

# Living as the Family of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hello, and welcome to the last in our series on Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. We're in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, and we're looking at how Paul is teaching the church at Thessalonica how to be a community, how to be the new people of God, really how to be a family.

And so we're going to focus on that family aspect today. You know, families are interesting things, aren't they? They're so important to us, so special. The best times, the most fun times will be had with our families.

If you're in your teen years, you probably don't think that, but before your teen years and after your teen years, you realize how important family is. And even if there's heartache in your family, because they can do that, they can give us the deepest pain, but that still speaks to how important family is.

And today's passage is all about the church being a family. In chapter 1, Paul wrote about how they were chosen by God. And that chosen language is covenant language.

That's from the Old Testament, where God talks about his covenant people as he chose them out of all the nations of the earth. And he chose them to be a community of people. And in fact, a family. They come from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[ 1 : 18 ] The word brother is used five times in this passage by Paul, just to underline that whole family idea and to show you how important family is. You know, as Christians, we call God our Father.

And if that's true, if God is our Father, then our fellow Christians are de facto our brothers and sisters in Christ. We don't just belong to God.

We also belong to each other. And the final section of the letter, Paul is almost calling like a family meeting. And it's all about how we are to live together as this new community that has been created, the new people of God.

In other words, as a family. And Paul focuses on four areas that they need to develop or to work at in order to be a successful family.

You know, this doesn't come naturally or easily. If you want to be a successful family, a family that works together and loves and helps each other. And so Paul says, look, there's four areas I want you to focus on in order to work properly as a family.

[ 2 : 22 ] And we'll just go through them one by one. And so the first area is living with leadership. Verse 12 to 13, every family needs to have authority structures. And the church is no different.

And then in verse 14 to 15, they've got to learn to live. The church has to learn to live together with each other, just like a family. And in verse 16 to 22, they've got to worship together as a family.

And then in verse 23 to 28, Paul discusses how God can help us do these things. Living with God. So, first of all, we look at verse 12 to 13. Living with leadership.

Living with leadership. The first area Paul touches on is leadership. How should the church relate to its leaders? And what is the role of the leaders in the church? The basic point he's going to make is that the church must respect, honor, and love its leaders.

And the leaders need to work hard, lead well, and counsel wisely. And if both of these do well, if the leaders and the church do this part of their relationship well, there will be peace in the church.

[ 3 : 29 ] So, there's this two-way relationship between church members and leadership. And that's important because very often everything is expected from leadership without any responsibilities from the church.

And Paul says, no, they've both got roles of responsibility. So, verse 12 and 13. Paul says, If they step up to a position of leadership, they must take ownership and work hard at that. And then thirdly, leaders must talk straight. Sometimes leadership requires hard words.

That's the admonish word there in verse 12. Now, that doesn't mean harsh words. Okay? This is more like counseling. In fact, there's biblical counseling that gets its impetus from this very word, admonish.

The Greek word is *natheteo*, to place their mind properly. You might know it as *nathetic* counseling or biblical counseling. So, counseling is helping someone when there are things that are going wrong in their life and offering to help change what is needed to make it get better or go better or work better.

[ 6 : 05 ] That's what admonishing is. Not to break down, but in order to build up, to strengthen. It's a helping word. Okay. Those are what the leaders must do.

What about the church? Just the church members. How are they to relate to these leaders? Well, they are to respect them, to esteem them, and to love them. And notice the progression there.

Paul starts with respect. That's to give the proper honor due to someone. But it could lack that personal element. I'm sure we've all had jobs where we respect the boss, but certainly don't show them any love.

But Paul doesn't want that here. He wants church members to have good feelings towards their leaders, to esteem them, and to love them. To esteem means to acknowledge. Okay, so how do we do that?

How do we do that as a church? Well, very simply, the first place to start is to look at how you speak about those in leadership. What words are coming out of your mouth or on your phone about those leaders?

[ 7 : 05 ] What are you saying to yourself in your heart and in your mind? Are you complaining? Grumbling? Are the words negative? Are you lifting them up or breaking them down?

Have you sent them messages of encouragement and say, I really appreciated this, or I really enjoyed that, or thank you for this? Or maybe you're thinking to yourself, you know what, I am saying negative things, but they're just small little things in my mind.

You know, I don't really mean it. But there is such a thing as death by a thousand cuts. And the Bible is very clear about how we speak about others, especially behind their backs.

In other words, you're not meant to do it. Lifting them up, esteeming our leaders looks like positive words. Looks like support. Looks and sounds like encouragement and enthusiasm for the various ministries and tasks that they give us to do.

And then you've got to share those words with both the leaders and with others. Maybe you need to share words of encouragement, not just to your leaders, but to the church around you.

[ 8 : 08 ] And say, hey, don't you enjoy the guys doing this and that and this and that? Now, using the analogy of a family, no parent lets their children get away with bad-mouthing their moms or their dads.

Instead, parents teach their children to respect and obey them. On YouTube, there's one of those TikTok videos, I guess. There's a prank where the mom asks the child to do something.

And the mom is in on it. And the child tells the mom, oh, shut up, mom. And the dad's in the room and he doesn't know. And you must see how the dads react. They just jump up. The kids, whoa, dad, we're just joking. We're just joking.

All right. So parents teach their children to respect, honor, and obey them. So then, as a church family, we need to be respectful and honoring towards our leaders, just like the Ten Commandments teaches us to be towards our moms and dads, to be honoring towards our moms and dads.

And then this, in turn, will bring peace to our relationships and help us live in concord, in harmony. All right. So that brings us to the next point about how we should be living with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

[ 9 : 12 ] So the first section, how to live with our leaders and how to make peace there, how to have peace. And then the next, how to live with each other. And the basic point Paul is going to make is that we need to live together as a family that patiently helps each other.

Have a look at verse 14 and verse 15. We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all, see that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

You know, you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. And here Paul is helping the Thessalonians with the church's sort of problem children. You know, the new people of God are not going to be miraculously changed overnight in the twinkling of an eye into perfect little goody-goody Christians.

People do change, but change is a process. And importantly here, there's a tool that God uses to change people, and that's other people, Christians in other words.

And so he uses people to help other people change. In fact, one of the counseling books is a well-known counseling book, I think it's by Paul Tripp, People in Need of Change, Helping People in Need of Change.

[ 10 : 31 ] And so that's to say that God uses you and me. Notice Paul says, we urge you, brothers. So this is not the church leadership doing the work, this is the church itself doing the work of admonishing and helping and encouraging.

Our job role as the new people of God, living in community with the other new people of God, is to help them become better people of God and better members of God's family.

So, we as a church family must, first of all, warn the idol. That's not just those who are lazy, but it does mean people who are slack in their duties, but also out of order or disorderly, just people doing weird things.

But we don't warn them by shouting at them like in the army. This again is the counsel word from verse 12, admonish. We are to speak words that help and encourage, but nonetheless that do have an edge of warning to them.

An example from my bagpiping experience. In bagpipes, you've got to play things in a certain way, and when you don't, it really sounds horrible. And you can have a leader in the band, they call the pipe major, who typically they're in army bands, and he will shout, don't you do that, that's wrong, blah, blah, blah.

[ 11 : 55 ] But they won't tell you how to do it properly. So, all you get are these harsh words of doing things wrong, but no one helps you to do it properly. So, the words here aren't just telling what's wrong.

Show them, help them how to not do that, but to do things better. Alright, so we must warn the idol, we must encourage the faint-hearted.

The Greek word is small-souled. Those who are small of soul. Shame. People who may be fearful, or maybe too much drawn inside of their own fears and doubts.

They're almost shrinking within themselves. Shrinking violets, so people have that saying. Now, to encourage here means to help them move away from their own fears, and to trust more in God.

And that's a process, but again, it's people helping people. And then we must help the weak. The picture here is literally of helping a little old lady as she crosses the street, by putting arms around them, holding them up, holding them tight, so they don't slip and fall.

[ 13 : 01 ] And this could mean those who are weak in the faith, or weak in temptation to some particular sin. Either way, as a church, we're not to judge them, but to help them, to support them and carry them, so that they don't slip and fall.

Until they get strong enough to stand on their own two feet. That's the whole point of giving help there. And then those who help must practice lots and lots of patience.

The word is literally big suffering, or long suffering. So if you're going to help people, you're going to suffer. And you must suffer for a long time, because people don't want to change. And so Paul is concerned for the weaker members of the church community.

So the church is not a place for only the strong and the brave and the holy and the good. The church is a place where people can grow and develop into that. And the way that they're going to do that is to have other church members help them along the way.

In other words, we must act like a family. That's why you must be patient with everyone, not getting irritated with others. But just imagine a dad that was getting frustrated with his two-year-old, because she couldn't tidy the house.

[ 14 : 11 ] Or a mom who got impatient with her six-year-old, because they couldn't yet cook dinner. You've got to be patient and help them grow to the place where they can do those things. And then Paul adds, on top of that, you must be forgiving and work for the good of others.

Don't repay evil for evil. You know, we're so good at wanting to get our own back, aren't we? If I'm hurt, my first instinct is to hurt back. But, as Christians, as a Christian family, we can't harbor petty little grudges against our Christian brothers and sisters.

Family feuds have no place in the Christian family. Thinking of ourselves as a family, then, families that are full of manipulation and guilt, and so competing agendas, jealousies, and even abuse, we call those dysfunctional.

They're not working as a family. This kind of family cannot produce growth or development. It cannot produce people who are stable, who are mature, and can contribute constructively to society.

Those families just don't work. Families are designed to be a place of acceptance, love, and support. When you have that, you have growth.

[ 15 : 23 ] You have functionality. You have ability. You have a place that will help people change, that trains them to be the kind of people that God wants and that God can use. The family is the training ground for the future, and our churches need to be the same.

Alright, so that's living how we live together as a family. Right, then living with worship, or putting worship at the center of our family life. God wants a family that is joyful and thankful, and is careful to listen to Him.

So verse 16 to verse 22. At the center of the church's family life is its worship. Worship is at the core of our identity as humans. It was the core of the Israelite national life, and it is at the core of the church, the new people or family of God.

Worship is meant to reflect the realities of the gospel that saved us. And when we fully grasp the good news, it transforms our lives and it changes how we worship.

It helps us become more automatically joyful, or maybe more constantly joyful is a better way to put it, as well as thankful in every circumstance.

[ 16 : 35 ] So have a look at verse 16 to 22. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophecies, but test everything.

Hold fast what is good, and abstain from every form of evil. Now what Paul is talking about here is the communal and therefore public worship of the church.

It's kind of what we do on Sundays. Yes, you must do it in your private capacity as well, but Paul is concerned with what we do together as a family. And then I just noticed the verbs, rejoice, pray, give thanks, do not quench, do not despise, test, hold fast, abstain.

These are commands. These are not suggestions. We're commanded to do them. We're commanded to rejoice. We're commanded to give thanks. We're commanded to pray. Now these verbs are in the imperative mood.

If you remember your school grammar, the imperative mood has to do with telling people what to do, giving commands, or giving orders. So the church is meant to rejoice and pray and give thanks.

[ 17 : 42 ] But notice then the adverbs, the thing that tell us a little bit about what Paul tells us what to do. How are we to rejoice? Always. How are we to pray? Without stopping. When are we to give thanks?

In all circumstances. So there's a constancy that Paul wants the church to achieve here. Now for some, this comes naturally. Others struggle to be more consistently joyful and thankful.

But we're to strive for them even if it requires work. We must reject this idea that we're to be joyful and thankful only when we feel like being joyful and thankful. Feelings just don't enter into it.

Think of the family analogy again. Parents train their kids to be polite and to be thankful at all times, even when they don't want to be, especially when they don't want to be. I know it's hard, but that's the goal.

Same with being thankful. But these are excellent skills to have and can make a big difference in a person's life if it's done as often as Paul says that it can be done.

[ 18 : 45 ] And so it's something to work towards. Again, you need help with that, so that's where the Christian brotherhood comes in. Now if you're going to do these things, or if you're going to be these things, you're going to need the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so Paul warns against quenching his power. We must let the Holy Spirit do his work because he is the source of our power and ability to develop these spiritual disciplines.

We quench him, we stifle his work by despising prophecies. That is to ignore or reject God's word out of hand when it's directed towards us.

And I'm using prophecy here in sort of the broadest sense of a communication that claims to have its origins in God. Because that can cover everything from the Bible itself, it's communication that has its origin in God.

It can cover preaching, because what we say comes out of God's word, and it could include special revelation or insight into a specific circumstance.

[ 19 : 51 ] What many would consider what charismatic Christians says happens in their churches. But anyone with deep insight could, in a sense, make a prophecy about something. It's just more general kind of prophecy.

Now whichever definition you use, it means we must listen carefully to when God is speaking to us. And we are to test those words to see that they are indeed a word from God.

One of the tests is the word of God itself. It's the Bible. Does what you hear line up with the rest of the Bible? Another test is the result of that word.

Here Paul talks about clinging to what is good and staying away from what is evil. Does what you are listening to help you live a better Christian life? Does it make you more holy?

Does it help you overcome and get rid of sin in your life? Does it help you become more joyful and more thankful? Or does it have the opposite effect and make you confused, make you doubt, and make you withdraw from Christian service and love?

[ 21 : 00 ] You know, using the family analogy again, one set of parents told me about how they get their kids to listen to them by demanding instant and happy obedience.

You know, so kids can obey, but it's not instant, that's not good enough. Or they obey instantly, but they do the grumpy thing, and that's not good enough either. God kind of wants the same from us.

We need to listen to Him. We need to think through what He's saying, what we are hearing, and then respond with joy, prayer, and thanks.

By doing this, we will go a long way to fulfilling what God's will for our lives is. Alright, so, Paul is telling the church how to live as a family, how they need to live with leadership, how they need to live with each other, and how they need to live with worship.

Alright. Well, how are we supposed to do all of this? And so that's the last section, how we live with God, verse 23 to 28. And Paul here wants a family that is empowered to be holy by the covenant faithfulness of God.

[ 22 : 15 ] A family that's empowered to be holy by the covenant faithfulness of God. So God wants us to live as His new family, the new people of God, but you know, we all struggle.

It's difficult to do these things. So He wants us to be holy, but how? How are we going to get this whole thing right? And how right do we get it? Well, that is what the last part of Paul's letter tells us.

Have a look at verse 23 to 28. Now, may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Now, in order for us to be the people of God, or to be the people that God wants, we need the transforming power of the Creator God working in our lives.

[ 23 : 22 ] And we need to know that He's truly for us. In the same way that we can only trust our parents and do what they say if we know that they love us and accept us and want the best for us.

And these verses promises that God will help us and that we can trust Him because He is totally and utterly faithful to His promise. How faithful?

We'll just think about the covenant promises which we learned about in Genesis some time ago. God's faithfulness in the Bible is tied to His covenant. So this is covenant language again.

And He's been faithful to His promise to Abraham for over 4,000 years. Remember, Abraham was called round about 2,000 B.C. So we're now 2,080. That's a period of 4,000 years that God has been faithful to His promises.

And the main proof of that promise the main proof that God is faithful to His promise is something that happened nearly 2,000 years ago.

[ 24 : 21 ] In other words, the death and resurrection of Christ. And we saw last week how Christ's resurrection helps us to have hope in our own resurrection because it's based on something that God has actually done in time and space.

There is simply no more trustworthy person than the God of the Bible. And so you can trust Him to do what He says He's going to do. And what is God going to do?

He's going to change us completely and totally inside and out. Through and through. Our whole beings. Top and bottom. And that's the best way to read what Paul is talking about by having our spirit, soul and body kept blameless.

Notice He says He wants your whole spirit, soul and body. It's a unified whole. May your total self, your entire being, all of you, be changed by God.

So God says there's going to be no area of our lives that will be left untouched by Him and by the transforming power of Christ. Well, let's end off with one final family analogy.

[ 25 : 31 ] God is our Heavenly Father. And like earthly parents, His role is to empower and to help us be the people that He wants. We don't have to worry about the small details, but how, when.

We want the details. We want the exact time frames. And we don't have to wuss out in fear. But I can't. Like all dads, when they are encouraging their kids to do something that's difficult, God kind of says the same thing.

He says, Hey man, I'm here. You can do this. Don't worry about it. Try your best. Go for it.

I will help you. And then you try. You know, remember the first time you're trying to ride a bicycle, it was just the scariest thing. And you even had the little fairy wheels. And then, two meters, you fall.

Knee cuts open. Wah! I told you, I told you. Don't worry. What does your dad do? Picks you up, nurses the wounds, and says, Let's try again.

[ 26 : 39 ] God does the same thing. He says, Don't worry about this. You can do this. And I will be with you every step of the way. Isn't that a family worth belonging to?

Isn't that a family worth making the effort of working towards? Of putting the effort in to make it work properly? Jesus thought so. To the point of sacrificing his life so that you could be a part of it.

And our job here is to be good members of that family. To help as much as we can. As often as we can. And to strengthen it. And to help others do the same.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word of promise that you've created this new family by calling us to be Christians.

You've created this new family. And you want this family to work well. To be full of joy. And to be full of thanks. To be enjoyed. Lord, Lord, it's hard work.

[ 27 : 43 ] But your word is full of promises that you will help us do the things that you want us to do. Lord, as we think about our time together at St. Mark's, will you point out things and areas in our lives that we could change, that we could be better at being more encouraging, we could be more helpful, and we could ask for help if we need it.

Help St. Mark's to be a place, a family that is wholesome and good and loving and kind, just as you have set out in your word.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.