

1 and 2 Thessalonians
Church Life (1 Thess. 5:12-28)

Lesson #10 for September 8, 2012

Scriptures: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28; Matthew 5:43-48; Galatians 5:22, 23; Philippians 4:4; John 15:4-6.

1. In the last half of the last chapter of 1 Thessalonians, Paul threw together a lot of individual bits of advice for church leaders and church members. There are actually 17 admonitions in verses 12-20 followed by a closing prayer in verses 23-27. There are three admonitions about how local church members should treat their leaders followed by six commands regarding how local church leadership should behave toward their people. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, there are eight additional brief admonitions. Three of them deal with maintaining a positive Christian attitude, and five are on how to relate to new light in the form of prophecies. Do we need any of that kind of advice today?
2. We ended the lesson for last week with words suggesting we should “encourage one another and help one another.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11, *GNB*)
3. Do church members tend to have more difficulty getting along with those outside the church or with other church members? How often have you seen churches almost split in half because of disagreements among their members?
4. We have heard it said that the church is a hospital for sinners and not a museum of saints or even a club for saints. Do patients in a hospital fight and argue with each other? Does it depend on the hospital? In general, do you find that Adventist churches are places where it is safe to ask questions and even to speak your mind when you have an idea that may be a little different from what someone else thinks?
5. There are several admonitions in this chapter. The word translated *admonition* could be translated, “Knock some sense into their heads”! Was Paul talking about tough love? What is supposed to be the role of the pastor and church leaders? Shouldn’t their first job be to lead and guide church members into an ever better understanding of Scripture and thus, hopefully, a better lifestyle? Do church members always appreciate it when someone helps explain the Bible to them? Occasionally, pastors and church leaders need to correct church members because they have developed wrong ideas about what the Bible teaches about what Christians should be doing. This may not make them very popular!
6. If we are supposed to respect our leaders, is there ever an opportunity or a necessity for corrective criticism of the local pastor? Or, even a conference official? Even a General Conference official? Is there ever a time for challenging their leadership? Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church truly democratic? Should it be?
7. Did Paul ever challenge other so-called leaders in the church? What about Peter? (Galatians 2:11-14) What about the people claiming to be of great authority—the so-called Judaizers—in Galatians 1? There were a few times when Paul really laid it on the line, comparing himself to some of those other so-called leaders. (Read 2 Corinthians 11:5-8, 16-29)
8. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15. Paul instructed the Thessalonian church leaders to admonish, cheer up, take an interest in, be patient with church members, and never pay back evil for evil.
9. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. These are some of the most often-quoted verses in

Thessalonians. Look first at a bit of trivia. What is the shortest verse in the Bible? Traditionally, Christians who speak English will mention John 11:35, “Jesus wept.” But, that is only the shortest verse in one English translation. If we turn to the Greek, John 11:35 is actually three words, *edakrusin ho iesus*. By comparison, 1 Thessalonians 5:16 is only two Greek words, *pantote chairete*; and 1 Thessalonians 5:17 is also only two Greek words, *adialeptos proseuchesthe*. To get very detailed, by counting the number of letters, 1 Thessalonians 5:16 is the shortest; John 11:35 is the second shortest; and 1 Thessalonians 5:17 is the third shortest. But, this is a lot of to-do about nothing because there were no verses and no chapters in the original Greek writing of the New Testament.

10. The bigger question is this: Is it possible to rejoice, pray, and give thanks in every situation? How could that be possible? If you have experienced a disaster, are you supposed to give thanks? What about Job? The only thing he had left was his trust in God. Or even rejoice? Was Jesus rejoicing on the crest of the Mount of Olives looking over Jerusalem as He was weeping uncontrollably? (Compare John 1:11 which actually means, “He came to His home and His family rejected Him!”) Ellen White said:

It is a law of nature that our thoughts and feelings are encouraged and strengthened as we give them utterance. **While words express thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words.** If we would give more expression to our faith, rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have—the great mercy and love of God—we should have more faith and greater joy. No tongue can express, no finite mind can conceive, the blessing that results from appreciating the goodness and love of God. Even on earth we may have joy as a wellspring, never failing, because fed by the streams that flow from the throne of God.—*MH* 251.4-253.0 (1905). (*2MCP* 419.3; 663.2; *RH*, June 2, 1910 par. 4)

11. Does this suggest that if we rejoice and give thanks more often, we will have happier lives? How can we promote a healthier, happier, holier life? Should we constantly look for the bright side in everything?

12. Ellen White also once wrote:

Smile, parents; smile, teachers. If your heart is sad, let not your face reveal the fact. Let the sunshine from a loving, grateful heart light up the countenance. Unbend from your iron dignity, adapt yourselves to the children’s needs, and make them love you. You must win their affection, if you would impress religious truth upon their heart. (*Adventist Home* 432.2; *Child Guidance* 148.1; *Fundamentals of Christian Education* 68.3; *RH*, March 21, 1882, paragraph 13)

13. Is that being phony? Or, is it planned? Is that recognizing that Christians ultimately know that they are sons and daughters of the King of the universe! Doesn’t God love us? Our ultimate destination is out of this world! No matter what happens to us here and now, that truth cannot be altered. Thus, do we not have reason to smile, be thankful, and rejoice? We should never let temporary upsets or setbacks in this life take our minds off that wonderful truth. When we mope around, we are suggesting that God cannot take care of us!

14. Look at the book of Job. Do you think he rejoiced and was thankful for what happened to him in Job 1 & 2? But, did he give up his trust and faith in God? When even his wife was telling him to curse God and die, his faith in God was all he had left! His relatives were

telling him that he smelled bad! What kind of relationship did Job have before that experience? He had no Bible, no church, no pastor. Did Job talk directly with God as Abraham and Moses did? What was Job's equivalent of Bible study?

15. How would you like to have an hour with God every week? Wouldn't that be fabulous? But, guess who would demand equal time? How would you like to have to spend an hour every week talking to the Devil?
16. How do we "pray without ceasing"? Is that actually possible? One world-renowned theologian suggested that these words mean "practicing the presence of God." Don't we believe that God is omnipresent? Do we always recognize that God is present? Do we act as if God is present? The 144,000 are going to live through the final events of this earth's history. Do you think they will be joyful, rejoicing, and thankful during those events? Will they be rejoicing that they have an everlasting Father who will see them through it?
17. To what extent does your picture of God impact your daily life? If one studies the behavior of Christians or at least those who call themselves Christians, it is not much different from the behavior of worldlings! In this context, it is interesting to recognize that the other side of the coin is not the same. People seldom admit to believing something that is completely out of harmony with the way they are living! Behavior dictates belief. Why do you think that is? Are people afraid or embarrassed to admit that their "beliefs" do agree with their actions?
18. Do we need to read the book of Psalms more so our prayers will be more authentic? Is there evidence in the book of Psalms that David and the others who wrote Psalms felt like God was very real to them? Did they feel comfortable expressing themselves? Look at Psalm 18, 22, and 69.
19. How much access does Satan have to us? Do we have any control over that? Dr. Richard Nies suggested that if we allow our circumstances to influence us too much, the Devil will find ways to control those circumstances enough so that we will actually be controlled by the Devil. Technically, could that be called demon possession? Is it easy not to be influenced, even somewhat controlled, by circumstances?
20. We live at a time in history when people think that feeling good is the ultimate goal. No one wants to experience pain, depression, sadness, or any bad feeling of any kind. The pharmaceutical industries have built multi-billion-dollar businesses based on this idea. While we recognize that certain chemical imbalances may cause problems in our brains and it is appropriate to try to rebalance those imbalances, to what extent are we opening ourselves up to Satan's control when we demand to always have the right kind of feelings? There is a large group of young people who have grown up using medications to control their thinking. Now, they are afraid to stop because they do not know if they can handle life without pills! Is *Facebook* correctly representing the lives of those who use it?
21. Never underestimate the Devil. Remember that he convinced one-third of the angels to stop trusting God even while they were living in the very presence of God! How could that even be possible? At the end of time, there will be two great individuals coming, both claiming to be Jesus Christ. The only way we can be safe is to be so certain and grounded in the truth about God that we will never be deceived by the counterfeit. When the Devil arrives and conducts the most successful "evangelistic campaign" of all time and the whole world "wonders" after him, (Revelation 13:3, *KJV*) will we be like these people described by Ellen White?

Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. (4BC 1161.6; FLB 287.7; LDE 219.4; Mar 200.2; OFC 83.6; See also Revelation 7:1-3)

22. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22. How are we supposed to relate to new revelation? How should we relate to the writings of Ellen White? Is Ellen White being held in correct respect within the Seventh-day Adventist Church of our day? How many church members are studying her writings carefully and learning what they can about how the final deceptions and the final events will take place in our world? How many Adventists are choosing to ignore bits of her advice that they do not like? What did Paul mean when he said, “Do not restrain the Holy Spirit, do not despise inspired messages.” However, he did go on to say, “Put all things to the test: keep what is good and avoid every kind of evil.” Has Ellen White passed that test?
23. What did she mean when she said she was a lesser light to point to the greater light (the Scriptures)? (See *The Review and Herald*, Jan. 20, 1903 par. 9; 3SM 30.4; Ev 257.1)
24. Seventh-day Adventists have been famous for the idea of present truth. (For decades we had a magazine by that name!) But, we do believe that every present truth must agree with all previously revealed truth. We do not believe that present truth will be given to overthrow previous truth. Is our faith based on solid evidence? (*Steps to Christ* 105)
25. In these verses we have seen Paul going back and forth talking about the two different sides of various issues. How do we avoid extremes? Do we have the correct amount of constructive criticism of our pastors? Are we too critical? Are we taking inspired revelation seriously enough? What have you learned from our study of 1 Thessalonians so far? How do you think you would have fit into the church at Thessalonica? Are there “Judaizers” in our time that are trying to lead the church astray?

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