

# Encourage One Another Healthy Attitudes for a Spiritual Community:

**I Thessalonians 5:11-28**

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## Introduction:

If you had only one minute to tell someone how to help their church be healthy and spiritually vibrant, what would you say? What issues would you address? What would you tell them to do—with only one minute to say it? That's approximately how long it takes to read Paul's words in the second half of I Thessalonians 5. He rapidly moves from one exhortation to the next as if someone were standing there with a stop watch saying you've only got one minute, Paul. So he packs in one statement after another telling them how to cultivate a spiritually vibrant church.

As many of you know, we at Living Word Christian Center want to be a community of Real People, experiencing the Real Power of God, and fulfilling Real Purpose in our lives. The emphasis is on the word "Real" because we absolutely refuse to allow religion to replace reality in our relationship with God and with one another.

The blind songwriter, **Ken Medema**, wrote the cry of our hearts when he wrote these words:

"If this is not a place where tears are understood,  
Then where shall I go to cry?  
And if this is not a place where my spirit can take wings,  
Then where shall I go to fly?  
I don't need another place for tryin' to impress you,  
With just how good and virtuous I am.  
No, no, no  
I don't need another place for always bein' on top of things  
Everybody knows that it's a sham, it's a sham.  
I don't need another place for always wearin' smiles  
Even when it's not the way I feel.  
I don't need a another place to mouth the old platitudes  
Everybody knows that it's not real.  
So if this is not a place where my questions can be asked  
Then where shall I go to seek?  
And if this is not a place where my heart cry can be heard  
Where, tell me where, shall I go to speak? [1] Charles Swindoll, The Quest for Character  
(Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1987) p.147.

Church needs to be a place where people can find God, hear God, grow in God, develop rich relationships with other people, and be encouraged not with superficial platitudes and religion but with love and reality. How many already know that those kind of churches don't just happen by accident. There are certain principles and attitudes that we must live by to foster long term health and spiritual vitality. Paul lays many of those out before us in our text this morning.

## **1st He talks about our Attitudes toward ONE ANOTHER in verse 11-15**

**1 Thessalonians 5:11** “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you are also doing.” Those words come after a lengthy teaching on the Coming of the Lord. Your hope and my hope is not limited to this temporal life alone. Everything in your life and my life is moving toward something—toward a great eschatological event called in the Bible, the Day of the Lord. Jesus went to prepare a place for His bride (the Church), the Holy Spirit is at work preparing us for a great wedding day—One day the clouds will break open and the glorious Son of God will descend out of heaven. Let me quote it from **1 Thessalonians 4:16** “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, and with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

In the light of eternity a lot of things that seem real, real big lose their significance. Are you living with an eye toward heaven? Are you living with an anticipation of His return? Just the mention of these things brings courage to our hearts. Guess what folks, when it's all said and done, we win! For if God is for us who can be against us? (**Romans 8:31**) We have good reason to be encouraged and a good reason to encourage one another. You will find Paul saying “one another” quite a bit in his writings—because he understands that this thing called Christianity is not designed for us to live alone but in community with others. It is God's way to set the solitary in families. (**Psalms 68:6**)

Do these two things for one another. Comfort one another. Edify or build up one another. Now we will see more specifically, how we can do that as a spiritual community.

**Verses 12 & 13** “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.”

Without this happening there will not be peace in the camp—why, because order is maintained through authority. Without a proper recognition of authority you have chaos. Turn on your television and watch the news—look at the scenes from Iraq and you will see a vivid picture of what happens when people do not recognize authority. That is an extreme example but there are lots of churches locked down spiritually because of personal conflicts. And I can almost guarantee you somebody in that conflict has a wrong attitude toward authority.

Paul says to this church—you need to recognize those I have put in authority over you. If nobody is in authority over you—guess what you get to do—you get to fight your spiritual battles with no cover—and that is not a good situation for anybody. Know who is in authority over you. Then esteem them very highly. “But how can I esteem a person very highly when that person is no smarter than me—in fact, I pray more and know more Hebrew and have lived longer? I have even led more people to the Lord?” So!—know those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord. None of that matters if God put that person over you. And if you are too spiritual or too bright to be under anybody—may God help you.

The basis of the esteem does not come out of those kind of comparisons. The basis of the esteem is the work God has given that person to do. We begin by esteeming the office of authority and the work being done. Hopefully we can find other things to appreciate. But Paul doesn’t say esteem them because their IQ is greater than yours or they have a better personality. Esteem them “in love” for their work’s sake—in appreciation for the work they do.

### **Now Paul gives instruction for how to handle three particular groups in the church (vs 14)**

**(1) The Unruly or undisciplined**—some translations say “lazy” or “idle” because of other information we have in these letters. We know from the next letter which Paul wrote shortly after this one, that there were people in the church who had quit their jobs and apparently just lived off the generosity of the other believers. And Paul specifically tells those people to “**get a job**” and “**go to work**” (**2 Thes. 3:11-15**). Although all of that applies to our text I think Paul is making a broader statement as well. What are we to do about people in the church who misbehave? The nice thing to do is just ignore it and hope it will take care of itself. Occasionally that works. But there are a lot of churches that are not healthy places to be because there is no courage in the leadership and nothing gets confronted. Paul says you warn or admonish or correct that person. The correction is to be done in love and humility and always with a motive of redemption. The goal is not punishment but correction and healing and the well-being of everyone involved. Although the leadership has considerable responsibility in this, Paul is talking to the whole church. “Now we exhort you, brethren—“adelphos.” By the way, the word used was not just used to refer to men—Paul is using it in a generic way to refer to all the men and women in the congregation. Michael Holmes, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) pp 49,180. But everybody has some responsibility in this according to Paul. Some people have an unbiblical concept that being like Jesus means you never confront anything—but if a congregation ignores Paul’s instruction here it will have serious problems in the long run. For an extreme case see **2 Corinthians 5:3-6**.

**(2) The discouraged or fainthearted are to be dealt with in an altogether different way.** It’s important to correctly diagnose the problem before administering the solution. If we apply the wrong solution we can actually make matters worse. This situation is not

a rebellious person but a downhearted, discouraged person. They don't need to be warned and told to get in line. They need to be encouraged and cheered up. They need a word of hope and affirmation. What Paul is calling for here in our text is a church where everyone is sensitive to the needs of those around them and are discerning of what's going on and are willing to get into the other person's life enough to be part of the answer. He's not talking about coming to a service once a week and exchanging nice greetings and then being done for the week. He's talking about taking genuine interest in those around us.

**(3) The weak can include people who are physically weak, financially weak, or spiritually weak.** They are not particularly discouraged. They are not rebellious. They just need help. And Paul is saying help them—do something practical that makes life better for them. NKJV says “uphold the weak”. Administer some kind of support. Maybe that person is sick and needs someone to watch the kids. Maybe another person just does not know how to manage finances and is willing to receive help in that area. When we see a weakness in another believer is that a call to gossip or a call to help?

Listen to the following testimony from **Pastor Frank Cardale**, “I remember a dear man in our congregation back in Texas who had been injured during World War II. We never could get him to wear socks or a coat. Even during the cold winters that we had in the Panhandle he never wore a coat. He seldom bathed and because of his trauma in the war occasionally his mind would slip and he would start talking out loud during the sermon. He was not what the world would call one of the beautiful people. But he was beautiful in the eyes of the Lord and he was a precious gift to our church. The wisdom of God far exceeds the wisdom of man. God is not trying to create socially elite clubs called churches. He is looking for people who will have His heart of compassion. And that dear man helped our church keep that perspective.” When God sends the weak we do not reject them. We embrace them and love them and are awesomely blessed in the process.

We're talking about how a body of believers are to relate to one another and in **verse 15**. Paul talks about what to do about offenses and injustices. Notice that in that first century Spirit-filled church they had injustices happening. They had hurt feelings. They had one believer doing something to another believer that just was not right. Now Paul's instruction is two fold. First don't try to get back at the person in any way whatsoever. “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone”. That is certainly not what our flesh wants to do, is it? It takes a lot of the grace of God to just hold our tongues and not malign the person, doesn't it? I may think I'm getting pretty mature in the Lord and pretty spiritual—but when somebody really does me wrong, then I get to find out exactly where I am. How many have learned that it's a lot easier to talk spiritual talk and read Christian books, and listen to the latest gospel hit than it is to meekly take wrong the way Paul is describing here? That's where the rubber really meets the road.

Now that would be challenging enough in my opinion—but that is not all that Paul has to say about the matter. Yes, we are not to retaliate. That is the negative side. But then beyond that we are to what? **“Pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”** That includes the stinker that did you wrong. This is the key to healthy relationships—

pursue what is good—pursue that other person’s well-being in every, every case. (Charles Finney defined love as pursuing the other person’s highest well-being.)

Here’s how Jesus put it in [Matthew 5:43-48](#) **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?"**

In other words, passively taking wrong is not enough—sometimes we must actively do something toward that person’s best interest. When your flesh is screaming out for vengeance that’s a good way to deal with it—do the opposite of what the devil and your flesh is telling you to do. The best defense is a good offense. [Rom 12:21](#) **"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**

## **2. In verse 16-17 Paul talks about our Attitude toward Circumstances.**

**a. "Rejoice always."** How can I honestly do that? I have had plenty of times in my life when I did not feel like rejoicing—I didn’t want anybody to tell me to rejoice—come on, anybody else ever been there? I don’t think Paul is telling us to close our eyes to the realities that are going on around us. What he’s telling us to do is to open our eyes to the greater realities—like God—like His eternal plan for you and me—like His assurance of love and interest in our well-being. There is only one way I can honestly rejoice when everything is going wrong around me—that is when I lift my eyes above the temporal and immediate and consider the eternal. One of my favorite verse in all the Bible, [Jer 29:11](#). **"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."** When we begin to ponder His attitude and heart toward us something begins to rise up inside. I don’t have to make myself rejoice—I do rejoice not because of the immediate circumstances but because of the eternal plan God has for me.

**b. "Pray without ceasing."** Live in continual dependence upon God. Pray while you work. Pray while you play. Prayer is the life-line of the church and when the church stops praying—problems begin to take over. Prayer restrains evil. Prayer invites the workings of the Holy Spirit. Prayer continually acknowledges our partnership with God and dependence upon him. There are some people who have been very instrumental in keeping prayer before us this last year—and I am very grateful for their efforts. Church, we’ve gotta’ pray. We can’t do this thing without God and we don’t want to do it without Him.

**c. Verse 18** **"in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."** NIV says, **"give thanks in all circumstances"**. There is a fine distinction here that I think is worth pointing out. Paul is not saying "give thanks for all circumstances"

he is saying “**in**” all circumstances. There are all kinds of terrible things happening in this world that we are not thankful for—in fact, we pray that they would stop happening, and we would stop them if we could. I’m not thankful that millions of innocent babies are aborted every year. I’m not thankful that innocent little children get molested. We are not expected to be thankful for all things. **But in the midst of any circumstance we can be thankful for what God is working—because He is always working—and He is working in our behalf. Nothing should steal our gratitude toward God because nothing can separate us from Him.**

### **3rd Our attitude toward the Holy Spirit (vs 19-21)**

**Verse 19 “Do not quench the Spirit.”** Now why would Paul tell a church not to quench the Spirit? Because it is very possible for a church to quench the Spirit. When we disobey His promptings we quench the Spirit. When we pursue our own agenda without yielding to His agenda we quench the Spirit. John the Baptist said, **“I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”(Luke 3:16)** We need the fire of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We need to fan the fire of the Spirit not quench it.

**Verse 20 “Do not despise prophecies.”** Do not take the supernatural gifts of the Spirit lightly. Do not discount what God may say just because He uses an imperfect human being to communicate His word to you. Paul is laying out a balance on how we can properly respond to the operations of the Holy Spirit. In the next verse he says (**verse 21**) test all things. That includes prophecies. There is a divine aspect of prophetic utterances. There is a human aspect. Because human beings are involved in the process prophecies must be tested. Because God is involved in the process prophecies must not be despised.

If we would have a healthy fellowship anointed by the Holy Spirit we must live godly lives. Paul tells us to abstain from every form of evil. Back in the first half of **1Thessalonians 4** he talked about abstaining from sexual immorality which was as prevalent in that culture as it is in our culture. God is holy and if we would enjoy His favor and blessing we must live in accordance with His nature. The good news is we’re not left alone to do that in our own power. We have a responsibility to choose purity and obedience to God. But God Himself is working in us toward that end.

**“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” (1 Thes 5:23-24)**