

6.28.20 ~ 1Thessalonians 5:14,

Reaching Out to the Unruly, Fainthearted, and Weak Among You...

Read 1Thessalonians 5:12-13... Last week we studied how Paul, writing to the believers in Thessalonica, requested of them that they both appreciate and show high regard for those who have been given the responsibility to care for, teach, and lead them, in the Lord.

Read 1Thessalonians 5:14... Now Paul urges the believers in Thessalonica, to step out and help their brothers and sisters in Christ who are clearly in need. The Greek word translated *urge* means, to come alongside someone to help them.

Paul lists several types or categories of individuals who are in need of brother/sister to brother/sister association and accountability, made effectual by offering concern, compassion, warning, correction, support, instruction, and modeling concerning what is right and good and acceptable among God's family.

Before you start looking around or considering who you think might fit into the categories of unruly, fainthearted, or weak, you ought to first look into the mirror of God's Word, illuminated by God's Spirit, and you'll most likely see that you have reflected one or more of these negative attributes during your life as a Christian.

Paul urges *the brethren* to *admonish the unruly*. The Greek word translated *admonish* [*noutheteo*] here means to warn or strongly advise someone concerning the consequences of continuing in their sinful and/or harmful behavior, i.e., they will not have peace, or joy, or comfort, if they continue as they are presently behaving.

There is a method of counseling based on this word *noutheteo*, it is called nouthetic counseling, and I am convinced that it really is the only practice, of all the so-called forms of Christian counseling, that is in alignment and agreement with what God's Word teaches.

Nouthetic counseling is much more than just warning, it is coming alongside someone to express care and concern, confronting what is wrong with the standard being God's Word, confirming the changes that need to be made to correct the behavior, and then comforting the person, letting them know you are willing to help them through this process of change.

There are a couple of places where the word [*noutheteo*] is used, this helps us gain understanding of its importance. To the Pastor-Elder-Overseers of the church in Ephesus, Paul exhorts them in **Acts 20:31-32**, "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to *admonish* each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

To the believers in the church at Colossae, Paul urges them in **Colossians 3:16-17**, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and *admonishing* one another with psalms [OT] and hymns [NT] and spiritual songs [personal praise to God], singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

To admonish is to seek the best for a person, whether they are in agreement with your warning advice or not. I came up with an Acronym of my own using the word **WARN**: **W**ake up, heed the Word of God. **A**cknowledge your sin. **R**epent and turn back to God. **N**ow, get up and walk [live] in a manner that is pleasing to God, according to His Word, and beneficial to those around you.

Who is Paul urging us to admonish? those who are *unruly* [the Greek word translated *unruly* those who are out of step with everyone else; those who aren't serving, instead they are spectating, and they don't seem to care what the Bible teaches. Unruly people can be apathetic, disorderly, rebellious, and contentious; instead of being willing to help make things better, they sit in the seat of mockers, criticizing others who serve, while undermining the church leadership, causing division and dissension in the body.

They need to be prayerfully and personally approached and admonished [privately at first], warning them against continuing in the disorderly and sinful behavior they are exhibiting, exhorting them to find out what pleases God and is beneficial for God's people, and then start doing it; we should offer to help and support them if they are responsive and willing to put forth the effort that will be necessary to make changes for the better.

But, what do you say to an unruly person? Well, for starters, you can show them the consequences of their current behavior, e.g., their lack of faith [no works = dead faith]; their lack of joy, blessing, purpose, and peace; their lack of close relationships in the family of God. Then you can show them the benefit of making the proper changes, e.g., their faith will grow stronger and they will have God's assurance, joy and peace; they will be able to know and maintain a strong sense of purpose; they will be able to develop intimate, enjoyable, and valuable relationships with other believers, but most importantly, they will have intimacy with God, through His Spirit, because of Christ.

God's people must care enough to get involved even with the unruly among us; it is not just the responsibility of the pastor, but that of all mature believers.

Matthew 18:15-16, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take

one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.”

Galatians 5:16-23, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”

1Corinthians 2:12-16, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

Next, Paul urges the believers to encourage the fainthearted [the Greek word translated *fainthearted* here is a compound made up two words, *small and soul*], i.e., these people are small souled, causing them to be worried and fearful all the time; often they appear discouraged or in despair; for they want nothing but to be safe, they avoid change, trouble, and persecution. They need caring and mature believers to encourage them [the Greek word translated *encourage* here means, to speak alongside someone words of comfort and consolation, in order to give them courage].

What do you say to the fainthearted? Well, they need to know the truths of God’s Word in reference to the salvation they have received in Christ; they need to know that nothing can separate them from the love of God, that He will never leave them, and that He has provided all they need for life on earth and for eternity.

Next, Paul urges the believers to help a third group of people among them, the weak [the Greek word translated *weak* here, has to do with people who are more susceptible to things that aren't necessarily sin, but have to do with the unrealized freedom and liberty believers have been given in Christ, e.g., during the early church, a person coming to Christ, from a background out of idol worship may be afraid to eat any meat, for fear that they might unknowingly eat some meat that had been sacrificed to idols.

Romans 14:1-3, "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions*. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him."

1Corinthians 8:4, "Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one." **6-9**, "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."

Or it might be that a person's conscience won't let him eat meat because of the killing of the animal that is being served as food.

Acts 10:9-15, "...Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. But he became hungry and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. A voice came to him, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat!' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.' Again a voice came to him a second time, 'What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.'"

Romans 14:20-23, "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin."

Mature believers should come alongside those who are weak perhaps because of prior beliefs and lifestyles combined with their own lack of understanding of what the Scriptures teach concerning their freedom in Christ.

Jesus said (**Matthew 15:10-11**), "After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, 'Hear and understand. *It is* not what enters into the mouth *that* defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.'" **17-18**, "Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man."

1Timothy 4:1-4, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer."

Way too often believers get caught up in judging what other believers eat, or drink, or listen to, or drive, or wear, etc. We have been given much freedom in Christ, and we have God's Word to guide and direct us; we must not become legalists or liberals, but must allow God's Spirit to help us balance both the Spirit and the Letter of His Law, so that we can know what it says and what it means by what it says..

1Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything." **19-20**, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

We need for mature Christians to step up and step out alongside the unruly to admonish them; to come alongside the fainthearted to encourage them; and come alongside the weak to help strengthen them.

Do you see that the main response we are to have with each of these problem or troubled believers is to provide a clear understanding of what God's Word says and means, articulated through a brother or sister in Christ who is willing to come alongside them.

In the last phrase in **1Thessalonians 5:14**, Paul urges the believers to "be patient with everyone." Some of you have been Christians longer than I have, and some of you are younger in your faith. Whether young or old in the faith, it is easy at times to become impatient with other believers for a variety of reasons: a lack of

maturity, an unwillingness to serve in the church, or just a variety of pet peeves, personal biases, dislikes and/or disagreements.

But we must be patient with one another, because God gives us patience, as we earlier read in **Galatians 5:22-23**, as one characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

Patient people are forgiving people.

In **Matthew 18:21-22**, Peter asked Jesus, "Lord how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

Paul writes (**Ephesians 4:32**), "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

As we reach out to those in the church who are unruly, fainthearted, and weak, we are to do so patiently, imitating God our Father, remembering how much God has forgiven us in Christ (**Ephesians 5:1-2**), "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

Pastor Mike
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