

Practical guidelines – Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2015

*“ But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. 16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.” (1.Thes.5:12-22).*

Beloved in The Lord,

God’s Word is very practical and gives us clear and concise advice as to how we should live. The Bible is a great teacher and we can learn lessons from every page. The Bible is not merely a collection of nice stories and poems and songs, no it is The Living all powerful Word of Almighty God. The Bible is extremely practical and gives us very clear guidelines as to how we are to live and serve God.

Our text today is a great example. In ten verses Paul gives us 15 very clear guidelines for the Christian life. If we both individually and also corporately as a congregation adhere to these guidelines then we will find that we are on God’s path and that as a result the God of peace Himself will sanctify us entirely; and our spirit and soul and body will be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we have our AGM, and so I think that it is an appropriate time for us to consider these guidelines and allow them to sink deep into our hearts. Obviously time will not allow us to unpack each one, but we will, as it were have a brief overview of each one.

The first thing Paul teaches us is that we are to appreciate and honour (hold in esteem) those who have charge over us and who instruct us in God’s ways. God is a God of order, and we find this principle at work all throughout Scripture. We are to honour those who are in charge. We are to esteem those who hold an office. Paul writes: ***“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”***

This is very important. A couple of weeks ago in my message I encouraged you to pray for me and also to pray for one another and to support one another. It is so easy to criticise and to be negative about those who serve, but what does that do? Nothing good. We need to

esteem and support those who serve in God's work. I believe that this concept is rapidly disappearing in society, and is no longer in the forefront of peoples thinking.

The next thing that Paul encourages us to do is to live in peace. He writes: "**Live in peace with one another.**" One of the major ways in which Satan operates in a congregation, is to sow discord amongst the members. We need to be awake and alert at all times to his schemes. We must not allow him to gain a foothold. Most divisions in a congregation begin over something fairly trivial and insignificant. May we strive to put out the fires before they take hold. We need to strive to live in peace with one another at all times.

The next guideline to live by is **admonish the unruly**. In doing this we must always be motivated by love and love alone. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "**but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,**" (Eph.4:15)

The point is that we are to always speak, and teach the truth, but we must always do it in love. True love does not brush away sin, nor sweep it under the carpet. True love deals with sin and unruly behaviour lovingly.

The next admonishment is **encourage the faint hearted**. We need to encourage one another in our walk with Christ. We need to support, encourage, prop one another up. So many are weak and faint hearted; living in fear of this or that. We have the Living Word of Almighty God. We are ambassadors for The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We are to encourage the faint hearted. We need to show those who fear, that God is all powerful; all knowing; ever present. In order to be able to encourage the faint hearted we need to be strong in our own faith and convictions. For this to be so, we need to walk closely with Jesus every day.

The fifth thing Paul teaches us is **help the weak**. We read in James: "**Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world**" (James 1:27). In Bible times the two groups in society that were the most needy were widows and orphans. True religion, true service to God is to help, to serve the weak. We need not look too far, before we find weak people who need our help. I thank God that as a congregation we are giving and are helping orphans and the needy, but we could be and should be doing so much more.

The sixth lesson is: **be patient with everyone**. I admit, this is one that I find challenging and difficult at times. Our example must be Jesus. When we are in danger of losing our patience with people, it is good to remind ourselves how patient God is with us. Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive a brother for the same sin. He said is seven enough. Jesus shocked him by saying not merely seven times, but seventy times seven.

The next exhortation is closely related to this one, namely: **See that no one repays another with evil for evil**. Here we must learn to control our sinful and natural tendencies. Our old nature. Here we must also very often swim against the stream. When somebody does

something bad or evil our natural tendency is to retaliate, to repay in kind. To seek revenge. This is not the Christian way. We must control ourselves. If some individual or some group does something against us, or writes something bad, or spreads slander then the right reaction is to turn the other cheek. God sees all things and knows all things, and in His time all will have to give an account to Him. God will sort it all out in His time. We need to learn to leave it in His hands.

The next thing is: ***“always seek after that which is good.”*** We are given very clear direction here. Always seek after that which is good. This means to be actively striving, seeking after all that is good. This is done by keeping our focus on Jesus at all times and by obediently following Him. We are to strive, to surrender, to seek God’s will in all things at all times. This normally means swimming against the tide.

***Rejoice always.*** This is only possible when our minds are set right and we think correctly. We must be focused on Jesus and God’s Word all the time, and not on our circumstances. Paul wrote to the Philippians: ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!” (Phil.4:4).***

Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS. In all things at all times. You have much more to rejoice about than to worry about. You have a Father who loves you with everlasting love. He has saved you from sin and death and hell. When you don’t feel like rejoicing remind yourself of this truth: ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)***

Here we have a reason to rejoice always. Once you are a child of God by faith in Jesus, then nothing can separate you from Him – ever! Praise God!

***Pray without ceasing.*** This means that we are to live our life in total surrender to God, aligned with Him at all times. We pray this when we sing or pray: “Take Thou my hand and lead me o’er life’s rough way, With Heavenly manna feed me from day to day. Without Thy grace and favour I go astray. Take Thou my Hand O Saviour – Choose Thou my way.”

It means to keep the line of communication open all the time. We need to have the line open in both directions – both speaking to Him, but also listening when He speaks with us.

***In everything give thanks.*** In this statement we have the key to a victorious and blessed life. Nothing brings us closer to God, than a life of thanksgiving – an attitude of gratitude. When we give thanks in all things we demonstrate to God and to others that we believe and know that God is in absolute control of everything, and that nothing happens to us outside His knowledge. Begin the day with thanksgiving. Spend the day thanking and praising God. End the day praising Him and thanking Him. In everything give thanks. Oh, how our faith would grow if we did this.

***Do not quench the Spirit.*** Religious people tend to quench the Spirit with their rules and traditions. God is alive. He is a creator. He often moves in the supernatural realm and specialises in the extraordinary (miracles). May we never try to confine God in a little box. We need to allow the Holy Spirit free reign, sovereign rule over us in our personal as well as congregational lives.

The next teaching is again very closely related. Paul writes: ***Do not despise prophetic utterances.*** A prophet speaks God's Word in a situation. All throughout history people have despised prophets, because they have not liked the message, especially when it makes them uncomfortable.

Paul goes on to say: ***But examine everything carefully.*** This relates to the previous statement. We must examine all teaching and all events in the light of Scripture. Satan is a deceiver and specialises in counterfeit and deception. He has many false prophets, teachers and miracle workers. The Bible exhorts us to test the spirits. Test the teachings. That which is good, i.e. in line with Scripture we are to keep; that which is contrary to God's Word, we are to discard. All that is in alignment with God's Word is good. Anything that contradicts or teaches something that is not Scriptural is a lie and false teaching. That is why we need to study the Word and be well versed in it.

The last thing Paul teaches us is: ***abstain from every form of evil.*** God is calling us to live a holy life. That means to depart from, to abstain from all evil. To keep away from anything that is unholy. We are to abstain from things that are not pleasing or honourable to God. This includes the way we speak.

A holy life or to use the theological term a sanctified life is a life that is separated from sin and evil. A congregation must be different to a club or regular society.

The congregation is the Body of Christ. The Church is His bride. We need to keep this in the fore front of our thinking and in all we do.

I said at the outset, that if we strive to live by these guidelines we will be blessed.

Paul ends this passage with some very beautiful words of blessing, with which I close today:

***“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.” (1.Thes.5:23-24).***

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.