

# A Study of 1 Thessalonians



Beginning in chapter 4, Paul begins addressing specific problems in the Thessalonian church as well as answering their questions. The Thessalonian Christians had a number of questions about those who had died as Christians and the Second Coming. The return of Jesus will be sudden and unexpected so Christians need to be prepared by living lives that are watchful and self-controlled. Because Christians know that Jesus is returning they are to live in expectation of that great day.

In this last section of 1 Thessalonians Paul turns to final instructions for the church. These instructions are general and appropriate for the needs of all churches in all times. Each of the teachings in this final section are short, timely, and important.

## **How to Treat Church Leaders (5:12-13)**

Paul instructs the Thessalonian Christians to respect their leaders. He has in mind the elders of the church and evangelists. These ones are “over you in the Lord.” These men are said to “labour among you,” referring to both physical and spiritual effort expended as well as the concern for the members of the church.

Church leaders are to “admonish” the congregation. This word means to instruct, correct, and warn. It especially refers to correcting those in error. We need to humbly accept correction and instruction from those who lead in the church.

1. Describe how admonishment takes place.
2. Why does Paul say church leaders should be esteemed highly.
3. What is the meaning of love in verse 13?



Paul tells the young Christians “be at peace among yourselves.” James Smith writes, “The greatest respect Christians can show toward their leaders is to be at peace with one another. Church leaders should not be placed in the role of refereeing disputes and arguments among members. A peaceful church, working harmoniously under the leadership of the elders, is the goal for which we are to strive.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, James E. *Teacher's Commentary: Eschatological Epistles*.

## How to Treat Others in the Church (5:14-15)

First, Paul addresses in quick succession how to interact with weaker Christians.

1. "Admonish the idle."
2. "Encourage the fainthearted."
3. "Help the weak."
4. "Be patient with all."

The word translated "idle" is a military term meaning: out of order, disorderly, or slack in performance of duty.<sup>2</sup> Some in the church thought the Lord was coming any time so there was no need to work. It is unacceptable for those who are able to work to remain idle.

### 4. What damage can idleness do to the church?

The "fainthearted" are those who lack courage, who are timid, and afraid. These people are to be encouraged.

### 5. What causes one to be fainthearted?

The weak are those who are weak in their spiritual life. It may be the new converts to the faith.

### 6. How are the weak to be treated; and why?

### 7. Define the word "patience" and describe why it is necessary in the church.

People in the church come from all kinds of backgrounds and develop different levels of spiritual maturity. Some people can be frustrating to mature Christians because they remain weak and require more attention and support. As members of the church, we are members of a family; the family of God. It is our responsibility to admonish, encourage, and help the weak while exercising a high degree of patience. The goal is to see every Christian grow to be the best they can be for Christ.



Second, Paul discusses how to react to those who mistreat their brothers or sisters in Christ. There should be no retaliation against those who treat a Christian in an evil manner; instead they should be treated with good. This is true for those within and outside the church.

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<sup>2</sup> Strong's Concordance.

**8. How far are we to carry the command to avoid retaliation and to seek to do good to those who do evil to us?**

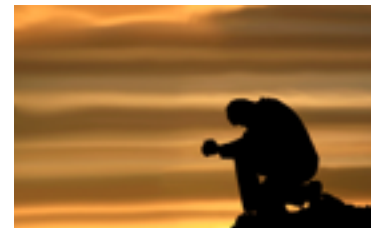
**General Instructions (5:16-22)**

The Christian is to rejoice always and give thanks; whatever the circumstance.

**9. Describe the difference between happiness and joy.**

**10. How does one pray without ceasing?**

In the constant prayers of the Christian must be the giving of thanks. Paul is writing to a group of young Christians under tremendous persecution and he tells them to give thanks “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”



Even in the midst of (or through) persecution God is shaping and strengthening the Christian, helping him to grow and become more like Jesus. Those things that seem so distasteful and harmful can be great blessings as they lead to greater spiritual maturity.

The Holy Spirit is given to every Christian at baptism. He lives within the Christian and helps us to develop a fruitful and faithful life. It is possible to “quench” the Spirit by willful sin and disobedience to God. Since all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit any rejection or disobedience to the Bible would be another way to resist the Spirit. This quenching is like pouring water on a fire.

Because verses 19 and 20 are joined it seems reasonable to assume that Paul may have also had in mind the use of spiritual gifts such as healing, speaking in tongues, and prophecy. We know these gifts were in use in the first century churches and were provided by the laying on of the apostle’s hands.<sup>3</sup>

The instruction to “not despise prophecies” is made briefly and succinctly. The gift of prophecy was the most important spiritual gift in the early church. It is quite possible Paul had passed on this gift to some within the church. Since the New Testament had not yet been written, it was imperative the members be taught through prophecies which revealed what had not yet been recorded in Scripture.

Prophecies refer to speech that is directly given by God’s inspiration. It could be either a God given directive for what the future held or more commonly an inspired message of encouragement, teaching, or rebuke.

Just as there were God inspired prophets, there were also false prophets. It was important then to “test everything” and “hold fast to what is good.” They were to “test” if

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 6:6-8; 8:14-19; Acts 19:1-7; 2 Timothy 1:6.

the teachings of any prophets were in fact genuine. This testing could come from a comparison to what Paul had already taught them or what they had heard from Timothy. If a prophecy or any teaching did not conform to what Paul had taught them, or what they knew to be true, it could not be from God.

The next instruction is to “abstain from every form of evil.” A Christian desires to love God and avoid sin. This leads him to make every effort to remove himself from any evil thought or practice.

**11. What are some of the steps a Christian can take to “abstain from every form of evil?”**

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**Closing Prayer (5:23-28)**

**12. How is God described in verse 23 and why is this appropriate?**



Paul’s desire for these brethren is that they be prepared for the Lord’s return. He prays that they be sanctified completely (to be made holy). They were growing and he wants them to reach full maturity. He wants them to be blameless in spirit, soul, and body (the entirety of their being) so that they will be ready for the return of Christ.

**13. Describe the importance of the promise found in verse 24.**

Not only does Paul pray for the Thessalonian Christians, he requests they pray for him and his co-workers. A kiss was the common form of greeting in the ancient Near East even as it is today. The kiss was holy because it was among Christians who loved one another as brothers.

Paul charges the church to make sure this letter was read to all the brothers. It is likely some could not read and Paul wants to make sure every Christian receives this teaching.

Finally, he asks that the grace of the Lord be with them. God’s grace is what makes salvation possible. Because of God’s grace the Christian lives his life with the hope of Christ’s Second Coming.