

We are continuing in our series Summer of Love, where we are learning to love like Jesus. We can learn how to love like Jesus from scripture's 'one another' statements. For instance, we talked about encouraging one another last week, and this week, we will look at how we can do good to one another. All the one another's found in scripture are summed up in Christ's command to love one another the way he loved us.

I also want to keep in front of us the fact that each of the one another's is a command. There is an expectation that, as believers, we will fulfill these commands. The community of believers suffers to the degree that these qualities are lacking in our lives. So, as we look at these statements throughout the summer months, we should be doing some introspection as to whether these characteristics are present in our lives or our church.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, however, wherever we see these qualities needing improvement, our response should not reflexively be to try harder. As if you can just make yourself suddenly love someone you have no affection for. If our response to these messages is to try harder, we will not only fail, but it will show a misunderstanding of the gospel. Pastor Tim clearly explained this last week. How we move from being a friendly church is to behold Christ, and in so doing, we will be transformed from one degree of glory to another or said differently; the more we look to Jesus, the more we will become like him, and these qualities will become present in our lives. Like a kid who doesn't know their dad has let go of the bike that they are peddling without training wheels, when we love Jesus, we will find that we are doing it!

Now with that out of the way, today we will look at 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15 to observe how the Christian community should seek to do good to one another, not only one another but even those outside the church. Read...

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

12 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle,[a] encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. 15 See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

It's not uncommon for a conversation with Leah to be interrupted by one of our kids complaining that their brother or sister did something to them. Only to find out they hit them or whatever was because the other one had said or done something similar, and the cycle continued. Usually followed up with the age-old adage, two wrongs make a right. We try to help our kids understand that just because one of them does something to annoy the other doesn't mean they need to retaliate.

Truthfully, we aren't all that better as adults. How many situations have we been in where we've responded similarly. Granted, we don't end up hitting each other, but whenever we feel exposed or vulnerable, we make others feel the same through whatever means possible. Even if

we have to go into the past and bring up that one time, they did that one thing. Let's level the playing field. We can all be immature and petty at times.

I do want to borrow from this illustration something that is important and relates to what we are looking for in this passage, and that is something Leah often reminds our kids of, and it is the fact that we are family and family shouldn't treat each other that way. This is the exact point Paul is trying to make in his letter to the Thessalonian church: they are family, which is why he addresses them as brothers and sisters. You can see this in the previous chapter when Paul refers to himself as their spiritual father. Paul sets an example for us in how you and I should relate to one another as believers. We are family. Now let me ask you. As you look around the room, do you think of the people who fill the pews around you as a family?

So, the first thing we need to understand in these passages is that Paul's expectations of the church's operation resemble a healthy family.

Interestingly, this passage seems to draw from a larger body of teaching that Paul often referred to in his letters to the churches. You can find similar references in Romans, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians; you can even trace this teaching in Peter's letter in 1 Peter, and it has roots in the gospel as well as the teachings of Jesus. So at first, it may appear on the surface that Paul is quickly giving general instructions to the Thessalonian church just like he would to any church he was speaking to, but upon closer inspection, what you find is that he wasn't wasting his words he was actually speaking to the exact needs of this little church. He laid out the social structure for the healthy Christian community, and the first people he addresses are its leaders.

Paul first addresses his brothers by asking them to respect those who labor among them. By respect, Paul means to recognize as legitimate. We need to consider that when Paul planted the Thessalonian church, he did so in a rush, likely without the ability to establish leaders in this newly formed church. You can read the account in Acts. Paul wasn't in Thessalonica long before being persecuted and forced to leave. Paul sends Timothy back to check in on this church, and to his surprise, Timothy finds a thriving church faithfully enduring persecution while trying to get their beliefs worked out. This prompts Paul to write a letter and help establish a healthy functioning Christian community. He instructs them to recognize those who labor or toil among them as legitimate. Ultimately considering that those who labor among them do so for the benefit of those they are serving and not for themselves. He says and esteems them very highly in love because of their work. Paul says you should love your leaders. Now that may sound a bit self-serving at first but consider the kind of relationship you should have with the leaders of your church for you to be able to say that you love them. I like what one commentator said when he alluded to the leaders functioning as the big brothers of the church. If we keep with Paul's family theme, the church leaders are like big brothers we look up to, admire, and love.

He concludes his first admonishment by telling us to be at peace among ourselves, which is the aim of the Christian community.

Secondly, Paul addresses the responsibility of all the members of the family of God. He does this by offering three instructions. First, he says to admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, and help the weak.

Again, these are instructions given to believers. What this suggests is that, like a family, we all have a role to play. The work of the ministry is only partially up to the leaders but is instead spread across the entire community. There is likely no more effective way to lead a church than when the members of the church take a vested interest. We have become so conditioned by our culture to be consumers. We expect that we show up to the church and that the church should provide everything we seek. It should have all the amenities, and we shouldn't have to lift a finger. This is not how you should treat family, or at least I should hope. As if when they are not performing in a way you should like, you begin imagining what it would be like to be a part of a different family.

This is where Paul says to admonish the idle. To challenge those who aren't pulling their weight. At that time, in the Thessalonian church, some individuals didn't have jobs, lived off the generosity of others, and on top of that, complained. They were disruptive, unruly busybodies who put a strain on the entire family. Paul encourages the church members to admonish these individuals so that they would no longer mooch off the family but find a way to meaningfully contribute.

Secondly, Paul says to encourage the fainthearted. The Thessalonian church was experiencing severe persecution, and there were likely those among them who were becoming discouraged. There also needed to be a better understanding of when Christ would return; they thought they might've missed it. Your faith is not a solo mission. It's a community project. We need one another to come alongside us and encourage us at key moments. When one of us is struggling, we are all working. For us to act as a family, we need to stop trying to do a two-person job on our own and begin to recognize our need for help.

Thirdly, Paul says it's the responsibility of the entire body to care for the weak. This could mean so many things. It could refer to those aged, struggling financially, losing a loved one, or even weak in their faith. It doesn't matter so much what Paul means specifically as it means that we should be on the lookout for these individuals and look to help them. This is how we all make it together; it is by helping one another. Hand in hand, side by side, everyone doing their part and contributing what they can. This is the picture of what a healthy family looks like.

Paul caps this section off with the statement, be patient with them all. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit and is naturally produced in the heart of a Christian who is beholding Jesus. Patience is not something that is practiced. Instead, it is produced when we recognize God's patience toward us. The Lord is not slow, as some would count slowness, but he is patient toward us, willing that none should perish.

Finally, we arrive at the one another that we are looking at today. Paul says, "See to it..." Once again, referring to the entire church's responsibility to ensure this happens. He says, "See

to it that no one repays evil for evil." This was the expectation of how people treated one another, and it is the exact kind of behavior that would have the opportunity to do the most damage to a family and its image to the watching world. This is precisely why Paul follows this statement by saying to "always seek to do good to one another and to everyone." The way you treat family is the way you treat others. If the watching world peeks into our family and sees how poorly we treat one another, what would ever attract them to wanting to be a part of our family.

On the flip side, when the watching world observes us, they see a model of healthy leadership, mutual ownership, the purpose being given, people encouraging, and the weak being served. If when the world sees us, they observe a family who is patient with one another, seeking to always do what is in the best interest of others and not backstabbing, gossiping, and devouring one another. Don't be surprised when people who want a piece of the action begin to enter. Keep in mind that all of us are a work in progress and tend to bring some of the dysfunction we learned while in the world. So, let's be patient with one another in the process, always seeking the do good to each other even when it may be underserved.

So, what we are really observing in these verses is Paul's instructions for what a healthy Christian community looks like, and it resembles a family. So, church, how are we doing?

As we progress through this series together over the summer, we will find areas where we are deficient and not quite measuring up to the standard given to us by Christ. The temptation can be to go out from here and to try harder only to realize that no matter how hard you try, you can't do it. This cycle can often lead to discouragement and the temptation to give up, believing that it's impossible; however, this approach does not follow the gospel pattern. I want to remind us again of the verse we heard last week.

1 Corinthians 3:18

18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,[e] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

The way in which we accomplish the one another's found throughout scripture is by "beholding the glory of the Lord," Truly understanding what he accomplished for us in every aspect, and by considering Christ, our hearts become receptive towards him and from the inside out he transforms us from one degree of glory to another until we are more and more like him.

In one sense, you are freed from having to try harder, but the lack of the presence of the fruit of the Spirit reveals a lack of love for Jesus. If we want to truly become a church that does good to each other and the world around us, we need to consider the good that was accomplished for us in the person of Christ. Allowing his love to be poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.