

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

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The Living, Breathing, Community of Believers

Related Topics: leadership; encouraging leaders; unruly; out of step; warning the unruly; fainthearted; small-souled; encouraging the fainthearted; strengthening the weak; living in peace; responding to evil; doing good; rejoicing always; prayer; praying continuously; giving thanks; quenching the Spirit; prophecies; despising prophecies; testing all things; holding fast to good things; the appearance of evil; abstaining from the appearance of evil; sanctified by God; thrichotomy of man; body-soul-spirit; grace



Much is said today about community, "The great need for community, "The need to create community within the local church."

CRUCIAL:

Community is a not some philosophical, esoteric thing for Christians to talk about, dream about, feel about. Something to manufacture or fabricate. It is a very real way of living.

Paul is going to close with a series of requests, exhortations, and commands. Not to the leaders of the church in Thessalonica, but to the community of believers at large. In them, the Holy Spirit gives to us a clear picture of a living, breathing community of believers.

1 Thes 5:12 12We ask you, brothers,

Interesting that Paul does not wield his apostolic authority here. The verb, "ask" used here is one that would be used by a friend making an urgent appeal to a friend.

1 Thes 5:12 continued 12...to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

Respect is not bowing before the pope and kissing his ring. The Greek word for respect is Oida. It comes from the Greek word eido. The Latin equivalent is video (I see).

Thayer Definition = to see, to perceive with the eyes, to perceive by any of the senses, to perceive, notice, discern, discover.

In it's most obvious meaning, the community of believers is to KNOW by observation those who labor and teach. This is simple but huge:

Paul told the elders of Ephesus in Acts:

Acts 20:29-30 29I know that after my departure(fierce wolves will come in among you,not sparing the flock; 30and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Hey, wait a minute, is this guy in leadership? And if not, why are people following him and where is he leading them?

But there is more here. The translators consistently see that this word is not just about mere facial recognition. They see this word as meaning that they were by observation to know, and in knowing have an appreciation and respect for specific individuals. Hence they translate Oida as respect or appreciate the worth of.

KEY QUESTION:

Who is it that they are to know by way of observation and in turn respect and appreciate?

12....respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you

Labor = to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually, work hard, toil, strive, struggle

Used in:

- Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.
- Luke 5:5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!
- 1 Timothy 5:17 NLT Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching.

FIRST — The Holy Spirit, through Paul, is talking to those in that community of believers who are NOT in leadership. He is telling them how they are to relate to those who lead, but in doing so the Holy Spirit also tells those who DO lead and teach about the NATURE of their task and the EFFORT they should exert in it.

1 Cor. 15:10 10But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

If it doesn't COST you. If it isn't FRUITFU., It isn't genuine service.

FOR THOSE BEING LED:

The local assembly should SEE the effort of those leading and teaching and appreciate them for it. You should recognize and appreciate leadership not by their title but by their service.

12....respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you

Over you = pro-is-temi.
pró = before, over
hístemi = put, place, stand

Literally means those who are put or placed before you or over you. It carries the basic meaning of "standing before" others and, hence, the idea of leadership. It describes one who presides over others, and exercises a position of leadership (rule, direct, be at the head of.)

Romans 12:8he who gives, with liberality; he who leads (stands on the first place), with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness

NOTE WELL:

They are not over them by virtue of things natural; talent, wealth, influence, popularity. They too are saved sinners like any other follower of Christ. They too are sheep in the flock of God. They did not apply for, attain to leadership. They were PLACED there IN THE LORD. It is IN THE LORD and ONLY there that they find their authority and position.

12....respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you

Noutheteo is the idea to counsel someone to AVOID or CEASE an improper course of conduct.

Noutheteo literally = "to put in mind."

QUOTE: They instruct and inspire you, reminding you of truth that is easily forgotten in these days.

The only voice that is speaking powerfully against the spirit of the age, the self-centered, self-sufficient, restless spirit of the Me generation, is the voice of the church.

We need to be reminded continually of the danger in that kind of philosophy. This is done by the leadership who instruct, warn, and point out folly. They help us to keep our feet on the right path.

KEY INSIGHT:

The word is in the PRESENT TENSE, which means that it was the continual undertaking of those in leadership.

EXAMPLE: Paul in Acts

Acts 20:31 31Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

Guys, as one who stands as a leader IN THE LORD, THAT is HARD work. It is, by nature of the work, not something that is usually enjoyed by the receiving party.

"Oh boy, it's pastor Richard, he's going to tell me that I need to AVOID or CEASE an improper course of conduct, AGAIN!"

As a result is rarely APPRECIATED. THAT is why Paul asks them to observe and as a result respect them because they have spiritually, physically, and emotionally spent themselves in the work of leading the community, issuing any warning or reproof to the community and the individuals within it.

1 Thes 5:13 13and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Esteem is an interesting word, Hege-o-mai is from ágo which means to lead. It has two basic meanings in the NT.

1. Used in describing men in any leading position; ruler, leader, governor (Acts 7:10). It is the opposite of a diakonos or servant in Luke 22:26. In the apocryphal writings Hege-o-mai was used of military commanders.
2. Means to engage in an intellectual process. (1 Thes 5:13, 2 Cor 9:5, Phil 2:25;3:8, 2 Pet 1:13) In this sense, Hege-o-mai conveys the picture of leading out before the mind. In this sense, it pictures one giving careful thought to something and not making a quick decision. The picture is that of one leading his or her mind through a reasoning process to arrive at a conclusion. In this context they are to give careful thought in regards to respect and esteem.

What a huge word, huge concept for a community of believers!

We live in a culture that is quick to lavish esteem and respect on "personality." Oh this guy is so charismatic, so dynamic, so funny, so talented. "personalities" — celebrity — recognition. Personality or celebrity does not

disqualify an individual from leadership or ministry, but it is not the basis for esteeming or respecting them.

By contrast, the community of believers is to lead their minds through a reasoning process in regards to respect and esteem. They are to esteem them because of their labor on behalf of God's people. Paul is calling for saints to make a conscious judgment of their leaders after a deliberate weighing of the facts. They have observed their diligent labor even to the point of exhaustion among the saints.

The tense of the verb here calls for the flock to continually esteem their leaders and in context to esteem them even "beyond measure! Esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Very highly in love means that Christians should love their pastors and church leaders.

QUOTE: John Calvin - In his commentary on Galatians

"It is not enough that pastors be respected, if they are not also loved. Both are necessary; otherwise, their teaching will not have a sweet taste."

QUOTE: J. Vernon McGee

"I have always appreciated people who love the Word of God because I have found that they become my friends. One of the things I have so appreciated about my radio ministry is the number of friends that God has raised up for me across this country. Many of them have written to say their home is open to me (of course, I can't accept all those invitations), but when I am in their town, they do nice things for me. They reveal their love. When they reveal that love to me—and I'm hard to love—it reveals that they honor the Word of God since I teach the Word of God."

This is a huge concept, not grasped at large today because we live in a society that makes celebrities of those in the pulpit. The position is one to be desired because of the trappings that come with it. But in the Mid-First Century AD they loved and esteemed very highly those who labored and taught them because it was a costly position — one that could cost that person his life. Those in leadership would be the FIRST to be arrested and fed to the wild beasts or burned in boiling oil. That is why those who ruled well and taught well were worthy of double honor (income). They were risking their lives to be the point man in a community of believers!

QUOTE: David Guzik

"If a Christian can't esteem and love their pastor, they should either get on their knees and ask the Holy Spirit to change their heart or put themselves under a pastor they do esteem and love."

So, here we see the living, breathing community of believers in regards to the relationship between leadership and congregation. Paul is going to begin to address the community of believers at large.

13.....Be at peace among yourselves.

LITERALLY — Live in peace

INTERESTING: This is not a suggestion, but a command for this to be their lifestyle. The mindset of each believer in the community of believers is to be one of continual, complete dependence on (and yielding to) the Holy Spirit.

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

In others words, we must be continually sowing to the Spirit, so that we will not reap the corrupting deeds of

the flesh!

Paul's next words are a practical way to preserve and maintain peace.

1 Thes 5:14 14And we urge you, brothers

Interesting, Paul uses the word brothers some sixty times in his writings. Twenty seven of them are in his two letters to these believers in Thessalonica. I think it is because the church was so young. He was there for just three Sabbaths and then he was driven out of the city. So he is reinforcing the reality of their nature and relationship to one another – ADELPHOS – from the same womb. BEGOTTEN of God – By the WILL of God – By the WORD of God.

In so doing Paul is reinforcing the nature of this community on the midst of a hostile environment.

1 Thes 5:14 14And we urge you, brothers, admonish (warn) the idle (unruly), encourage the fainthearted (KJV - feeble-minded), help the weak, be patient with them all.

CRUCIAL OBSERVATION:

It doesn't say, "We exhort you pastors." It is an exhortation to the community of believers at large, a corporate responsibility.

Admonish (warn) the idle (unruly), not just those who are hard to rule. Used to refer to the person who was out of step and going one's own way; disorderly, insubordinate. It was a word commonly used in the military in describing a soldier out of step or an army moving in disarray. Then it was further applied to those who quit the ranks and did not perform their duty. Paul says this to the community at large – that they were to warn those who were, "OUT OF STEP – DOING THEIR OWN THING."

CRUCIAL:

It does not necessarily mean you are doing a bad thing, but you are doing your own thing. We have already learned that within a community of believers there are men who IN THE LORD are PRO-IS-TEMI – placed in front of and over to lead. They are responsible to the Lord for the vision and mission of that local community of believers.

Listen, if the devil can't undermine a community of believers through blatant sin, this is the way he comes at them.

James 3:6 6the tongue is set on fire by hell

The unruly person who says, "I think we should be doing this or that or the other or I don't know why we have to do it this way. The next thing you know, otherwise well fed, growing, contented sheep are wondering.

Why can't so and so do such and such?

Why aren't we doing this or doing it this way?

Your responsibility as a community of believers is to warn those that are marching out of step. Because if you don't warn that person who is not at his or her post, marching out of step with the vision and mission that Jesus has for that community of believers. You will end up like an undisciplined army in battle.

It doesn't say to kick them out. It says WARN them. But if they are warned and continue to march out of step with the direction of the fellowship, there will come a point when they should find the place that they can be in step with.

14...encourage the fainthearted (KJV - Feeble-minded)

CRUCIAL INSIGHT:

It is a compound Greek word meaning SMALL SOUL

oligos = puny in extent, degree, number, duration or value
psuche = soul, mind

Those who really struggle with believing that God loves them or struggle to believe that God can use them. They're just small souled. But God has begun a good work in them and the community of believers is to comfort them.

ILLUSTRATION: Valerie and I have four children and they are all different. As we have watched them grow up, we have seen each of them at different levels throw in the towel! Some give up more easily than others. They are more easily discouraged than the others and they quit.

What are we to do with the person who seems to so quickly and regularly say, "I guess God doesn't love me," "I'm never going to mature," or "I'll never be used?" Are we to say, "Get lost ya big quitter!"

Paul says that the community of believers is to warn the one marching out step, but they are also to encourage those who are small-souled.

Encourage = come along side with your mouth and speak kindly to that small soul to build it up and encourage it.

This is not just for me or the guys in leadership, this is for you, the community of believers at large. To individually come along side with your mouth and speak kind words that will encourage that small-souled individual.

NOTE: The range of persons and behavior; from the UNRULY to the SMALL-SOULED and now to the WEAK. All of these will be found in a living, breathing community of believers!

Weak describes a state of limited capacity to do or be something. Used literally of physical weakness (most of the uses in the Gospels). Also used figuratively of weakness in the spiritual arena. Weakness in an area of the flesh. Weakness in regards to liberty in Christ. Weak in their understanding of the doctrine of the Christian life, who have not learned the truth that sets them free. Whatever it may be, Paul says to the community of believers at large, to help them.

HELP = "Lay hold of the weak" with the idea of supporting them. The idea is of supporting another by keeping one's self directly over the weak one so as to sustain him.

QUOTE: Hiebert

Let the strong put their arms around the weak and hold them up. They need to be assured that they are not forgotten or despised because of their helplessness. (Ibid)

That type of help demands a little extra effort, a phone call, an invitation to lunch, a quiet talk about their needs. This is addressed to us all. We are all to watch out for one another like this. The Lord directed us to have that time between worship and the Word to rub shoulders and have a cup of coffee. To sit around tables on Monday nights, to share a meal together, so that we could actually discover one another as individuals within a living, breathing community of believers and then warn, comfort and help.

CLOSING:

14....be patient with them all.

PATIENT — Makrothumeo
makros = long, distant, far off, large

thumos = temper, passion

The picture of this word is that of a person in whom it takes a long time before fuming and breaking into flames towards those who fail!

1 Thes 5:15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

This is a necessary exhortation because the natural response is to repay evil with evil, hence the popularity of Clint Eastwood (Go ahead, make my day!). When we think of the kinds of people that make up a living, breathing community of believers, the responsibility of the the community of believers at large to live in relationship to their leaders and to one another.

We discover that REAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY can only be lived by the Spirit, through the Son, to the father.

AGAIN – It's ALL ABOUT JESUS

John 14:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

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