

“Live in Gospel Community”
I Thessalonians 5:11–22
Rev. Benny Youngblood
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In this study we’ll be looking at latter half of I Thessalonians 5. God directed Paul to Thessalonica because God had already prepared hearts there to receive the Gospel. So Paul, Silas and Timothy go to Thessalonica and share the Gospel and God does a powerful work there. He calls people to Himself from all different people groups. He raises up a church there as well. We see in I Thessalonians 1:4-5 how they came to Thessalonica which says, *[4] For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5] because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.* Then we see in I Thessalonians 1:9, *[9] For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.* God did such a mighty work that they had a deep commitment to Christ, each other and to share the Gospel with all those around them. It says it was like thunder claps as the Gospel went forth from them to all the world. It sounds like a great church here but God did this work in Thessalonica.

As you read further in I Thessalonica we see how Paul wanted to encourage them in their faith for they were new believers. He had to rush out of Thessalonica because his own life was at risk. He also wanted to instruct them and I Thessalonians 4 and 5 show us Paul’s instruction to them. This is where we pick up in our study and Paul will show them how they live in this new Gospel community and how to live as brothers and sisters in Christ. Here Paul lets them know that Christ is going to come back and he is going to help them be prepared and ready so that when He comes back they’ll know Him, receive Him and ready to be with Him. Then Paul encourages them again with the Gospel.

I Thessalonians 5:9-10 says *[9] For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.* As Paul is encouraging them with the Gospel of Christ, God is encouraging us with the Gospel of Christ as we read this. He didn’t destine us for wrath even though we deserved wrath of God. He chose us as His very own, to save us to be His sons and daughters and that’s powerful. It is a summation of the Gospel that Jesus died for us, paid the penalty for us on the cross and that we would live forever with Him. God wants us to let this ring in our hearts and minds every day of our life. He tells them they are a Gospel community and has risen them up as a church, setting them aside as His people. This is how they are to live until He returns or until they are with Him. As we move to verse 11 and forward He tells us how we are to live with one another.

I Thessalonians 5:11 says *[11] Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.* Because of the Gospel in our life we are to encourage one another and build each other up. This is Gospel community. Philip Ryken in his book The Communion of Saints told a story that fits so rightly here. He said in 1630 the devout puritan governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony led a small group of colonists to the shores of North America. His name was John Winthrop. As his shipped sailed the Atlantic the governor stood on the deck and charged his followers to establish a new kind of Christian community. Winthrop said, “For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man, we must entertain each other in brotherly affection, we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of others’

necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor, and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us, as His own people and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness, and truth than formerly we have been acquainted with.”

Dr. Ryken goes on to say that what Winthrop proposed was a living fellowship of love centered in Christ Jesus. The community he envisioned would be animated by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit who would enable the people who lived in it to share a common life of unity, charity and generosity. John Winthrop desired Gospel community, where brothers and sisters in Christ would love each other and love Christ with all their mind, soul, heart and strength. Gospel community is really what we desire and do you know why? It is because God designed it that way. When God puts the Holy Spirit in us He immediately turns us to desire this Gospel community, relating together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Starting in I Thessalonians 5:12, Paul lays out what this community looks like, so as we read it, I want you to listen for three things. First, look for how Paul wants us to relate to our community leaders, those spiritual leaders. Secondly, look for how we relate to one another. Thirdly, look for how God wants us to relate together to Him.

I Thessalonians 5:12-22 says *[12] We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, [13] and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. [14] And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. [15] See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. [16] Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. [19] Do not quench the Spirit. [20] Do not despise prophecies, [21] but test everything; hold fast what is good. [22] Abstain from every form of evil.*

So first Paul outlines how we're to relate to our spiritual leaders. The direct message here is to the church, the congregation. Paul also outlines some characteristics of the spiritual leaders. Just looking at verses 12 and 13 we see that the spiritual leader is laboring. This idea of working hard is a picture of a laborer who is sweating on his brow because he is doing such intense work. So this particularly points to the pastors, elders and deacons in the church as spiritual leaders. Secondly, we see Paul is among the people. He is working among the people as he ministers to them. He is listening to them, praying with them, teaching, talking and shepherding them. Also, the spiritual leader is over you in the Lord.

For the leader, it means so much to understand that God is the one who set you over those whom you are leading. As a leader, this is a very humbling thing because of what is says in Hebrews 13:17; *[17] Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.* Leaders will have to give an account for how they ministered to others among the Lord. The other thing we see in these verses is that Paul is actively teaching and admonishing the congregation. He is studying the Word and praying. He is teaching in small groups and preaching in every avenue. He is nourishing this congregation.

Paul tells us how to relate to those spiritual leaders God has put over us. God has put spiritual leaders in place. God has put each pastor, elder and deacon in place and placed them over us in the Lord. God has done that for His glory and ultimately for our good. He also tells us that our attitude is to be one of respect for we are to esteem them very highly. It not only means to appreciate them but it means affection that you would love those who lead you and are working among you. That love would move you to encourage your spiritual leaders, pray for them diligently and care for them. God gives us clear instructions here of how we are in the Gospel community and how to relate to our spiritual leaders.

At the end of verse 13, He starts teaching us how we're to relate to each other. There is a special bond we have with one another. God tells us that we're the body of Christ and He has welded us together as brothers and sisters in the family of God. We have this special relationship because we're a part of the family of God and we'll have this relationship for all eternity. He says whether we are awake or asleep how will we live with Him. We will live with Him with each other for all eternity.

He gives four exhortations here. The first one is to be at peace among yourselves. Here the Prince of peace Himself is commanding us to pursue peace and live at peace among yourselves, with each other. We are to make this our aim, to live at peace. Colossians 3:15 says *[15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.* Romans 14:19 says *[19] So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.* II Corinthians 13:11 says *[11] Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.* Hebrews 12:14 says *[14] Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.* We are to make sure we strive for this peace.

In John Calvin's commentary on I Thessalonians he said 'for Paul, in my opinion, had in view to oppose the artifices of Satan who ceases not to use every endeavor to stir up either quarrels or disagreements or enmities between the people of God.' We have an enemy. Now he can't do anything about our salvation but if he can get us quarrelling among ourselves and get ourselves off of the Gospel so then in his mind he has a small success there. Our enemy is out there trying to start quarrels in our churches. Calvin goes on to say that this passage tells us to seek peace with each other but especially between us and our pastors.

We need to make sure we maintain that peace of Christ and we can only do that by applying Philippians 2:3-5 which says *[3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.*

How do we pursue the peace of Christ? It is difficult period but I would say we do this the way the Prince of Peace has done with us. He lavished His grace upon us. We did not deserve grace or salvation. We were enemies and haters of God yet because He loved us He poured out His grace and mercy upon us. So how do we keep peace among ourselves? We have to pour grace out upon each other even when they don't deserve it. We have to forgive one another. We can't hold grudges. We have to be quick to forgive just like Christ forgave us and we can only do that in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, **peace**, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The Spirit of God has to be in control of our lives for us to pursue peace and we have to be walking in the Spirit in order to have this peace with each other.

Next we are to love the unlovely. Paul names three different roots of unlovely people. Before we look at that, does Jesus love the unlovely? Absolutely, because He loves me and He loves you. Honestly we were not very lovely when He poured out His love upon us. Again, we were enemies and sinners. Now He gives us these three groups of people that we're to love and how to love them. The first one is admonish the idol. Who are the idol? The word in the Greek means they are marching to the beat of their own drum or are marching in cadence to those who are outside of those who are leading them. Basically they are rebellious and are not surrendered to Christ. So what are we to do with a Christian brother or sister who seemingly walks out of fellowship with Christ and are not following the Lord? We are to admonish them. In love we take the Scripture to them and because we love them so much we want them to come back and fellowship with Christ and His church.

Secondly, He tells to encourage the faint-hearted. Who are the faint-hearted? It literally means 'little souls' but it also means they are those who are overwhelmed with worry and anxiety. The cares of this world have pressed in so much that they just don't think they have the energy any longer to fight the fight of faith. They are faint of heart and what do we do with them? We get faint of heart sometimes and what we need to do is to encourage them and walk along side of them. Love them, pray for them, help them through the difficult time and instill courage to them to trust God in the midst of what they are going through.

Next we are to help the weak. These are those who are weak in faith. They have a hard time handling temptation and find themselves in sin. They are immature in their faith. How are we to help a brother or sister in this situation? The Greek word used here for 'help' is a very strong word. It means to grab hold of them, to cling to them and pull them up from what they are ensnared in so that they can walk on their way with Christ. Don't go the other way when you see them coming on Sunday because you know it will be tough at times to listen to them. Instead help them grow in their faith and walk through what they are going through by helping them hold on to the promises of God.

Now Paul goes to the next exhortation and that is we're to be patient with them all. Be patient with your brother and sister in Christ, in your homes, in your church and with everyone. That is pretty exclusive. The new Bible dictionary defines the word patient here this way; it is to bear the offenses of others, to be mild and slow to avenging, to be long suffering, slow to anger and slow to punish. This is for those who bother us, are immature, who aggravate us and even those who persecute us. Praise God that patience is a fruit of the Spirit. As we spend time with the Lord we are to walk in His power for that patience with others.

In I Thessalonians 5:15 it says we are to do good to everyone. He has both the negative and the positive command. I Thessalonians 5:15 says [15] *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.* That is pretty emphatic. So the negative command is that when someone does us wrong or evil or sinned upon that we are not to repay them with evil. Let the Spirit control you so that you don't repay evil for evil but instead we do good to those who have done wrong to us.

This reminds us of Christ's teaching in Luke 6:27-36 which says [27] *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. [29] To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. [30] Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. [31] And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*

[32] “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. [33] And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. [34] And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. [35] But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. [36] Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Praise God He poured out His grace and mercy upon us. Praise the Lord that He loved us when we were so unlovely. He is telling us to do the same thing and do good to everyone, especially to your brothers and sisters in Christ no matter what. Do unto them as you would have them do unto you. So we see how He has told us through these four commands how to relate to each other but now there is a shift in this passage which comes on rather quickly for now he starts taking the verbs and makes them plural. In the next part He tells us how we are to relate to each other in our relationship to God.

So as a congregation or as Christians, how do we relate to God together? He gives us five commands on how we relate to God. The first thing is that together we need to rejoice always. We also see this command in Philippians 4:4. To rejoice is much more of a devotion than a motion. We have to make a decision in the midst of all circumstances that we’re going to find our joy in Christ and not in how I feel or in what I have or don’t have. My joy has to be in the Lord. That is what Paul is telling us here that we are to make sure our joy and rejoy is in the Lord alone and that we would do this together – that we would trust Him, worship Him and praise Him together. Rejoicing always leads to prayer.

This leads us to the next command which is to pray without ceasing. This is plural so he is saying when you’re together in whatever context, make sure that your context is praying to the Lord. This word for prayer is for all kinds of prayer – for thanksgiving, supplication, confession and adoration. Matthew Henry said ‘The way to rejoice evermore is to pray without ceasing. We should rejoice more if we pray more. We should pray always and not faint. Pray without weariness and continue prayer until we come to that world where prayer shall be swallowed up in praise.’ Samuel Chadwick, a great pastor and theologian, said “Satan dreads nothing but prayer. His one concern is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, or prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil and mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray.” God has called us to be a praying people.

Next he tells us to give thanks in all circumstances. Thanksgiving is speaking of much gratitude to the one who has given us all good things. It is a heart that meditates on who God is and what He has done for us. It bubbles forth in gratitude and thanksgiving to the Lord. F.F. Bruce in his commentary says ‘Thanksgiving is the natural response of a heart conscious of the greatness of God’s grace.’ If we’re conscious of the depth of God’s greatness and grace that He have lavished upon us then the natural response is gratitude and thanksgiving.

What does that mean when our thanksgiving is low? Then we need to go back to God and thank Him for who He is. We need to meditate on the good news of the Gospel and of our condition before Christ, what He did for us. All of a sudden our hearts will warm back up in thanksgiving for the Lord. Pastor Andrew Young who is at the Grace Church in New Zealand says in his commentary on I Thessalonians, ‘The lives of Christians should be marked with gratitude. They are to give thanks in all circumstances, believing that their lives are in the hands of a wise and holy God, in that all things seemingly good and bad come from Him.’ Thankfulness is true Christianity.

As we go through these five exhortations we get to verse 18b and it's almost like there is a pause where God wants to make sure we understand and that we're hearing, reading and studying the Word so that we get it. I Thessalonians 5:18b says *[18b] for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* It's like He is saying to remember that this is the will of God. It is God's will that you rejoice together always as a church and as Christians and that you pray without ceasing, giving thanks in all circumstances.

Next he says do not quench the Spirit. This word 'quench' means to put out, hide, to stifle, to suppress or to extinguish. The picture here could be of a light or a fire here. He is telling us not to quench, put out or hide the Holy Spirit's fire in your life or in the church or the light of the Spirit collectively in your church or in your life. How do quench it? It is by not doing the will of the Lord or not following the Word of the Lord which goes to the next exhortation.

The next exhortation follows in I Thessalonians 5:20-22 which says *[20] Do not despise prophecies, [21] but test everything; hold fast what is good. [22] Abstain from every form of evil.* We are to make sure we do not despise the prophetic Word of God. Despise means to turn away from, reject or to discount. Don't discount the Word of God. Hold to it, know it, follow it and walk in the Word of God together as My people. That is the authority of which He has given us for our life and the church to understand what we're to do, how we're to think and how we're to follow Him. We are to value the Word of God. Accept it and pursue the Word of God. Hold on to it, trust it and walk in it.

Then we're to test everything. So as the Word is being preached and taught go back and make sure that it is true just as the Bereans did in Acts 17. When you test it, if it's good then hold onto it and apply it to your life. If it is not the truth and it's evil then you abstain from it. Praise the Lord that God is doing a work here in this church. We know the Lord is doing a work in the mission field as well. We are trusting that God is going to raise up men and women who will follow Him into the mission field and that the Gospel will spread, just like it did in Thessalonica. We believe the Gospel will continue to spread in our own city and in all the nations because God has a people for Himself and He is going to continue to do that work.

He wants us to hold on to His Word and that we relate to each other with Gospel community and to relate to our spiritual leaders through the Gospel with love and respect. Pray for your spiritual leaders. Encourage them and follow them. We can relate to one another by pursuing peace, by ministering to those in need, being patient and always seeking good. We want to relate to God together as Paul has outlined here. We need to rejoice always, praying without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, not quench the Spirit but instead stoke the fire of the Spirit in our church. Let's not despise the prophetic Word but hear it, follow it and encourage one another to follow the Word of God. As we do that we will be living in Gospel community because that's what Gospel community is. A Bible ready church is a church who is walking and living in Gospel community. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be in Your Word and that You would continue to do a mighty work in the mission field and pray you continue to use our spiritual leaders there. Father, we thank You for this Your church and for the love of Christ that is evident here. We saw in Thessalonica that they were encouraging one another, building each up and loving each other but You encouraged them in this letter to do it all the more. May we as Your people do this all the more; encourage each other in Gospel community, in Jesus' Name I pray, Amen.

Power Point

I. Gospel Relating with Our Spiritual Leaders
(5:12–13)

II. Gospel Relating to One Another
(5:13b–15)

III. Gospel Relating Together to God
(5:16–22)