

"The Ministry of Restoration—part 8" 1 Thessalonians 5:14—continued

We're interested in getting people to come in the *front door* of the church. That's called the ministry of outreach. To do all we can to reach unsaved people with the gospel, disciple them, and incorporate them into the life of the church is our mission. We might call that *front door ministry*.

But there's another a vital responsibility that many churches neglect. We could call it *back door ministry*. What's that? It's what happens to far too many who've entered the front door of the church. As time passes they begin to trickle out the *back door* and eventually stop coming all together.

Granted, a person who stops coming to church is responsible for their choice and will be held accountable before the Lord for such a decision. But churches are responsible too. We're responsible to engage in *back door ministry*.

Think about it. We have people at the *front door* of the church building. Why are they there? To greet folks who come. To help them get where they need to be, to the correct class, etc. To identify potential needs and connect the individuals with someone who can help meet those needs.

Do we need people at the *back door*? I don't mean literally standing at the back door (although I've observed that one of the first steps people take towards being inactive is they look for ways to avoid interaction at the front door! They leave immediately after the worship service ends and go out the side or back door to avoid having to talk with anybody about spiritual matters in their life). I do believe the Word of God talks, at least in principle, about *back door ministry*.

For several weeks now we've been doing a series called *The Ministry of Restoration and Recovery*. We've looked at several texts: Galatians 6:1, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, John 21, Romans 15:1-3, and Matthew 18. Most recently we've been digesting Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, and to that verse we return this evening: "And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone."

Review... Let's review some observations made the last two weeks based on this verse.

1. There were at least four different kinds of people in the church at Thessalonica. One could safely assume these four kinds of people are present in most if not all churches. Here are the categories Paul used:

The idle

The timid

The weak

Everyone else

2. In this verse Paul gives an exhortation to the "brothers" who received this letter. He said that the "brothers" were to identify the above four groups of people in the church and then treat them accordingly.

This would imply that you do not handle an *idle* person the same way you would the *timid* person, nor the timid the same as the *weak* person, and so on.

3. We are not to treat everyone in the church the same way. The *idle* need to be “warned.” The *timid* need to be “encouraged.” The *weak* need “help.” *Everyone* needs “patient” treatment.

Review first category...

Two weeks ago we investigated the first category, both who the people are and how we are to help them.

Category #1: The Idle

The idle: Greek *ataktos* = out of order, out of place, not in proper order

--hence, disorderly, insubordinate, even undisciplined; deviating from the prescribed order or rule

--hence, lazy, idle. The KJV uses the term ‘unruly.’

--The related verb *ataktéo* means “to set oneself outside the order,” “to evade obligations,” “to act without discipline, or irresponsibly.”[\[1\]](#)

Examples of word usage:

--used of soldiers when they were out of rank

--used in Greek society of those who did not show up for work

Warn the idle: The Greek verb is *noutheteo* which is comprised of the noun *nous* (for mind) and the verb *tithemai* (to put into).

--it’s a command meaning to admonish, to exhort, to instruct, to warn

--it appears in Acts 20:31 and Col . 1:28

--it means “to provide instruction so as to correct behavior and belief”[\[2\]](#)

--it appears in 5:12 where Paul says concerning pastors, “who are over you in the Lord and who *admonish* you.”

We looked at indicators in the letter itself as to what kind of people Paul had in mind when he referred to the “out of order” ones...

--4:3 “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality...”

The fact that Paul gave this instruction indicates the fact that some in Thessalonica struggled with moral purity. If a person engages in immoral activity, how should the church

treat them? Do they need *encouragement*? No. They need to be *warned*.

--4:11 “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you.”

What does that instruction indicate about what was happening in Thessalonica? Some were NOT leading quiet lives and working with their own hands. Apparently, some were sponging off the rest of the church. And based on what Paul said in his second letter (which was written about six months after the first letter), some folks didn’t take to heart this instruction in the first letter. Note the same word *idle* in the following...

--2 Thes 3:11-12 “We hear that some among you are **idle**. They are not busy; they are busy-bodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.”

Paul did here what he told the church to do in 1 Thes 5:14. He “warned the idle.” What was to happen if the idle didn’t respond to the verbal warning? Note...

--2 Thes 3:14-15 “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but **warn** him as a brother.”

Observation: When a person is knowingly disobeying God’s Word, he doesn’t need our “support” or “encouragement.” Paul says he needs our *warning*. And if he refuses to heed our warning he needs even stronger warning in the form of action that is intended to help him come to grips with the seriousness of his condition so he will change.

Review second category...

Category #2: The Timid

The timid: the Greek is *oligopsychos*, a rare word

--literally “small souled” or “short breath”; those who are losing heart, perhaps on the basis of physical weakness

--we could translate 5:14, “Encourage those who are losing heart.”

--feble-minded (KJV); faint-hearted (NKJV)

--refers to those who do not have courage, those whose hearts are not strong

--carries the idea of being despondent, exhausted, and at times anxious

Examples of a small-souled person: I think of a person in a rest home or care facility whose health is failing and whose perspective is likewise failing. I also think of a person who has been hit by a series

of losses (like Naomi in Ruth 1).

What does this kind of person need from us? They don't need what the *idle* person needs, to be challenged to change (i.e. to "buck up!"). Rather, as Paul tells us...

Encourage the timid: The Greek is *paramutheomai* and appears 4 times in NT

--translated 'comfort' all four times in the AV

--to encourage, cheer up someone

--can mean to speak to someone in a friendly way

--can carry the idea of admonish (according to Kittell), to urge, to win over, to spur on, to persuade, to convince; other nuances include, to refresh, to cheer, to tend (as with plants)

Examples of usage:

1 Thes. 2:11-12 "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹²encouraging [*parakalountes*], comforting [*paramutheomai*] and urging [*marturomai*] you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."

Application Questions:

We ran out of time last week when we began to discuss application. Let's do so now, and then we'll break ground on the third category...

1. What is involved in *encouraging* someone? What must you do in practical terms if you are going to engage in the ministry of *encouraging* a small-souled person?
2. How can we determine if someone is struggling because they are "timid" rather than because they are "idle" and therefore need our encouragement rather than our warning?
3. What is the goal of encouraging a timid person? What outcome are we seeking to accomplish? It's not necessary a change in the person's circumstances (the person may never leave the nest home). It is to fill them with hope and courage in the midst of their trial (to encourage means to *put courage in* another person).
4. Why is it important to have the proper goal in mind as we seek to encourage the timid person?

New Material: The third category...

“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”

Category #3: The Weak

The weak: Greek, *asthenas*

--unable, weak, powerless, feeble, infirm, the state of limited capacity

--can mean sick or ill (in a weakened condition physically) as in Matt. 25:43, “I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was *sick* and in prison and you did not look after me.”

--morally weak, unable to do good, a helpless condition; The word is used elsewhere by Paul...

*In 1 Cor. 9:22, “To the *weak* I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.”

*In Romans 5:6, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still *powerless*, Christ died for the ungodly.”

--can refer to those who are weakened physically because of sin, as in 1 Cor. 11:30, “That is why many among you are *weak* and sick (Gr. *arrostos*, ‘not strong, feeble, sickly’), and a number of you have fallen asleep.”

--can refer to any type of weakness; used by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:22, “On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be *weaker* are indispensable...”

--used by Peter of wives in 1 Peter 3:7, “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the *weaker* partner...”

--in extrabiblical Greek it can mean economically weak, poor, without influence; also used of stones that are too weak to stand up under great strain

e.g.—my brother is about 6’2” and over 200 pounds; he’s lifted weights and is stronger than me; What would happen if he picked up a 300 pound bar stack of weights and placed them on my shoulders? The load would crush me to the floor. I am *weaker* than he is.

Who are the ‘weak’ in the church at Thessalonica? I think we find a clue in Paul’s counsel to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 8:9-13 [we see the same Greek root in different forms here]:

“^{?10}Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the **weak**. ^{?11}For if anyone with a **weak** conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? ^{?12}So this **weak** [same Greek word, *asthenas*] brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ^{?13}When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their **weak** conscience, you sin against Christ. ^{?13}Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.”

Discuss: Describe the ‘weak’ person in light of this passage? He is a person who cannot do something that God says is permissible because his conscience is weak, that is, triggered by an unbiblical standard. He is probably a relatively new Christian who, for instance, if he saw a fellow Christian eating meat previously offered to an idol, *could not handle* it.

To summarize, this person may be weak because of personal sin. On the other hand, he is not necessarily guilty of sin but is morally weak and vulnerable due to a conscience that has yet to be trained by learning God’s Word. What does this person need from his church family?

Help the weak: Greek, *antechomai*, present middle imperative indicating continual responsibility to do so

--the root *echo* means ‘to have, to hold’

--cling to, be devoted to, hold firmly to (sound doctrine; Tit. 1:9)

--assist

--to take an interest in; to concern oneself with, to hold fast

--used by Jesus in Matt. 6:24, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will *be devoted to* the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

--used by Paul in Tit. 1:9, “He must *hold firmly to* the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

Let that sink in. We love sound doctrine. We guard it. We study it so as to be able to detect false doctrine that can subtly creep in. And Paul says we are to do with the weak person what we do with sound doctrine.

Discuss: What does that mean in practical terms?

Application Questions:

1. With these definitions in mind, describe a scenario in which a person “helps the weak” in the church.
2. What’s the difference between the *timid* person and the *weak* person, and what distinct ministries do they need from us?
3. What should a church do with a *weak* person who refuses to take steps to grow up and get stronger (i.e. a person who has been in the church for 15 years but still is *weak*)?
4. What is something *you* need to do in light of this instruction?

Category #4: Everyone else

Everyone else: Greek, *panta*

--means 'all, every, any, every kind of, the whole'—that pretty much covers everybody in the church! This is what the idle, the timid, the weak, AND all the rest of the church need from us...

Be patient with: Greek, *makrothymeo*, comprised of two smaller word: 'long' (*makro*) + 'wrath' (*thumos*); the verb is present, active, imperative indicating this is a command we must continually obey (not a one time shot!). This is something we are to do over and over with the 'weak' in the church.

--be longsuffering; to exhibit internal and external control in difficult circumstance

--have patience, wait, be forbearing with; bear long, suffer long, patiently endure

--be of a long spirit, not to lose heart; to be patient in enduring the offenses and injuries of others^[3]

--used in 1 Cor. 13:4, "Love is *patient*."

--in the noun form it is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22 patience)

--it's what the farmer does (James 5:7) as he waits patiently for his crop to grow and produce a harvest; he doesn't dig up his garden in June saying, "This crazy piece of ground. I've been waiting for 6 weeks for some fruit!" No, he keeps waiting because he knows the harvest will come.

Application Questions:

1. Why is it vital to remember that *patience* is a fruit of the Spirit? For starters, it means we do not have the ability in and of ourselves to fulfill this command. We need the Spirit's enablement. And we have it! We who know Christ and have the Spirit can do what Paul is commanding here in 1 Thes 5:14!

2. What does it mean in practical terms to *be patient with* people? Give examples.

^[1] Kittle, *TDNT*

^[2] Greek-English Lexicon

^[3] Enhanced Strongs Lexicon