

5/2/21 - 1 Thes. 5:14-15 - “The Harmony of the Church, part 2”

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[0 : 00] I want to turn to the word of the Lord here today. We're going to continue our series here in 1 Thessalonians. And I'm going to read a small excerpt of the passage today as we're studying, kind of digging into the text a little bit.

We're going to be continuing the flow of thought regarding the harmony of the church as Paul is commanding this church.

And we're going to be in chapter 5, chapter 5, verse 14 today, reading to 15. That's 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 14 and 15.

It says, This is the word of the Lord.

And this series in 1 Thessalonians, I think, has been extremely helpful, insightful, challenging at different instances.

[1 : 23] And especially from the contents of last week's passage, we see that Paul is getting into the concluding thoughts of his letter to the Thessalonians at this point.

And that's starting in verse 5 or chapter 5, verse 12. And Paul wrote this book. He wrote this book. He wrote this letter to a group of young Christians who were planted in Thessalonica.

Paul and his companions, Timothy and Silas, were forced out of Thessalonica. And they were forced to depart.

They were accused of civil treason in Acts 17. You can read all about the fun that they had there. The culture, the society did not like what they had to offer.

No Jewish in faith. Not Greek in faith. Nobody. There was much hostility towards this church and this young church.

[2 : 25] And so you can imagine the pressure, the fear, the anxiety of the society coming in on them. Paul, being forced, was probably sitting in that bed wondering if this church is doing all right.

And so he was compelled to write to them, to send Timothy to them, to write to them and for him to report. And to his surprise and great encouragement, he received a terrific report.

And that would be an understatement. That not only is this church surviving, this church is thriving in the midst of great persecution and affliction.

As 1 Thessalonians and Paul's own writing says that they are destined for it. The church is destined for affliction. And so he's getting into the conclusion of his thoughts and his letter.

And obviously, through any English grammar student, you know that in the conclusion, it ties back to the body. So what we're doing at this point is we're looking very exegetically into this passage.

[3 : 31] We're taking it almost literally verse by verse. And digging into the soil of the word. And we're going to do that as he's tying back into previous themes.

And so this multiple part message of the harmony of the church, I feel compelled and led by the Holy Spirit to dig into this a little bit for us as a church.

As his church. And we're going to lead into a couple instructions next week of the whole church. And instructions for regarding discernment in verse 19 through 22.

And the identity of the church in 23, 24. And some closing remarks that he has, as he does in many of his letters. So today is the second part titled The Harmony of the Church.

It's not part one on the live stream. I think there might be a typo. But if we were to close our eyes for just a moment.

[4 : 31] And I'm not going to, I'm not kind of, you know, whatever. Just keep your eyes open. But just imagine closing your eyes for a moment. And imagining what our perspective is today.

On this day. Of what the church's attitude ought to look like. Think for a moment. What you picture in your mind.

Of what the church's attitude ought to look like. What comes to mind. Depending upon how your life has unfolded in the community of God.

You may imagine some things. You could be on this side. Of thinking that the church's attitude is that standing around, holding hands.

Looking, smiling at each other. Singing kumbaya. Everything's great. Waiting for the day of the Lord to come. And everyone's getting along. Or you could be over on this side.

[5 : 39] Where it seems like a battle scene from the Pirates of the Caribbean. And you got the two ships coming up with their cannons blasting at each other.

Trying to destroy one another. Depending on how your life has unfolded in the community of God. Will probably dictate what comes to mind. With what the attitude of the church might look like to you.

It is under the conviction and instruction of scripture. That what ought to be brought forth in our minds. Is an endless, continuous, without condition attitude of holding the door for one another. Regardless if the other person deserves it or not. The problem we face actually is getting to that point though. Getting to that point of swallowing our pride.

And getting to that point to serve one another in that way. Because we are at war with our flesh. Our flesh wants to retaliate when we're offended, doesn't it?

[6 : 49] Our flesh wants vengeance when we're hurt. And soon enough, if we allow it, our community can be beckoned by our flesh rather than scripture.

And in turn, we resemble nothing of what God intended his church to reflect on this earth. And in that, we become absolutely useless to the world.

As God intended. Contrary to the popular belief of what the secular culture labels as self-sufficiency. That all you need to do is worry about yourself.

It's just pick up your bootstraps and get to it, right? Self-sufficiency. The church is organized, however. And it exists to glorify God.

There is a yoke with the glory of God. And it expresses in our midst tangibly as a one another community. Looking out for one another in this community.

[7 : 50] While the world says God helps those who help themselves. And they probably scour scripture to find something to back that false statement up. While the world says God helps those who help themselves.

The Bible actually says God helps those who humble themselves. And so as we see today, when God helps those who humble themselves. This will draw out the community that God intended to be his rightful representatives here on earth.

His rightful ambassadors here on earth. And we enter a text today that should stretch us as a church. As we look upon the communal and corporate cooperation of the church.

Specifically, several commands of this one another community. And we will prepare ourselves for the challenges that lay waiting ahead based on the text.

By the end of today, I do hope that we will grasp and practice forbearance and grace with one another.

[8 : 55] And not only that, to the world. Because the truth is, in Christ, God has modeled perfect forbearance. Perfect grace against sin.

And so we ought to be compelled to model the same forbearance and grace towards one another. But before we look at the word of God today and go through this passage, I want to pray and ask for help.

Let's pray. Father, we come to you right now seeking truth. Father, help us as your church body to be governed by your word.

To come under the teaching of your words and specifically the inspired commands from Paul to the church. And Father, I beg you today, let this church body see Christ.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. The first section that we have today is a community of forbearance. A community of forbearance.

[10 : 06] And we see that in verse 14. And it says, And we urge you, brothers. Many translations make that brothers and sisters. Admonish the idle.

Encourage the faint-hearted. Help the weak. Be patient with them all. The church is commanded at this point in scripture to exhibit a certain level of oversight into the spiritual lives.

Into the spiritual members of his body. Looking at the people around you. There's a certain level of oversight that we are commanded to have over one another.

And this, contrary to self-sufficiency as culture tries to put it, this should be expected within the church. This should be embraced within the church.

This should be always expressed in the church. And too often, the spiritual lives and well-being are sort of passed off to the pastors. And that's obviously part of our job as pastors and shepherds.

[11:23] However, according to Paul's commands, it also is commanded that not only pastors are to admonish, the church ought to admonish one another as well. So the church ought to not act as news reporters, delivering the nice juicy gossip that they found out among the small group that they're in of things that are going on.

They're not just news reporters to deliver the latest observable issues for the pastors to handle. The Bible actually calls the church to not be news reporters, but to be diagnostic in how we conduct our affairs.

To be administering spiritual caretakers to one another. Similar to that of doctors and caretaking of one another. I trust that you haven't heard of the tale of Paul and Cindy.

We're going to pick on them a little bit today. But I don't know, maybe you are a visitor and you are a Paul or a Cindy. I promise you, I didn't intend this to be towards you. But we're going to pick on Paul and Cindy in a hypothetical situation.

And Paul and Cindy seemed like quite problem members. The church members were talking amongst themselves one day, saying that Paul and Cindy have not been around in a while.

[12:52] Every time I call, Paul and Cindy don't answer. Every time I text, they don't return my text, they don't return my call. I guess I'll just ignore them too, Paul and Cindy.

After all, who needs them? Now, we're going to pick on this situation. And you can insert whatever your mind can imagine with what you've heard in the past and whatever your experience within a corporate body might attest to.

But this is a very light situation of what's going on with Paul and Cindy. Well, turning to the word and Paul's command and regarding this situation, he gives a command.

For the church, we urge you, brothers and sisters, admonish the idol. Admonish means to simply instruct, to warn or counsel in terms of someone's bad behavior and its consequences.

And to reprove, even discipline those who have done wrong. And so, as the church picking up the responsibility of being spiritual caretakers of one another, not seeing Paul and Cindy, yeah, you would be admonishing maybe the idol.

[14:13] The idol being disorderly, not submitting to discipline and order, being unruly, maybe even being lazy, as Paul's instructing here. Because Paul and Cindy might be rebelling.

The other instance is, he continues, to encourage the faint-hearted. Meaning that the church ought to encourage one another.

To give counsel. To give support. To give comfort. To alleviate sorrow or distress. To give emotional strength to. So, as a doctor and physician for one another, this would mean that the patient might be faint-hearted.

Paul and Cindy might be faint-hearted. They might be discouraged. They might be less hopeful.

This COVID-19 thing has really been getting to them. They watch the news. They get disheartened. Maybe Paul and Cindy are discouraged. Or maybe, as Paul continues, to help the weak. Meaning that the church is to help one another.

[15:17] To be devoted to them. To take charge of. To manage. To deal with something or some situation. So, as a church being a physician, as being a spiritual caretaker, maybe this is an instance that Paul and Cindy might be weak.

Sick. Waning in moral strength. Maybe struggling with courage in their lives. Maybe of their will.

Maybe they're struggling with sin. Maybe Paul and Cindy are struggling in sin.

Or, as Paul concludes this verse, to be patient with them all. To be patient is to be even-tempered. Of which the church ought to be.

With one another. And so, maybe Paul and Cindy are just like all the rest. Of just needing patience in sanctification. And this is not only them helping Paul and Cindy.

This is all constituting the full extent of people. Not just inner circles. But all. Now, this being a set of participles in this passage.

[16:34] Why would Paul end a series of participles in such a way? It is because each and every participle that he uses here.

Has a certain level demanding of our patience. Think about the patience that a pastor needs in admonishing and instructing.

It wasn't too long ago that I saw a video on Facebook of this sheep that needed rescuing out of this rut. I don't know if anybody saw this. But it said the life of a pastor.

And so this guy comes over and pulls the sheep up out of this rut that it's utterly stuck in. And once releasing it, the sheep goes hopping and hopping and hopping and right back in the same rut.

And it said the life of a pastor. Think about the admonishing. The level of patience that's needed in admonishing. Think of the level of patience needed in encouraging.

[17:34] And encouraging. Think of the level of patience needed in helping. Similar to that of admonishing.

Paul ends this way in a chronological fashion which ends to not only this specific situation as he's commanding. But it stretches to not only our inner circles but to all.

To be patient with them all. And however it demands. Patience. Did you know that your level of patience is under attack?

Technology specifically is making us. Training us. How to be impatient. A survey suggests that in our society of immediacy, our patience runs out in seconds.

This is how many seconds with a couple different situations. In 14 minutes, we are prone to losing our patience at Bob Evans for waiting for our food to come out.

[18:51] 14 minutes, we completely lose it. At that point. And we say something. Man, that food's taking a while. 14 minutes. Over half of people.

About half of people who are surveyed. Saying that waiting in line for just 30 seconds. At Walmart. Anywhere. Paying your bill at Bob Evans. Waiting in line for 30 seconds.

You begin to lose your temper. 22 seconds for people to express frustration. Honey, our TV is not loading. As fast as it was yesterday.

Our computer. We need to watch this movie. We've been sitting here. Are we going to die? We're on to 23 seconds. 20 seconds to begin cursing.

At the slow drawing ink that we're writing on a card. 16 seconds for people that people begin to curse at a webpage that's needing to be loaded.

[19:56] I've got to say, that's weak. 16 seconds to be mad at a webpage loading. I don't think it's anything. You didn't grow up in the 90s with a computer. That thing would be dialing. And you'd be sitting there for well over 16 seconds.

That was normal. Not to mention pushing the button to turn the computer on. And sitting there looking at a screen. We saw 16 seconds these days.

And obviously with the Amazon Prime culture, people begin to get annoyed by 3.8 days that their mail hasn't arrived.

Those pesky Sundays where they don't do deliveries. I tell you, upsets everyone, right? You don't have to talk to me about patience. We have four children under the age of 10.

And we basically lose our patience multiple times during the day. So, basically what I'm saying is we're in this together, church. This journalist who wrote this article about patience and how the culture is training us to be severely impatient.

[21:07] Says that, quote, Creating an expectation of instant delivery creates an increased intercession for instant gratification.

We receive emails or electronic messages and feel compelled to reply instantly. And if someone, for whatever reason, doesn't reply to our messages instantly, we begin to twitch, as this article says. Technology creates the expectation that everything should move more quickly. As if this somehow makes humans more productive.

Amen. The culture has been training us for quite an awful long time to be impatient.

And unfortunately, when this is experienced in the church, the gospel is distorted, church. And we misrepresent God who is ever so forbearing with us.

[22:15] One commentator said it perfectly. Saying one might say that the idle, as Paul is instructing and commanding the church to be patient with. The anxious and the weak may say that

those are problem children in the church family.

Those are the, yeah, just don't worry about them. That's just how they are. Don't worry about Paul and Cindy. They're plagued, respectively, with problems of understanding, of faith, of conduct. Basically, that they don't understand what the Bible says. Or Paul and Cindy don't know what faith is. They're anxious for no reason. Or their conduct. How are they still struggling with this sin? This is easy for me. Every church member is surrounded by members of this kind. As this commentator says.

We have no excuse for becoming impatient with them on the ground that they are difficult, demeaning, disappointing, argumentative, rude. And the list goes on and on and on.

[23 : 24] We are without excuse for that. And on the contrary, we are to be patient with them all. As patience is translated here as long-suffering.

Which is an attribute of God. Which is a fruit of the Spirit. And a characteristic of love, isn't it? For any married couples. Long-suffering.

Sometimes longer for some couples than others. But since God has been infinitely patient with us. As he was, for example, with Saul of Tarsus.

The very man writing this letter. We too must be patient with others. I got a challenge for you based on verse 14. What does your level of patience say about the gospel?

What does your level of patience say about the gospel? I'm not trying to compare or contrast different instances of what makes one person impatient with the other.

[24 : 29] We all have our things that go on. What does your level of patience say about the gospel? And specifically, when your brothers and sisters in our community.

Or maybe even outsiders. Become difficult. Demanding. Disappointing. Argumentative. Or rude to us. Does our response to such people define the gospel?

Or distort the gospel? This should challenge us today. Church, God has provided a model of forbearance towards us. And so we ought to be compelled to model that same forbearance towards others.

Whether we like it. Feel like it. Or not. This is a command. And we see as section two comes. Not only is the church to be a harmonious community of forbearance.

But in verse 15. A community of grace. Verse 15 continues. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil.

[25 : 41] But always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. See that no one. Some translations say the word where we see as see to it.

And this brings about a vigilance in our attitude. This is similar to remember when we were talking about the breath. The breath place. The breastplate of righteousness.

The helmet of salvation. Paul's faith, hope, and love that he tied into Isaiah's terminology. And that attentiveness of a military lineup of troops.

When the sergeant says attention. That jerk up, chin up. Attention. That vigilant attitude. He says to see to it that no one repays evil for evil.

You want to know why? He says to be vigilant. Because this implies that it's not a matter of his concern if this is going to happen. It's a matter of his concern of when it happens.

[26 : 48] Because this is prone in our sinful nature to repay evil for evil. Oh, someone said this about me? Oh, I got words for them.

Right? But vengeance, as we put it. See to it that no one repays evil. Anyone evil for evil. This is to pay back and reward and to punish based on what the person deserves.

As if we are to judge. And being evil, morally objective behavior. And Paul provides also a basis for the reoccurrence of this command.

He says, but always, on every occasion, seek to do good. Always seek to do good.

Now, easier said than done, church. You can sit here and nod your head all you want. But when it comes down to it, when things get real and people get hurt, we go back to scripture like this and we're challenged.

[28 : 00] To do good to one another. Always. Everyone. Locally and outsiders. Mask or no mask, may I say. Vaccine or no vaccine.

To do good to everyone. All. Doing evil towards others is unjustifiable and non-negotiable.

And Paul makes a similar case to the first section of forbearance and continues that thought into section two with grace. Did you know that repaying evil for evil, known as retaliation in simple terms,

is the antonym of grace?

Grace. It's the complete antonym of grace. Giving back what the people deserve. Could you imagine if God did that to us?

God has provided us a model of grace towards others. Grace. So we ought to be compelled to model that same grace towards others.

[29 : 06] Whether they deserve it or not. Because grace is a gift of God to the ill-deserving, giving them the complete opposite of what they deserve. Praise God that he deals that way with us.

The antonym of grace. At the heart of retaliation in the community of God, our eyes become fixated upon ourselves rather than fixated upon God.

It's plain and simple. Furthermore, when retaliation is conducted in the name of God, as if you were God's justice warrior to make the record right, this is the impenetrable of taking the Lord's name in vain.

And if we consider the Thessalonians' context, let's go back to Thessalonica now. And Paul is writing this church who's experiencing great affliction.

People hate these people. The Jews hate them because they're claiming that Jesus was the Messiah. The Greeks hated them because they're causing dishonor to their false gods that they had.

[30 : 15] Those Christians coming from both sides. They didn't have much of a fan club, I'll tell you about it. And they were potential enemies of the state. Paul was accused of civil treason in Acts 17.

It was suddenly driven out after just three weeks. Like a handful of weeks being among this church that began. Think about that affliction for a moment.

And Paul is telling this church, the very people that want your head, you're to love them. You're to not repay evil for evil. There is no retaliation in this instance.

What Paul is saying to this, the church then, and the church now, is that we need to walk closely in Christ's footsteps. Which involves submitting ourselves to God just as Christ did when he suffered at the very hands of his countrymen.

And did not return insult for insult as 1 Peter 2, 23 speaks. A church who excels in forbearance and grace between these two verses.

[31 : 24] A church that excels in these two things. Towards insiders and outsiders. With whatever skin color, whatever ethnicity might be involved.

This is a church who truly knows that all judgment rests in the hands of God. And if somebody does wrong to you, vengeance rests in the hands of God.

And we covered that in 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 6. All forms of personal revenge and retaliations are fruits of the unsaved.

I can't say this enough. But if we can't get our stuff together in here, we have nothing to offer to the world. And Paul is saying that for that purpose in this church.

You need to get yourself past your own offenses and to love one another. And to be patient not only in this instant. But I need your patience to stretch outside of your gatherings as well.

[32 : 32] To the very people that want your heads. This challenges us, doesn't it? Jesus, too, taught his disciples to love both the neighbor and the enemy.

And not to resist evildoers or curse them in return. But in the Sermon on the Mount, we see, turn the other cheek if someone hits you. Followers of Jesus are illogically called to love their accusers.

Plain and simple. And never repay evil for evil. A church that excels at this, defines the gospel, and is set apart just as the nation of Israel was set apart in conduct in the Old Testament.

And this is how God intended it to be. I love how Sproul says, A Christian must treat others justly and work for their genuine good, as Isaiah 56 and 58 say.

It is remarkable. It is a remarkable part of the Christian morality. That the Christian, following the example of Christ, should refuse to seek personal retaliation.

[33 : 38] That is clear evidence of a changed heart who truly understands what grace is all about. Let's step back for a moment, church.

I know I kind of just laid it on you this morning. And we just jumped right into the text. But what a beautiful picture of what God intended for this church.

Regardless of the image that may have come to your mind as we began our time this morning of the one another community of God. We see that this, when done right, when expressing the very grace that we received, when expressing the very forbearance that we've received, this is the most

uplifting thing that can exist in this world.

When we assemble together, it's not a burden, but it's a joy. It's uplifting to our souls. It's not something that we try to hide away on a live stream. We want to get together with the family of God personally.

We want to be known by them personally, and we want to know them personally. This is what God's design was intended to be. Paul is providing the whole congregation the command to care for each other as brothers and sisters, as a family, even though the brothers are annoying at times, even though the sisters hog the outlets in the bathroom with their curling irons and straighteners, all sorts of things, and we'll stop there.

[35 : 13] To care for each and all of our brothers and sisters, to give support, to encourage and admonish to the church's, quote, problem children.

Paul is providing the whole congregation the command to model Christ as we cultivate patience, renounce retaliation, and pursue kindness. What a picture.

Paul says, it is a beautiful vision for the local church as a community, not only of mutual comfort and encouragement, but of mutual forbearance and service as well.

So if you're a follower in Christ, I have an exhortation for you. Your sin must die at the foot of the cross, however it may kind of appear and manifest in your life.

Your impatience must die at the foot of the cross. Your bitterness, your resentment must die. Your unforgiveness must die.

[36 : 26] Your vengefulness must die. Your evil intentions must die. And guess what? That whole list is still applicable even if somebody calls you out on it.

Because that's the most loving thing that we can do within a community is to say, hey brother, I've been seeing this and I love you enough to tell you that it seems like you need to work on a couple of things.

And that's the most loving thing that we could ever accept from one another in this community of God. When the church excels in dying to our flesh in these ways, we are identified as forgiven, as forbearing, as gracious people who have been recipients of forgiveness, of forbearance, and of grace.

Are you dying to your sinful instincts or are you feeding it? The quote is true. That which is not fed cannot grow.

So if you're choking your sin out, it cannot grow any longer. And that is our aim as his community. Let us all surrender in all times of our flesh.

[37 : 38] And maybe you're joining us today and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ today. Maybe church has kind of been just a ritual in your past.

Mom and dad poured water on you to get you out of bed and get to church. Maybe the pastor was mean or things like that. Maybe you have this false image of an experience, a negative experience in your life.

Maybe you're not a follower of Jesus Christ. Maybe something within the attributes of the harmony of the church as God designed is something that you desire, but you feel disqualified to partake in. As if you need to be some sort of dressed up, you need a cool like power coat like this or something like that. I don't know. Like you need to be dressed up and to look good and everything to be a part of that community.

Right? You feel disqualified to kind of enter in due to your failures. I got news for you. I want to encourage you. The community of God are all made up of problem children.

[38 : 49] We are all problem children. I am a problem child. Ask my wife. Just kidding. We are all problem children. We are all imperfect.

And that's why we need these commands in our lives to remind us all the more as we're drawing upon the day of the Lord. Whether it comes tomorrow or it comes a week from now or maybe it doesn't even come in our lifetime.

This is how we ought to establish ourselves in this organization called the church here on earth. I am a Paul. I am a Cindy.

And so are we all. We fail ourselves as others often. However, by the forbearance and grace of God, we are bonded in the common fiber of growing and dying to our sin.

And this is a process and it's a progressive in its nature and maturing in its content. Just as Christ died for you and by his blood, you can receive forgiveness of your sin.

[39 : 56] And it was upon the cross of Calvary that your sin was dealt with, that it was atoned for. So if you are not a follower in Jesus Christ, be assured in the resurrection and ascension that you are justified.

You are made right. You are pardoned. And there's assurance whether you feel like it or not. And the communion of God is something that creates an ongoing assurance that we believe that you are still a Christian.

Come to faith today. Because the church that God intended for this earth looks quite like this. And we are a church after that.

At Youngstown Metro. May we all remember these words and reflect on these words this week. And evaluate our hearts and actions towards all people. Let us be reminded in a simple poem.

When our patience runs thin. May we count the cost. And place our sin at the foot of the cross. Let's pray.