

**1 Thessalonians 5: 14 and 15; “Exhortations to the Brethren”, Sermon # 26 in the series – “A Persevering Faith”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The duties of the Christian life, of believers toward other believers in the body of Christ, are many. This is, indeed, a great part of what it means to be a Christian, to take seriously all the commands which the Apostle Paul wrote to various churches. It was often his custom, in his letters, to place these toward the end of the letter. He calls these commands “exhortations”. The word, “exhortation” in the Greek is παρακαλεο, – par-ak-al-eh’-o; from (para) and (kaleo); to call near, i.e. invite, invoke or implore: – to beseech, to call for, to tell them to be of good comfort, desire, to give exhortation, to entreat, or to pray. The word appears to mean that a person or persons are to be told their duty and then urged on to do it. The word can also mean to be encouraged on to that duty which a person is called to, or commanded to do. In this case these exhortations were to be given by the elders to members of the local church. It is not simply that one person in the church was to take it upon himself to fulfill all these duties himself without regard to the elders of the church. He was to engage in these duties in co-operation with the teaching and leadership of that local church. In doing so, he would be attempting to preserve the unity of the body and not disrupt it as a result of his personal efforts.

This verse 14, that we are studying, seems to be an amplification of verse 11 in this same chapter. "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." The word comfort there is a very similar word to exhortation. It is παρακαλεϊτε, (para-ka-leite) from the same root. The exhortation being given here to the church at Thessalonica by Paul, is positively, that they would build each other up and encourage one another to love and good deeds, in their relationships with one another. And negatively, that they would admonish and warn one another if they were not doing the right thing. In this way, it would be hoped that good things would be promoted in every way in the church; and the truth of this would be confirmed by many witnesses. Christ’s cause and kingdom would then be able to go forward and His name and His truth would be honored. This is a part of our sanctification and it is how the church is made strong and fruitful in God’s sight. This is what we want to see taking place in our own church here, as well. Believe it or not, there are actually 14 exhortations that are crammed into 9 verses here; verses 14-22. So what I would like to do this afternoon is just to take the first four of these exhortations which are found in verse 14 and open them up. As I do so, I hope that you will be praying about what you might personally have the ability to do; not only to receive these exhortations, but also that you might think about what you might do for others in the church. -

**1<sup>st</sup> of all - We who are brethren of the same church have a responsibility to warn the unruly.**

Now what does it mean for someone to be “unruly”? In the context, here, I believe that it simply means a person who does not want to be ruled by the truth of the word of God or the authority of the local church. He or she generally does not want to be submissive to authority; doesn’t like being told of their Biblical duty. This is something that almost invariably leads to problems in the local church. If a person is unruly they will probably be attempting to rationalize their own ideas of what they ought to be doing or what others ought to be doing in the church. They often do not want to submit their thinking to the test of Scripture, but instead they generally want to make strong assertions of why, what they are doing, or thinking, or saying, is right. Having an unruly spirit sometimes leads an unruly person to contend with others in the church, the people who see through this person’s attempts to promote something that is wrong, something that would not be good either for them, or for other people. Members

of the local church, as they see such a person acting this way need to understand that together they have a responsibility. That responsibility is to warn the unruly. The elders of the church, no doubt have the primary responsibility to warn the unruly. They have the Biblically authority to do this. But individually and collectively, the members of the church also have a right to be concerned about a person who is unruly, and they should try in the right way, to warn them. Together, the local church has an authority. They are the “brethren” being spoken of in 1 Thessalonians 5: 12 who are urged, “to recognize those who labored among them” in the ministry. Collectively, if the authority of the elders is rejected in matters of this sort, the church has the authority to warn, reprove, censure, and even excommunicate such a person if they persist in being unruly. The church has the authority to discipline such a person if they will not repent of the spirit of not wanting to submit to be ruled by God’s word, and speaking against those in authority who would try to bring them to their senses.

The word for “warn” here is the Greek work *νουθετετε*, (nou-the-teite), the word which we get the word Nouthetic counseling from. Good counseling is not simply that which affirms and tries to help other people; it is also has warnings for those who are unruly. What kind of warnings? These are warnings, not only of what the pastor together with the church might have to do to admonish and to warn, but also warnings of what the Lord Himself might do in terms of His loving discipline of His children. The object of all of these things is not simply to win an argument or prove a point of truth with the unruly person; it is to win them to the truth of how they should think and act. It is to win that person to the truth and to show them the truth in the right way. It is to go about this in love, and try to “restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted”, as it says in Galatians 6: 1. You can really see how an unruly person disrupt the whole body; make ineffectual the “doing good” of the brethren. Paul is saying don’t let that person do this. Don’t pander to those who go about to speak and undermine the authority of the elders of the church or the truth of the word of God itself. Because, the truth of God’s word is to be lived out for the good of all, by the members of the local church.

### **The 2<sup>nd</sup> exhortation is to comfort the fainthearted.**

Once again, this is an exhortation, I believe, not only given to pastors, in order that they might comfort the fainthearted, but it is also given to those who are able to do this good work among the brethren. Do you remember Barnabas, Paul’s first co-worker in the gospel and missionary work? It will be well for us to think about him for just a few minutes. Turn over with me to Acts Chapter 4 and verse 33. This was the time in the early Church when the Lord was doing great acts of power by His Spirit, through the apostles. “And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” “And great grace was upon them all.” “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostle’s feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.” This was not socialism; it was simply a good spirit of generosity and love among the brethren; showing the work of the Lord in their hearts, in caring for the needs of others, and the cause of Christ in general. But look at verse 36. “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having the land, sold it, and laid it at the apostle’s feet.” Barnabas was named, “Son of Encouragement”, which also could be translated and is in the King James translation: “Son of Consolation”. He was a man who looked at other believers around him to see how he could comfort and encourage them, especially if they needed to be encouraged to exercise their faith.

You will see this if you turn with me over to Acts Chapter 11. In verse 19 it says, “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.” “But some of them were

men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who when they had come to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus.” “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” “Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.” “When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” “For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” “And a great many people were added to the Lord.” Here we find Barnabas being sent from the church at Jerusalem to Antioch, where these new believers were. Those who had believed were Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews) They were no doubt wondering what would become of themselves now that they had believed in Christ. Would they be persecuted by their own people? Would they be shunned and disinherited from by their family and relatives? Some among them may have been quite apprehensive and fainthearted about these things.

But Barnabas, the Son of Consolation, the Son of comfort and encouragement spoke to them words of encouragement, telling them to continue on in their faith with the Lord. Sometimes this is just what people need. They need to be encouraged and comforted, and told that they are going in the right direction spiritually speaking, if they are trusting in the Lord and taking their stand for His word. They need the promises of God’s word ministered unto them; not only by the pastor, but also by others in the local church who know by God’s grace, how to do this. They need to know that the Lord will be with them, to help them, even if no man is with them to help them. They need, however, to know also, the love and encouragement and comfort of a church who is there for them and will be with them when their spirits are low or discouraged. This is a very needful part of the ministry of the word of God by the pastor, but it is also a very needful part of the ministry of the service of the church to Christ Himself, when the fainthearted are comforted.

Sometimes people are fainthearted about their soul’s salvation. They lack assurance that God is for them and that God is with them. If they become fainthearted, they should be ministered to with the verses of truth which will lead them on to look outside of themselves to Christ for their assurance. This is where our greatest assurance may and must be found. They may also need to be told to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith, but this is never doubting Christ’s power and grace to come and be their sufficiency; their strength to live the Christian life consistently. This is often why true Christians struggle with assurance. It is not that they do not believe in Christ. They simply do not see the evidence of His grace at work in their lives which they know would bring about a greater consistency in their obedience to Him. It is because they do not see this evidence within their heart and in their life, that they then doubt their salvation. They need to be taken to such verses as Isaiah 40, verse 1. “Comfort, yes comfort My people!” says your God.” “Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned.” “For she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”

This is the prophecy of a deliverance from God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. The warfare of God’s people is against the world, the flesh, and the Devil. It comes to them with threats to ruin them and undo them. But God has made provision for those trusting in Jesus; that all their iniquities will be pardoned, and all their warfare will be ended. It is by faith in Christ, not by works of righteousness which they might do. Jerusalem had received double for all her sins. Not only has Christ died to pay the punishment due to them, but He lives to cover them with the robe of His righteousness and to intercede on their behalf. This is the comfort of all of God’s people. They have received more in Christ than could ever be expected. Christ has died for their sins, and because of his death and resurrection the believer receives life and strength to do God’s will and to grow in consistency of obedience to it. Praise the Lord God! This is how we comfort the fainthearted.

**Now the 3<sup>rd</sup> exhortation we find here is to uphold the weak.**

The church and her pastor are not to despise the weak, make fun of the weak, or look down upon the weak; they are to uphold the weak. Who are the weak? The weak are those who lack strength and ability to do the things for themselves that they would do if they did have the strength and ability. We are called upon to uphold them. We are to think about them and see what we can do to strengthen them and keep them going on in their faith and in their physical life. Some persons are weak in their faith, and weak in their conscience in regard to things that they should do or not do. What is our responsibility; we who are stronger in faith and stronger in conscience? Is it to look down upon them or to disdain them? No, the answer is found in Romans 15, verse 1. "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples (the weaknesses) of the weak, and not to please ourselves." "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification." (leading to his being built up) Why? "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You (God) fell upon Me." (Christ) "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." This is what the weak need. They need to be upheld in this state and situation of their weakness, however long it lasts. This is what all Christians and their pastors are called to do. We are to uphold them, we are to help them to keep going, to keep trusting, and to help them to do what they can to help themselves by the grace and truth of God. This applies to the elderly in our midst, the widows in our midst, those of feeble minds or bodies that we know of; it applies to everyone who is weak.

**And then last - the 4<sup>th</sup> exhortation is that we be patient with all.**

Sometimes, I think that we forget how patient our God is with us, in our learning and growing in our Christian life. We forget that our real goal in living our Christian life is to become like Him. He is the God of patience. If God is patient even with unkind and ungrateful men, then cannot you and I be patient with the saints around us? Listen to Romans 15: 5. "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be likeminded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." What is it that is happening in our hearts when we become impatient? We are saying that we cannot wait for that person; if I do, then I will not accomplish what I myself need to accomplish. But brethren when we say that, we are saying that we cannot trust God to so order our time that He will give us enough time to accomplish both; what we need to accomplish, and what we would help that other person with. And so we end up not "receiving" the other person. But our God gives a greater grace. He is the God who gives us patience as a grace in our hearts towards all of His people. You say, "But that person that I am thinking of is a real trial to me." Remember the words of James. "Consider it all joy, my brethren when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." "But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." To learn patience brings a certain completeness to our faith; and God will see to it that we are lacking in nothing, and actually have something to give to others; brotherly kindness and Christian love.