

Commandments for Christians (1 Thessalonians 5:11-28)ⁱ

The Lord Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). There are some Christians who have never listened to His commandments. Well, here are twenty-two of them... practical ones, right down where the rubber meets the road in a believer's daily life.

In Chapter five of Paul's first letter to the Church at Thessalonica we come to a series of twenty-two commandments for Christians. These are the commandments for believers -- not just ten of them but twenty-two of them! Up to the time we are saved, God has us shut up to a cross. That is, God is not asking anything of us except this question: "What will you do with My Son who died for you?" After we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, then God talks to us about our lives. The child of God is not under the Ten Commandments as the way of life -- he is way above it. He is to live on a much higher plane, as we can see by the commandments in this section. These commandments are practical -- right down where the rubber meets the road. It is a wonderful, glorious thing to keep looking for the coming of Christ, but it is also very important that we keep walking down here on the sidewalks of life -- at home, in the office, in the schoolroom, wherever we are called to walk.

The Lord Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). There are some Christians who have never listened to His commandments. Well, here are twenty-two of them. They are given like military orders, brief and terse. They are barked out like a second lieutenant would give them to you. We were just told to be sober and to put on the uniform of warfare (see [v. 8](#)). Now the orders are given, and they seem to be categorized -- that is, certain ones are related to each other.

Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do
[[1Thess. 5:11](#)].

The first commandment is to "comfort yourselves together," which means to encourage one another in the faith.

The second commandment is to "edify one another." The Thessalonian believers were already doing that, Paul says, Edify means "to build up one another." You and I should be a team working together, edifying each other with the Word of God.

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves [[1Thess. 5:12-13](#)].

Here are three commandments that seem to belong together. "Know" or understand those who teach the Word of God. It means we should recognize them. When Paul wrote this, he was speaking to the local situation in Thessalonica. He had been with them less than a month. He had won them to Christ and had taught them. A church had been started, we would say, "from scratch." There wasn't a believer there before Paul had arrived and presented the gospel to them (see [Acts 17:2-3](#)). So all the Thessalonian believers had come to know Christ at about the same time. Now among them certain ones would have been given the gift of teaching. Some would have the gift of preaching and some of helping. Every believer receives a gift when he is saved, and that gift is to be exercised in the body of believers to build up the body of believers. But I have a notion that among the believers in Thessalonica there could have been this attitude: So-and-so and I were saved at the same time. I knew him before he was a believer. Where did he get the idea that he could teach me? So Paul is telling them that certain men and women had been given certain gifts of leadership, and they should respect them. They should look to them for admonition.

We still have the problem today that very few people in the church pay any attention to the teachers God has given them. People say they believe the Bible is the Word of God and they believe every word of it. Then why don't they obey it? Why don't they listen when it is being taught? One man said to me very candidly, "I believe the Bible from cover to cover, and I am ignorant of what is between the covers." Now that is an untenable position to hold. I think if people knew what was between the covers, they would believe it. But it is a hypocritical position to say you believe it and then be ignorant of what it says. Anyone who says he believes the Bible is the Word of God is obligated to know what it says. Therefore, those who are preaching and teaching the Word of God should have the attention of the believers.

Now the fourth commandment is "to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." I have always appreciated people who love the Word of God because I have found that they become my friends. One of the things I have so appreciated about my radio ministry is the number of friends that God has raised up for me across this country. Many of them have written to say their home is open to me (of course, I can't accept all those invitations), but when I am in their town, they do nice things for me. They reveal their love. When they reveal that love to me -- and I'm hard to love -- it reveals that they honor the Word of God since I teach the Word of God.

Then the fifth commandment: "And be at peace among yourselves." These all come together in one package. You can't have everybody running the church. You can't have everybody running any kind of organization. There must be a certain one with authority.

I think one of the great problems in many churches today is a case of the old bromide, "too many cooks spoil the broth." There needs to be one who is the leader and who is followed. With that arrangement you can have peace. But when everybody is trying to play his own tune, you have anything but harmony and peace!

Now here are the sixth through the ninth commandments --

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men [[1Thess. 5:14](#)].

"Warn them that are unruly." This would naturally follow the fifth commandment: "Be at peace among yourselves." The "unruly" are those who are out of step. My feeling is that they are loners, and they like to do their own little thing rather than support the work which God is doing. They are to be warned.

"Comfort the feebleminded." What does he mean by "feebleminded"? Well, a better word would be fainthearted. He is not referring to folk with mental problems. But here are folk who are fearful to move out for God, and they need encouraging. There is many a saint today who needs someone to put his arm around him and say, "Brother, you're going to make it. I'm for you and I am praying for you." My, what comfort and encouragement that would be to the fearful, the fainthearted -- and sometimes all of us get discouraged and become fainthearted!

"Support the weak" is the eighth commandment. There are folk who are weak in the faith. They cannot get in step because they are little babies. They are not able to march with the rest; so help them. Lift them up, and carry them along.

"Be patient toward all men." That means: Don't lose your temper. That is so difficult! In business or in our other relationships with people, we meet ungodly, unholy, cantankerous, unsaved people who are definitely trying to trip us or to abuse us in some way, and it becomes very difficult to be patient and not to lose our tempers. But God commands us to be patient with everybody.

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men [[1Thess. 5:15](#)].

Now here is the tenth commandment: "See that none render evil for evil unto any man." In other words, don't fight one another.

The eleventh -- "but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." There are three philosophies of life or three standards of conduct. The pagan world operates on a philosophy which does evil in spite of good. In other words, you get the other fellow before he gets you. Use any kind of method. He may have treated you well, but if you can get the advantage over him, do that. That is pagan and heathen philosophy.

Then there is the standard of the so-called refined, cultured, and educated world. That is, do good to those who do good to you. The political parties in our country operate on that principle. If one person helps a man to get into political office, the politician reciprocates by offering the man a job or office. You take care of your own. That is the philosophy of the so-called civilized world. Jesus said, "*And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same*" ([Luke 6:33](#)).

The Christian is to live under a different standard. We are to do good to those who do evil to us. That is contrary to the natural man. The minute someone hits us, we just naturally want to hit him back. This is the philosophy that Paul is talking about -- "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good" -- even to those who do evil to you.

Now the twelfth commandment --

Rejoice evermore [[1Thess. 5:16](#)].

I think these next three commandments go together. "Rejoice" does not mean to be happy. This is not the happy hour that he is talking about -- happy is not a New Testament word. This is a joy in the Lord as Paul wrote to the Philippians, "*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice*" ([Phil. 4:4](#)). My, what a commandment! You won't find that in the Ten Commandments! The child of God has no right to go around with a sour puss. The child of God has no right to be a cantankerous individual. If you a child of God, you are to rejoice evermore! That, incidentally, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit -- love, joy, peace. If you cannot rejoice, then begin reading the Word of God and calling on God to put joy in your heart. He will do it.

Pray without ceasing [[1Thess. 5:17](#)].

This has to do with an attitude of prayer. I don't think this means that one is to stay on his knees all the time. But it means to pray regularly and to be constantly in the attitude of prayer.

Associated with that is this fourteenth commandment --

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you [[1Thess. 5:18](#)].

This tells us to "give thanks" in all circumstances, not just once a year, but all the time.

This "is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." If you come to me and ask what is the will of God for you, I can tell you three specific things that are the will of God for you: Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything. That is the will of God for you.

Now the fifteenth --

Quench not the Spirit [[1Thess. 5:19](#)].

One of the figures that is used for the Holy Spirit is fire. How do you quench a fire? You dampen it down and don't let it burn. To quench the Spirit means that you refuse to do the will of God; that is, you are not listening to the Holy Spirit. You refuse to let the Holy Spirit be your Guide to lead you. You and I quench the Holy Spirit when we take matters into our own hands.

This is the same teaching that Paul gave to the Ephesian believers: "*And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption*" ([Eph. 4:30](#)). You cannot grieve a thing; you grieve a Person. The Holy Spirit is a Person, and He is grieved by sin in our lives. Also, He is quenched when we step out of the will of God.

Despise not prophesyings [[1Thess. 5:20](#)].

Do not look down upon Bible study as something that is beneath you. Do not be indifferent to the Word of God. We have a lot of folk who are in Christian service, but they are ignorant of the Bible and they look down on Bible study. Occasionally I hear such a person saying, "You just spend all your time in Bible study and you don't do anything. What you need to do is get out and get busy." Well, what is needed is to get busy studying the Word of God, and after you do that you will see how to get busy and really be effective.

We had a Bible study downtown in Los Angeles, averaging fifteen hundred people every Thursday night over a period of twenty-one years -- what a thrill that was! What a privilege that was! But sometimes folk would make a remark like, "You need to get out and do something, not just go to sit and listen to the Bible." The interesting thing is that those people who came to sit and listen to the Bible did go out and do something. There are several hundred of those people who are out on the mission field; there are several hundred who are witnessing for God; and there are several hundred in the ministry. I notice that the boys who do not study the Word of God run down like an eight-day clock. Their ministries don't last too long. The sixteenth commandment which Paul gives the Thessalonians is "despise not prophesyings," that is, the teaching of the Word of God.

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good [[1Thess. 5:21](#)].

"Prove all things." Don't be taken in. To put it crudely, don't be a sucker. Don't be misled into supporting a project just because somebody sends you a picture of pathetic looking orphans. Don't contribute to things you know nothing about. Don't fall for some promotion job. Investigate. Investigate anything to which you give your support. Christians ought not to be gullible. We are to prove all things. This also means that we are not to be taken in by flattery. There are many deceivers in the world.

"Hold fast that which is good." Hold to that which is true and genuine.

Abstain from all appearance of evil [[1Thess. 5:22](#)].

This nineteenth commandment is the answer for questionable pastimes and amusements. If there is any question in your mind whether something is right or wrong, then it is wrong for you. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Now notice that man is a triune being --

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ [[1Thess. 5:23](#)].

Man is a triune being; body, soul (mind), and spirit. "Sanctify you wholly" -- not perfectly, but we are to reach a place of maturation. We should not continue to be babes in Christ; we should be growing to maturity.

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it [[1Thess. 5:24](#)].

You can depend upon God.

Brethren, pray for us [[1Thess. 5:25](#)].

This twentieth command is to pray for those who give out the gospel. You can't pray for Paul today, but you can pray for me, and I would appreciate it. You can pray for your pastor and your missionaries. I know they would appreciate it also.

Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss [1Thess. 5:26].

This is a commandment, too. Just make sure it is a holy kiss! In our culture and with our customs, a warm handshake will do.

I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren [1Thess. 5:27].

That is the twenty-second commandment. In Paul's time there were no printing presses, but today we have our Bibles. I encourage you to read this marvelous epistle from God our Father, through the Holy Spirit, and Paul for those who have believed. The epistle has a threefold purpose: (1) To confirm young converts in the elementary truth of the gospel; (2) to condition them to go on unto holy living; and (3) to comfort them regarding the return of Christ. Paul's message offered a marked contrast to the paganism and heathenism which were present in Thessalonica. A heathen inscription in Thessalonica read: "After death no reviving, after the grave no meeting again." What a difference Jesus makes, hallelujah!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen [1Thess. 5:28].

ⁱ Based on commentary by J. Vernon McGee, www.TTB.org