

# I THESSALONIANS 5:15-28

## “LIVING IN GOD'S FAMILY ”

### 57-34

Imagine you are sitting down to eat a very special family meal. Say, Thanksgiving dinner. That's not too hard see how we just did so 6 weeks ago. But picture these folks around the table: a lifelong Irish Catholic IRA terrorist escaped from Dublin prison sitting beside a militant North Irish Protestant minister; across from them sit a Hamas terrorist from South Lebanon and an Israeli war hero; then a Black civil rights speaker is sitting by a white robed Ku Klux Klanner; next are a Hutu and Tutsi tribe members from Rwanda; and a Turkish Cypriot and a Greek Cypriot; and an Algerian terrorist and a citizen from a loyalist village – do you get the picture?

In the 60's my parents drove us through riot torn Detroit. We were escorted by a jeep with National Guardsmen holding machine guns. Many buildings were still smoldering. We saw racial enmity and strife at its height. Can you imagine those parties all sitting and laughing and enjoying a meal? Only and always through Christ could such an event take place. And that is exactly what the Lord's Table and the Agape feasts were like.

Strong<sup>1</sup> cultural barriers also pervaded the ancient world. Ethnic, social, religious, financial and gender walls were towering over the society. The cultured, educated Greek or Jew looked with contempt on the barbarian or Scythian. Barbarian was an onomatopoeic word used to describe people who spoke an inarticulate and stammering speech. The Greeks intended it as a term of derision on those who were not among 'the elite (i.e., themselves). The Scythians, above all barbarians, were hated and feared. They were a nomadic, warlike people who invaded the Fertile Crescent in the seventh century before Christ. The Scythians were notorious for their savagery. William Hendriksen notes several historical references that help to describe these people (Colossians, p.154). Herodotus, the Greek historian, wrote of them,

- They invaded Asia, after they had driven the Cimmerians out of Europe ... and made themselves masters of all Asia. They ruled Asia for twenty-eight years; and all the land was wasted by reason of their violence and their arrogance....
- They drank the blood of the first enemy killed in battle, and made napkins of the scalps, and drinking bowls of the skulls of the slain. They had the most filthy habits and never washed with water. (4.64, 65, 75)

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, Colossians, p. 152-53.

- The Jewish historian Josephus added, "The Scythians delight in murdering people and are little better than wild beasts" (Against Apion 2.269).
- The early church Father Tertullian could think of no greater insult to the heretic Marcion than to describe him as "more filthy than any Scythian" (Against Marcion 1.1).
- A fellowship including Greeks, Jews, and Scythians was unthinkable in the ancient world. Yet that is precisely what happened in the church. Christ demolished the cultural barriers separating men.

A social barrier also existed between the slave and the freeman. The slave was viewed, in the words of Aristotle, as "a living tool." However, both slaves and freemen were saved and became brothers in Christ because they "were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free" (I Cor. 12:13). Paul reminded the Galatians that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). He told Philemon to view Onesimus, his runaway slave, "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother" (Philem. 16).

That<sup>2</sup> unity of slave and freeman was dramatically demonstrated in the arena of Carthage in AD 202. Perpetua, a young woman from a noble family and Felicitas, a slave-girl, faced martyrdom for Christ. As they faced the wild beasts, they joined hands. Slave and free woman died together for the love of the same Lord. There is no place for man-made barriers in the church since Christ is all, and in all. Because Christ indwells all believers, all are equal. He breaks down all racial, religious, cultural, and social barriers, and makes believers into one new man (Eph. 2:15).

But long term, it should also touch us as we think about our new family, our wider family in Christ. That is what Paul heads to as he winds up this letter to his friends and family members in Thessalonica. He has repeated the theme of expecting Christ's coming each moment of life. He adds this final thought, "Living in God's Family" is a powerful privilege. While we wait for Jesus it is our responsibility to care for that family in Christ. Note these special areas he outlines in this section:

1. **While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR LEADERS:** (12-13)  
Our family obligations to our LEADERSHIP
2. **While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR FAMILY:** (14-15)  
Our family obligations to our PARTNERS IN CHRIST
3. **While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR LORD:** (16-18)  
Our family obligation to our INNER LIEFE
4. **While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING TO WORSHIP:** (19-22)  
Our family obligation to our SHARED WORSHIP

Paul's favorite name for Christians Brethren 60 x N.T. 27 x I/II Thess. **What is a Christian?**

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<sup>2</sup> M. A. Smith, From Christ to Constantine [Downers Grove, III: Intervarsity, 1973], p. 107.

- I Pet. 1:22-25 = Born again word > H.S.
- II Pet. 1:3-4 = Partaking God's nature

Then part of brand new family of God! So to a brand new family in Greece Paul writes back to help them function as a family!

**While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR LEADERS:** (12-13) Our family obligations to our LEADERSHIP. What responsibilities do we have toward our spiritual leaders?

1. **ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR PLACE.** 1 Thessalonians 5:12a *And we urge you, brethren.* If there are children in the family there must be parental leadership. Elders are God's gifts to the church.
2. **APPRECIATE THEIR MINISTRY.** That is the meaning of the exhortation "know them who labor among you" (1 Thes. 5:12b). There is nothing wrong with honoring faithful servants of God, so long as God gets the glory. Spiritual leadership is a great responsibility and a difficult task. It is not easy to serve as a pastor, elder, deacon, or other spiritual leader.
3. **LOVE THEM.** v. 12c *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..*
4. **OBEY THEM.** v. 13b *Be at peace among yourselves.* How? Note Hebrews 13:17 "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves" (Heb. 13:17). When God's servant, led by God's Spirit, calls us to obey God's Word, then we must obey. Being wrong is part of daily life. Being false (to know you are wrong and not admit it) is never to be in our lives.

**While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR FAMILY:** (14-15) Our family obligations to our PARTNERS IN CHRIST. Every family members must learn to minister to each other.

1. **v.14a "Unruly" 'out of rank' need ADMONISHING** = corrective instruction. That's hard to give and hard to take but a spiritual, love-filled Christian can do both. 2 Tim. 2:3-4. Same v. 12 Job of ALL *The unruly (v. 14a)*. This word means "careless, out of line." It was applied to a soldier who would not keep rank but insisted on marching his own way. 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.NKJV
2. **v.14b "Timid" need COMFORT** Para [near] muthisthe [speech] Tender words up close Encouraging words. *The feebleminded (v. 14b)*. This term has nothing to do with mentality. The literal translation of the Greek word is "little-souled, fainthearted." These are the quitters in the church family. They always look on the dark side of things and give up when the going is tough. In families where there are three or more children, usually one of them is a quitter. Every church family has its share of quitters too. These people need to be encouraged, which is the meaning of the word translated "comfort" in the *King James Version*.

It is also found in 1 Thessalonians 2:11. We must teach the "little-souled" that the trials of life will help to enlarge them and make them stronger in the faith.

3. **v. 14c "Weak" need to be helped.** "Hold fast to the weak!" is the literal translation. "Don't let them fall!" Who were they?

This kind of personal ministry is not easy, and so Paul added some wise counsel to encourage us.

1. v. 14d "Patient to all": Slow to anger, even-tempered; Spiritual response. *Be patient (v. 14d)*. It takes patience to raise a family. That weaker member who demands much help may one day be a choice leader, so never give up. A truth I have learned is often the most troublesome children turn out to be great servants of the Lord. Like MacArthur. Patience!
2. v. 15a Don't retaliate [explode or clam up] against offenders. That's hard, but it's a sure sign of spiritual maturity Rom. 12:17-21; I Peter 2:19-23, 3:9. Non-retaliation for personal wrongs is perhaps best evidence of personal Christian maturity. *Watch your motives (v. 15)*. Often as we minister to others, they reject us and even oppose us. Often they show no appreciation. But we should always serve in love, and be ready to forgive. "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-21, NASB). If your motive is a desire for appreciation and praise, you may be disappointed. If your motive is "ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5), you will never be disappointed. v. 15b Pursue kindness for all How? It's the fruit of the H.S. in our lives. I Thes. 5:13 = Love; 5:16 = Joy; 5:13 = Peace; 5:14 = Long suffering

Family partnership is vital to the health and growth of the church. Are you bearing your share of the burdens, or are you merely a spectator who watches the others do the job?

**While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING OUR LORD:** (16-18) Our family obligation to our INNER LIFE. Our family obligation to maintain our own inner spiritual life. v. 16-18

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. NKJV  
Spring flows out to others.

Only way v.12-15 is if right.

Worship is the most important activity of a local church family. Ministry must flow out of worship, otherwise it becomes busy activity without power and without heart. There may be "results," but they will not glorify God or really last. Many church services lack an emphasis on true worship and are more like religious entertainments, catering to the

appetites of the congregation. Paul named the various elements that make up the worship ministry of the church.

1. **BE JOY-FILLED BY GOD** (v. 16). Joy takes the burden out of service. "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). God loves a cheerful servant as well as a cheerful giver. Every church family has its Doubting Thomas or its Gloomy Gus. To see them and listen to them is like witnessing an autopsy, or diving into a cold lake on a winter's day. God wants His family to be happy, and that means that each member must contribute to the joy. The four spiritual characteristics Paul mentioned are part of the fruit of the Spirit named in Galatians 5:22: love (1 Thes. 5:13), joy (1 Thes. 5:16), peace (1 Thes. 5:13), and long-suffering (1 Thes. 5:14). We cannot manufacture these spiritual qualities; they only come as we yield to the Spirit and permit Him to control us.
2. **BE PRAYING TO GOD** (v. 17). Prayer was important in the early church. It was a high and holy experience when the church united in prayer. If we are led by the Spirit (Jude 20), we will experience unity and freedom in our praying, and God will answer. "Pray without ceasing" does not mean we must always be mumbling prayers. The word means "constantly recurring," not continuously occurring. We are to "keep the receiver off the hook" and be in touch with God so that our praying is part of a long conversation that is not broken. God knows the desires of the heart (Ps. 37:4), and He responds to those desires even when our voice is silent.
3. **BE PRAISING GOD** (v. 18). Thanksgiving is also a vital element of worship. We use "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19) to express our love and gratitude to the Lord. As we grow in our application of the Word of God, we must also grow in our expression of praise, for the two go together (Col. 3:16). If a local church is "growing in grace" the members will want to learn new hymns in order to give praise to God. If the heart and head do not keep pace with each other, Christian worship becomes either juvenile or hypocritical.

SO WHAT ARE THREE MARKS OF GENUINE CHRISTIAN AND GENUINE CHURCH?

1. **THEY ARE IN JOY:** They are Happy - atmosphere of joy
  - Nehemiah 8:10 Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." NKJV - Joy is strength
  - 2 Corinthians 6:10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. NKJV- Always rejoicing
2. **THEY ARE IN TOUCH:** Praying - they pray best together who also pray alone. They had a settled dependence on God.
  - Jude 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. NKJV
3. **THEY ARE IN THANKS:** Thankful - if face sun, never in shadows, because no combination things bad

- Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. NKJV - God is constantly orchestrating for good His own. The Holy Spirit is superintending our lives so each temporary event is part of larger plan.
- Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.
- Ephesians 5:19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, NKJV

**While waiting for Jesus we should be LOVING TO WORSHIP: (19-22) Our family obligation to our SHARED WORSHIP**

1. **BE IN THE WORD OF GOD** (vv. 19–21). Apart from God’s Word, we have no certain revelation from the Lord. Worship that ignores the Bible is not spiritual.
2. **BE INTO GODLY LIVING** (vv. 22–24). The purpose of worship is that we might become more like Christ in character and conduct. The greatest definition of worship I ever read was given by William Temple, a late Archbishop of Canterbury: “For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.” Paul emphasized balance in Christian living: the negative—“Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thes. 5:22) and the positive—“And the very God of peace sanctify you” (1 Thes. 5:23). Some churches only preach the negative, and this leads to lives and ministries that are out of balance. *Sanctify* simply means “set apart for God’s exclusive use.” There is *positional* sanctification (Heb. 10:10); we have once and for all been set apart for God. There is also *practical* sanctification (2 Cor. 7:1), a daily dealing with our sins and a growth in holiness. All of this will culminate in *perfect* sanctification (1 John 3:2), when we see Christ and become eternally like Him. Expecting to see Jesus Christ is a great motivation for holy living.
3. **BE IN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP** (vv. 25–28). After the corporate worship is ended, the saints minister to one another. They greet one another and seek to encourage. Fellowship is an interchange of mutual care and concern through the agency of our spiritual gifts. Some of the ways that interchange manifests itself are when we:
  - Love one another (Rom. 13:8; 1 Thes. 3:12; 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11).
  - Admonish one another (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16).
  - Forgive one another (2 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).
  - Serve one another (Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10).
  - Restore one another (Gal. 6:1).
  - Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).
  - Be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32).
  - Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21).
  - Comfort one another (1 Thes. 4:18; 5:11).

- Edify one another (1 Thes. 5:11; Rom. 14:19).
- Teach one another (Col. 3:16).
- Exhort one another (Heb. 3:13; 10:25).
- Confess our faults to one another (James 5:16).
- Pray for one another (James 5:16).
- Show hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9).

How can I prepare my life for worship?

1. **PREPARATION:** To begin with, we ought to prepare<sup>3</sup> for the Lord's Day. Edith Schaeffer tells how, when living in Villars, Switzerland, the church bells would toll every Saturday at 4:30 P.M. as a reminder to prepare for the Lord's Day. The bells were ignored by most but were a poignant reminder of a more enlightened day. *My point is we need to be thinking about the Lord's Day before Saturday night.* Parents, and I mean both men and women, how much more meaningful the day would be if clothing were laid out and food decided upon and if everyone headed to bed at a reasonable time. How much better the Lord's Day would be if Christian families took just two minutes on Saturday evening to pray for God's blessing on the worship and events of the day. How much better if we fasted from TV in preparation. And on Sunday morning, how far better it would be if a wife never heard, "Honey, you got the kids ready yet? I'm going to be late," but instead something like, "Dear, the boys are ready, and so am I."
2. **PARTICIPATION:** Lord's Day participation could be made so much more meaningful by arriving a few minutes early, getting the kids situated, and slipping into church to read the text and hymns and offer some prayer.
3. **PRESERVATION:** Then there's the matter of preserving what has happened. Here I am compelled to say that there is no better way to erase worship than to turn on the TV when you walk in the house after church. Sunday afternoon football, and sports in general, with the incessant beer commercials and inane chatter, is a sure-fire way to flatten out-one's spiritual brain waves. And the whole family will suffer - "You want daddy to look at your Sunday school paper? In a moment, son. . . at half-time maybe." Men, if you're the kind who sits in church fretting because you've already missed the 1st quarter of the game and wonder when the preacher is going to end, you will rarely get anything out of the service! Indeed, the cultivation and preservation of the spiritual benefits of the Lord's Day demands thoughtful discipline and sacrifice.

And, of course, there is the matter of rest. For most of us, the Lord's Day is the best day to rest, because Christianity's past influence has made it the day most people have off. And Christians ought to make use of the day for rest - not legalistically, but in thankful observance of the genesis rhythm. For some, that rest may be sleep. For some, it may include some activity. If so, we must keep in mind the distinction between the older understanding of recreation as *re-creation* and the modern pursuit of

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<sup>3</sup> Hughes, DISCIPLINES OF GRACE, p. 82.

recreation. In broad strokes, today's idea of recreation is a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure. It's not re-creative but destructive.

The older, wiser way of re-creating is the way to go. Forget your regular labors, and re-create with *conversation* with family and friends. A common, unrushed meal around a table is so important. Especially re-creative are *picnics, walks, swims, or playing* with the kids, wrestling on the floor, shooting baskets with the boys. Listening to *good music* is also a marvelous way to re-create. A great "*read*" in one of the Christian classics is a time-proven way to restore the soul as well. Think of it - the Lord's Day, a day to show love for Him.



## FELLOW BELIEVERS AT YOUR SERVICE<sup>4</sup>

Paul said, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all" (1 Cor. 12:4-6, sco). God has given a variety of gifts to His church.

### Using Our Gifts

Some of the gifts were of a temporary nature; others are permanent. The temporary ones were miracles, hearings, and tongues. The permanent ones are these:

1. Prophecy (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 14:3), the ability to preach or proclaim God's truth to others for edification, exhortation, and comfort.
2. Teaching (Rom. 12:7), the ability to teach the truths of God's Word.
3. Faith (1 Cor. 12:9), the ability to trust God without doubt or disturbance, regardless of one's circumstances. People who are especially prone to anxiety would do well to get to know individuals gifted in this way, and follow their example.
4. Wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8), the ability to apply spiritual truth to life. Believers gifted this way are also good models for the anxious.
5. Knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8), the ability to understand facts. It is the academic side of comprehending biblical truth.
6. Discernment (1 Cor. 12:10), the ability to distinguish truth from error-to discern what is of God and what is satanic deception.
7. Mercy (Rom. 12:8), the ability to manifest Christ's love in acts of kindness.
8. Exhortation (Rom. 12:8), the ability to encourage, counsel, and comfort others with biblical truth and Christian love. Those prone to anxiety need to be humble enough to listen and value what these gifted individuals have to say.
9. Giving (Rom. 12:8), the ability to provide for the Lord's work and for others who have difficulty meeting their own material needs. It flows from a decision to commit all earthly possessions to the Lord.
10. Administration (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28), the ability to organize and lead in spiritual endeavors. It is also known as the gift of ruling or government.
11. Helps (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28), the ability to serve faithfully behind the scenes, assisting the work of the' ministry in practical ways.

All spiritual gifts are designed to edify the church (I Cor. 14:26). My gifts are not for my benefit, and your gifts are not for your benefit. We must edify one another "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

WE ARE TO BE ENCOURAGING FAITHFULNESS: Luke 12:42 And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?"

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<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, *Anxiety Attacked*, p. 69-71.

WE ARE TO BE ENCOURAGING OBEDIENCE: Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you

WE ARE TO BE ENCOURAGING PURITY: 1 John 2:28-3:3 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.<sup>29</sup> If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.<sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.<sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.