

1Thessalonians 5:12-28

It usually happens this way in our household. I am due to go away for a retreat week, or on a course and so about a week before I go I spend time talking through what will need to be sorted by my dearest three while I'm away. They all know what they have to do, ranging from sorting the washing, to making sure things are out of the freezer ready to be cooked for tea, you know the sorts of things I mean. But even though I may have covered some of the instructions in some depth before I go I always leave an abbreviated version of them that I stick with a magnet onto the fridge door. You know the last minute stuff to jog memories to be sure that they will be confident to do everything we've talked about. And it's when we get to the last few verses of Paul's letter here that I have this sense that this is his stick on the fridge door with a magnet list. He's already encouraged them in their faith, he's talked with them about what it means to live a life that pleases God of how they are to go about living confidently in uncertain times and now right at the end of the letter it's almost as though he's wanting to jog memories, to be sure that they will be confident to do and be the people God has called them to be, that they will be the confident church of Christ that Paul sees they have the potential to be. And as I read it I see 5 bullet points in his fridge door message. 5 points that I think can also speak to us this am as those who make up the church of God in this place in MK. What do we need to be mindful of, how can we together build a confident church here in Walton.

1. Confidence in leadership v12-13

Well the first bullet point as I see it is all about leadership. Being confident in the leadership of the church v 12-13. Paul is talking to the entire congregation here, everyone about their attitude toward the leadership. In some ways the Thessalonian church isn't that dissimilar to the church of today. We read of a group of people who are working hard, who sacrifice time, energy and effort to ensure that the ministry of the church happens. The word for work that Paul uses here has the idea of manual labour, of toil and, and as we'll see in a minute there were a group in the church who were obviously not doing a lot, so the church here was probably a bit like the churches of today with 20% of the people doing about 80% of the work. And those who were working really hard were probably feeling worn out and underappreciated and maybe like they were just very taken for granted.

Paul describes this group as the workers as those who were over the Thessalonians the spiritual leaders in the church, those who taught them about God. So I think we are not just talking about ordained ministers here but also those who lead in other ways within the church, the stewards, Sunday school teachers, pastoral team etc and notice he doesn't say crown them, stick them on a pedestal and agree to their every whim. He says respect them, and this word means something like to know someone so well that you appreciate their true worth. Paul is talking here about a relational kind of respect. I wonder how well do you know the people who are working hard for you, toiling for you, labouring for you? It would seem to me that when these people are working hard in the ministry of the church and people within the church know them well enough to appreciate all they do that there is peaceful harmony in the church. Be a confident church says Paul nurture respectful relationships with those who lead you.

2. Confidence in our ministry v14-15

Paul is again here is addressing everyone when he says that the idle are to be warned, the timid encouraged, the weak helped and all them are to be dealt with in patience. These groups could be seen as the won't do's, the want to's and the can't do's. The idlers are the won't do's, those who refuse to get involved, those who expect things to be just right for them but haven't yet personally contributed to building up the church. We all have the responsibility to challenge them to play their parts.

The timid are the want to's. Those who would love to serve in some kind of way but because their lives are marred by brokenness or their opinion of themselves is so low they never seem able to take the next step. These are the discouraged and broken hearted, the troubled and the depressed and they need tender care and support from the whole congregation.

And then we have the can't do's. The weak those we are all told to help and the word here means to prop up, so we are to support those who are at the point of collapse, physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally we are all to lend support so they don't fall. And we are to be patient with them all because Paul seems to know we could very easily lose our patience with the won't do's, the want to's, and the can't do's, so much so that we are reminded to seek only to do good to everyone.

This is the ministry we are all to take a part in, patiently seeking God's purposes with the won't do's, the want to's and the can't do's. A confident church is one where people are ready to get involved in one another lives.

3. Confidence in devotion v16-18

It seems to me that we build a confident church by embracing a devotion to God's will for our lives and living. A joyful resolve despite our circumstances, a praying spirit that constantly seeks God, and a thankful attitude in the midst of all of life's circumstances makes us people devoted to God's will for our, lives as individuals and also as a church. This kind of enthusiastic embrace of God's purpose for our lives builds a strong sense of community.

4. Confidence in our direction

The fourth bullet point of Paul's fridge door message to the church as I read it is all about us being confident in the our direction. In v 19-22 we read Paul telling the church not to quench the Spirit. If the Spirit of God is seen as a fire then this congregation obviously had the extinguishers out ready to put out or smother the work of the Spirit within the church. And its an easy thing to do when we get so organised and structured that the work of the Spirit is quenched completely.

It would seem that the specific way the Thessalonians were quenching God's Spirit was by disregarding prophecy. Prophecy in the New Testament is when the Holy Spirit gives a person supernatural insight into God's will. It wasn't so much a foretelling of the future as much as that the prophet was gifted a supernatural insight into the present and what God wanted to do. And as you can imagine this was extremely important at a time when the NT wasn't yet completed, because they had a greater need for supernatural guidance. Since we have the completed 27 books New Testament, we have much more to draw from in terms of guidance, but God still works in prophecy sometimes to give us specific guidance.

So when we hear from someone who says I really sense that God is saying this about our current situation, or I really think God is asking for us to move forward in this direction what do we do? Maybe you'd want to run a mile, I have to say I am always ready to hear from people who think they have heard from God but equally whenever someone prefaces any comment to me with the words the lord has told me that.....I also know I will have to listen up but also test it out. Paul really says don't be quick to disregard such words but test them, because not everything spoken in God's name is true, sometimes simply because we are human beings and we make mistakes.

The word "test" means to sift through something, to learn its genuineness, to closely examine something to determine if its real or not. Paul doesn't tell is how to do that here but other places in the bible we know that the sieve we sift with is the bible itself, is what is said consistent with what we read and hear in the bible itself. So as we sift through prophetic claims, when we find something real and genuine we hold on to it, but when we find something that's not real, we separate ourselves from it.

Many of the decisions that we take as churches are spiritual ones whether its budgets, mission, services, staffing, these are all spiritual decisions because they would all be at their core about what God wants for us and with us and not about our preferences. Many of the greatest mistakes of the church I sense are those decisions made over good ideas that turn out ok but because we weren't ready or really to listening for God's words, timing and desire we end up working hard on a good idea and missing the God idea. This again is seen as the responsibility of all of us, we need others who are sensing God's direction to share that direction with us. Then we can sift and sort through it, to more accurately hear God's voice. This kind of listening for God, of discernment results in a sense of vision, a sense of knowing what's next, what direction we should all be travelling in. Paul say be confident in your direction together.

5. Confidence in our God v23-28

Finally, and it really is a last but not least point this in v 23-28 Paul breaks into a prayer. And can you hear what it is he is praying? Paul prays that the Thessalonians might be sanctified, another super churchy word we never hear used whole shopping at Tesco's. He asks that they might be made holy, Christ like. This of course is a journey that all Jesus followers are on. A process that impacts every dimension of who we are--our spirit, our soul, as well as our physical bodies. Sanctification--being made holy--is pictured here as a process that God is performing in our lives. It isn't something that we do as if we had the power or the resources to sanctify ourselves, but it's fundamentally a work of God.

That doesn't mean we're passive in the process, but it does mean that we can't make ourselves holy. And this is the note of incredible assurance for each and every one of us, just as God has called us to faith in Jesus Christ, so God also will faithfully complete his work of making us holy. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ here today, God has called you--your faith in Jesus is evidence of that call. If you've been called, then you can be sure that God will accomplish his work of making you holy through and through--spirit, soul and body. We can depend on that promise, why, because God is faithful, reliable, and trustworthy to do whatever needs to be done in our lives to make us holy.

This is followed by Paul's final greetings, a request to pray for him, to greet each other warmly, and to publicly read this letter, it was and is for the whole congregation to hear.

You can be the confident church of Jesus Christ here and now in the uncertainty of the times that we are in by trusting in God's faithfulness for our spiritual progress.

Five bullet points on the fridge from Paul to us as the church of Jesus Christ here. Be in the business of building a confident church, confident in leadership, ministry, devotion, direction, and in God.

May God, help us to hear his word to us this am and help us to all play our parts in nurturing respectful relationships between leaders and members. May he help each of us get personally involved in people's lives, enthusiastically embracing God's will, biblically discern God's guidance together, and trusting in God's faithfulness for our growth and progress.