

Looking After Each Other

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15
Halifax: 19 November, 10:30 AM

Introduction

Today in the sermon we are going to look at a major duty that we have as Christians that has been grossly neglected in our day.

- It is the duty that is presented to us by our LORD in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15.
- It is the duty of looking after each other—
 - Not just looking after each other in terms of our daily needs, but looking after each other's walk with the Lord.

The very mention of such a duty makes us feel uncomfortable.

- We are happy to help out with various practical needs, but when it comes to addressing each other's walk with Christ—that is something we would prefer to avoid.
- One reason we don't want to do it is because of the difficulties associated with doing it.
 - If they are discouraged, you end up carrying an extra burden—as if you didn't already have enough to deal with in your own life.
 - And worse still, not many people get offended if you help them fix their car or something, but if you go to meddling with their walk—that leads to all sorts of trouble—especially if you are addressing something that they need to correct!
 - And besides, doesn't the Bible warn us against being busybodies in other people's affairs?
 - Yes indeed, looking after each other's walk with the Lord is something we can avoid on moral grounds!
 - So we like to think.
- Now of course you are not supposed to be a busybody or to meddle in other people's affairs...but you are to look after each other's walk with the Lord.
 - Of course you are not supposed to do this in an arrogant way, or with airs of superiority...
 - but you all know that it is right for you to care whether or not your brothers and sisters are flourishing in their relationship with Christ.
 - And when you see indication that they are not, you know that you ought to try to help them out!
 - You shouldn't even need to be told that you ought to care about these things.
 - It is a shameful thing for someone to pull away from Christ without having a single person in the congregation notice them or address them.
 - It betrays a wicked indifference on our part about each other's walk.

Ever since we got to chapter 4 in our sermon series in Thessalonians,

- we have been looking at different ways that we ought to abound in our walk with God through Jesus Christ.
 - We have such a gracious Saviour who has redeemed us, and such a loving Father in heaven to whom He has brought us that our desire is to please Him in all things.
 - He is working in us by His Spirit to enable us to do that, and what a marvellous thing it is!

- We have seen things to abound in like sexual purity, brotherly love, our hope in the glorious appearing of Christ, and our preparation for His Day.
 - Last week, we looked at how we are to live in harmony with the elders of the church (and they with us) as they admonish us spiritually...
 - We are to be very thankful that they are there to keep us mindful of Christ, of all that He is to us, and of our walk with Him.
 - And this week we see that we are all to share in this work—each one of us to help the others to keep our eyes on the Lord!
- That’s right—verses 14-15 are not addressed only to the elders, but to all of you!
 - If you compare verse 12 with verse 14, you can see that in both cases, it is the brethren of the church who are addressed...
 - That’s everyone—the word *brethren* refers to both men and women...
 - And in verse 12 & 13, you *brethren* are told to highly esteem the elders for their work of admonishing you—keeping you mindful of the Lord...
 - And in verse 14 & 15, you *brethren* are exhorted to look after each other to make sure that you are flourishing in your walk with Jesus Christ.
 - So you see, the call to abound in our walk with God through Christ back in chapter 4 is so important that not only the elders,
 - but all the members of the church are to be involved in looking after each other!

Let me read this text to you, and you can see it for yourself.

- I am going to do as I did last week and read the introduction to this entire section in chapter 4, verses 1-3,
 - and then move on and read our text from last week in chapter 5, verse 12-13 and then our text this week in 5:14-15.
- Give careful attention to the reading of God’s Word, taking it to heart:

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3a: Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13: And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15: Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy word.

Do you see the overall duty here?

- The task of maintaining the wellbeing of the community is the responsibility of us all.
- How we have neglected this duty in the modern church!
 - We are in such a sorry state that many men do not even look after the spiritual health of their own families—
 - And many parents do not look after the walk of their own children.

Do you see our Saviour's great love in exhorting us to this responsibility?

- You see it in the words *I exhort you brethren* in verse 14—
 - With these words, our Lord pleads with us and begs us to look after each other.
 - The walk of your brothers and sisters is so important to Him that He not only wants the elders to look after them, but you also.
 - He loves us and He yearns for us all to abound more and more in holiness and in doing His will.
 - This love is for you and it is for all of them.
 - How it ought to motivate us to this duty!
 - Let's look now at what He calls us all to do for each other.

I. As those in Christ, He calls us to be intelligently engaged in ministry to each other.

- We are not to treat everyone the same because people are not the same...
 - We are to notice what each person needs and reach out to them as their particular need requires.
- Of course part of this intelligent engagement with each other means that you consider your own place in the community.
 - You are to take into consideration your age, your maturity in the Lord, and many other things, and act with wisdom...
 - If you are younger and you see an older person that is discouraged, you might ask them how they are doing or tell them how the Lord has encouraged you.
 - The focus of this passage is that you are to deal with the various problems that you see according to each problem.
- There are three general categories or persons with problems that are spoken of here, and you are told how to address each one.

A. First, there are the unruly people that you are told to warn!

1. The unruly people are the ones who do not walk according to the rules of the Lord.
 - a. The word was originally used of soldiers who were out of step with their commanding officer.
 - The unruly in the church are not following Christ as Lord—they are following Satan's call to do things their own way instead of the Lord's way.
 - Back in 4:2 when Paul introduced this section, he said, **for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.**
 - b. It should make you very sad when you see people who are out of step with the Lord in the church.
 - Maybe they are involved in sexual immorality or maybe they are engaging in gossip or complaining.
 - Or maybe they are being idle in their work—or even in their home.
 - Instead of loving their husband and children their days are filling their days with social media,
 - Or instead of loving their wives, they seem to be married to their work and their recreations.

- It is a sad thing to see an unruly person...
 - They have clearly lost sight of Christ and become distorted about Him.
 - They are looking at following Him as something undesirable.
 - They are not enjoying their relationship with Him and the Father.
2. The Spirit (through Paul) says here that you are to warn these persons.
- a. The word *warn* is the same as the one that was used of the elders in verse 12 of the elders who *admonish you*.
 - It is the word *noutheteo* which literally means *to put them in mind*.
 - Just as the elders are to put you in mind of the Lord, so you are to do this for each other—and especially when you see someone who is unruly.
 - b. This word implies verbal confrontation—in other words, you are supposed to *say something to them...with words*.
 - That is very hard for us to do, but it needs to be done!
 - It has been very distressing to me to see members in the church who departed from Christ while their brothers and sisters were watching!
 - They saw them living in immorality—they saw them engaging in drinking parties—they saw them cursing and being idle...
 - And they just let them go!
 - We seem to be very proficient at excusing ourselves from this duty.
 - I don't want to drive them away—but they are already going away!
 - I don't want to spoil my friendship—a real friend would care enough to help even if they reject you.
 - I am no better—so wouldn't you want someone to come after you if you were departing from Christ?
 - The reality is that their walk with the Lord is not important enough to you to engage in the uncomfortable task of admonishing them.
 - It is even worse when parents neglect this duty with their own children!
3. Don't let Satan deceive you!
- His great lie is that doing what God says to do here is unloving, that it is not wise, that it will not help!
 - You have no guarantee about whether it will help or not, but it is not unloving to admonish those who are unruly.
 - Our Lord does not call us to do things that are unloving or unwise.
 - He is the master of love.
 - Do you think it was unloving of Him to confront you about your sin when He reached out to you to bring you into His kingdom?
 - Do you think it is unloving of Him now to admonish you when you go astray?
 - Do not insult Him so!
 - Your walk with God was so important to Him that He went to the cross for you!
 - If He wants you to admonish those who are unruly, you should do it—by all means—you should do it in love and grace and prayer.

B. Next, our LORD tells us to comfort the fainthearted.

- So you see, here is a very different kind of person which calls for a very different kind of treatment. Intelligent engagement!
- 1. The word *fainthearted* is a word that refers to a person who has been discouraged by the difficulties of life.
 - a. This may speak of a very strong person who has been severely tested...
 - They are beat down—even as Job was, though he was a strong man, by all the afflictions that were piled on him—
 - Think of it—his children were all killed, his estate was ruined, and his body was covered with painful boils...
 - and to add to his misery, his friends insisted that he must have departed from God else these things would not have happened to him,
 - and his wife who knew that he had not departed from God, instead of helping him in his afflictions, told him to curse God and die; that God had not dealt fairly with him!
 - I do not think it would be blasphemous to say that Jesus was *fainthearted* when He was in Gethsemane and pled with His disciples to watch and pray with Him.
 - He told them that He was overwhelmed with extreme sorrow, even to the point of death.
 - God tests the strongest of his servants and there are times when they need to be encouraged!
 - b. It may also refer to a person who is naturally lacking in courage and hope.
 - They are easily overwhelmed with even the simple struggles of life.
 - They quickly lose heart in the face of affliction—and sometimes the Lord seems pleased in His wisdom to keep affliction coming at them.
- In either case, you are to reach out to them.
- 2. The Lord tells you that you are to comfort them.
 - a. You can only do that if you care enough to notice that they are discouraged and beat down in the first place.
 - Some of you are better at noticing such things than others.
 - But we should all try to get more proficient about it.
 - You can ask others to help you notice—my wife helps me with that a lot because I can be a blockhead.
 - Just noticing and caring enough to go to them and ask is a great start!
 - b. But then you need to comfort them...how can you do that?
 - The best way to comfort anyone is to point them to the Lord!
 - Remind them of how much He loves us...
 - The time when everything is going wrong in life is a time to look at the foundation of His love—
 - Romans 5 speaks how affliction helps us to see God's love as the Holy Spirit pours out an awareness of His love in our hearts when affliction comes...

- It mentions how God's love for us is demonstrated, not because all in life is going well—
 - **Rom 5:8: But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**
 - Knowing that God uses affliction to help His people see His love can help you to be a very good comforter.
 - If you know this, you have no doubt experienced it as well and so are able to comfort them with the comfort that you received when you were afflicted.
- c. Just think how much it would have helped Job if his friends had pointed him to God's unwavering love...
- And how much it would have helped Christ at Gethsemane if one of his disciples had encouraged Him with Isaiah 53:10,
 - that the pleasure of the Lord to save His people would prosper in His hand!
 - It is a time to pray with them and to point them to the love and faithfulness of the Lord.
 - Get them to God's promises and get them to prayer.
- C. The third sort of person we are all to minister to are the weak—we are instructed by our Lord to *uphold* them.
1. The weak seems to refer to those who are not strong in their faith.
- They are not grounded in the faith and can easily be led astray by every wind of doctrine that comes along—or they may have a confused conscience.
- a. Sometimes, this is through their own fault.
- They are weak because they have been slack about engaging with God's Word—
 - In Hebrews 5:12, there is a complaint against such persons that **though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.**
 - There are weak Christians who hardly ever come to church—
 - who hardly ever pray or read the word...
 - No wonder they are weak.
 - They fall more under the category of the unruly who need to be admonished... but be careful—
 - They may be so weak that they can't get themselves together even to do things they find pleasurable—then your admonition needs to be gentle.
- b. The persons in view here are those who are weak through no fault of their own.
- They may be more feeble-minded and incapable of understanding—they may have a weak conscience that causes them to feel guilty.
 - They may simply be young Christians who are not yet grounded in the Word.
 - They may be persons who have a hard time managing in life and are easily taken advantage of.

2. We are told that we are to *uphold* such persons.
 - a. It is helpful to know that the word *uphold* means *to hold on to them*—the way you hold on to your hat in the wind!
 - They are in danger of being blown away with the winds of false teaching.
 - Sometimes you even have to go after them as you see them being led astray.
 - b. Even if you aren't strong in the word yourself, you can encourage them to speak to someone who is—you can be a catalyst in their lives.
 - You can tell them how you hold on to Christ.
 - But what will not do is to have them drift away from Christ!
 - That is what we cannot allow under our watch without making every effort to hold on to them in love!

TRANS> So do you see why I say that you are called to be intelligently engaged with people?

- Different people in different conditions call for different actions.
 - Just as it would not do to comfort the unruly, so it would not do to admonish the fainthearted as if they need to repent when they are overwhelmed with trouble.
- But now we come to something that we are to be with all people!

II. At the end of verse 14, it tells you to be patient with all!

A. It is not hard to see why patience is called for at this point!

1. The translated *patient* is a word that points to keeping anger and frustration under control!
 - When you are involved in doing the ministry we have just been looking at, it is easy to become irritated with those who are having problems!
 - Obviously, the unruly person can be very trying—you have to admonish them again and again—think of Paul with the Corinthians or Moses in the wilderness.
 - And even with the fainthearted—
 - It speaks ill of us, but we can become irritated with all the hard things that keep coming their way—*not again...*
 - How do you think it is for them? to be sick again? to lose their job again? to have another crisis in their family?
 - How wrong it is for us to be irritated with them for having problems when we should be encouraging *them!* Not being irritated!
 - Would you be irritated with Jesus because of the troubles He faced?
 - And with the weak—
 - You keep having to recuse them, keep having to hold on to them...
 - But is that not what the LORD has to do with you?
 - If you love the fact that He does that, you will be glad to do it for others for His sake as well as theirs.
2. Oh my brothers and sisters—our impatience is a wicked thing!
 - Parents, husbands, elders,
 - Impatience makes your care of others ineffective.

- Either it makes you irritated so that you avoid reaching out to those who need your help,
 - Or it causes you to shift from trying to help them and edify them to wanting to manipulate them or shame them or vent your anger at them.
- Parents, even if your children are being unruly and need firm admonishment even with the rod of correction...
 - this must be done in love for their good, not in frustration and irritation.
 - As soon as that whiny tone is in your voice—you have crossed the line.
 - You have ceased to be an effective authority in your child’s life and have become a peer to them—in the fray with them—not leading them in a way that can be respected, but acting like a child yourself.
 - Ask yourself—am I trying to control with manipulation? with anger? or am I trying to draw my children and all those I minister to to the Lord Jesus?

B. The Lord Jesus is the one that makes the difference as to your patience!

1. If you are rejoicing in His salvation and His blessing to you,
 - Your goal will be to bring others into that blessing with you.
 - You will admonish them and comfort them, and uphold them with that in view!
2. You will be mindful of how patient the Lord has been with you,
 - You will know how many times He has had to deal with you about the same things—and you will be gentle with others.
3. I know the reality...God is often pleased to push us to the breaking point...
 - a. You have a hard day at work—you have made mistakes and had conflict with your boss,
 - You just had some unexpected car repairs and are burdened with that,
 - And now you are going home in hopes of a peaceful evening...
 - Only to find that your wife has two children that she wants you to deal with while she is cleaning up after the supper that just boiled over and was ruined—and she is rather hostile when she sees you.
 - b. When that sort of thing happens, it is helpful to always remember that the Lord sent all that to you so you can grow in your patience.
 - He loves you and He is working in your life—you needed this test!
 - No one grows in patience if things never get hard.
 - c. The best part about it is the way it draws you to trust in the Lord to remember afresh how much He means to you.
 - It is an opportunity to learn of Him and to rest in His strength.
 - Admonish those little children if they need it—but do it all in patience!
 - You are there *for* them—you are not to be *against* them.

TRANS> And that brings us to the third thing that we are called to see that we all do...

III. We are to see that we always pursue what is good for everyone!

- Look at verse 15.

- This is to be our whole way of life as those who belong to Jesus: **See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.**
- Notice several very important things here...
- A. First of all, that there is still in this verse a sense of responsibility for each other in the congregation...
 1. The injunction begins with the words, **“See that no one...”**
 - This means that you are not only supposed to make sure that *you* don’t render evil for evil...
 - but also that you are to see to it that no one else does...
 2. Therefore, if you see someone else in the church who is rendering evil for evil, or who is not pursuing good toward all...you have a responsibility to say something!
 - Responsibility for others in the church is something we would like to forget and excuse ourselves out of—but the Lord keeps bringing it up again!
 3. As those who love Christ, you are to care about the health of the church...
 - You are to see to it that both you and others are living like Christians, and that none of us are living vindictive lives or lives that are indifferent about doing good.
 - We should pray for each other, admonish, encourage, and uphold each other—so that together we will live for Jesus.
 - We are too independent.
 - We are part of a body and we are responsible for each other.

TRANS> Now let’s look at what we are to see that everyone in the church does...

- B. We should see that no one ever renders evil for evil!
 1. Retaliation is completely out of line for the Christian.
 - We know that God is the judge and that He will punish the wicked.
 - That means that you don’t need to.
 - It is your job to try to lead them to Christ, not to try to get even with them.
 - Note that it is not just toward each other that there is to be no retaliation, but that we are not to render evil for evil to anyone!
 2. We need to behave in the world as those who know that we have been released from the vengeance of God Almighty!
 - Instead of punishing us for our sins, the Lord has graciously pardoned us through our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - It is therefore not fitting for us hold others to pay for their sins against us.
 - Understand that this is not talking about the courts of the land.
 - The courts represent God and it is their responsibility to bring about justice in the punishment of crime...
 - but in our personal relationship with others, we are to love our enemies and to do good to those who do us wrong.

- The more we are abused, the more opportunity we have to shine for Christ.
 - Don't let Socrates put you to shame...
 - We are told that when someone said to him, "May I die if I do not avenge myself on you," he replied, "May I die if I do not make you my friend."
3. How much more does this avoidance of vindication pertain to our dealings with each other in the body of Christ!
- If it is inappropriate to do it toward anyone, how much more toward those that we have just been called to admonish, to comfort, and to uphold,
 - and all that with patience!
 - As I mentioned before, once you move to irritation and wanting to get back at someone, you have ceased to be ministering to them for Christ.
 - You are no longer seeking to see them love your Lord—nor are you loving the Lord at that point.
 - Now you have become a nasty self-seeking vindictive tyrant.
 - See that no one is like that in the body of Christ.
- And what should we do instead?
- C. We should see to it that all of us pursue what is good both for ourselves and for all.
1. What a fantastic thing to do!
- The word *pursue* is a word that means to *track down like a hunter*.
 - You are called here to make it your earnest endeavour to do good to others.
 - You are to exert yourself and work hard at finding fine things to do for others.
 - If we could be half as diligent about pursuing the doing of good for others as a drunkard is about pursuing his drink—he can't live without it...
 - or the pervert about pursuing his fornication...
 - or the covetous man his success...
 - our lives would be beautiful examples to all of Christ.
2. He left the glories of heaven to come here and do good for us...
- He let nothing stop Him...
 - neither our own unworthiness—how often does that stop you from doing good?
 - or the great sacrifice that He had to make in order to save us—how often has the difficulty stopped you?
 - But not Him—He pursued what was good—He delighted His Father—and we are to do as He did.
3. Notice all of the absolute terms that are used here as well...
- It says: **always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all!**

- a. Always means always...
 - There is never to be a time in our lives when we are not looking to do good for others.
 - At no time are we to be against them, always we are to be doing things for them...prayers instead of curses, well-speaking instead of gossip, helping instead of harming, kind words instead of cutting words, assisting instead of hindering, giving instead of taking...
 - We are always to be pursuing these things.
- b. And notice the word all—we are to always be doing this for all...
 - No one is to be excluded from our striving to do good.
 - Enemies, friends, those that have wronged us, those that are better than us, those that are better off than us, those that are serving us...
 - We are to constantly pursue what is good for all of them.
- c. That is what Jesus did, and that that is what we will do in heaven forever.
 - This is God's will and, as it says in 4:1-3:
 - **Finally brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; ² for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification.**