

Great Exhortations

Introduction. The final section of 1 Thessalonians has several appeals which the brethren were to do or avoid, but they were not necessarily connected to each other. Such a “lumping together” of appeals of several actions is found elsewhere in Paul's letters (cp. Romans 12:6-12).

I have long proclaimed my love and appreciation for 1 Thessalonians 5:14. The reason is because this single verse contains four superb exhortations for every congregation. And Paul addresses the exhortations not just to the congregational elders but to the whole church: correcting faults in members is the duty of the entire membership. So what did Paul exhort or urge the Thessalonians to do?

I. “Warn Them That Are Unruly”

- A. Who are those to be warned or admonished? “Unruly” or “disorderly” is from a military background, signifying “to break rank.” The word is also found in James 3:8 where the tongue is called a “restless” evil. The unruly one rejects submitting to orders; they are, as the BBE says, “not well-ordered.”
 - 1. The admonition recalls the idlers from the marketplace (Acts 17:5).
 - 2. The church is to put sense into the unruly members who break rank.
- B. The disorderliness is not specifically identified, but in Paul's second letter to the church the word appears again (2 Thessalonians 3:6). It seems Paul's admonishment in his first epistle had fallen on deaf ears.
 - 1. In 1 Thessalonians 5, the special reference seems to be the idleness and neglect of duty which characterized certain members of the Thessalonian church in view of the shortly expected coming of Christ.
 - 2. Paul vigorously denied having walked disorderly among them, depending on others to feed him (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9) — he had “paid his own way.”
- C. The phrase really means to “warn the quitters,” and this is a challenging task for any church and its leadership.

II. “Comfort The Feeble-minded”

- A. While “comfort” means to “encourage,” the KJV uses “feeble-minded” while most other versions use “fainthearted.” This word now conveys an entirely different meaning than what Paul intended.
 - 1. Paul wrote of his philosophy toward life in 2 Corinthians 4:18.
 - 2. The fainthearted, on the other hand, are those who find it difficult not to be affected by the present. It is not easy for them to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Other versions translate the word “discouraged,” “disheartened,” “stragglers,” and “little strength.”
- B. These “small-souled” members are perhaps those who had small courage to face the afflictions that were caused by hostile outsiders (1 Thessalonians 2:14; 3:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10; Revelation 2:10). They were worried, discouraged, and fearful. But in every church there should be Christians who, being brave, help others to be brave and hold the line (cp. Judges 7:15-18).

III. "Support The Weak"

- A. "Support" is used again in Titus 1:9 where the elder is to "hold fast the faithful word." We, as a congregation, are not to let go or abandon the members who feel as though they amount to little, but we are to hold on to and support them.
- B. The "feble-minded" and the "weak" in this verse are alike in one respect: they were both immobile in a spiritual sense.
 - 1. But the difference in the two was that the "feble-minded" did not have questions about the course he was reluctant to walk in — he acknowledged that course was right. He just was afraid of the externals.
 - 2. The weak are not the physically sick but those who were spiritually and morally weak, who thus need to be supported. "Weak" is variously translated as "sick" but also "without strength" (helpless, powerless) in Romans 5:6. They are tempted to sin, so we support or help them in several ways:
 - a) By demonstrating a non-hypocritical example (Philippians 2:15).
 - b) By encouraging pure morality (2 Timothy 2:22).
 - c) By warning of unrighteousness (Romans 1:20-32).
 - d) By showing a way of escape their temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- C. Clinging to the weak is a lovely piece of advice. Instead of letting the weak members drift away and finally vanish altogether, Christians should make a deliberate attempt to hold them fast (by visits, studies, calls, texts, cards, etc.) within the church so that they cannot escape.

IV. "Be Patient Toward All Men"

- A. To be patient is likely the hardest phrase of all these. The verb means to hold out long before taking action. We do not possess a short or quick temper toward those who fail, but we are considerate of them. Bearing one another's burdens and fulfilling the law of Christ can be a long process (Galatians 6:2).
- B. We are patient with others, remembering God's longsuffering with us.
 - 1. Both the Old and New Testaments affirm the longsuffering of God (Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:15; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9, 15).
 - 2. Longsuffering is part of brotherly kindness, enduring the frailties and weaknesses of our brethren (Romans 12:10). It is a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and therefore a part of our ministry in Christ (2 Corinthians 6:3-10, esp. v. 6; 2 Timothy 4:2).
 - 3. Longsuffering towards all means not only towards all in the three previous groups, but toward all, including outsiders who may be very antagonistic and hostile at times.
- C. Disorderly elements try the patience of the congregation, and sometimes I'm tempted to say, "Let's kick them out." But we hold out with them, even though it is tough! What a wonderful ideal with which Paul inspires the church!

Conclusion. Our command is to grow up together in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16). But we know that congregations have imperfections because they are full of people who are imperfect, tempted by the devil (1 Peter 5:8; cp. Luke 22:31-34). Our work is to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28).