

# Patience unto Peace (Part 1)

Living out 1 Thessalonians 5:14 within the Covenant Family of God

---

## Introduction

### The Text

A. I love traveling through a book of the Bible as we have been with Luke now for about a year. But in no way do I feel locked into some rigid schedule. I'm always open to preaching on other texts I feel God puts on my heart.

1. I'm a member of David and Lenora Lin's Home Group and we've been going through 1 Th for quite a while now. A month back or so we came to 5:14. I found myself so moved by this text that I actually woke up the following morning and, in a matter of minutes, outlined much of what we'll be discussing over these next two weeks.

"And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all" (1 Th 5:14).

### Wise Love

A. The 60s, I've been told, were all about free love. 1 Th 5:14 is all about wise love.

1. It's about knowing how to love that person that's standing in front of you—at the office, in the bedroom, in the church. They deal with sin, just like you. They deal with suffering, just like you. They need love from God and from others, just like you.
  - a. So how are you going to love them? What would love say? What would love do? What would wise love look like here and now?
    - i. 1 Th 5:14 is Paul's way of pointing us towards the answer.

B. This morning we'll proceed through three headings: (1) Wise Love in Context; (2) Wise Love in Definition; and (3) Wise Love in Action.

## (1) Wise Love in Context

A. Before we address the particulars of our verse, we must let the surrounding context of this letter orient us.

1. We shall deal much more with the context next time. Today I am only after two of the more overarching themes that Paul develops throughout this book. Seeing these clearly will help us interpret and apply our verse rightly.

## (1) Covenantal Family

- A. The first overarching theme Paul develops is: The Church as Covenantal Family.
- B. This theme is already hinted at in our verse: “And we urge you, brothers (and sisters)...” Paul’s using family language here.
  - 1. Now we might not immediately think all that much of this word “brothers”, but we’ll soon see that this word connects us to a much larger system of thought for Paul.
- C. Paul begins by addressing this letter: “To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1).
  - 1. Immediately the Thessalonians are put within the covenant family of God where God has become their “Father” by virtue of their adoption in His Son Jesus Christ.
- D. But the familial language continues as we keep reading: “<sup>2</sup>We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,<sup>3</sup> remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,<sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1:2–5a).
  - 1. Here is the first of many times Paul will refer to the church as “brothers”. Because God has become our Father through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we have now become brothers and sisters in His covenant family.
- E. From here Paul goes on to describe his relationship with the Thessalonians along almost every possible familial line:
  - 1. He describes himself like a mother: “<sup>5</sup>We never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.<sup>6</sup> Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.<sup>7</sup> But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.<sup>8</sup> So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (2:5–8).
    - a. Any new mom’s in here? What’s one of the first things you come to face? Life is no longer about me. You don’t look for your children to provide for you. Your entire life becomes about you providing for them. And strangely, though it’s hard, you love it!
      - i. Paul is saying: “I approach the church like a mother. I’m not trying to get something out of you. I’m ready lay my life down for you!”
  - 2. Clearly Paul is driving at something here. For he turns immediately from describing himself like a mother to describing himself like a father just a few vv. later: “<sup>11</sup>For

you know how, like a father with his children,<sup>12</sup> we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (2:11–12).

- a. He’s not arguing for gender fluidity here. He’s arguing for the familial bond of the church. He wants us to see that we are the covenant family of God.
3. But he’s not done. Lest we think he’s only interested in describing himself like a parent of the family, he goes on to describe himself like a child: “<sup>17</sup> But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face,<sup>18</sup> because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again...” (2:17–18a).
- a. “Like a child?” you say. “I don’t see any mention of Paul like a child here.” Well, interestingly enough, what the ESV translates as “torn away” at the beginning of v. 17, means simply in the Greek: “orphaned”.
    - i. “To be torn away from you Thessalonian church is to be orphaned, to be without my parents, without my family. And so, naturally, I am trying desperately to get back to you!”
- F. In all of this, Paul is emphasizing one profound reality: namely, the church is the covenant family of God. We have been brought into covenant with God in Christ and through Him we have been brought into covenant with one another. We are covenant brothers and sisters under one covenant Father in one covenant family.
- G. Is this how you approach Mercy Hill? Like a mother laying down her life for the good of others? Like a father laboring to help others grow in the knowledge and wisdom of the Lord? Like a son or a daughter, so that when you miss a church service or an opportunity to worship and fellowship with God’s people, you feel orphaned?
1. Until we approach one another with this kind of bond in love, and commitment, and covenant, we will not be able to work out the wise love of 1 Th 5:14. We will admonish from the hip, we will encourage from a distance, we will help for a limited time only.
    - a. Paul know this. I think that’s why he slips in the familial language: “And we urge you, brothers...” This is family business here!

## (2) Comprehensive Shalom

- A. Let me give you one more overarching theme Paul develops in this letter that will help orient us with 5:14: The Comprehensive Shalom of God. As with the first, this theme arises within the immediate context of v. 14 but connects us from there to a much larger system of Paul’s thought.
- B. Immediately preceding our verse come these words in v. 13b: “Be at peace among yourselves.” This call is likely connected to what’s come before it (vv. 12-13a) with Paul’s

discussion of church members respecting and esteeming their leaders. But it is likely also connected to what follows after in v. 14.

1. “I am calling you—church, covenant family—to labor for peace among yourselves, and here’s what that looks like: ‘admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.’”
  - a. As we press into the family, as we love one another wisely, we are, in fact, pursuing the peace, the shalom, of God.
- C. We are reminded at this point of the comprehensive shalom that the redemption of God is moving towards, of which interpersonal, relational peace is just one dimension. One day, all things will be made right, within me and without—in my soul, in my body, in my relationships with people, with creation, with God Himself.
  1. And this shalom begins in the church—the embassy of heaven, the outpost of God’s new world, the outcropping of God’s new humanity, the living room of God’s family.
    - a. We represent shalom’s slow but steady beginning. From the cross of Christ, through the church, to the world.
- D. It’s this grand vision of the peace of God moving through the covenant family of God, that causes Paul to open and close his letter the way that he does:
  1. “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace” (1:1)...“<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (5:23–24).
    - a. Paul begins and ends this letter by directing them to the God of peace—He has begun His work of peace and He will one day bring it to completion.
      - i. As His covenant family, we are called to partner with Him in this mission, and one of the ways we do that is by living out 1 Th 5:14 with one another.

## (2) Wise Love in Definition

- A. So let’s look at it. We’re just going to scratch the surface here this morning. We’ll do a deep dive next week. All I’m after right now is defining the terms Paul uses.

### (1) Admonish the Idle

- A. First Paul calls us to “admonish the idle...”

- B. Who are the idle? **“Idle”**: “to be out of step and going one’s own way, disorderly, insubordinate; to being without socially recognized constraint, undisciplined.” **“Ataktos** is a military term for the soldier who does not keep in rank” (Tyndale).
1. So we’re not just talking about being lazy here. We’re talking about being insubordinate, rebellious, unruly. These are people who see the line that God has drawn, and they don’t care.
- C. How can we wisely love them? **“Admonish”**: “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, admonish, warn, instruct.”
1. We love them too much to let them go on this way. We don’t sit back and let them walk off a cliff. We throw our body in front of them if we have to. “Brother, sister, turn back towards the narrow way!”

## (2) Encourage the Fainthearted

- A. Next Paul calls us to **“encourage the fainthearted...”**
- B. Who are the fainthearted? **“Fainthearted”**: “faint-hearted, discouraged.” In the Gk. it literally means “small-souled.”
1. These are people who are hurting, who are depressed, who feel like life is stepping on their heart. Have you ever felt like you’re in so much pain, your soul is just shriveling up inside you? Like you’re just a shell of a person? Then you’ve been fainthearted.
- C. How can we wisely love them? **“Encourage”**: “to console, cheer up...someone...especially in connection with death or other tragic events.”
1. We are to come alongside and comfort them with our presence, words, and actions. In the dark night of their soul, we move towards them and sit with them.

## (3) Help the Weak

- A. Next Paul calls us to **“help the weak...”**
- B. Who are the weak? **“Weak”**: “pert. to suffering from a debilitating illness, sick, ill; pert. to experiencing some incapacity or limitation, weak.”
1. These are people who find themselves unable to care for themselves in some way. They might be weak in body, or conscience, or intelligence, or economy, but in one way or another they are in need of something from outside.
- C. How can we wisely love them? **“Help”**: “to have a strong attachment to someone or something, cling to, hold fast to, be devoted to.”

1. Isn't that beautiful?! What are you supposed to do with the weak? Hold them tight! Don't let them go!

### (3) Wise Love in Action (Part 1)

- A. As we move now to consider our last heading: Wise Love in Action, let me make two observations that will close out our time here this morning.

#### (1) Wise Love Wears Many Faces

- A. If there is anything that this verse teaches us it is that, while wise love is always moving towards the other person, it wears many different faces.
- B. Our culture wants to give love one face and one face only right now: tolerance; uncritical, unquestioning acceptance. But biblical love is much more nuanced, much more wise.
  1. Some people call for love with a firm hand, others for love with a soft hand; some people call for love with a closed hand, others for love with an open hand. It is love that guides us at every point, but wise love takes on many faces.
    - a. It would be wrong to encourage or help the idle, and to admonish the fainthearted or the weak. They are in very different places and require very different approaches.
- C. Here's the bottom line: We must know a person truly if we are to love the person wisely.

#### (2) Wise Love Requires Humble Diagnostics

- A. But all of this begs the question: If wisely loving a person requires truly knowing them, how do we begin to truly know them? How do I know whether I am dealing with the rebellious, the depressed, or the disabled?
- B. Sometimes it's hard to tell from the outside, is it not?
  1. That mom that you think needs a talking to because you would never let your kids do that...maybe her kid is on the autistic spectrum and you had no clue; maybe she came from a broken home and is trying her best to correct the poor model she inherited, but she's tired, stressed, and scared. Maybe what you were ready to admonish as unruly, is actually from faintheartedness and weakness. Your admonishment would crush an already shriveling soul.
- C. So what do we do? How do I get to know you truly so I can love you wisely?
  1. This leads me to my second observation: Wise love requires humble diagnostics.
    - a. We can break what I am calling humble diagnostics here down into two parts: (1) Avoid Assumptions; and (2) Ask Questions.

## (1) Avoid Assumptions

- A. I'm just going to let veteran biblical counselor, Paul Tripp, speak to us on this: "Why don't we ask better questions and take the time to really listen? Why don't we ask people more often what they meant by what they said, or why they did what they did? Why don't we ask people to define their terms or explain their logic? Why don't we ask people more about what they were thinking and feeling? Why don't we get them to talk more about the purposes and desires that shaped their decisions? There are many answers to these questions, but one in particular seems to get in the way of our call to function as the Lord's ambassadors. It is the problem of assumptions.

When you assume you do not ask. If you do not ask, you open yourself up to a world of invalid conclusions and misunderstandings. You may try to be God's instrument but miss the mark because you are putting two and two together and getting five—and you don't even know it. Thanks to your assumptions, the person you think you are helping may exist only in your mind...

For personal ministry to be effective, the principle is simple: Don't assume—ask. This is true not only for a good counselor, but for a wise teacher, elder, spouse, parent, or friend as well. Assuming that you already know what you need to know almost always leads to misunderstandings that blunt and derail personal ministry. If you think you can take something for granted, ask anyway. Only then can you be sure that the help you offer will fit this person's situation..." (pp. 169-170).

- B. It is quite interesting that the first action wise love takes could really be classified as inaction: Stop!
1. It's a lot like what our elementary school teachers taught us to do if ever we were to catch on fire: "Stop...drop, and roll."
    - a. Stop! Don't go running off towards your supposed "solution". Until you know the person rightly your running will only fan the flame. Stop the assumptions. "Be quick to hear, [and] slow to speak" (Jam 1:19).

## (2) Ask Questions

- A. In what I just read, Tripp actually points us to the other side of our humble diagnostic process as well: namely, Ask Questions. This really is just the same step put positively. If we are to avoid assumptions we necessarily must ask questions.
1. Wise love is not guided by my preconceived notions but by your particular needs. I will never know if I never ask.
- B. Let me illustrate this for you by reading a story from one missionary's experience overseas: "Over seven years of my twelve in Korea as a foreign missionary were spent doing evangelistic work with prostitutes. My initiation into that ministry came simply because of the large number of those 'unreached peoples' and because I thought they were rather clearly sinners. I saw them as in rebellion against God and needing repentance. And I went calling them to faith. I defined their needs in terms of how I had seen needs in a North American pastorate [Assumptions].

The fruits of my initial encounters were very few. The young women listened but never left prostitution. No one changed. The breakthrough came when one person began to change: [me]. As I worked with the women, I gathered more information about the system of which they were a part [Questions]. I learned that many of them had entered prostitution because it was often the only work they could find in an Asian, male-dominated culture. The war had destroyed their links with the extended family system. And often they were the senior breadwinners. There were brothers and sisters to take care of. Frequently the young women came from rural homes, looking for quick money in the big city. Personal problems at home or a bad economic year sent them looking for a better way. They were met at the trains by pimps, who offered them a place to stay for the night. In the home they were gang-raped. When they got ready to leave, they were informed they had to pay for room and board. They couldn't and found prostitution the only way to pay their debts. After a few weeks of this, their debt was paid for by another brothel owner, and they were moved closer to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. They had become slaves of a system from which they could never break free. Their debts were always higher than their ability to pay. They found themselves imprisoned and oppressed, their humanity buried in shame and guilt.

All this information began to change my attitude...I discovered that a person is not only a sinner. He or she is also sinned against" (Conn, pp. 44-45).

1. Suddenly this man went from admonishing the prostitute as a rebellious sinner, to encouraging her with the liberating grace and love of God, and helping her break free from her oppressors.
  - a. Avoiding assumptions, asking questions, humble diagnostics, changed everything about his approach and made him wise, and effective, in his love.

## Be Patient with Them All

- A. There is one final injunction in **1 Th 5:14** that I have waited to bring up until now: **"...admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all."** Whoever you are dealing with, patience is the governing principle.
- B. This reminds us that whatever we are doing here in the church we are doing in the light of the cross.
  1. The cross, if it says anything at all, says: "I will be patient with you, even to the end, even through death. I will not give up on you!"
- C. We are those who know the perfect patience of God, and therefore we are called to be patient with others.
  1. We must never read this string of commands isolated from the gospel. It is the gospel that makes such things possible for us. The only way we are going to love one another like this is if we are so overwhelmed by the way God has loved us like this.

- a. We were the unruly—we didn't want to fall in line. We were the fainthearted—our lifestyle of sin had broken us down to the dirt. We were the weak—we were unable to save ourselves from our desperate estate.
  - i. But down Christ came! Into our story Christ came. He brings us into His covenant family and carries us onward to His comprehensive shalom, and through it all He is perfectly patient with us.

(1) May we love one another like that!