meant to defend my sermon prep.

That is not meant to justify what I do each week.

That is simply a discipline of my life that you need to hold me accountable to.

I have yet to step into this pulpit unprepared in almost 5 years of being here.

That day may come, and when it does, you will notice it and I need to be confronted about it.

I have a responsibility to instruct the flock entrusted to my care.

So the elders, the pastors, the overseers responsibility is to work, to lead, to exercise authority and to instruct the church.

Simply put, the shepherd has been put in charge of the sheep in every way.

So what are the sheep's responsibilities to the shepherd.

Well, we will go back through these same verses and it will be clear..

Verse 12..

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you [i]appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you [j]instruction

The first call for the sheep is to appreciate the leaders over them in the church.

The Greek word for appreciate here is oida, which speaks of the need to know your leaders..

It would carry the idea of appreciating your leaders by knowing them..

And this doesn't mean just knowing their name or recognizing them..

This is the idea of knowing their hearts and being a part of their lives..

This is interesting since most leaders catch slack for not knowing those under their care, but it is equally true that the sheep are to get to know their leaders.

Now some of that is accomplished through the preaching ministry in the life of a pastor..

Yall know a lot about me as it comes through in my preaching..

Yall know about Whitmire, my grandparents, my interests and hobbies...

But there is still a call for the sheep to get to know all the leaders in a church..

Honestly, I think so many difficulties in churches could be avoided if people simply got to know one another..

Yet, most people see it as the other person's responsibility to get to know them..

What we learn here is this..

When you get to know someone in a real way, you show appreciation for who they are..

The second command for the sheep is to esteem their leaders..

Verse 13..

13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

This is the idea of respect and admiration that comes from a great love of the leaders over them.

Sheep are to love the men that give watch over their souls.

They are called to esteem them, to hold them in high regard.

It is sad, and I have seen it all too often in churches, when there is suspicion of leaders rather than esteem for them..

To slander the leaders of a church is disobedience to this verse..

Esteem does not drag down.

Esteem holds up.

And every sheep is called to esteem the shepherds that the Lord has put over them.

And there is one final admonition here at the end of verse 13..

Live in peace with one another.

The sum of all of this instruction in verses 12 and 13 is seen here..

Shepherds and sheep are to live in peace.

Church leaders and church members are to be at peace..

Now how is that peace achieved?

Well it is achieved when leaders diligently work, when leaders protect and care for the flock, and when leaders teach.

It is also achieved when those under leadership appreciate and esteem their leaders..

Conclusion

As we put these instructions in context, there must have been issues in Thessalonica.

Most likely, Paul had appointed some men to lead the church while he was gone, and the people under their leadership weren't happy..

It may have been that the men were lazy and not taking care of the sheep.

Or it may have been that the people didn't appreciate all that was being done for them by the leaders..

Ultimately, God called both of them in line through this letter of Paul and it seems to solve their difficulties in the early church.

So how do we apply these truths to the modern church?

#1 - Leaders of the church must lead.

There is not room for laziness in the Lord's church.

There is always much to be done.

Sermons to study for, people to care for, issues to deal with, and the lost to preach to..

The role of church leader is not for the man who can't get out of bed.

It is for the man who is able to spend less time in bed.

The lazy church leader is not a man living according to his job description of Scripture...

#2 - People of the church must love.

I can assure you that not every church leader is the easiest to love.

But if he works and teaches and cares for you, you are called to love him as the people of God.

Love covers a multitude of sins.

I would remind anyone who finds it hard to love their leader that they also aren't the easy to love either.

#3 - The peace of the church must prevail.

I understand that not every church leader and not every church member will be best buddies.

But the leader must still work and protect them and the follower must appreciate and esteem them.

And the reason for that is to preserve the peace of the church.

There are more important things than being right.

In fact, the peace of the church must prevail if the church is to retain any influence in the community.

For leaders, this means stepping aside at times even if you are right.

For members, this means going somewhere else even if you are right.

The worst outcome of church leader and church member disputes is that the Lord of the church is shamed.

May we never be so determined to get our way that we lose the ability to represent Christ in the world.

Let us pray.

II. The People within the Church (14-15)

III. The People and the Lord of the Church (16-28)