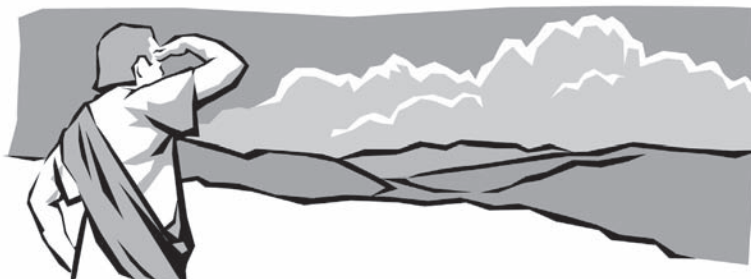


Church Life (1 Thessalonians 5:12–28)



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 1

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Thessalonians 5:12–28; Matthew 5:43–48; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 4:4; John 15:4–6.

MEMORY VERSE: “Don’t [do not] treat prophecies [special messages from God] as if they amount to nothing. Put everything to the test. Hold on to what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21, NlrV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Paul gives these Thessalonian leaders and members very useful and spiritual advice about how to treat one another.

PAUL ENDS HIS FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS WITH SEVENTEEN WARNINGS (1 THESSALONIANS 5:12–22). Then he gives a closing prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:23–28). This week’s lesson begins with three warnings about the attitude (feeling) of local church members toward their leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13). These warnings are followed by six commands about how local church leaders should behave toward their people.

Eight short warnings follow in the next seven verses (1 Thessalonians 5:16–22). These can be organized into two groups. Three pieces of advice are about keeping a positive Christian attitude (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). And five are about how to accept new light on prophecies (1 Thessalonians 5:19–22).

In the closing prayer, Paul sums up a main theme (idea; topic) of this letter. Believers in Thessalonica and beyond are to continue to grow in holiness until the Second Coming itself. In other words, they are to live every day, getting ready for the Lord’s return. In a way, what would make a better “present truth” message than that?

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 2**DOING THE MINISTRY (WORK DONE FOR GOD)
(1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13)**

The two verses at the heart of today's lesson follow the warnings that end last week's lesson: to "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11, NIV). This work takes place in local churches through coaching and discipleship.¹ The lesson today focuses (puts our attention on) on how disciples should accept the work of their leaders and coaches.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13. What is Paul's basic point? How should we use it in our lives? How can you better work with, support, and love those who are "over you in the Lord"?

The Greek of verse 12 shows that the three parts in the second half all point to the same group of local leaders of the Thessalonian church. Paul calls on the members to "know" these leaders. By this Paul means for them to notice, respect, or recognize them. This seems to suggest that, perhaps, some people in the church were disrespectful of their leaders.

The word *admonish* suggests the meaning of instructing, warning, or even helping people think better. Paul admits here that church leaders will often need to use "tough love."² This kind of leadership is not always wel-

come. But in verse 13 Paul goes on to ask the members to respect their leaders in dealing with difficult issues. Paul wants all the members of the church to be at peace with one another.

The language of these verses shows methods often used in Paul's time for dealing with people. Thinkers of Paul's day knew that dealing with people is serious and sensitive work. They encouraged leaders to carefully study the condition of their followers. The leaders were to be sensitive to how each follower would accept correction, to choose the right time to correct him or her, and to use the proper punishment. Above all else, the leaders were expected to examine themselves before trying to correct others. Paul added ideas to this framework. For the Christian, God is the perfect example of leadership, and the goal of church leadership is to create a group of members who live lives worthy of God.

In some cultures, people distrust and challenge (question) leadership. In others, people blindly obey their leaders. How has your own culture's attitude (feeling) toward leadership influenced the church in your area?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 3**WORKING TO HELP OTHERS
(1 Thessalonians 5:14, 15)**

In verses 12 and 13 Paul lists ways that members in the church should

1. discipleship—the process of learning to become a disciple and to make other disciples for Jesus.

2. tough love—punishing or correcting those who disobey in order to help believers to become better members.

treat their leaders. In today's verses (1 Thessalonians 5:14, 15), Paul turns his attention to the leaders of the church and how they should treat those under their care.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14, 15. What does Paul warn church leaders concerning the treatment of members? Look at the principles (important rules) there. How can we use them for ourselves, no matter what we do in the church? How should we use these principles at work, at home, or at play? Read also Matthew 5:43–48.

Paul encouraged the leaders in Thessalonica to “warn those who don't [do not] want to work” (1 Thessalonians 5:14, NIV). Those people were the ones who refused to support themselves. They were stubborn and difficult to work with. They had to be disciplined (punished; corrected).

But Paul instructs the leaders to “encourage those who are timid [shy], take . . . care of . . . the weak,” and “be patient with everyone” (1 Thessalonians 5:14, NLT). The “timid” are people who have little self-confidence or sense of worth. They are worried about many things. Such people are important to God. So, leaders should encourage them.

The “weak” are those with moral (righteous) and spiritual limitations. They are easily deceived and discouraged by hardship. They are also afraid of the unknown. Their hearts might be in the right place, but they do not have knowledge and are trou-

bled by the past. They need help to grow.

Paul directs church leaders to be patient with everyone. The first three pieces of advice in verse 14 are for different conditions. But patience is always most important when caring for church members.

Paul probably continues to have leaders in mind in verse 15. Whenever leaders are attacked by those who do not accept their warnings, they (leaders) may be tempted to (feel the desire to) fight back. But when leaders fight back, it shows that the spirit of Christ is not in them. It is important to strong church leadership to keep the good of others in mind.

Verses 12–15 show that there will be coaches and disciples in the church. It is important that there be a lot of respect and patience in those relationships. But we should not forget 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (“encourage one another and build one another up,” ESV). Ministering (serving others) will often go both ways. There are times when the leaders need to be coached.



Leaders are to be patient with those who are weak and afraid.

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 4**POSITIVE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES
(1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)**

According to 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15, Christians need to learn how to accept and how to offer constructive (positive) criticism. That can be done only in relationships. The bottom line is that every Christian needs to be responsible to others and needs to be willing to hold others responsible. A praying church will grow in counsel (advice) and encouragement.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18. What three things does Paul consider to be the will of God for every believer? Why is each thing so important? Read also Galatians 5:22 and Philippians 4:4.



Every Christian needs to be responsible and to be willing to hold others responsible.

Glenn Coon, a beloved Adventist preacher, loved to say that there are many more commands to rejoice in the Bible than there are to keep the

Sabbath. But we rarely give rejoicing the attention it should have. A joyful life is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22; read also Philippians 4:4). And spirit-filled joy is possible even in suffering (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

Paul certainly was a perfect example of what it means to pray without ceasing (stopping). First Thessalonians is filled with prayer as we have learned. Here Paul invites readers of his letter to follow his example.

Thankfulness is another positive Christian attitude (feeling) that Paul shows (1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3). At the root of pagan (idol-worshipping) sinfulness was a lack of thankfulness to God (Romans 1:21). According to Thomas Erskine, “In the New Testament, religion is grace.³ And ethics⁴ is gratitude [thankfulness].”—Adapted from F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle [Teacher and Leader] of the Heart Set Free* (UK: The Paternoster Press, 1977), page 19. It is interesting to note that the Greek words for “rejoice” and “be thankful” have the same basic root. This shows that the key to godly rejoicing is keeping a spirit of thankfulness to God.

Open your hearts. The gifts of God are all around us. We just forget to thank Him for them. This is because we are too worried about the problems and struggles of living. If we would develop an attitude (feeling) of thankfulness to God more and more, we would walk much closer to Him, and our lives would be filled with joy.

3. grace—God’s gift of mercy that He gives us to take away our sins.

4. ethics—a way of deciding what is right and good and choosing to do it.

Make a list of ten things that you are thankful for. Then make each of these the center of a short prayer to God. Notice the changes that will come in your whole attitude (feeling) and outlook (view) from these prayers. This practice can show you just how very important thankfulness is in our experience with God.



The key to godly rejoicing is a continuing spirit of thankfulness to God.

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 5

RELATING TO “NEW LIGHT” (1 Thessalonians 5:19–22)

What is Paul saying to us in 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22? What can these words teach us in our experience with Christ? What “form of evil” (NKJV) must you, in your own situation, work very hard to avoid?

In 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15, Paul was warning the church. In verses 19–22 he brings up another kind of warning about the gift of prophecy.

The word *stop* is used twice at the beginning of these verses. This shows how strongly Paul feels about these two subjects: “Stop quenching [drowning out] the Spirit” and “stop despising [avoiding] prophesyings [messages from God]” (1 Thessalonians 5:19, 20, author’s translation). Paul is telling the Thessalonians to stop something that they have been doing all the time.

We do not know what problem Paul is talking about. But he seems to be telling the Thessalonians to be open to more light. At the same time, he is telling them to test it, just to make sure it is really light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

There are different ways to destroy the gift of prophecy. One of these is to “quench [drown out] the Spirit.” We do this when we do not listen to the work of a true prophet (special messenger from God). Look at all the attacks from our own members against the prophetic (given by God) gift of the life and ministry of Ellen G. White.

A second way to destroy the gift of prophecy is to accept what is said but misinterpret (understand wrongly) or misuse (use wrongly) it. We can approach a prophetic message with an open mind but misuse the message in any church situation. This is something that we, as Seventh-day Adventists, need to be very careful of. We have been given a wonderful gift. We do not want to destroy that gift by misusing it.

A third way to destroy the gift of prophecy is to accept persons or writings that have not received the

gift from God. The church must be always watchful. It must test everything to see whether the prophetic message builds up the church.

What has been the influence of Ellen G. White’s prophetic ministry in your own life? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 6

END-TIME HOLINESS (1 Thessalonians 5:23–28)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24. What does it mean to be “holy through and through” and “kept free from blame” (NirV) at the coming of the Lord? Should we not be that way even now?

In today’s verses Paul returns to the language of prayer. His way of writing is much like that of 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13. Paul’s main theme is also the same: being found “holy and without blame” (NirV) at the Second Coming. But Paul makes a change here from what the Thessalonians are supposed to do (1 Thessalonians 5:12–22) to what God does in us (holiness) and for us (the Second Coming).

Believers have often disagreed about what exactly this verse says about humans and the character (who a person is) they can expect to have when Jesus comes. In our short study of these verses, we will focus on what can be said on the basis of these verses.

Paul is saying that what God does in

believers, He does to the whole person. Every part of the believer’s life must be influenced by sanctification (righteous or holy living) as the return of Jesus comes nearer. In speaking of “spirit, soul, and body,” Paul is not trying to be scientific about different layers of the human person. (In the Bible, mind and body are a unified [joined as one] whole, not separate parts.) Rather, Paul is explaining that every part of our mind and body is to be given to God. We should let God have full control of our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Paul’s prayer goes from the present time to the Second Coming. He prays that believers are to be protected or kept blameless until the coming of the Lord. He prays that the believers’ faith will be completed and be protected all the way to the end. According to this letter, the Thessalonians are not perfect. But what they do have is worth protecting until Jesus comes. Paul is praying that they will continue to grow in grace through a closer relationship with Jesus. (Read also John 15:4–6.)



God should have full control of our minds and bodies.

In what ways can you, and should you, be preparing every day for the Lord's return?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 7

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “[As a child] Jesus remained cheerful and courteous in His work. It requires much patience and spirituality to bring Bible religion into the home life and into the workshop. It requires the same to accept the heavy load of worldly business, and still keep the eye single to the glory [great praise and honor] of God. This is where Christ was a helper. Jesus was never so overcome with worldly care that He would have no time or thought for heavenly things. Often Jesus showed the gladness of His heart by singing psalms and heavenly songs. Often the people of Nazareth heard His voice raised in praise and thanksgiving to God. Jesus often talked to heaven by singing. Whenever His fellow workers complained about being tired from work, they were cheered by the sweet song from His lips. Jesus’ praise seemed to drive away the evil angels and fill the place with perfume. The minds of His hearers were carried away from their earthly prison to the heavenly home.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 73.

“Nothing does more for the health of body and of soul than a spirit of thankfulness and praise. It is a Christian’s positive duty to drive out sadness, negative thoughts, and feel-

ings. It is as much his duty as it is to pray.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, page 251.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① As a class, go over your answers to Wednesday’s final question. Look at it in two ways: What has been Ellen G. White’s influence on our church? And how has her ministry influenced our lives?
- ② Think more about this idea of how our culture’s opinion of leadership influences our opinion of church leaders. Does our culture lead us to disrespect leaders or to be too obedient to them? How can we keep the right balance?
- ③ How can your local church do a better job of coaching new believers in character growth? What kind of spiritual leadership training is needed?

SUMMARY: In this week’s verses (1 Thessalonians 5:12–27), Paul discusses many problems. But he is very interested in how spiritual the local church life is among believers. Believers at the local level are to coach one another and be joyful and thankful. They should also be open to new truth, especially prophetic truth. But they should be careful and thoughtful in testing new ideas. Above all else, Paul calls for complete surrender to God in every part of our personal lives while we wait for the return of Jesus.