

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden had earned the title “*The Wizard of Westwood*” from leading his UCLA men's basketball teams to ten national championships—seven of them in a row. ... Every talented college basketball player *dreamed* of playing for John Wooden.

Players gathering for the first day of basketball practice at UCLA were always full of anticipation. They wondered how their extraordinary coach (John Wooden) would set the tone for the long season to come. They didn't have to wait long.

Veterans knew what was coming. But first year players were no doubt perplexed by the initial lesson imparted by their Hall of Fame coach: He taught them how to put on a pair of socks. ... He did not teach this lesson only once... but before every game and practice. Why?

Wooden discovered many players didn't properly smooth out wrinkles in the socks around their heels and little toes. If left uncorrected... these wrinkles could cause blisters that could hamper their performance at crucial times during games. Many players thought the practice odd and often laughed about it. But the coach would not compromise on this basic fundamental principle: “*I stuck to it. I believed in that, and I insisted on it.*”

In our desire to grow as Christians... we can easily forget about the fundamentals of our faith. ... If we do... we run the risk of developing painful spiritual blisters that can hurt us as we run our race.

This seems to be the mind-set of the Apostle Paul as he concludes his first letter to the Thessalonian church. ... What are the essentials for a happy... thriving church family? ... How can we make our local churches more spiritual to the glory of God?

In his closing verses... Paul discussed these matters.

As Paul wraps up his letter... he seems to be reminded of all the things he still needs to tell them before he signs off. It might seem a little disjointed (perhaps even panicked with random-sounding reminders) like - how my mother would end our visits as we walked out to our car... *“Oh yeah... and don't forget this... And there is also this... (Just a couple more things...) I'll call you if I think of anything else...”* ... But a quick review of the previous verses... will make it seem a little less like that.

Remember... Paul had been discussing the Rapture — which is the next event on the prophetic calendar... (when all believers will be removed from the earth.) ... He also talked about the day of the Lord... and the horrific events of the Tribulation... which will occur on earth while believers are in heaven.

All of this is imminent... (It can happen at any time!) ... But before Paul ends his correspondence... he wants the believers to know how they should live - in the meantime... in light of the fact that Jesus is coming back. **Pay close attention to the basics!** (In light of the fact that Jesus is coming back)... Do not neglect them.

So I would like to do something a little different as we read our passage today. We are going to read through these essentials for a happy (thriving) church family... and after every one of them that I read... I'm going to pause... (and just like we used to do with congregational readings... remember those?)... I am going to have you all say together (in unison) ***“Because The Lord is Coming!”*** Are you ready...?

1 Thes. 5:12 “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:13a “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:14a “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:14b “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:14c “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:14d “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:15a “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:15b “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes. 5:16 “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes. 5:17 “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:18 “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:19 “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:20 “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:21 “Because The Lord is Coming!”
 1 Thes 5:22 “Because The Lord is Coming!”

We must focus on the basics... doing all that we can to ensure that our church is a happy (thriving) family... because Jesus will soon return. And all of these instructions boil down to three things: **respect your leaders** ... **love the brethren** ... and **glorify the Lord** – because “The Lord is coming!”

That is how Paul presents the basics to us in our passage. **1) respect your leaders** (he gives in verses 12-13) ... **2) love the brethren** (verses 14-15) ... and **3) glorify the Lord** (we see in verses 16-22.)

1 Thes 5:12

I'm *not* sure if you will believe me when I tell you this... but I truly *am* trying not to take you deep into the weeds... when I explain the way our passages are written in the original language. However this is another case of a principle that I mentioned two weeks ago. Greek is a very

precise language... and when it employs a grammatical rule... like the rule of apposition (which is employed here once again) the author is saying something that is not always as clear in an English translation. So please bear with me (just a moment) as I explain (briefly again) “the rule of apposition.”

When writing a list of items (in Greek)... it is absolutely necessary to place the Greek word “ και ” between every item – UNLESS (and this is the only exception)... unless you want to tell the reader that all of the items are different nuances of the very same item. If that is the case... then you only employ the Greek word “ και ” - once... and it comes just before the last item in the list.

Well Paul lists three things in verse 12... *“those who labor among you,” “those who are over you,” and “those who admonish you.”* And Paul employs this rule of apposition – telling us that he has in mind only one type of person... who discharges all three functions.

Now... who does that? ... *Who is it* ... that has this triple function? ... I believe that Paul is writing about the office-holders... known as “elders” of a church. Paul is saying: *“Respect those whom the Holy Spirit has placed in positions of authority in the local church – because “the Lord is coming!”*

The authority of elders in the local church is spiritual. This is not an authority... in the sense of a dominant and forceful personality. This authority does not allow an elder to impose his own will on others. The power that elders exercise... comes from their Christian character... their Christlikeness... their knowledge of the Word of God... their care and

compassion for other people... and their ability to rule well in their own homes.

How are church folks to treat those who labor... lead... and instruct them? Between verses 12-13... Paul gives three ways: recognize them ... (in the sense of respecting their authority)... appreciate them ... and love them.

Paul doesn't mean that we should place them on a pedestal... or blind ourselves to their faults. ... But neither should we hold back our praise... as we see some do... and say it is an effort to keep them humble.

1 Thes 5:12-13

In verse 12... the word for “respect” comes from the Greek word “ οἶδα “ and it means to know them. But this means more than knowing their names... or being acquainted with them. It means: “*to acknowledge*.” And how it is used here... the idea is “*take an interest in*” or “*recognize the authority of*.” Recognize – Appreciate – and Love them.

Appreciate is found in verse 13... with the phrase “*esteem them very highly*.” ... This should be a continuing attitude. Paul taught that elders should be held in esteem... because of the nature of their responsibilities before God.

Spiritual leadership is a great responsibility – and often it is a difficult task. The battles and burdens that most people in the church never see - are many. ... And it is dangerous when a church family takes their leaders for granted and fails to pray for them... work with them... and encourage them.

Paul writes: Recognize – Appreciate – and Love them.

Now here is why I think Paul included this third urging – they are over the flock. This could be a very strained relationship – apart from true Christian love. ... They are not to be regarded simply as the cold voice of authority. What Paul is asking is that they be respected **and** loved. Hold them in special esteem and affection. ... The church cannot be expected to do its work effectively... if there is constant criticism of those who the Lord has set over the flock. ... Recognize – Appreciate – and Love them... because “*The Lord is coming!*”

The second part of verse 13 gives us the **result** of obedience to Paul’s 3 urgings.

1 Thes 5:13b

This is actually written as a command. In Greek... it is called “imperative.” Be at peace among yourselves by Recognizing – Appreciating – and Loving the elders... because “*The Lord is coming!*” ... [P A U S E] ...

In our passage today... Paul is presenting the basics of what we are to be doing as we wait for Christ’s return. #1 (we have seen) is **respect your leaders** ... We are now ready to move on to #2... **love the brethren**.

Paul now begins a series of short... staccato statements... in which he fires off a number of brief (but substantial) statements... regarding how we are to love the brethren. ... In verse 14... Paul named special church people... who need personal help. They need our time and attention. ... We are to **love** these brethren... because “*The Lord is coming!*”

1 Thes. 5:14

“And we **urge** you, brothers...” ... Now “**urge**” is a stronger word than “**ask**,” is it not? ... Asking is one thing... **urging** is another. ... There is a little bit more **zeal** in urging. ... “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle ...”

The term "admonish" (*new-the-teō* *νουθετεω*) is a strong word which means "**to confront**." Our responsibility in loving the brethren... is to confront those who are idle. Slackers are to be warned. Those who neglect their daily duties... (those who are able to support themselves by obtaining and holding a job... but instead become too dependent on the good graces of the church)... need to be stirred into action. It isn't love to keep giving them handouts... if they can work.

The first point about loving the brethren... is confronting the freeloaders... who **can** work... but won't. ... The second involves dealing with a special type of people in the church... in a far more **gentle** manner. (Handle the first group with a firm grip of tough love. But handle **this** group with tenderness.) ... Who are the next group of people? - They are the "**fainthearted**."

The literal translation of the Greek word is "**little-souled**". 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. ... These dear people are trembling under the weight of life's problems. They are overwhelmed with anxiety, deeply discouraged, physically or emotionally debilitated. We sometimes use the terms "depressed" or "blue." Such people need an affirming word, a warm embrace, a shoulder to lean on . . . or to cry on.

The Greek word for “encourage” is made up of two words: *para* (near)... and *muthos* (speech.) ... Instead of scolding the fainthearted from a distance... we must get close to them and speak tenderly. We must teach the “*little-souled*” that the trials of life will help to enlarge them and make them stronger in the faith.

The fainthearted need constant encouragement. Often... we tend to be impatient with such people. They call for so much of our time and attention. We regard them somewhat as a burden... but not so with the Lord.

Admonish the idle... encourage the fainthearted... and third – help (or support) the weak... (those without strength.)

I love the picture that we get from the Exodus story... when the children of Israel left Egypt. When the Children of Israel came out of Egypt and marched toward the Promised Land... the rate of their march was not set by the strongest – but by the weakest. ... [P A U S E] ... It is a poor excuse for Christianity that has little or no concern for the feeble ones among the flock of God. ... The Lord is coming! Reach out to the weak.

The philosophy of the world takes little enough account of the weak. The devilish doctrine of Evolution can be summarized by a single phrase: “*the survival of the fittest.*” ... Hitler used it to support his concept of the master race. All who were not of Aryan blood were considered inferior. Socialism also uses it to reduce its opponents to perpetual slavery... or to be exterminated.

In a Darwinistic world... Christianity is scorned. Its doctrine of grace and compassion and care for the weak... the infirm... the handicapped... the

disenfranchised... the poor... the aged... the sick... and the feebleminded is always treated with contempt. - Only the fit should be allowed to live.

In Paul's day... Rome and Greece had much the same attitude. Not until Christ came did the world at large see exhibited a care and a concern—regardless of religion... race... or the failures and misfits of society.

Christianity taught the world the value of a human life. Christianity built hospitals... asylums... and orphanages. ... Christianity broke the back of slavery... gave (never-before known) status to women... campaigned against prostitution... and fought for the repeal of unjust laws. ... Our modernistic society is re-writing history so they can forget these truths... and say Christians are hateful.

Admonish the idle... encourage the fainthearted... help the weak... (don't let them fall)... and fourth – strive to be patient with everyone. ... Don't merely accept the fact... if you have a short fuse. Perpetually STRIVE (constantly make diligent effort) to develop more patience.

1 Thes 5:15

The opposite of patience is retaliation in some form. Retaliation is not an option for a Christian. Even if the wrong done to him is an imposition by a needy brother... or an action springing from evil intent... the offended one never has the right to repay wrong with wrong.

Not giving-in to the “eye-for-an-eye-tooth-for-tooth” principle is hard enough. (“*You hurt me... now I'll hurt you...*”) This even happens in the church... doesn't it? ... But this verse and Jesus' same command in

Matthew 5:38-48 tells us to take it ONE STEP FURTHER. When someone does us harm... we are to do them good.

This takes supernatural intervention. Only a life that submits to the Lord and is empowered by God can do this. (More on that later!)

Paul is presenting the basics of what we are to be doing as we wait for Christ's return. #1. ... respect your leaders ... #2... love the brethren... #3. ... glorify the Lord.

First we see how we are to glorify the Lord with our attitude... as individuals before the Lord. (After that we will see how we glorify God in corporate worship.) But here is what our attitude needs to be... because "*The Lord is coming!*"

1 Thes 5:16-18

All three of these are commands. Even "*Rejoice always*" is commanded. Here's why. ... A Christian's joy does not spring from his circumstances... but from the blessings that are his... because he is in Christ.

"The Christian who cannot rejoice... might be one of those "weak" that we are to come along side and lovingly help. We need to patiently teach them to trust God — His power... sovereignty... and Fatherly love."

But then there might be an occasional person in the church... who needs to be shown how this is a commandment. The child of God has no right to be a cantankerous person! (Why do so many churches have them? - I just don't know.) Believers have no right to go around as a perpetual sour puss.

This doesn't mean you need to be a cheerleader. Everyone does not have to be like Pappy the Clown... or a stand-up comedian. ... And it doesn't mean you go through life like every day is a scene from *The Sound of Music*.

Rejoicing (in the biblical sense) means praising God for the small things as well as the big things. ... It means facing even the toughest days with optimism... not because you've got everything under control - but because God does. ... [P A U S E] ...

(AND)... "Pray without ceasing" does not mean we must always be mumbling prayers. The word means "constantly recurring," not continuously occurring. ... Continual prayer is not prayer that prevails without any interruption... but prayer that continues whenever possible. ... The word for "without ceasing" (*a-die-a-lay-ptōs* "αδιαλειπτῶς") was used in Greek of a hacking cough... (automatic... constantly re-occurring... at any moment.)

Just as compulsive... we turn to prayer not as our last alternative when all else fails... but (automatically instantly!) as our first line of defense. ... When worries and fears attack... with hardly any thought about it... it comes bursting forth. ... When pain and suffering intrude... (like an insatiable cough... we pray.) ... Whether we think we know just what to do or have no idea what to do... we pray.

(Very much) like how we are told to pray... we are to give thanks. ... "In everything give thanks." ... Notice that he doesn't say "for everything," but "in everything." ... We're not called to be thankful for the storms of life... but we can still be thankful in the midst of them.

(LISTEN!)... Whenever we find ourselves in financial straits... facing persecution... bereavement... or pressured by any events beyond our control... we can complain... worry... or rebel... .. **OR** ... we can thank God that He is still on the throne... and that He is too wise to make any mistakes... too loving to be unkind... and too powerful to be thwarted in His ultimate and exalted purpose. ... [P A U S E] ...

Now let's look at how we glorify God in our corporate worship (when we come to church)... because "*The Lord is coming!*"

1 Thes 5:19-20

The early church (including this one – Thessalonica)... did not have a completed Bible... as we do. ... The Holy Spirit gave the gift of prophecy to certain members of the church... and would speak authentic messages of truth through prophecy. ... When I preach... I preach the truth (in a manner that is called) "*mediately*." It is mediated (or arbitrated) by the Bible. Whatever I preach... must check out by what the Bible says! ... But before they had compiled the New Testament... these early prophets preached the truth *immediately*... as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Of course (as you could imagine)... there were dangers with this manner of immediate preaching. ... Satan (or the flesh) could seek to counterfeit a message from God... and thus lead the church astray. ... So... on the one hand... if the church didn't allow the speakers to give their immediate message... the church might be guilty of quenching the Spirit. ... (And Paul just told them not to do that.) ... But on the other hand... if the church simply believed all that was spoken... they might be obeying false spirits.

So what do they do? ... The answer is given in verses 21-22...

1 Thes 5:21-22

Today... we have the completed revelation in the Word of God. God's Word is perfect. We have in this Book – everything we need for faith... life... and growing in Christ-likeness! (To say that we need MORE revelation – is to render this Book incomplete and less than perfect.)

But because it is **not** - there is no need for Apostles and prophets today. The message of God's Apostles and prophets has been written down – in our Bibles. The Bible is the sufficient message that they left us.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:20 that the church has been built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets. The church's foundation was laid 2,000 years ago... and we have been building on it ever since. Only a foolish builder would keep laying the foundation.

It is important... also... that we understand a little bit about Christian church history. We need to consider how the early church determined whether a Christian writing should be regarded as Scripture or not.

During the middle of the second century... a letter emerged... it was circulated widely among the churches... and many believers thought that it should be elevated to the same authoritative status as Paul's letters – Scripture. ... But they wisely rejected the inspiration of this book entitled *Shepherd of Hermas*... based on the fact that it was written **after** the time of apostles and prophets. Here is what the church council wrote: "It cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets *whose number is complete*, or among the Apostles, *for it is after their time.*"

By the middle of the second century... the church had a settled conviction that the time of the Apostles and the prophets had already come and gone. They saw that the foundation for the church was already laid. ... There was no need to consider anything else as having the same level of authority for the church... as the foundation that true Apostles and prophets had already established.

And that is my view. ... Nobody can legitimately claim to be an authoritative apostle or prophet in the church today... with a message that has the same authority as the Bible. ... However... today we can still "*despise prophetic utterances*" when we disbelieve or disobey Holy Scripture... which contains the living messages of God's Apostles and prophets of old.

1 Thes 5:20 ("*do not despise prophecies*") is still VERY MUCH applicable to us – today. Keep God Word central in our worship! – because "*The Lord is coming!*" ... [P A U S E] ...

The heart of the command we have been studying today is found right here in our very next verse. Here is why I have been emphasizing: because "*The Lord is coming!*"

1 Thes 5:23

And if you ever had the thought today that all that we have been commanded to do in these verses is impossible... ("*Yeah... right!... I can't do this!...*") ... Verse 24 is just for you.

1 Thes 5:24

Not only is it a matter of our daily experiences and failures... or a simple matter of common sense... but it is also a simple **fact of Scripture** that it is utterly impossible for even the most sincere born-again believer to obey these commands in their own strength and by their own power. We need God's enabling power.

Verse 24 says... "*He will surely do it!*" The same God who calls a Christian will perform this by the Holy Spirit who indwells him. God **is faithful** to bring to completion the work He has begun in believers (Phil. 1:6). ... God does not save a person by grace... and then leave him alone to work out his Christian growth and obedience in these matters.

Respect your leaders ... **love the brethren** ... and **glorify the Lord** –
(say it with me...) **because "The Lord is coming!"**

1 Thes 5:25-28