



Let's Get Ready to Rapture

First Thessalonians 5:12-22

“Community“

Did you know that communes are thriving all over the world?

The preferred name for them is “intentional communities.” There are as many as 10,000 in the US. Not all of them are religious; it’s trendy to do it for ecological reasons.

You are not called to start or settle in a commune, but you are to have a strong sense of community. Christians are connected with one another and are expected to experience those connections in community with other Christians in a local church.

Our text brings out three aspects of living in community with other Christians. Those three aspects can be captured by three words: government, grace, and gifts.

By government I mean that the Church community has leaders. We read about the community dynamic of leadership in verses twelve and thirteen.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

1 Thessalonians 5:13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

The church was less than a year old. By definition, everyone in it was still a young Christian. Some among them were leaders. It may be that there was a problem with submission to leadership as the members felt they were all more-or-less spiritual equals.

They may have been spiritual equals; but God still raised-up in their midst some to lead. It was a matter of gifts not growth. Church leaders are supernaturally gifted to accomplish their work.

The local church has leadership. Here at Calvary Chapel our leadership structure is a pastor-teacher supported by elders, who are supported by deacons. There is also leadership over and within the various ministries God has raised-up.

A few of a leader's responsibilities are listed:

They "labor among you." The word "labor" means toil, strive, struggle. It describes hard work that causes the leader to grow weary.

Leaders are "over you in the Lord." This means they exercise oversight in a way that is characteristic of Jesus. Jesus' example of being over you was to humble Himself to serve you. He illustrated it most memorably by washing His disciple's feet on the night before He was crucified.

Leaders "admonish you." "Admonish" literally means to put in mind. It is reminding others of spiritual truth, especially in the

sense of appealing to the conscience and the will to encourage believers to obedience.

Leaders are resources that the Holy Spirit uses to help you make spiritual progress. You cooperate with God when you do two things in relation to your leaders: Recognize them and respect them.

“Recognize” means acknowledging that God has placed them over you by His sovereign gifts in their lives.

“Respect” is the meaning of the word “esteem” in verse thirteen. It takes recognizing leaders one step further in that you recognize that they are over you for your good and you thus respect their influence in your life.

“Be at peace among yourselves” reminds us that leadership in the church, and authority in general, is very different than what we are used to in the world. Leaders are not to lord over us; they are to be like the Lord and serve us. And we – when being led – are to submit to biblical authority without causing strife and division.

Another aspect of living in community is grace. You see it in verses fourteen and fifteen.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

Some of the believers were putting a strain on community life:

The “unruly” were probably those believers who had quit their jobs to wait for Jesus to Rapture them. Their mooching was a strain on the rest of the community.

The “fainthearted” were probably those whose loved ones had fallen asleep in death. They were overcome with grief, focusing only on their loss.

The “weak” were probably those who were morally weak and struggling with sexual sin as discussed in the opening verses of chapter four.

Regardless the particular causes, however, all church communities will have believers who are unruly, fainthearted, and weak. The rest of you are to be “patient” with them; and to express your patience by warning, comforting, and upholding them.

“Warn” is the word admonish, which we said meant put in mind. You are to remind them of spiritual truth.

“Comfort” is translated from words meaning to relate near. The idea is that you try to relate to what they are going through, then come near to them with words to encourage.

“Upholding” means support. It’s a picture of coming to them in their spiritual distress and holding them up by holding them accountable.

You can’t list every possible stress that believers can experience when living in community with one another. You can’t list every possible strategy for dealing with one another. So Paul gave a principle to follow in verse fifteen:

1 Thessalonians 5:15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

In practical terms, you should desire the very best for every other member of the Christian community, and then treat them in a way

that promotes what is best for them. Christians living in community should therefore extend grace to one another.

The next three verses encourage practical ways grace works in a community of believers.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always,
1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing,
1 Thessalonians 5:18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

The last phrase, “this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you,” relates to each of the three things we read about.

It is God’s will for you that you “rejoice always.” “Always” means always. Remember that the Church at Thessalonica was suffering intense persecution. Nevertheless, they could rejoice always.

It is God’s will for you that you “pray without ceasing.” “Without ceasing” means a life permeated with prayer – mostly silent prayer in your heart, but not excluding public praying. You might describe it as a spirit of prayer.

It is God’s will for you that “in everything [you] give thanks.” “Everything” means in every circumstance. This is possible when you accept the promise that God works all things out for good to those who love Him and are yielded to His will. You can then thank Him no matter what – knowing everything He allows is for your ultimate good and His glory.

You put grace into practice when you do these three things; and living in community with other believers gives you a context to practice them – to be encouraged in them by others who can remind you to rejoice, to pray, and to be thankful.

The third aspect of living in community is gifts. You see it in verses nineteen through twenty-two.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:20 Do not despise prophecies.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

In the church at Corinth the exercise of gifts was what we would call charismatic; if you read all of First Corinthians chapter fourteen you'd call them charismaniacs! They needed to be corrected about the proper, orderly exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in a corporate assembly.

The Thessalonians had the opposite problem. They were quenching the exercise of the gifts and despising prophecies.

Both assemblies were told to “test” and then “hold fast what is good.” They were to test the things spoken by the standard of the Word of God. As long as what was being prophesied, for example, was lined-up with God’s Word, they could receive it as God’s encouragement.

Do we despise prophecies – seeing as we don’t allow people to get-up and share them on Sunday mornings?

Not at all! We understand that the teaching of God’s Word is itself an exercise of the gift of prophecy. Teaching can also include the gifts of the Word of Wisdom and the Word of Knowledge.

What we are doing on Sunday mornings is following the overriding biblical principle that all things be done decently and in order.

The final verse of this section at first seems out of place:

1 Thessalonians 5:22 Abstain from every form of evil.

As a stand-alone verse, this is great spiritual advice. In context of the exercise of the gifts during public worship, it has to do with the false exercise of gifts, e.g., tongues, the interpretation of tongues, and (especially) prophecy.

Just because something ‘spiritual’ seems to occur, it doesn’t mean it is from The Lord. We are commanded to test gifts to be certain they are from The Lord.

A lot of your growth as a Christian can only occur if you are in a community of believers:

If you are a loner, you will miss out on the growth provided by interaction with leadership.

It’s impossible to exercise the grace of patience unless you are among folks that test your patience.

You can’t exercise speaking gifts to the edification of the body unless you meet with the body.

Jesus leaves it up to us to determine just how involved we are going to be in our community. He doesn’t force us to go to church. He draws us, by His love.

Have a strong sense of community and let that guide your decisions about your involvement.

If you want my opinion – err on the side of more, rather than less, involvement. It’s good for you and for those you get involved with.