**1 Thessalonians 5:13b-14**

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**Fellowship—The Lifeblood of the Church**

* As I explained in my introduction last week, beginning in v. 12 Paul changes subjects from eschatology to practical exhortation and instruction to the church.
* Here in v. 12-15 Paul gives instruction in 3 distinct areas.
	+ In v. 12-13a Paul instructs the church regarding the need to ***know*** and ***esteem*** church leaders as those who are given charge over the souls of their flock.
	+ In v. 13b-14 Paul gives instruction to the church in regard to interpersonal relationships between church members . . . those who are of the fellowship of faith.
	+ And in v. 15 Paul gives instruction to the church in regard to their attitudes and actions toward unbelievers . . . those who are outside the fellowship of faith.
* With that outline in mind, lets read the entire passage . . . v. 12-15

***12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.***

* In this section of Paul’s letter he **instructs the church in regard to the interpersonal relationships within the church**. And, amazingly, **though only 23 words, v. 13b-14 contain 5 specific commands from the apostle.**

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* + Those commands, in order, are . . .

**1. *Live in peace with one another***

**2. *Admonish the unruly***

**3. *Encourage the fainthearted***

**4. *Help the weak***

**5. *Be patient with everyone***

* In looking at these 5 commands, we can see that the middle three verses are instructive toward those in the church who have various significant needs.
	+ But the first and the last commands are more general commands concerning the well-being of the church regarding ***peace*** and ***patience* toward one another**.

**The first command**

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***v. 13b— Live in peace with one another.***

* Looking at the first command, we read a very important command from the apostle Paul . . . ***live in peace with one another***.
	+ Here in this present tense command Paul is emphasizing the fact that continual ***peace*** between Christians is an ever-present need in order to maintain a healthy church fellowship.
	+ The command to ***live in peace*** is from the Greek verb *eirēneuō* (#1514), means **more than merely being “at peace,” but is a command to “continually live in a state of peace.”**
	+ The present tense of the verb emphasizes that this **“living in a state of peace”** is to be the habitual and continuous state of peace within the church.
* And just as importantly, **not only are we commanded to “live in a continual state of peace,” but we are to enjoy living in this state of peace with one another.**
	+ The reflexive pronoun, ***one another***, emphasizes that the source of ***peace*** and the responsibility of maintain this ***peace*** is mutual. In other words, **we are all responsible for establishing and maintaining a state of peace within the church body.**
* Here in this command Paul emphasizes the need for the church to establish and maintain a state of ***peace*** within the church body. **But it is important to understand that the state of *living in peace* is the result of many other actions.**
	+ What I mean is . . . **peace is the end-product as a result of other Christian actions.**
	+ In order for a state of true peace to exist within the church, the fruit of the Spirit must be present . . . those being **love, grace, mercy, patience, self-control, faithfulness and gentleness.**
* It is only when the church is functioning in true harmony that true ***peace*** will be present. As Paul says in Romans 14:19 . . .

***Romans 14:19— So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.***

**3 Ailments of a Healthy Church**

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***1 Thessalonians 5:14— We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak***

* Then, having commanded and emphasized the need for the brethren to ***live in peace with one another***, in v. 14 **Paul *urges* the Thessalonian church to assist in correcting 3 ailments or impediments to a healthy church.**
* **The first ailment** Paul commands the church to correct comes in the command to ***admonish the unruly***.
	+ The verb ***admonish*** is the command in this phrase. The Greek word, *noutheteō* (#3560), means “to warn, counsel and correct.”
		- The verb *noutheteō* is the cognate of our English word **“nouthetic,”** meaning “to correct a sinful or disobedient behavior.”
		- In Christian circles **nouthetic counseling is also known as “biblical counseling.”** In nouthetic counseling a sinning brother or sister is counseled to repent and be restored by the counsel of the word of God.
	+ And, just as those who practice **nouthetic counseling** to correct a sinning brother or sister, here in v. 14 Paul commands the same practice . . . that we ***admonish . . . counsel . . .***  the brother or sister who is ***unruly***.
		- The word ***unruly*** . . . the Greek word *ataktos* (#813), is used to refer to “a soldier who is disorderly or who has abandoned his ranks.”
* By his use of this phrase . . . ***counsel and correct the unruly*** . . . Paul is referring to a Christian who has become embroiled in some sinful behavior and needs to be corrected.
	+ In the Thessalonian church there were some brethren who believed that since the return of the Lord was imminent, they should disregard their earthly responsibilities and were, metaphorically, sitting on their suitcases, waiting for the Lord to show up. As a result, they had completely abandoned their responsibilities and were becoming a burden on the church.
	+ For the Thessalonians, this represented their ***unruly*** members. For other churches throughout time this **unruliness** manifested itself in many different ways.
	+ Paul’s point in this command is that **undisciplined and sinful behavior must be corrected by the church.**
		- If left uncorrected, sinful behavior will become a cancer in the church and destroy the peace of the church.
* **The second ailment** Paul commands the church to correct is . . . ***encourage the fainthearted***.

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* + The command in this phrase is the word ***encourage*** . . . the Greek word *paramutheomai* (#3888), meaning “to comfort, encourage and console.”
	+ And those within the church who are in need of **encouragement**are ***the fainthearted***.
		- The Greek word *oligopsuchos* (#3642) means “those of little spirit” . . . those whose faith is weak.
		- The King James Version, unfortunately, translates the word as ***feeble-minded***. In our society this word implies mental deficiency, but this is not the meaning of the Greek word.
		- The Greek word Paul uses here refers to those who are **discouraged and have become worried for some reason**.
	+ Unlike the first term, ***unruly***, those who are **discouraged and** ***fainthearted*** are **not** in need of corrective counsel, but are in need of **‘encouragement’ and strengthening in their faith**. They are downcast and despondent for some reason and need to be ***encouraged***.
* **The third ailment** Paul commands the church to address is . . . ***help the weak.***

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* + The term ***weak*** (*asthenēs*—#772) that Paul uses here **does not** refer to those Christians who are **physically *weak***, but those Christians who are **spiritually or morally *weak***.
	+ The command to ***help*** (*antechomai*—#472) such brethren is a command to “lend support and come to the aid of” those who are unable to help themselves. It is a command of brotherly love and compassion.
	+ D. Edmond Hiebert says of those who are **spiritually *weak*** . . . *“truly converted people may yet be weak for various reasons. Some believers are weak through* ***lack of knowledge of the will of God*** *. . . some through* ***lack of courage to trust God*** *. . . some who are* ***timid or over-scrupulous*** *and hesitate to use their liberty in Christ . . . some, through* ***lack of stability or purpose****, are easily carried away . . . some* ***lack courage to face, or will to endure persecution or criticism*** *. . . some are* ***unable to control the appetites of the body or the impulses of the mind.”***

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* + To such Christians of ***weak* faith or *weak­* wills** Paul commands the church to **come to their aid.**
* **The last of the five commands** in this section is found at the end of v. 14 . . . ***be patient with everyone.***

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* + The Greek word for ***patient*** . . . *makrothumeō* (#3114) literally means **“long-suffering.”**
	+ The concept of being one who is **long-suffering** is found in the exhortation of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:5 when he states that . . .

***1 Corinthians 13:4-5— 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,***

* + As Paul so eloquently states, **a person who is long-suffering toward others *“does not take into account a wrong suffered.”*** **Who does that sound like? It sounds like God’s actions toward us, who have wronged Him innumerably.**
	+ Here in this command by Paul we are commanded to demonstrate this God-like quality and not ***take into account a wrong suffered***.
* This final command by Paul was something the Thessalonian church was already practicing, as we learned in the opening of this letter. But we have to understand how difficult this command must have been to obey.
	+ In the culture of the Greeks . . . ancient and modern . . . retribution and revenge were, and are, the way wrongs were settled. A person who was wronged always sought to avenge an evil act perpetrated against him or her. It was a cultural practice.
	+ So, for the Thessalonian brethren to not seek retribution against those fellow countrymen who were persecuting them was truly a remarkable demonstration of Christ-likeness in them.
* But in the context of this passage, Paul is especially concerned that the brethren ***be patient with everyone*** in the church in order that they would be able to ***live in peace with one another.***
* So, we have now examined the five commands that Paul issues to the brethren of the Thessalonian church. They were commanded to

**1. *Live in peace with one another***

**2. *Admonish the unruly***

**3. *Encourage the fainthearted***

**4. *Help the weak***

**5. *Be patient with everyone***

**How are these commands to be implemented?**

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* Now, having explained Paul’s instruction and commands to the church regarding how we are to relate to one another, a very good question arises . . . **How are these commands to be implemented?**
* In answer to this question, I believe there are **two answers**.
* **First**, **in order to establish and maintain a state of peace within the church, there must first be a love of the brethren.**
	+ It is only when you see the welfare and well-being of others as more important than your own well-being that a state of ***peace*** can be established and maintained.
	+ One of the classic and most beautiful passages of Scripture on the subject of self-sacrificing ***love*** is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 . . .

***1 Corinthians 13:4-7— 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***

* + True ***love*** is demonstrated in the Christ-like behavior of sacrificing self for the good of others.
	+ **Love is the reflection of the true Christian’s heart.**
* **Secondly**, in order to effectively implement Paul’s instruction in 1 Thessalonians 5:13-14 the church is in need of **true Christian fellowship**.

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* **If love of the brethren is the heart of the true church, then fellowship is the lifeblood of a healthy church that pumps from that heart**.
	+ Just as human blood carries life-saving and life-preserving healing properties from the heart to both healthy and ailing organs, so the lifeblood of Christian fellowship gives spiritual life sustaining and healing properties to the body of Christ.
	+ Fellowship is what God uses to heal and strengthen those members who are sick, injured or wounded by various spiritual ailments.
	+ It is the responsibility of those Christians who are spiritually strong and healthy to come to the aid of those brethren who are spiritually sick, injured or wounded.
	+ To refuse to serve a brother or sister in spiritual need is like refusing life-saving treatment to someone who has been physically wounded by an enemy.
	+ **Would you come to the aid of a brother or sister who had been physically attacked and had been injured? Then you should also be just as willing and ready to come to that same brother or sister who has been spiritually attacked or injured.**

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**What is fellowship?**

* But when I say that **true fellowship is the lifeblood of a healthy church, we have to define what true fellowship is.**
	+ **Many Christians believe that the term fellowship is a synonym for “socializing.”**
	+ It is true that there is an important social aspect to Christian fellowship. But true Christian fellowship is more than getting together for a meal, to play games or to sing hymns.
	+ The word ***fellowship*** is from the Greek word *koinōnia* (#2842) and refers to “a close intimate friendship and association.”
	+ *Koinōnia* also has the connotation of **“joint participation.”** In other words, ***fellowship*** is a mutual, reciprocal fellowship. For there to be true fellowship, all parties must be willing to invest of themselves and participate equally.
	+ **True Christian fellowship is an investment of your life in the life of your brothers and sisters for the purpose of spiritually strengthening and helping them and allowing them to invest their lives in you to spiritually strengthen and help you.”**

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* + In fact, **it is not an overstatement or exaggeration to say that fellowship is a gift to the church from the Holy Spirit**.
	+ Just as the Holy Spirit is present in every believer, teaching, strengthening and transforming us more into the image of Christ, so, too, the Holy Spirit is present and operative in each of us when we give ourselves in service to one another.
	+ When we love and serve one another the Holy Spirit is using us to serve and help one another, empowered by His life-giving strength.
		- We also have to understand and recognize that when we serve the brethren, we are serving one another in the strength which the Spirit supplies, not in our own power.
		- When we serve others, we are merely conduits of the Holy Spirit . . . the Holy Spirit using us as proxies and surrogates for Him. Therefore, in your service and fellowship to one another you are serving both your brother or sister and serving the Holy Spirit.

**What does Christian fellowship look like?**

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* So, understanding what true Christian fellowship **is**, the next question is . . . **what does Christian fellowship look like? How do I practice fellowship?**
* In answer to that question I simply point you back to Paul’s commands in this passage . . .

**1. *Live in peace with one another***

**2. *Counsel and correct those in sin***

**3. *Encourage the spiritually downcast***

**4. *Lift up and protect the spiritually weak***

**5. *Be patient with everyone***

* + But in repeating these 5 commands I want to direct you attention, in particular, to the middle three commands. When Paul instructs us to ***counsel and correct those in sin, encourage the spiritually downcast, and lift up and protect the spiritually weak*** **he is instructing each of us to invest our lives in the lives of your brothers and sisters.**
* **Christian fellowship is an investment of your time, energy and spirituality in the lives of your fellow brothers and sisters.**

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* **Christian fellowship is a deliberate effort to seek out close friendships within the church.**
	+ We all know that if is difficult to share personal feelings with those whom we only know casually. But for those friends we know and trust, we are able to talk about and seek counsel concerning very personal subjects.
* I know with all certainty that there are many people sitting here among us this morning who are struggling in some aspect of their spiritual life . . . whether it be an issue of sin or discouragement or weakness.
	+ And many of these hurting people desperately want or need a trusted friend that he or she can confide in and seek godly counsel from, but they don’t have that trusted godly friend or confidant.
* Perhaps you do have one or two close friends you can share very personal and intimate secrets with. But there is no rule that says you are limited to only 1 or 2.
	+ And perhaps you have some very good, personal friends that you trust. But have you considered that there is someone here in our midst who has no one and might see you as a person he or she would like to get to know better?

**True Christian Fellowship is Christ-centered**

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***1 John 1:3— what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.***

* One of the great joys I am currently experiencing in our congregation is the growth of our men’s ministry through the monthly men’s Saturday morning breakfast meetings.
	+ In our monthly breakfast meetings the men of the church are gathering together and being taught biblical principles to help them be more godly leaders in their homes and in the church.
	+ And, at the same time, the men investing the time and sincere effort to form close personal friendships. It is my sincere hope that these friendships will grow to the point that these men will see one another as brothers with whom they can have significant spiritual conversations and seek godly counsel from.
	+ Within our men’s ministry meetings we are fulfilling the exhortation of the apostle John in the opening verses of his first epistle regarding Christ-centered fellowship . . .

***1 John 1:3— what we have seen and heard* [concerning Jesus Christ] *we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.***

* John’s point is that true Christian fellowship result in the brethren being in fellowship with one another and, as a result, in fellowship with God.

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**My exhortation to you—be deliberate in reaching out to your brothers and sisters**

* In closing this morning I want to exhort you to follow through on the commands of Paul that we have studied this morning.
	+ It is a fact that **every Christian will experience periods of trial and difficulty in their faith during their life.**
	+ While you may be in a time of your life in which you are spiritually strong and flourishing, that condition can change very quickly. **Know this . . . there are brothers and sisters sitting among you this morning who are struggling.**
	+ My exhortation to every one of you is . . . be deliberate in reaching out to your brothers and sisters to establish friendships and seek Christ-centered fellowship.
		- Have serious spiritual conversations.
		- Exhort and encourage one another with things you have learned or read.
		- Be willing to provide a strong shoulder for a brother or sister in a trial to lean on.
		- Be ready to offer words of consolation and encouragement.
		- Become a good Christian friend to someone new.
* The Christian life is a team sport. God has brought us all together here, at this time, for the purpose of lifting one another up and encouraging one another.
* **Christian friends and Christ-centered fellowship are the Holy Spirit’s way of loving us through one another.**

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