

A Proper Response to Problem Members

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15
Preached on: Sunday, April 24, 2016

In the sweet providence of God, he now brings us to 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and 15. We are in the last section of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians where he gives a series of exhortations pertaining to the fellowship, pertaining to the church; what a Christ-honoring church looks like. You will recall last week we dealt with a proper response to church leaders and today we will look at a proper response to problem members. Of course, that doesn't mean it's speaking to any of us but just in case we ever have that issue, it's good to know this. And next week, we will look at the final section where he addresses a proper response to God himself.

Now, in verses 14 and 15, Paul describes five kinds of people that existed in the church at Thessalonica and as we look at the New Testament, we see that they existed in every church and, frankly, they exist in every church still to this day, even Calvary Bible Church. Those five categories could be described as the unruly, the fainthearted, the weak, the wearying, and the evil, and here he urges you and me, all of the brethren, not just the leadership, to deal with each one accordingly. Let me read the text to you.

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.

Sadly, this is one of those neglected passages in Scripture, one of those passages that, frankly, few believers take very seriously. The vast majority of folks in the church who fit into one of these categories are typically ignored. Most Christians give no thought about even praying for these kind of people, much less ministering to them. In fact, most believers, I would suggest, live in a world of relational isolation. Oh yes, we have fellowship but for the most part it's superficial. We prefer to stay at a safe distance from one another. We go by the ethic, "Live and let live." Don't meddle into anybody else's business. And then when problems come up, we say, "I sure wish pastor or one of the elders would go talk to Mary about that vulgar stuff she's putting on Facebook." Or we say, "I wish someone would tell that girl to put some clothes on." Or, "I wish pastor or one of the elders would talk with Harold and tell him to stand up to that Jezebel wife of his that continues to henpeck his eyes out." Or, "Poor Philip. My, he seems so lonely, so depressed. You know, he needs to go and talk to pastor, or maybe he needs to go to a doctor." And on and on it goes but there is never a thought of, "You know, I know these people. I'm friends with these people. They may even be in my family but that's not my

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responsibility." Unfortunately, that is all too often the attitude and, folks, when we fail to directly minister to our brothers and sisters in Christ who have problems, the whole body is weakened. It becomes sickly. Christ will be dishonored, the church will forfeit blessing and our testimony for the Gospel will be greatly diminished and we will become, if we're not careful, like so many churches, nothing more than a cruise ship, a religious Love Boat where we can all enjoy the pleasures of being together but in reality we're not really loving one another and we're not really loving the Lord our God as we should.

Why is this so prevalent in churches today? Why is it that we fight against this very thing? Let me give you a little background that may add some perspective before we look at what the apostle has to say; a little background with respect to how the enemy has so cleverly brought deception into the church to a place where we finally think that somehow we're all okay even with blatant sin in our midst. Think about your own personal history. You know, each one of us are really either victims or beneficiaries of our religious heritage, of our religious background, our church background. And while mainline evangelical churches are going to vary in many ways, for the most part, they're all going to fall into one of two categories: they will either be what I call a man-centered church or a God-centered church. A man-centered church asserts either implicitly or explicitly that man builds a church by accommodating the unsaved. Basically, what you must do is discover the message and implement the methods that attract the unsaved and then your church will grow, and to be sure, that will happen. I mean, churches that adopt that form of pragmatism can fill up stadiums rather quickly.

Now, certain dominant features typically identify man-centered churches but most notable is their emphasis on man's happiness, more than God's holiness. They believe that we must be like the world in order to win it. Being popular is much more important than being faithful and so what you must do is kind of lower the standard so that you can attract more people. Many schools do this, Christian schools. Many Christian colleges and universities have done this over the years unlike Paul who was so sickened by the Athenian culture that his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. This kind of church embraces the culture, even the popular culture that is so aggressively hostile to the church as Jesus said would happen. They insist that in order for the Gospel to be heard by whatever people group they are targeting, which typically is a mirror image of themselves, that the Gospel therefore must be carefully sanitized so that you don't offend the unchurched. So they tend to avoid even the topic of sin altogether or they carefully redefine it and, needless to say, dealing with sinning members is avoided, really, at all costs because if you do that, you will lose people.

The other kind of church has a very different understanding of virtually every area of Christian theology, certainly of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, and even the

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doctrine of sin and the nature of the Gospel, and that would be the God-centered church. They would insist that it is not man but that it is God that builds his church by sanctifying the saved, not accommodating the unsaved. A huge difference. After all, Jesus promised, "I will build my church." Knowing that God is zealous, as Paul said, "to sanctify her", Ephesians 5:26, "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless," the God-centered church is committed, first and foremost, to God's holiness, knowing that as a result of holy living, man will enjoy unassailable happiness.

Now, by holiness, I'm not referring to a legalistic set of rules and rituals that give an illusion of spirituality, an illusion of godliness, but are nowhere to be found in Scripture, but rather I'm referring to just holy living that adorns the Gospel and the glory of God. This kind of church will be committed to purity in order to maintain an effective witness and be blessed by God. So therefore the leaders of this kind of church and the members will be committed to loving one another enough to dealing with the issues that come up inevitably in our lives.

When I was first called to be the pastor of this church which, by the way, was called East Cheetham Baptist Chapel when I came along. They were meeting at a little storefront over here. By the way, this was 22 years ago in 1994. There were only a handful of folks meeting in that storefront, some of you, I won't point you out, but you were there. And like most start-up churches, they were looking for a pastor that would help them grow spiritually and numerically and I felt the pressure. Even though I had been a professor and I had taught and been in Christian counseling and ministry for most of my adult life, I really had to think through what is going to be my philosophy of ministry, of pastoral ministry. And I remember a season of prayer and study and one passage of Scripture grabbed my attention like no other, it was found in Acts 5:14 where Luke records, "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number," and I remember thinking, "That's it! That's precisely what we want to see happen at Calvary Bible Church. We all want more believers in the Lord, multitudes of them." But what was striking about that text, an observation I still find intriguing, is that the context for growth in the early church was God publicly executing two of its members. Now, I'm not suggesting that I hope that happens here. I'm sure you understand that. And I also understand that the book of Acts is very unique; it's primarily an historical narrative speaking of the transition, you know, from the old covenant to the new and the beginning of the church; it's not a doctrinal theological treatise like Romans or Hebrews or whatever. But some of the principles there are timeless and certainly this is one of them and that is that God is holy and he is serious about holiness in his church. He wants purity in his church. This is not a cruise ship.

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The text tells us that a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira succumb to Satanic temptation. They lie to the Holy Spirit in order to exalt themselves there in Acts 5, and as a result, God killed them on the spot. So much for being a man-centered church accommodating the unsaved. Well, that dramatic display of divine judgment shook everyone to the core. Can you imagine how you would feel if all of a sudden first one got zapped and they drug him out or her out or him and then the next one, and that's literally what they did, the text says. Talk about getting your attention. Acts 5:11, Luke records that "great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things." I mean, that's one of the great understatements in the Bible. Instantly, every worshiper understood that God is absolutely serious about holiness in his church. That's his number 1 priority. He's not concerned about numerical growth. He's concerned about purity, not prosperity, and he basically drew a line in the sand and said, "Look, don't come into my church if you are not willing to deal with your sin, if you do not have a hunger and a thirst for righteousness." Well, it's therefore no coincidence that the first mandate that Christ gave to the church revealed the process for how we are to discipline unrepentant sin, egregious, high-handed sin in the church. It is delineated in Matthew 18:15-20. A process, by the way, not motivated out of a desire for retribution but for restoration; a process of love.

Well, that message also came through loud and clear to the unbelievers outside of the church. Luke went on to record in Acts 5:13, "But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem." By the way, as a footnote, a man-centered church espousing the modern philosophies of evangelical pragmatism would have been utter folly to those first saints; that would have been just foolishness.

Now, the man-centered church dedicated to accommodating the unsaved will quickly argue, "Look, very few people are going to attend a church that's committed to that level of purity." Well, up to a point they're right. In fact, the text goes on to indicate that most of them decided, as I just read, not to associate with those people. And to be sure, unsaved people, people that are spiritually dead who want nothing to do with God and have not been convicted of their sin and they have no desire to follow Christ, they're not going to come to this kind of a church. But it's interesting that the very next verse and this is the one that gripped my heart that I read to you a moment ago, the one that just really gripped my heart and really help shape my entire philosophy of pastoral ministry says this, verse 14, "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number." Isn't it fascinating? At the very beginning of the church, we learn that it is God who builds his church through sanctifying the saved. Man does not build his church by accommodating the unsaved. Oh yes, he will build a crowd. There is a big difference between a crowd and a church.

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I grew up in fundamental evangelical churches that leaned much more towards the God-centered end of the spectrum and, certainly, there is a continuum there, but I can see now that even in the church that I grew up in, the main church that I grew up in, they really didn't understand the deadly realities of sin. I mean, they had the basic do's and don'ts, some of which were biblical, most were merely cultural preferences, but the idea of personal ministry, of lovingly confronting sin, calling people to holy living, was really rather foreign. Intentional one anothering and discipleship which is at the very heart of Christian fellowship was selective at best, ignored at worst. I seldom saw modeled Paul's command in Galatians 6 that if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ and so on. Needless to say, church discipline was absolutely unheard of.

But what we see here in Paul's inspired exhortation to all of the members of the church at Thessalonica and, by extension, to Calvary Bible Church and to every church, is clearly an example of how a God-centered church is to function and unfortunately, few of us have ever seen this modeled. Very few Christians today take these matters seriously. And I would humbly ask you as your pastor this morning to ask yourself the hard question: are these divine exhortations a priority in my life? And if not, why not? Why do I get a pass? Or do I? Obviously, none of us do.

So let's look closely at what the Lord considers a proper response to problem members of our church family. Now, again, remember the context. He has just exhorted them regarding a proper response to church leaders, but now he says in verse 14, "We urge you." Urge, parakaleo. It means "to come alongside and speak earnestly; to provide help for someone in need." "We urge you, brethren." Folks, in your mind, not on your Bibles, but cross out the word "brethren" and put your name, okay? "We urge you. You, the members of the church. Not just the pastors and the leaders." So here we see the task of shepherding being expanded. It's delegated now to each member of the body. He's addressing our relationships with one another in the church family and how we should address various dispositions and needs within the church. So here we begin to see that pastoring is not reserved only for the leaders but at some level we are to pastor one another. My, how foreign that is. Beloved, we have a loyalty to love one another, a responsibility to one another, and how can we possibly turn away from a brother or a sister in our family who have some great need, even though they may not see some of it? We turn away from them, why? Because we feel uncomfortable? But yet this happens all the time.

Now, before we look closely here, I want to remind you of something because I know some of you may be hearing this. They're thinking, "Oh boy, you're gonna unleash the Barney Fife and somebody, you know, where we're going to start policing each other and

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all of a sudden you're going to be getting phone calls and you're going to be getting emails." No, that's not even remotely what I'm talking about and what the text is talking about, nor is this speaking of getting together in some kind of group therapy and exposing each other's hidden motives and secret sins. Boy, that would get ugly real quick, wouldn't it? But rather, when we have close family members and we've got friends and we're in relationship with one another and we see them struggling in some significant way or because of some sin we see them kind of walking off a cliff, we need to love them enough to say, "Brother, can we talk?" That's the point.

Now, you say, "Pastor, help me understand what that looks like." Well, I'm so glad you asked that. Turn to Galatians 6 for a moment. This is all so helpful to prepare our hearts for what Paul is going to ask us to do. In Galatians 6:1, we read, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass," in other words, they're ensnared by their sin, okay? "You who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." Now, that term "restore" is a very interesting term, *katartizo* in the original language; it was actually a surgical term used to describe setting a broken bone. Now, I've never had a broken bone that needs to be set. I've seen that happen and I cringe when I think about it, but if you go to the doctor with a broken bone and it needs to be set, how does the doctor treat you? Aggressively? "Come here, let me see that thing!" and he starts jerking you around? No. It's a very tender, hopefully you're anesthetized type of thing, where he is setting the bone. You get the idea. And why must the bone be set? Because if it's not set, it will grow in a bad way and you're in more trouble and that's the idea here. "Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

Then he says, "Bear one another's burdens." Let me camp on that word "bear" just for a moment. In the original language, it's a term that means "to help carry away or endure." Let me tell you where else it was used. It was used in Matthew 8, you remember the context there, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law? Do you remember that story? And then he was casting out some demons; people were bringing these people to him and he was casting them out and the text talks about how he is healing all of these other people and it says, Matthew records and says that, "it was done in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'He Himself took our iniquities and carried away our diseases.'" There it is, carried, *bastazo* in the original language. He bore. He carried away. That's the idea. Folks, we are to come along those who are ensnared in their sin and we are to try to restore them in a spirit of gentleness and we're to get under their heavy load of life dominating, habitual sin that they seemingly cannot manage, those things that are persistent, oppressive temptations that are weighing them down, that are bringing them and their family to misery, that is stealing away all of their joy. We're to get in under that burden and help them carry it away. That's what it looks like.

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There have been times in my life, and I'm sure in yours, where someone has loved you enough to sit you down, look you in the eye and say, "Brother, I need to tell you something that you may not want to hear." By the way, whenever I hear that, I already know, "Yeah, I don't want to hear it." But, boy, am I thankful that I have had people love me enough to do that. You know, chastening is never good at the time, right? Pride hardens the heart. It makes us like Teflon, nothing sticks. We tend to say, "Well, you just don't understand." Or, "You just don't know what I'm going through. Who are you to tell me?" And you could go down the line. I mean, we all know how we typically respond but, boy, how I have praised God for people in my life who were willing to tell me those hard things. As Proverbs 27:5 says, "Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Right? Verse 17, "Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another." When iron meets iron, sometimes the sparks fly a little bit but, oh, the results are so magnificent.

Well, this is the kind of heart that we have to have toward people in the church that are struggling in various ways. Remember, Paul gave the example he was like a nursing mother, he was like a loving father, all of these types of things. So with this in mind, let's look at these five categories of people, undoubtedly we will see ourselves in some of them; we may see our spouse, our children, certainly some of our friends; perhaps someone in our home fellowship group, which, by the way, is the very best place for genuine fellowship to occur. You know, it's great to share a meal and enjoy one another's company but, boy, what an opportunity to truly share our lives in ministry together; to be able to meet our physical as well as our spiritual needs. By the way, fellowship, remember that term, *koinonia*? It literally means "communion." There is something rich about that. It means participation. It means sharing in the mutual life and ministry of one another.

So with this in mind, let's look at the first type of person that Paul addressed and that is the unruly. He says, "admonish the unruly." Now, the term "unruly" in the active sense, speaks of a person who is basically insubordinate. He is disorderly. He is disorganized. He is undisciplined. He is rebellious. He's just basically insubordinate. Now, in a passive sense, it refers to a person that's lazy or idle, and given the context, I believe it refers primarily to the former rather than the latter. In fact, the term was used to describe insubordinate soldiers who refused to obey orders; those who want to do their own thing rather than doing their duty; they're not pulling their weight. And certainly if a soldier does that, he jeopardizes the mission that they've been set out to accomplish. He's a danger to himself, frankly he's a danger to the entire army. Well, the same thing is true in the church. When you have an unruly person that's just always out doing their own thing, you jeopardize the mission of the church. So Paul is concerned about those who are unsubmitive, unteachable, insubordinate. They simply refuse to walk in the same

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direction as the rest of the church. They've got their own agenda and as we look at it in other passages in the New Testament, we see that these type of people are angry, rebellious, they're contentious and so forth.

I've noticed over the years they are rather easy to spot. You will find that these are the types of folks that are just not involved relationally in the lives of other people at anything more than a superficial level. They want to be left alone. They're not using their gifts to serve Christ and the body and Paul speaks about this in his epistles to the Corinthians; they give very little, if anything, of their wealth to support the church; they're critical, cold, cranky. You get the idea. They're quick to criticize the leadership. As one pastor put it, they do everything they can to "undermine the leadership to justify their insubordination." The other thing that I've always noticed that goes with this kind of individual is that their marriages are usually a train wreck. God is not using them in any significant way. Their lives simply don't bear much spiritual fruit.

Alright, so we have them in the church. They are our brothers, our sisters in Christ. What are we supposed to do? Ignore them? Shun them? Get sucked into their black hole of pride and chaos? Call the pastor and tell him to go and talk to them, which happens most of the time? No. Notice what the Lord tells us here through his servant, "We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly." "Admonish" is that Greek term *noutheteo*; we get *nouthetic* counseling from that. It simply means "to warn; to instruct; to correct; to counsel." It denotes that loving, kind restoration and a spirit of gentleness type of approach where you are forthright but yet you're very caring; whereby you come alongside someone and you alert them to the seriousness of what they're doing, the consequences of their behavior. You warn them that this is not characteristic of a Christian. If you continue down this road, the word of God tells us that you will end up in a world of misery. You will produce disunity in the church. You will experience chastening from a loving Father. And you will forfeit blessing in your life.

Sometimes people will say, "Pastor, if I go and talk with them like you've suggested that I do, they're going to get angry, get defensive, they're going to attack me." And my response is, "Yeah, so what's your point?" They probably will. So are we to say, "Oh, okay, well then, let's don't do that." No, you see, folks, we obey God because we love him, we trust in him. How a person responds is really not the issue. We pray that they will humble their hearts, we pray that they will respond accordingly; it's not like we're looking to pick a fight. But ultimately we are admonishing the unruly because we love the Lord and we love that person enough to say, "You're walking in a direction that's forfeiting blessing in your life, that's dishonoring Christ and I just plead with you to be reconciled to God and consider this matter and repent of it."

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I will admit that most of the time when I've had to admonish the unruly, they do get defensive. I have. Haven't you? I mean, it's just our flesh. You want to counter-attack. I haven't made account but I'm sure it's into the hundreds of people who have left this church because they were confronted over a serious sin issue and they simply refuse to deal with it. But, folks, that doesn't discharge us from our responsibilities to serve the King, does it? We do this for the glory of God.

Well, the second telling mark of our mutual responsibility is to "encourage the fainthearted," he says. Now, the fainthearted....by the way "fainthearted" in the original language means "small souled." Small souled, s-o-u-l-e-d. Those who are timid. They are easily discouraged. Those who simply don't have vigorous resources by nature. They have a basic timidity in their disposition. They lack self-assurance and self-confidence. You're just not going to see these people on the front lines of the battle for the kingdom. They're fainthearted, they're frightened. Now, we must remember that a lot of these dear saints in the first century, especially at Thessalonica, were experiencing severe and mounting persecution and some in their midst are going to say, "Bring it on! I will not bow!" and others are going to say, "Oh, don't bring it on. I don't want to bow but I'm afraid I will. Where's the door?" You see, you're going to have that.

I find it fascinating, when I thought about this, I was thinking about the first time I saw how sheepdogs were trained. I don't know if you've ever seen that but they train sheepdogs, you know, like Australian shepherds and blue heelers and all those types of dogs, they train them on ducks and the reason why is ducks are like sheep, whenever the dog comes around, all the ducks are trying to get to the center. They are all fainthearted. They are all trying to get away from the dog. Now, the dog's not really going to hurt them but it's for this reason that the dog is able to move the whole group as one. As opposed to herding cats, you get the picture? Sheep are the same way.

Well, folks, I know the analogy breaks down a bit here but there are a lot of people that are like those sheep, they're always looking for the middle. They're not going to stand up and, "Dog, that's enough." You know, it's not going to be that way. These people are afraid of many things; everything is a potential threat. Where some will see fun and adventure, they see danger and death. You know how it goes. They are filled with anxiety. They are afraid something bad might happen but they're not sure what it is, "But one thing I'm sure of, I don't have the resources to deal with it and I'm not sure God does." Boy, I pity the children that grow up in that kind of home and I pity the church that has a lot of these dear people. But, folks, what do we do with them? They're our brothers and sisters in Christ. Do we berate them? Do we tell them to cowboy up? Well, it's much easier to do that, isn't it, than to come alongside and encourage them.

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You know, I find it interesting how the flesh works. It's hard to admonish the unruly, right? I mean, nobody likes to do that. We want to look the other way. Just kind of agree with them. Pretend like it's not happening or call the pastor and tell him to go and deal with them or one of the elders. That's how we typically do it. It's hard to do. It's hard to admonish the unruly. Do you know what? It's hard also to encourage the fainthearted. It's much easier to tell them to just get their thumb out of their mouth, put on your big boy pants, you know, there's nothing to be afraid of, rather than come along very tenderly and try to encourage them.

You know, we've all heard stories of how some men teach their kids to swim. Do you remember that with your kids? I remember with mine. One philosophy says, "Just throw them in the deep end. They'll learn to swim." Right? Yeah, they'll probably drown. Be afraid of water forever. Or you start out in the kiddie pool. I won't embarrass my kids but I remember that. It was the kiddie pool and then it was the floaties on the arms and, you know, "Jump to daddy." Every time they jump in, you get a little more water on them and before you know it, they're swimming everywhere. Folks, that's what you have to do with the fainthearted. You love them and you come alongside them and encourage them. You know, Paul did this with Timothy. Do you remember how Timothy was a timid pastor? He struggled with that. You can read many examples of this. It's as if he would say, "Come on, Timothy, you can do it! Trust in God. Be bold!" I love that passage in 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul says, "Timothy, I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, Timothy, I know you've got it in you, "which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and I'm sure that it is in you as well." Can't you just hear the heart of the apostle encouraging this dear brother? So he says, "And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline." Oh, dear friends, what a privilege we have to come alongside the fainthearted and encourage them.

Then we are to, thirdly, "help the weak." Now, the term "weak" can be used to describe those who are spiritually immature, morally weak, even those who are physically sick, those who are just weak in general, but I believe here and in other passages where Paul uses this term, it's really a reference to those that he describes in Romans 14:1 as those who are weak in the faith. They are weak in the faith. Their conscience is so hyper-vigilant and what you find is their faith is just not strong enough to enable them to perceive the full liberty that they have in Christ so their conscience holds them to non-essentials producing legalism. Remember, some of these saints now had come out of the Gentile background. Remember how even in Corinth, "Oh, I don't want to eat anything that was sacrificed to idols." Well, it's okay. I mean... "No! I don't want to." Alright, alright. And then some of the Jews, "Oh, we've got these feasts and rituals. I can't just abandon them. What am I going to do?"

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So we have these kind of people in the church today, believers who really don't have a full knowledge of how to live as a Christian. They are so afraid of committing some kind of sin or religious offense that they surround themselves with self-imposed religious restrictions. These kind of people, unfortunately, are easy prey for false teachers that come up with all kinds of movements and things that you have to do to make you feel spiritual. I've seen this in the home church movement, the family integrated church movement, numerous groups of religious separatists. You know, they've got a rule for everything. There is a dress code, a jewelry code. There are hairstyle codes. There are possession codes. You know, only one translation of the Bible that you can use. And then you become proud when you keep the rules and you feel guilty when you don't and you like those people who agree with your rules and you don't like those people who have different rules. You know, it's just a tragic thing. That's weak faith. That was going on back then.

So how do we deal with them? These people that are fragile, they're confused. They're our brothers and sisters in Christ. He says, "I want you to help the weak." That term "help" simply means "to support them; hold them up; show concern for them." Don't desert them as ignorant or unimportant. Remember in Romans 14 and 15, Paul went into this in great detail and in summary he basically says, "Whatever you do, don't have them violate their conscience. Don't be a stumblingblock to them. Continue to speak truth into their life." Like in chapter 15, verse 1, he says, "Now we who are strong are to bear the weakness of those without strength and not just please ourselves." Verse 7, "Accept one another." So, folks, when you see this, love these people. Count it a privilege to come alongside them and help them as you speak truth into their lives.

Then there are what I would call, number 4, the wearying. Let me explain this. These are people in the church family that just wear you out with all their stuff. They just never seem to grow up spiritually. They're always immature, always in trouble, make the same mistake. Drive everyone insane with their interpersonal style of relating and how they function in the body. You know, I'm sure that they had, you know, one of the leading Greek women in the Sunday School class that dominated the discussion and caused everybody to roll their eyes, alright? I'm sure that even in their church they had people that were always late; there were people that would every time you could set your watch on it, as soon as the service would really get underway in worship, they've got to get up and go to the bathroom. Or you've got the people whose kids are so undisciplined that when they have their pot lucks, the kids would be like locusts descending upon the table and everything is devoured. I mean, you're just going to have...folks, not everybody is going to flush the toilet, okay? That's how it's going to be in the church. That's how it's going to be.

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A Proper Response to Problem Members

By David Harrell

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So what do you do with these people? You "be patient," he says, "with everyone." Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit, right? We are to be longsuffering. You know, it's easy to be short-suffering, to be short-tempered. It's much harder to show meekness and patience. 2 Timothy 2:24, Paul speaks to Timothy and to all the leaders and he says, "The Lord's bond-servant must be patient to all." Now, this doesn't mean you become passive and you don't try to disciple these dear people, but we exercise patience. Aren't you glad the Lord's been patient with you? I am that he is with me. It reminds me of Psalm 86:15, "But thou, O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness." Folks, this is our standard and certainly the virtue of patience must be a spring that flows out of a reservoir that understands the great love and patience of God towards each of us.

Then the final category and with this we will close, it's those who are evil. Notice verse 15, "See that no one repays another with evil for evil." Obviously, they had to deal with evil people in the church, certainly people outside the church. The term refers to those who are malicious; those who are immoral; those who are nefarious in certain ways. I regret to say this but some of the most wicked people I have ever experienced in my life have been a part of Calvary Bible Church. They weren't here for long but they were here. Let's be honest, when we're victims of evil, our flesh automatically wants to do what? Get even. Seek retaliation. Make them pay. "I want my pound of flesh." Folks, as Christians we don't do that, rather God says, "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." And what is good for the evil person? We pray for them. We show humility towards them. We show kindness towards them. Now, sometimes it might mean putting them in jail but ultimately we want to give them the Gospel and we want them to see the Gospel in us but we should never, ever seek to snatch the sword of divine justice and judgment from the hand of God. He is the one that will deal righteously with the wicked. Romans 12:19, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay,' says the Lord. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

So there we have it, five kinds of problem people and how we should all respond in mutual love and, you know, folks, when we conduct ourselves accordingly, we not only enhance the reputation of the church but, more importantly, we honor Christ and we experience more of the blessings that he longs to lavish upon us. So I challenge each of us to these ends.

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Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for speaking so directly to us. We certainly can see ourselves in these categories. We see even the faulty ways that we tend to love each other. Lord, we are so poor at this but we thank you that you are patient with us and even today you have given us a reminder of how we should conduct ourselves in the body of Christ. Lord, may we take it seriously so that we can encourage one another that you might be glorified in our lives and that sinners might see the glory of Christ in each of us so that they too might be saved. So we thank you and we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.