

**Pastor Paul Bawden
Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, August 23, 2009
"The Building Or Wrecking Crew?"
I Thessalonians 5:8-11, 12-24**

Heavenly Harmony in Earthly Relationships has been our theme on Sunday mornings since the first of May.

To develop that emphasis we have been considering some of the "one anothers" in the New Testament.

"We are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (I Corinthians 12:5).

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Romans 12:10a).

"Give preference to one another" (Romans 12:10b).

"Be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus" (Romans 15:5).

"Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16).

"Through love serve one another (Galatians 5:13b).

"Bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2).

"Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1-3).

"Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 5:21).

There is no doubt that God is vitally interested in our relationships with each other in the body of Christ, as we review briefly the "one anothers" we have considered over the past several months.

Spiritually attached vertically to Christ and horizontally to each other through faith in Him, believers in Christ have the privilege and responsibility to act in the Holy Spirit's power to live in harmony with each other individually, in our family relationships, in our church life, in the work-a-day world, at school, and in our neighborhoods, wherever we are representing our Lord.

Today, as we bring this "one another" series to a close, the one another we consider today is a great summary of all the other "one anothers" we have looked at.

Note our text in I Thessalonians 5:11.

"Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

I. The eternal words in the text.

Since the word of God lives and abides for ever, as Peter states, quoting from Isaiah 40:6ff (cf. I Peter 1:24-25). These are eternal words that God gives us.

1. "Encourage."

Encourage is the word used to describe the Holy Spirit, parakaleo. It is a command in the present tense, so the encouraging, the cheering of one another on, which it can mean, is not an option, but it is to be done at all times.

2. "Build up."

Build up is also a command in the present tense, so it is to be done at all times. The word, build up, means to construct or build a house. So applied to our lives spiritually, it means to help establish, advance, to edify one another's spiritual life and other ways as well as needed.

It appears here that the encouraging believers in Christ are to give one another is part of the building up, the advancement, the establishment of one another to maturity in Christ.

3. "Just as you also are doing."

Then, notice that Paul adds to his instructions to the Thessalonians, "just as you also are doing."

As Paul writes this letter to the Thessalonians, he knows that they are already building each other up in Christ, but the commands of encouragement and building up, as mentioned, are in the present tense, which means that Paul is telling the Thessalonian believers to keep on encouraging in building each other in their walk with the Lord. Don't give up building each other up, but make it a daily practice in your lives.

Now I know such is taking place in the Grace family. We seek to build up each other in the Lord. But the challenge to us, as it was to the Thessalonian believers around A.D. 50, is to keep on, keeping on building each up in the Lord so we will become more Christ-like in our daily walk with Him.

Like Peter said in his first letter that he was writing to them to remind them of the things that they already knew, but in so doing he wanted to stir up them up to keep on following the truth.

That is what Paul is doing to the Thessalonian believers and to us today, as the Word of God is eternal, contemporary for all time, applicable to us today. Paul is stirring us up so we will not become lethargic in our relationships with one another, just taking our walk with the Lord as old hat. Rather, it is the continuous command of the Lord to us by His Spirit that we should be always building each other up in our on-going relationship with the Lord. That's why the Puritans talked with each other, asked one another, "How is it with your soul?"

Which means secondly, there is. . .

II. The eternal urgency of the text.

1. Found in the eternal words themselves.

That comes out of the words "encourage" and "build up" being a command and in the present tense. We can't go to sleep at the spiritual wheel when it comes to relationships with one another, whether individually, in our family relationships, in our church family, and in our other relationships.

The Lord commands us to continually build up each other so we will continue to mature in Jesus Christ. We are dealing with more than time issues here. We are dealing with eternal truth and with people who have eternal souls. There are life and death issues at stake.

The eternal urgency of those eternal words,

2. Has an eternal basis.

What's the eternal basis? Paul has been telling the Thessalonian believers that they are not in the awful day of the LORD, which was going to come on the earth. Due to the persecution, they were experiencing, the believers thought that they may have been in the terrible period of judgment that was going to come on the earth, which term is taken from Joel's prophecy in Joel 2. There Joel says that it will be a day of darkness and gloom. It is described in Revelation 6 and following as well, called also the great tribulation period.

Note Paul's words in I Thessalonians 5:4 –6a

"But you brethren are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as other do. . . ."

Then read I Thessalonians 5:9 –

"For God has not destined us for wrath, that is to experience the Day of LORD, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ".

Paul is telling his readers in the first century and us today, that they and **we will not be in the Day of the LORD yet to come on the earth.** The reason being, **that the Lord is going to come before that time as indicated in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. We will not experience God's judgment yet to come upon the earth.**

Rather Christ is going to come for all believers in Jesus Christ and take them to their heavenly home.

But note what Jesus Christ has done?

We are not destined to wrath, God's judgment in the Day of the LORD, but to obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, now note I Thessalonians 5:10 - - -

"who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep (that is have died but are alive in Jesus, resting in Him), we will live together with HIM."

The Lord Jesus Christ, "Who died for us, " is the eternal basis for the urgency of our text.

Jesus died to pay the penalty for our breaking God's law which is death, but He also conquered the grave bodily (which is implied in this verse) for it also adds in the text that "we will live together with Him."

In I Thessalonians 4:14, Paul had already written, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again. . . ."

The command to continually build up one another in the Lord has no eternal urgency without the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since He is alive forever more, conquered our greatest enemy, which is death, and the father of death, the devil, himself, Christ's completed work for us, through faith in Him provides us the eternal basis to enter into the eternal words to build each other up on the Lord – encouraging one another in that regard.

But that eternal urgency, those eternal words, and that eternal basis. . . .

3. Has an eternal motivation.

Paul uses the reality of not being in the Day of the LORD for the believer in Christ, as a motivation to build up one another. Why is that a motivation?

Since believers will not be in the Day of the LORD, Jesus Christ could return for the believer at any time.

That's why Paul pens that believers are not of the darkness but are sons of light. They are looking for the Lord's return as Paul taught in I Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Knowing that Christ could return at any time for the believer in Christ, is the eternal motivation to continue building up one another in Christ. That's why Paul in writing to Titus says that those looking for the blessed hope of Christ's any time return seek to live godly lives (Titus 2:11-13). That's why John calls it a purifying hope. He that has this hope purifies himself as He is pure (I John 3:1-3).

When we let the eternal words, continually build up one another, the eternal basis, Christ's death and bodily resurrection for us, and the eternal motivation, Christ's any time coming, become part of our lives, what happens in our lives and our relationships with one another?

III. The eternal experience from the text.

1. Personal interaction with God in His Word.

Notice I Thessalonians 5:8.

"But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

Since believers who know Jesus, are the sons of light, that is they belong to Jesus Christ and are to be a light for Him, the Spirit of God directs Paul to pen that believers are in a spiritual battle against the evil one and those who deny who Jesus is and what He had done in His death, burial, and bodily resurrection.

(1) Let us be sober – continually (present tense)

Obviously, Paul is making a strong contrast with those who become drunk at night, in verse 7, who are of the darkness, lose all sense of who they are and what they are doing, and will be in the Day of the LORD.

What does the word sober mean?

It means to be vigilant, on the alert spiritually, temperate, circumspect, controlled – not be taken in by that which would cause you to lose your sense of who you are in Jesus Christ – totally accepted in HIM – one's freedom in Christ to do God's will.

In light of the next few words in this verse, it is obvious that Paul is telling the Thessalonian believers and us today that we need to be vigilant like a soldier, for we are in a daily spiritual battle with the forces of evil.

****A believer who is sober, then, knows the tactics of the enemy who wants to defeat him,** Paul told the Corinthians his second letter to them that we are not ignorant of his devices (II Corinthians 2:11).

Two of Satan's main devices are:

To bring division in relationships (II Corinthians 2:10-11)

To make falsehood look like God's truth, which is deception (II Corinthians 11:12-15).

That is why there are two major names given to the evil one.

Devil – Slanderer – doesn't want us to have harmony in our relationships as believer's in Christ – wants to break up marriages, and cause consternation in churches.

Satan – Adversary – He is out to deceive us in whatever way he can.

He wants his thinking to be so like the Lord that we think that is what the Lord is saying to us. That's why we live in world of so-called political correctness, and your ideas are as right as mine – everything is relative. You and I decide our own truth.

**** The believer who is sober also knows the desires of the old nature are to cause him to live for self rather than Christ.**

****The believer who is sober also knows that the philosophy of the world are to cause him to live for the moment rather than live for eternity laying up treasures there rather than on earth.**

But the believer in Christ is not just sober or vigilant, knowing what the tactics of the evil one are, He also knows and exercises the victory tactics which he has in Christ.

(2) He has put on (like a garment – once for all) the spiritual breastplate of faith and love.

The breastplate (thorax) – Consisting of two parts, covering the chest area and the back, so if taken by surprise, he is still protected. In Ephesians 6:14, Paul calls it the "breastplate of righteousness." He also has the shield of faith. (Ephesians 6:16). Regardless of the terms used to describe the breastplate, faith and love are certainly a vital part of righteousness, and the shield of faith is a necessary part of the Christian's armor as well.

Faith is what takes God at His word and acts upon it. Faith is a growing experience as we learn to trust God in the dark, and to bank on His promises in the difficulties and the joys of life. Taking God at His Word defeats the evil one, for Satan is defeated by God's Word . Faith in God's word defeats our Adversary who wants to deceive us. (Read again Christ's temptation).

Love is what God sheds abroad in our hearts by His Spirit so that we can love like Calvary love with out conditions and sacrificially. God's love at work in our lives produces harmony in different relationships. God's love defeats the Devil, our Slanderer.

I'm told of the farmer who put on the top of the dormer on his barn a weather vane. On that vane, he put the words, "God is love." One day a traveler stopped by the farm and watched the weather vane moving with the breeze. Then, with a smirk on his face, he asked, "Do you mean to say that your God is as changeable as the wind?"

The farmer shook his head and replied, "No. What I mean to say is that no matter which way the wind blows, God is love!" God's love in Christ is what defeated Satan at the cross and in Christ's bodily resurrection. His love for us and our love for the Lord still defeats the evil one today who doesn't want our relationships to be in Christ-like harmony.

(3) He has put on (like a garment – once for all) the spiritual helmet, the hope of salvation.

The helmet, in the soldier's armor, protects his head on the battle field. Spiritually the helmet, the hope of salvation, is to protect the believer's mind against the doubts and assaults of the evil one as he sends evil thoughts one's way, or to cause one to give up in the midst of life's challenges. Having the mind of Christ, the believer needs to use that helmet, the hope of salvation.

In Ephesians 6, the spiritual helmet is just called, the helmet of salvation.

Why then does Paul add here that the spiritual helmet for the believer is the "hope of salvation"?

God leads Paul to call our spiritual helmet, the hope of salvation, because the Thessalonian believers, and we today, need to hear about our hope in Jesus Christ.

The Thessalonian believers were wondering about loved ones who had passed away before the Lord would return. Paul answers that question in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. In their persecution, in their trials, they needed to know that there was always hope in Jesus Christ – God was with them giving them strength and courage.

We need the same message today in our challenges – that there is always hope, the anticipated reality that something good is going to happen – God is working out His good for us in the midst of the difficulties of life – For God's hope does not disappoint. And there is always the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus.

In our world that offers us no hope, the living hope we have in Jesus Christ is what needs to fill our minds as we go about our daily tasks, for the news we watch and the happenings in our world bring us no hope. It's easy to become discouraged with what is taking place in our beloved country.

Keep wearing the helmet, the hope of salvation.

Then we come to our text, "Encourage one another and build up one another.

For it seems that now having written about what God's word should be doing in our individual lives, Paul moves to

2. Our personal interaction with one another.

Since the believer is vigilant, uses the breast plate of faith and love, and the helmet of hope, he should be involved in building up others in the faith.

(1) Encourage the leadership in the local church (I Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Certainly this includes the pastor, the church chairman, the elder board, the deaconesses, the trustees, the treasurer, the financial secretary, the church secretary, and all those who serve on the different committees of the church.

The context of Paul's directions here is in the setting that some in the church were not working, thinking the Lord would return at any time, and were becoming busy bodies in the church as described in II Thessalonians 3. The leaders in the church had to deal with the situation. But the words apply to the leadership in any church that proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ.

Note the words that God directs Paul to use in regard to building up, encouraging the leadership of the church.

**** Appreciate those who diligently labor among you .**

Appreciate means to get know, regard with favor – to let one know that you are grateful for their service to the Lord and to the local body.

**** Esteem them highly in love because of their work.**

Esteem means to respect them as God's servants to the body of Christ.

**** Live in peace with one another.**

The leadership and the congregation are to work together, discussing issues that need to be discussed, making decisions that honor the Lord and further His church.

I know Ferra and I appreciate the love, support, and encouragement you give to us, and I'm sure the leadership of the church appreciates your encouragement as well as we serve together in the Grace Family.

(2) Minister to one another (I Thessalonians 5:14-24).

Although seemingly directed to the leaders in the church who are to set pace, these verses can be applied to everyone in the local church to minister to one another building up each other in Jesus Christ to maturity in Him.

**** Admonish (Present Command) the unruly (5:14).**

It means to bring to mind – what's happening in their spiritual walk with the Lord (Present command), the unruly, those who are out of order, or out of rank (it's a military word). Those not living for the Lord should be contacted, and in love encouraged to start living for the Lord. Such needs to be done in the spirit of humility and grace.

**** Encourage (Present Command) the fainthearted (5:14).**

Bring consolation, (Present Imperative) comfort, gentle cheering, to the fainthearted (those who are despondent, down in the dumps spiritually and perhaps other ways as well).

God never puts us down when we are having struggles spiritually. He is there to encourage us, and we should do the same to others. He never puts us down when we are having physical, emotional, and material challenges. He is right there with us, saying I understand, gently cheering us on. May we do the same to others that we know are feeling fainthearted.

**** Help the weak (5:14).**

"Exercise a zealous care" (Present Command), for the weak (those who have spiritual weakness, inability to face challenges, experiencing the attacks of the evil one – also could refer to having physical needs as well).

**** Be patient (Present Command) with everyone (5:14).**

Be patient (Present Command)- meaning bear long, be long suffering, long tempered, with everyone, including your children and grandchildren. Christ is patient with each of us, so we must be patient with one another as we build each other up in the faith.

We live in a world that wants everything now, perhaps yesterday. That's why the fast food places thrive. But God is in no hurry, yet He is always on time. He knows that spiritual growth takes time.

We have planted a couple of new trees in our yard this year – One in the back yard, and one in the front yard. The one in the back yard is coming along great. The one in the front yard is having some challenges. I have been watering it, watching it. The Japanese Beetles thought it was prime eating. I sprayed it, and they left. But it looks a bit beat up. But in time I trust it will be okay. I need to be patient with that tree, and encourage it along, in spite of the challenges.

It's the same in spiritual growth as we build up each other, we need to know that it takes time and effort, but God blesses our faithfulness in being patient with others.

****Don't repay (Present Imperative) evil for evil (5:15).**

We are not to retaliate when treated unjustly. Sometimes in seeking to build up someone one may not be appreciated. We are not to respond in kind for God is the one who will take care of the situation. The Thessalonians were also facing persecution, and they should not respond with any kind of vengeance.

****Always keep pursuing (Present Command) good for one another and for all people (5:15).**

Good is always related to the will of God. God is a good God, and He wants our lives to experience His goodness. As we build up one another we bring the goodness of God, His will, to them so they can be encouraged in the Lord. We are to be God's channel of goodness to other believers but to anyone we know and meet.

****Rejoice (Present Command) always – bringing God's joy to others (5:16).**

The word joy has as its root charis, grace. God's grace produces in the believer the joy of knowing he is right with God and with other believers, the gladness that regardless of what is happening, God is in his life. The joy that we have an eternal hope in Jesus.

In building up one another, we should be bringing something of the joy of the Lord and the gladness He has placed in our lives, encouraging others to rejoice in the Lord.

****Pray (Present Command) without ceasing ((5:17)**

The attitude of prayer is always present in the believer's life. We build up each other by praying for one another, and by asking others if they have any prayer needs, praying for that person, and then checking in later as to how things are going.

****Giving thanks (Present Command) in everything (5:18), for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.**

Giving thanks to the Lord in our circumstances, releases us from needing to be in control, but acknowledges God's sovereignty in the situation. In building up one another, we need to remind ourselves of that truth, and encourage each one to have a grateful spirit before the Lord.

****Not quenching (Present Command) the Spirit (5:19).**

Not extinguishing, or putting out the fire of the Holy Spirit in one's life. The Holy Spirit lives in each believer. One can obey the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, or one can disobey the Holy Spirit's direction in the Word of God. Believers are to encourage each other to let the Holy Spirit fill, or control them and enjoy obeying the Lord. Sometimes, we are miserable spiritually because we are not obeying the Holy Spirit in our lives. When we minister to one another in times of spiritual challenges, it is well to talk about one's relationship to God the Holy Spirit.

****Not to despise (treat with contempt (Present Command) prophetic utterances (5:20).**

The word of God was not complete as we have the Bible today, so there was still revelation being received from the Lord, that was forthtelling of God's word, and foretelling of God's word which would be telling about the future. They were not to despise that which was from God.

We have the completed Word of God today. God is not giving further revelation. We are not to treat the Bible with contempt .

Rather, we are to use the word of God in building up one another. A good question to ask another believer that you know is, "What has the Lord been teaching you today from His Word?"

****Keep examining (Present Command) everything (5:21).**

Be an evaluator, a sifter of all you read, see, and hear. Don't be a swallow of everything. This is how we build up one another as we discuss issues together, and we bounce ideas off of one another, all based upon the truth of God's Word.

****Keep holding fast (Present Command) to that which is good –is part of the will of God revealed in the Bible (5:21).**

Keep holding fast – Keep holding in a firm grip that which is good, that which is of God as revealed in His word.

Again that is what we are doing when we discuss the word of God in the light of the culture in which we live. We are building up each other encouraging each other to keep a tight grip on God's goodness as revealed in the Word of God.

****Keep abstaining (Present Command) from every form of evil (5:22).**

Keep your distance from that which is the opposite of God's goodness, which is evil. A good question to ask about what we think, what we read, where we go and what we do is to ask, "Is this promoting God's goodness, His will, or is it against God's will?" Again as we build up one another, these areas can be discussed and we can sharpen each other spiritually to do the will of God.

Paul, then, summarizes these 14 present commands or imperatives in I Thessalonians 5:23, asking God that He would sanctify, set the believers apart as holy unto Him, in their spirit, soul, and body, that is in every area of their lives physically and spiritually it would be evident that Christ was living in them.

Isn't that the ultimate goal of our building up one another in the body of Christ? Definitely. It is to see Christ become more evident in our lives as we interchange with one another and serve Him together!!

Yes, faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass (I Thessalonians 5:24).

As I was putting these thoughts together, I started reflecting on those who have been part of building up my life in my spiritual journey with my Lord.

I think of my father, who had a tremendous influence on my life, especially as I grew older and we discussed theological issues. My mother who served me and our family so faithfully. My sister, who has been an encouragement in so many ways. Friends I grew up with. Profs in seminary, such as Charles Ryrie, and Howard Hendricks, as well as friends in seminary. Then the different authors God has used to cause me to grow in Christ. My wife Ferra, and our three daughters, and son-in-law, and 3 grandchildren who remind us how fun life should be with their enthusiasm for life and adventure, along with their sayings, as little Ethan said this week, "I hope I can find my ping pong ball, before we go to heaven." Then Ferra's father and mother, her sister Carol, and her family. Yes, the various people we have become friends with in the different churches we have served before coming to Grace, and the opportunity we have had to build up each other in this family as we serve together.

How good God is, and it's all because of His grace and faithfulness.

Yes, ten Little Christians, standing in a line, One disliked the pastor, then there were nine.

Nine little Christians stayed up very late, One slept too late on Sabbath, then there were eight.

Eight little Christians on their way to Heaven, One took the low road, then there were seven.

Seven little Christians chirping like some chicks, One disliked the music, then there were six.

Six little Christians seemed very much alive, but one lost his interest then there were five.

Five little Christians pulling for heaven's shore, but one stopped to rest, then there were only four.

Four little Christians, each busy as a bee One got her feelings hurt, then there were three.

Three little Christians knew not what to do, One joined the sporting crowd, then there were two.

Two little Christians, our rhyme is nearly done, differed with each other, then there was one.

One little Christian, can't do much 'tis true; brought his friend to Bible study-then there were two.

Two earnest Christians, each won one more, that doubled the number, then there were four.

Four sincere Christians worked early and worked late, Each won another, then there were eight.

Eight splendid Christians, if they doubled as before, In just a few short weeks, we'd have 1,024

In this little jingle, there is a lesson true, You either belong to The Building, Or to the wrecking crew.

Let's, then, continue, in the Spirit's power, to build up one another in love to become more like the Lord to the glory of God.