

“A Checklist Before Goodbye” – 1 Thess. 5:12-28

I once heard a man say, *“The most important thing in learning to relate to others is personal honesty. Once you learn to fake that, everything else is easy!”* I’ve told you before that my dad’s motto was, *“Just act like you know what you’re doing.”* There is a lot of acting and faking in this world and, honestly, I don’t think it’s all bad. Some of it definitely is but not all of it.

If you don’t like somebody and you find it hard to be nice to them, I say it’s a good idea to at least start by faking it. Pretend like you do like them. Treat them kindly and fairly and pretty soon, you just might start to like them. The other option is to treat them poorly. How do you think that is going to work out? So, sometimes it might not be wrong to fake how you feel but that can be dangerous in some situations, so be careful with that.

Learning how to relate to others is part of the learning process as we mature. We all have stories about how little kids just say whatever they are thinking. They have no filter. Years ago, I was talking to a sweet mother and her little boy as they were leaving church. The boy was probably 3 or 4 years old and was hanging on to mama’s leg. I playfully asked the kid, *“Is your mama mean to you?”* Of course, he said *“No.”* I asked him if his mama ever kicked him. He said, *“No.”* *“Does she ever cuss at you?”* **“Sometimes”**, he said. His mama couldn’t clamp her hand over his mouth fast enough. Kids don’t know how to relate to people and he was just telling it like it is.

There are lots of adults who never really outgrow that. And while it is cute in a kid, it can be very harmful for adults. Sometimes they excuse it by saying they are just telling the truth. Or they just tell it like it is. Or they say they were just born that way and if you don’t like it, that’s your problem. But the truth of that is, when you act like that, you make it everybody’s problem and it shouldn’t be a problem.

The Apostle Paul gives us a checklist for how to live and how to relate to others in **1 Thessalonians 5**. He has seen people relate to others in problematic ways and he is warning the church in Thessalonica and here in Chico that we ought to behave differently than the world does when it comes to relating to others. We don’t want there to be problems in our relationships but we also want to be sanctified, as Paul said earlier, and this is part of that sanctification process. This is part of how we become holy and set apart and start to look and act more like Jesus. And if that process of sanctification is not going on in your life then something is very wrong with your relationship with Jesus.

So, in **1 Thessalonians 5:12-28** Paul gives us a checklist for relating to others but specifically the checklist is for how to relate to leaders in the church. Then, how to live and relate with other believers, whether at home, at work, or wherever. And finally, how to live toward God and respond to the situations where he puts you. So, turn to 1 Thessalonians 5 and let’s start reading the very end of Paul’s wonderful little letter.

Now we ask you, brothers, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. 14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil. 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. 25 Brothers and sisters, pray for us. 26 Greet all God’s people with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

As I read this, I can't help but wonder if Paul came to this part that we call the fifth chapter and all the sudden realized he was almost out of paper or parchment or whatever. Maybe his pen was running dry and he just closes this letter kind of abruptly with a long checklist of all the things he wanted them to know. Maybe somebody was coming to see him or his phone was ringing. I don't know but even this checklist is rich with good, solid nuggets of wisdom, any of which could have its own message preached about it.

Paul says in Acts 20 that he preached the whole counsel of God or the whole will of God so I will do the same even though it is a little uncomfortable to talk about how Paul says to treat the leaders of the church. So, I'll just tell you what he says and what he means and go on. But we first have to define some words or at least make sure we understand the words that Paul uses.

He starts this passage by saying that we are to **acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you**. Some of your versions say we are to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord. That is not the best way to interpret that. The phrase, "those who ... are over you in the Lord," is not a good translation. It reflects a relationship that Scripture everywhere speaks against. Jesus said to his disciples, *"One is your Master, all you are brothers,"* (Matthew 23:8 KJV). Jesus is the Master. Christians are brothers. What is really being said here in Thessalonica is, "respect those who labor among you and stand before you in the Lord." The apostle is referring to those who stand in front and lead the whole group. There is no suggestion of anyone being "over" others. Tradition has caused this proper translation to be lost sight of down through the years. It badly needs correction. What Paul is saying, therefore, is, "follow your leaders." There are three things which church members must do with regard to their leaders:

First, they are to acknowledge them. Some versions say "respect" them. Again, this is not an accurate translation. The word really is, "know them." Recognize them. Be aware of them. Do not take them for granted. The great preacher, Adrian Rogers, once said, *"Anything with no head is dead, and anything with two heads is a freak."* And that goes for the church. But Paul is not just talking about the paid pastor. We have quite a few leaders in this church that work hard, who stand in front and preach or teach or lead music or lead Bible study or call us to worship.

I firmly believe that the leaders of the church are leaders because they are the chief servants. They should be willing to do even the most menial work and should do it without complaining. In fact, notice the words Paul uses about why we are to recognize them. In **verse 13** he says, *"because of their work"* and not because of their titles. We are not real big on titles around here. Servants don't usually get titles, right?

At the same time, I have some church leader friends and some pastor friends who feel deeply that they are only slaves to the people of the church and they have to do everything and are completely taken advantage of. Some of my pastor friends even feel that if they preach against certain things that scripture says we ought not do, but they know that some of their congregation does those things, that the pastor may very well be fired. That's just wrong. That is not respecting or acknowledging the leader and it is just sin.

I'm very thankful that our church is not that way. Sometimes I go to meetings with other pastors and I just feel so sorry for them and I feel so blessed to be where I am and to have the support that I have in this church. And when you do that, you have peace, just as Paul says in **verse 13**. So, thank you! And let's move on.

The next way Paul instructs us is in how we should relate to each other or how we should relate to especially other church members. But especially three different types of church members. He says, **"warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak."** "Warn the idlers," he says. The word is literally, "the disorderly," those out of step with the rest of the crowd. In Thessalonica, it meant those people whom he had referred to earlier who had quit working because they expected the Lord to come at any moment. It could also mean those who were living off the gifts of others, and were not willing to work and support themselves. It could include those who have gifts that could

benefit the church but don't do anything with those gifts. "Admonish them," says the apostle. Tell them to mend their ways. Do not let them go on like that. He does not mean to do this in a mean-spirited way, but to point out to them that this kind of behavior is unacceptable.

Then, second, "encourage the faint-hearted"; literally the "small-souled" person, one who feels inadequate and ungifted. We would call them the introverts among us. "Help them find their place," says Paul. This is addressed to everybody. People who feel out of it, who think they do not belong and cannot contribute anything, must be helped to find their place because they do have a place. In the wonderful picture of the body at work, in **1 Corinthians 12**, Paul says, *"The ear cannot say, 'Because I am not an eye I am not part of the body.' No, even if it says that, it does not make it any less a part of the body,"* (1 Corinthians 12:16). There are people who feel that way. They think, "I cannot do anything. I do not have any gifts." That is wrong thinking. God has equipped all his people with gifts. We are to help each other find our place, give them something to do and encourage them in the work that they are doing.

Then, finally, "Help the weak ones." This means especially those whom **Romans 14** describes as being "weak in the faith" (Romans 14:1); those who do not know very much about the doctrine of the Christian life, who have not learned the truth that sets them free and need extra help. Perhaps they are not sure of their salvation, or they feel guilty about the past and do not sense they have really been forgiven yet by God. Whatever it may be, the word is to help them, to hold them fast. That demands a little extra effort.

That makes me think about our Sunday nights and Wednesday nights around here. That is exactly what happens when we get together and sit around and study the Bible. Those that have more knowledge are able to help those that don't have as much. And we all wind up learning something. That is also called discipleship. Are you doing discipleship anywhere else? You do realize that is what Jesus called us to do in **Matthew 28**. He said, "Go and make disciples..."

And let me just throw this in there right now. Whether it is Paul or Jesus or Peter or John or anybody else writing in scripture, if they say to do something and you don't do it, do you know what that is called? Sin. So, when Jesus said to go make disciples, it holds the same weight as Paul saying to help the weak ones and encourage the timid. I'm just reminding you of that.

Now, the next three things on Paul's checklist are actually three special attitudes we all need to be able to do just what he has told us to do previously. If you want to be able to warn those who are idle, encourage the timid and help the weak, then you need to be patient with everyone, don't pay back wrong for wrong and always be kind. Now, I want you to look at those three attitudes again real close. Have patience. Don't pay back wrong for wrong. And be kind. That sounds easy enough, right? We all do that already, don't we? Ha! Those are the hardest things in the world sometimes.

Those are hard to do but doing those things is the very essence of how Jesus lived. Doing those things and having those attitudes is part of that sanctification process we have been talking about. I've said many times that God is not as concerned about your happiness as He is your holiness. He wants you to be like Jesus. He wants you to be mature and complete, not lacking anything as James says.

Now, add to that the next couple of verses that say, *"Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances."* And I hear what you are saying. "C'mon Paul! That's impossible. The patience, the kindness, the encouraging the weak folks and now this. That is just impossible for me. I can't do it!" But I want to tell you one thing. You are right. It is impossible. You can't do it. BUT you can do it IF you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you.

Grab your Bibles again and I want you to turn to the previous chapter. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. Through verse 7, Paul has told them some other ways in which they need to live and added in **verse 8** that he who rejects this instruction – in other words, the one who says he can't do this – does not reject man but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit. See, that's the secret. That is the only way.

When you ask God to forgive you of all your sins and you ask Jesus to be Lord of your life and your intention is to do what God tells you to do to be right with Him and spend forever in Heaven with Him, then the Spirit of God Himself actually moves into your life. Titus 3:5 says we are renewed by the Holy Spirit. Paul said in chapter 1 of this book that the Holy Spirit is the One who gives us joy (verse 6). Romans 15 says that by the power of the Holy Spirit we abound in hope. 1 Corinthians 12 says it is the Spirit that gives us our gifts.

It's not about you! Quit trying. Quit thinking that you have to work harder and be better and do better. You can't! All you have to do is be filled with the Spirit. Now, for some denominations they believe that means you have to speak in tongues and be baptized another time and you have to heal people and your eyes have to roll back in your head as you go into a trance. Nope. Not it. Do you know what Jesus said? He said, *"Abide in Me."* It means, rest in me. Get close to me. Lean on me. Don't lean on your own understanding but just trust in the Lord. (Prov. 3) That whole verse in **John 15:4** says, *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."* Jesus said it right there. You can't do it unless you are abiding in Him.

That ought to bring you great comfort. That ought to bring you peace in your heart and mind. All I have to do is get closer to Jesus through prayer, through scripture, through music and Bible study. Instead of watching TV this evening, try reading a Bible devotional and then talking about it with your family. Instead of spending your free time glued to your phone, listen to 91.3 or some other station that has good preaching on it. Spend your time intentionally and pretty soon you will start to see the Holy Spirit giving you the ability to be joyful always, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances.

Okay, I'm going to give you some homework. I never do this but I want to prove to you that what I was just saying is biblical truth. We are pretty much out of time and can't get to the next few verses. So, I want you to do some studying on **verses 19-22**. Look them up online. Get your Bible commentary and your concordance and see just what those verses mean. I know. I know. You are busy and I understand if you don't do this. I understand that you are a loser and don't love Jesus. 😊

No, I think you will enjoy it. If you have questions, I would love to help. I would love to point you in the right direction but I want you to come to your own conclusions about what Paul said and what he meant in those verses. You can do that – even that – through the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of you.

Do you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you? Do you know for sure? One of the things the Spirit does for believers and unbelievers is He convicts us of our sins. When we displease God, the Spirit makes us uncomfortable. He bothers us. Our peace is disturbed. He pricks our own spirit and allows us to realize, even when it may be accidental, that we have displeased God. Do you have that? It's not your conscience. That's different. Everybody has a conscience that tells us not to murder and not to lie but the Holy Spirit is much deeper and allows us to have the mind of Christ as it says in **1 Corinthians 2**.

We get all of that when we accept that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and we ask God to forgive us of those sins and we invite Him to be Lord of our lives. Then all we have to do is abide in Him as He abides in us. Have you done that? If you haven't or if you are not sure, I would love to talk with you and pray with you right now as the music plays.