

Living God's Way: Community

1 Thessalonians 5. 12-15 - Small Group Notes

Sermon 16th July 2017

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. **13** Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. **14** And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. **15** Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. (NIV)

Introduction:

Community is something we all long for and need!

Here Paul is writing to the church in Thessalonica about a few things that are obviously important to them, but are equally relevant to us and our church community today. We don't know what the particular issues were that prompted Paul to write - particularly in reference to how members of the congregation should relate to leaders and pastors, but it may have been that some people were struggling with issues of disrespect in relation to their leaders. We're going to look at this, our relationship with each other, and our relationship with the world.

Opening question:

What is the best community you have ever been part of? What made it good?

Christian Community:

There are many offers of community in our world - discuss those you are part of, or could be part of and what makes them attractive.

The community of the church is absolutely unique. Have a look at the following passages in 2/3's to get a sense for why. What characteristic does each passage describe?

Acts 4.32

John 17.20-23

1 Cor 12. 12-26

Galatians 3. 26-29

John Stott sums up Paul's vision for community in Thessalonians as *"a community loved and chosen by God, drawing its life from him."* And recognises that part of this is that we are given to each other - *"We can choose our friends but we cannot choose our brothers and sisters. They given to us."*

It is a very attractive description of the church as it could be. What is our personal experience of the church (here or elsewhere) as a community?

- *Encourage people to be honest about struggles, but try to avoid a long rant if it's going that way!*
- *Store up these things to use to pray later on - both to give thanks for, and to ask for God's healing and restoration where things may have gone wrong.*

Paul's teaching on the community of the church here can be split into three sections.

1. Relationship with leaders
2. Relationship with each other
3. Relationship with the world

1. Relationship with leaders

Read v12-13 again.

What jumps out at you here?

Someone once said (I've forgotten who!) that the church has historically swung unhealthily between two extremes in relation to its leaders - from Clericalism, which exalts the clergy to an undue place of reverence and power and leaves the congregation passive and dependent, to Anti-Clericalism, which dismisses any value in clergy at all and seeks to dismiss all forms of hierarchy and authority.

Which of these do you naturally tend towards in the way you view any church leader? Be honest!

What Paul advocates is a happy medium, summed up here by Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche community which lives and works with severely disabled adults. *"The congregation are neither to despise their leaders, as if they were dispensable, nor to flatter or fawn on them as if they were popes and princes, but rather, to respect them... This combination of appreciation and affection will enable pastors and people to 'live in peace with each other.'"*

What would help you to develop this kind of relationship with your leaders (thinking not just of clergy but those who lead worship, your small group and every part of ministry)

2. Relationship with each other

Read v 14 again. Paul's attention now shifts to each one of us.

Do any of these three groups of people immediately resonate with you or make you think of member of our church family?

- These people needn't be named unless it seems appropriate to do so, but again, encourage people to store them up for praying later.

Every one of us may have fallen into, or will fall into, one of these descriptions at some point! The important thing to recognise is what Paul urges us to do for each other:

1. Warn

- Has anyone in your group ever had to do this? Or been on the receiving end? How did it feel? how did it go?
- Why does Paul include this uncomfortable instruction as key to community?

2. Encourage

- Have people in the group ever felt encouraged by the church community? Share ideas for how you can encourage those around you - practice on each other!
- Many of us are secretly disheartened and feel we can't say so as 'good Christians'
 - how do we get around this?

3. Support

- The word Paul uses means to 'cling on to, hold up, put an arm around.' Think back over times when someone has put an arm around you and thank God for them. What difference did it make to you and your faith?

3. Relationship with the world

Read v15 again.

God has given the community of the church a role to play in the wider world - to show a different way!

Revenge and retribution are often the default when people are dealing with each other and so the cycle of violence and conflict continues on.

We see this in a comical way in Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift. The land of Lilliput is made up of two islands, separated by a channel 800m wide, inhabited by tiny people. A violent civil war has been waged between the two islands for decades, based on the way people eat boiled eggs! The Big-Endians insist the egg must be broken at the big end to be safer, and the Little-Endians are adamant that they must stick to the small end, the way eggs have always been eaten in Lilliput.

It's a brilliant ridiculous story about retribution, but at the core is a wider truth about how humanity treats those who disagree with us - Swift's story is in fact a parody of the conflict between the Catholic and Protestant Church...

How does Jesus show us a different way? (ref giving himself for us, NOT giving us what we deserve)

How does Jesus teach us a different way? (ref Sermon on Mount, Matt 6.38-44 in particular)

Jesus changed the world for all eternity by offering forgiveness and grace to each of us and asks us to do the same.

Pray

- For a growth in your belonging and giving to this community,
- For patience to treat each other as loving brothers and sisters
- Giving thanks for the church and what it has meant to you
- For any particular people God has placed on your heart as you've looked at this passage.