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1 THESSALONIANS 5:13

Series: Real Christians in Challenging Times

Well we are in an exciting passage of scripture. We are looking at 1 Thessalonians, but in particular we're looking at a passage in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22. This is a great passage of scripture because it is a passage that is condensed dimensions of the Christian life. Characteristics of being a Christian. Ways that we can understand what it means to follow Christ in practical ways. There are ten different ideas in this passage, principles, truths that we can apply to our lives. I want to take these words and look at them all, each one over the next several weeks. I don't know how many I'm going to deal with each week.

I know that last week we only dealt with one. If you weren't with us last week, let me remind you...I just want to review what we talked about last week. Because we looked at a verse that talked about how we have people over us. We talked about authority. This idea of authority is so important. It's foundational to the Christian life. I encourage you to go back and listen to that sermon. If you didn't listen to it yet, I'd encourage you to have your young people listen to it. And here's why. If we don't understand authority as we're growing up, if we don't put this idea of authority into practice in our lives then we end up in places we don't want to be.

For example, the young person who tries to skirt authority and sneak out of the house or who views authority as something to tunnel through and get around develops an integrity problem because they become manipulative and sneaky. Even adults can look for ways to sneak and get away with things in order to get what they want if they misunderstand authority. And that then starts to attack the integrity of a person.

God designed us to live well under authority with all its quirks and exceptions and appeals and all the things we have to do in that, but we have to understand we live well under authority. Authority is so important because it gives us this foundation upon which God is able to work in our lives. It starts with submitting our authority to God and His word and to other authorities. Last week we talked about civil authority, spiritual authority, and parental authority. We understand those things. It launches us into some valuable truths for the rest of our lives. Very important.

Now each one of the principles that we look at through this passage – these are action statements, these are verbs, these are things you want to do in your life. What I'm trying to do is embed these action statements into our theology so we understand the bigger reasons why we are to do this particular thing. So we're going to look at the very specific practical things that Paul has to offer in 1 Thessalonians 5. You'll come back to these verses 12-22 many times as you look at God's word. People will say, "Oh yeah there's a verse that says..." and go back to these words. So

you'll want to know these, understand them. I don't want to run over them quickly, but I do want us to spend some time understanding how important they are and what we can do with them in our lives.

So let me read the whole passage in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22 here so that you can see what this passage looks like. It says – *We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.* So that's what we talked about last week is the *over you in the Lord*. This week: *Be at peace among yourselves*. We're going to spend some time looking at that. There's actually two Greek words there. That's what we're going to look at. *Be at peace among yourselves*.

But he continues on and he says – *And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.* What we're going to look at in that part is how God does not expect us to treat everyone equally all the time. That is going to be a fascinating study. We're going to talk about that. How do you care for people the best? That means we don't treat everybody the same sometimes. So we'll look at that next week.

Notice in verse 15 – *See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.* I can hardly wait to get to that verse. We're going to talk about the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives on a daily basis. We're going to talk about what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit and what does that mean to quench the Holy Spirit? That's coming in. That special time we'll spend the whole Sunday just talking about the power of the Holy Spirit and what that verse means there in verse 19.

Verse 20 – *Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.*

So that's the whole passage that we're looking at. Now we looked last week at this idea of authority. We emphasized this idea of everyone needs to have people over them in the Lord. And then this week we're going to look at these words: *Be at peace among yourselves*.

Be at peace among yourselves. I want to talk about what that peace looks like, what it means, and how we can apply it to our lives. When we're done with our time today, I think you'll understand that peace and living peaceably in your life is more than stress management. When you live at peace it will affect so many areas of your life and it requires that you understand a number of theological truths in order to do that. So I want to spend some time explaining what that looks like so that you can practice this in your life the rest of today and tomorrow.

So in order to do that, let me take you to this verse 13 – *Be at peace among yourselves*. There are two Greek words. In fact the whole verse, those five words in English – *be at peace among yourselves* – are made of two Greek words. The first one is the word practice peace and the second one, *eautois*, is among yourselves. We'll talk about both of those today, but you can circle them in your booklet and draw a line across and write the Greek words if you'd like.

But the key idea here is with that word *eireneuo* is where it comes from is the idea that it's a verb. You've got to start there with this. This is what's very interesting because in English it's not a verb. In English we can't say "peace your brother" or "peace yourself." We don't say that in English. We have to put a verb with it because peace is a noun in English. But in Greek it is a verb, it's an action statement. So in order for us to use that word then we translate it with other words. It's a verb and we translate it practice peace or live peace or live peaceably. So Paul is making an important statement here about peace, what it is. He doesn't tell what it is, but he's talking about practicing it, living it out.

I want to talk about what it is and I want to take you on a journey through God's word so that you have an understanding of how you can actually live at peace, what it means to live at peace, and how to handle yourself in the midst of challenges. Because this is one of those things that characterizes the Christian in the same way we talked last week about how authority and living under authority is one of the things that characterizes a Christian. Peace is another thing that characterizes the people of God, Christians in the New Testament, followers of God in the Old Testament. Peace was an important part of what it means to be connected to God. You're going to want to know what that means and what it looks like for you on a practical level every part of your day. What does it mean to follow the Lord?

So in order to do that, what I try to do is look at these words and it's helpful for me to take a word like peace and break it up into practical parts so I know what to do in order to obtain that peace. So as I study God's word and try to understand what God has to say about a particular subject, I like to take it apart and say okay if I'm going to do that, what does it mean I need to do in order to get there. So in this idea of peace we do that. So in my diagram of peace there are three different parts to that. I want to talk about each one.

The first one is this idea of release. Every time that you are moving toward peace you are releasing something. Sometimes that release is the release of anger or hurt that you have towards someone. Someone who's definitely wronged you. Someone who's been vicious. Someone who's been mean or hurtful to you. You know it's starting to create something inside of you. It's starting to make you into an ugly person. God wants you to experience peace. So there has to be this sense of release. There has to be the ability to release the anger. God allows us to do that through His forgiveness. But we must release something. Sometimes when we're releasing something we're releasing control. Some of us are really into control. We really like to determine the course of our steps. We like to know what's going to happen. We have our five-year plan laid out. We have it all set. And when we can't control the situation we start to develop some emotional turmoil. God wants us to be at peace, even when we can't be in control. So sometimes we have to release control.

I think sometimes we have to release guilt in our lives. I think that is one of the reasons people come to Christ is because they realize that they can't balance all the scales with right and wrong. Oh I'm going to do more good today than bad and therefore I'll feel good about myself. No. We have to release that. That's why we need a Savior who comes into our lives. And that Savior provides for us something. But we must release this desire to be perfect, release this desire even to be good. We have to recognize that we are sinful people. We have to release that in order to have the peace that God wants us to have in our lives.

So we must come to this release part of peace and then we have to receive something. Now this is what makes the peace of God that He wants to give us different than stress reduction. When we understand the peace of God, we're receiving something that's supernatural. That God allows this thing, this experience to flood over us and to give us an internal calm in the midst of the challenges. That when we trust God as our Lord and Savior, He gives us something. He leads us beside quiet waters. He prepares the table in the midst of my enemies. It's that Psalm 23 experience of peace that we all need. That's why we love the psalm. Because we know that when we trust God He gives us the daily grace, the daily energy that we need to experience something in our hearts to be at calm, to be at rest. So receiving something here is important. It's a spiritual thing and we receive.

And lastly peace involves practice. This idea of practice comes from this verse 1 Thessalonians 5:13, which says practice peace or live peaceably. It's something we have to do on a daily basis. This is not just something you do instantly. It's something that you're working on and that God is growing in your life. It's something that you practice every minute. And there's sometimes when you're practicing it just continually. It's a practice time.

Let me give you an example. Sometimes when I work with a mom who has a trying child, a very difficult child who either has to be corrected a lot or who's disrespectful or who's defiant, and she's so upset about this. So we work on those things in the child's life. I will help a parent do that. But I say to a mom, "Let me just look at you for a moment. Do you know that God, I'm sure, has allowed this child to be in your home in part for your benefit. That during this time while you're working through these challenges with your son or daughter, God wants to do something special in your heart. He wants you to be able to have peace even in the midst of the struggle. In fact this is a supernatural peace that God want you to have. He wants you to be centered, even in the midst of challenges that you experience. So when you get up in the morning and you have your time with the Lord, you want to say, 'God, I want you to fill me with your Spirit right now. I want to be centered right now with your peace in my life. Before I go out and face the world, I want to be centered right where you want me to be.' Then you take that step out of your bedroom and when you see that child and that child needs to be corrected or that child is defiant and you feel yourself moving off-center, you feel that peace going away and dissipating, you want right in that moment to come back and say, 'God, I want that peace in my heart right now.' Because your primary goal in life, your mission in life is peace."

When you understand that your primary mission in life is peace then in the course of the day when you get uncentered, you get off course because some driver cuts you off, or because you get a bill in the mail, or you get an ache or a pain that bothers you or concerns you about something, you want to come back to this peace because you want to live peaceably. That's what Paul is saying in these verses to live peaceably. It's a practice.

So in my diagram I've included the word 'practice' because that's something we need to do in our lives. God has given us this supernatural experience that moves into our lives when we experience this peace.

Well let's move that off to the corner right now and let me pull a verse out of God's word from John 14:27 that just illustrates the fact that God's peace is different than the world's peace because Jesus said to His disciples and of course is speaking to us as well when He says these words – *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

I think our hearts have a tendency to be troubled. Even as Christians we can fall into that cycle and turmoil that's created by troubles, by our heart being troubled. So one of the things we want to do is practice peace. So I'm meditating on that this week. How do we practice peace? What does that look like? I'd encourage you to do the same. You're not just coming on Sunday to practice peace, but every day you're in the difficult challenges that you're in in your life that your primary mission is to practice peace and allow God to work in your life in that special way. Practicing peace is part of that mission that God has given to us. It requires that we think about this on several levels.

I'd say it's a 360 degree turn or look at peace when we see that it involves these three different dimensions. Peace with God, peace in relationships, and inner peace. So I want to talk to you about all three of those concepts for a moment.

When we talk about peace with God we're talking about this idea that we can have an openness with God. In fact I'd like to use the term that I think is very realistic today. There's this cleanliness that we have before God. Because the problem is we look at our own lives and we see that we're dirty. We have sin in our lives and one of the challenges we feel guilty or we should feel guilty about that sin. What happens is we start looking at our guilt and we start feeling inadequate. It starts attacking who we are because we do not want to admit that we have weaknesses. We do not want to face the reality that we have problems or that we have made mistakes. So what do we do? Either we lie, we try to defend ourselves, cover it up. Or we blame other people for the problems we have. Or we try to outperform, that is we try to prove something to ourselves that we're going to do more good than bad, and then therefore trying to somehow overcome this and attain to this peace with God. But it doesn't happen that way.

Many people have come to Christ because they realize that just is not working for me. I need the message of the gospel. Because this is the message that God has for us. That we are sinners, that we make mistakes, and we cannot overcome that on our own. We need the power of a Savior. And that Savior, Jesus Christ is the one we look to to take and wipe away all of that sin so that we can say, “Yeah, I'm a sinner, but I'm growing in God's grace. God relieves me of the guilt in my life. I don't have to have that self-condemnation.” For the person who's a perfectionist they can be more comfortable with mistakes. That they can look at themselves and say, “God accepts me for who I am because He accepts Christ as the person who takes away my sin. God loves me and I am now at peace with God.”

Let me share with you a verse of scripture that just illustrates this a little bit more. It says in Romans 5:1 – *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.*

If you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, this is a great reason to do it. Because when you see that Jesus Christ died for your sin to take away your guilt, that you can have peace in your relationship with God, this is so powerful it transforms your life. Many people are motivated by this one idea to come to Christ and give themselves to Jesus Christ and to accept Him as their Lord and their Savior. There are other reasons that people come to Christ. Some people come to Christ because the forgiveness that they need to offer to someone else is just too big and it's wrecking them on the inside, and they need the supernatural power to forgive and God is the only one who can give that and they know it. I can't forgive this person on my own. I'm too hurt. But I can allow God to work in my life. There's some people who come to God and trust Him as their Lord and Savior because they realize that their love needs are not being met by one person or by any group of people. That they have needs within their own heart. That they need God. They need the love. Those love needs say I need something else. God wants to pour that love that is so big. The scriptures describe that love as so big that it fills up every nook and cranny in our own hearts. Some people come to Christ because of their love needs. They just know that God is the one who provides those.

I just want to say that when it comes to this idea of peace, God is the one who gives this ultimate peace in our lives. If we come to this place where we start shaming ourselves or condemning ourselves, we need to look at that second verse on that slide. Romans 8:1 says – *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* None. There's no shame. That before God we are perfect, we're holy, we're loveable, we're worthy. All those things He offers to us. That's what peace with God is all about. If we're going to understand this idea of peace, we must start there. That is the foundation upon which we build. Because when we come to God and we know we have peace with Him, we can deal with much of the other stuff that takes place in our lives.

Well as we continue on then and we look at peace, we look at a second part of that and it says peace in relationships. In our verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:13 (look at it again in your books there) what it talks about is it says live peaceably or live *at peace among yourselves*. The *among yourselves* is this idea of you're living at peace.... Either it's meaning the idea that practice peace and encourage each other to practice peace among yourselves or it means that when there's a difference between you, practice peace together.

Now the reason this is so important is because as Christians we have this foundation that God is our peace. So when we come together, that foundation that we have allows us to overlook differences and to experience peace even when those differences exist. This is such a powerful thing in relationships. Paul is writing to brothers. Notice he says in that passage in 1 Thessalonians 5 – *brothers*. He's talking to Christians. That you want to *be at peace among yourselves*. So there's this idea of living together in this idea of peace.

Now I know that some of you are in conflict, not in peace but in conflict with Christians. It is true that sometimes there are Christians that we end up in conflict with. That is very difficult. It's a challenging place for us to be. But the idea here is if you are a Christian, you have extra resources to obtain that peace and we want to call on those in the relationships.

Now I would say it's particularly difficult to deal with this idea of peace and relationships with nonbelievers that have differences with us. That's why I'm grateful that Paul in his writing to the Romans talks about nonbelievers and he gives us these instructions when he talks about living at peace with them. He says in Romans 12:18 – *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

First of all, the word *live peaceably* is the exact same verb that we're using and we're seeing in 1 Thessalonians 5:13. It's a verb. *Live peaceably with all.* But I appreciate the words where he says *as far as it depends on you.* What that tells me is first of all my peace isn't dependent on someone else's reconciliation or their agreement with me or unity with someone else. I may not have unity with someone. In fact the passage there in Romans 12 is dealing with enemies, with people who are persecuting you, people who are treating you unjustly. And he's saying if it's possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with all people. So there must be, he says, this way for me to experience peace even in the midst of conflict and challenges that exist in life. So peace in relationships is important, but it's not the peace that comes through the unity of two people in that relationship. It's the peace I experience in the midst of my relating.

God wants us to experience that in our lives. Even when we're hurt, even when we're mistreated, even when bad things are going on, even when we have conflict we can experience in our hearts that's part of what God has offered to us. We can only achieve that through God's miraculous spiritual supernatural peace that He gives to us.

Well now we go to the third part of this peace, which is the inner peace. This is that peace that's tranquility that we experience inside of our lives. This is something that God offers us that we all need. Let me show you a couple of verses that are so helpful. Isaiah 26:3 in the Old Testament says this: *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.* I like the idea that there's a perfect peace that we can find. That there's a place where we can experience that perfect peace that God is the one who gives. That's the verse. It's written to God. God, you will keep us *in perfect peace.*

But it says two things about that perfect peace. One is that our *minds are steadfast* on Him. In other words our minds are centered on God and who He is and that allows us to experience this perfect peace. And secondly it says *because they trust in you.* It's that release and that receiving and that practicing that allow peace to overcome us, to provide us with this perfect peace that God wants to experience inside of our hearts.

I think it's a daily thing that we practice, and that's what Philippians 4:6-7 is talking about when it says – *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* There's this supernatural experience we have with God's grace and peace that comes over us and we understand appreciate because of who God is. This peace is big.

This is why I just want to park here because this is something that God expects characterizes a Christian's life. That we live peaceably. We're not people continually agitated. We're not people

continually in tension. We are people who are living peaceably. It's one of those characteristics of the Christian life that help us to be able to deal with life.

You know I'm the kind of person who's intense. I know you've probably noticed that. I'm the kind of person that has a high level of busyness in my life. I feel good about myself when I have a high level of busyness. When I accomplish things and the busyness decreases I feel better about myself when I increase the level of busyness. I like to be productive. Productivity is a high value in my list of values in my life. It's been that way since in my youth. But one of the side effects of being productive or taking a lot on or being a problem solver is that you run into roadblocks and there's frustrations. So stress is a natural byproduct of the kind of life that I live.

About thirty years ago when I came to New Jersey, my doctor, Dr. Jass, was not a believer at the time, but since then he became a believer and began attending our church at Calvary Chapel Mercer County. He loves the Lord and now is a Christian and serving God. He was my physician and I knew him before he was a Christian. In one conversation about something he said, "You know you'd probably be interested in my stress reduction program and stress management program that I do in four weeks in a person's life." Now I'm always weary and leery about someone's desire to get mental health from someone who's not a believer or mental health advice. I'm leery because sometimes they have their ideas embedded in worldly philosophies and I'm not really interested in that. Now I know some of you go to secular counselors and partly you're able to do that because you're a Christian and you can take the good and leave the bad, and I think that's important for us to do. So I figured I would do that. This sounded like a good idea for me. I would take advantage of what my doctor had to offer.

So I did go through his four-week program and I learned an immense amount about my body and about stress, about my thinking, about managing life situations, and knowing when they're coming on and so on a huge amount. I was becoming able to handle stress better. But the clincher for me was in week four when he said this to me. He said, "Now Dr. Turansky, I know that you are making a lot of progress in your life in this area. I can see that you've grown in your ability to manage stress. I just want to encourage you now as you're ending this time to tie this into your life purpose and your life mission. Aren't you a Christian? Isn't this somehow tied into who you are as a believer?"

When he said those words it opened up for me an understanding of something I hadn't thought of before. It integrated everything I knew about peace and my mission and my calling and my purpose as a Christian tied in with this understanding of stress management. It's really about peace. It's not just about taking deep breaths. It's about allowing God to come into my heart in that particular area so that I can live at peace in the midst of challenges. It transformed my life. Here's a man who's not even a believer, and God spoke to me through him and helped me understand that, yes, I can be productive and productivity can be good for me, but when I started getting stressed out about those things, that is not good for me. I need to be able to trust the Lord and allow peace to come into my life when I'm problem solving or when I'm experiencing a challenge progressing toward my goals. This is something I continue to wrestle with even today in my life. Where something will come into my life and it's just obviously a roadblock and I feel my stress level increasing. In those moments I need to come in and say, "God, would you just help me in the midst of this situation manage my body well with your spiritual peace that you

want to give to me so I can think rightly, so I can have that peace while I continue to do my work that I'm engaged in."

One of the benefits is this allows me to do more work, to be more productive. Which is a value for me, so I kind of like that. But one of the things I appreciate is being able to live life in the day to day, understanding what God has and what He wants for me in my life. It's the ability to integrate faith into my daily interactions. There are sometimes when I have to every hour (and sometimes every minute) I just have to pause and I have to say, "Lord, I need it now. Fill me with that peace that you offer because I need it in my own heart."

Well those are three dimensions of peace. This peace with God, peace in relationships, and inner peace that we experience in our lives all coming from this supernatural understanding of what God has for us where we release something, we receive something, and we practice this in our lives. It's God's design for us so that we can be people of peace. But it doesn't end there.

I want to close with this idea that when Jesus came and taught us about life in the Sermon on the Mount. He starts His sermon talking about this idea of peace when He says *blessed are the peacemakers*. You see God has made us ambassadors of peace. He's called us to pass peace on to other people. We live in a world that doesn't know how to handle stress and the stress isn't just about problem solving. The stress is about their inner turmoil inside of their own hearts and they need the ability to deal with that. We are ambassadors. We have what other people need.

I want to share with you this story from the Old Testament. In the book of Numbers 6 God is explaining to the Israelites how they are to live when they go into the Promised Land. He's given them all kinds of instructions about what the priests should wear and how the priests should act and how sacrifices should be offered and how the people should handle themselves and so on. But then he gives specific instructions to the priests. He tells them you are my ambassadors to give peace to people. In fact your job is to bless people and I'm going to show you how to bless people so you can give them peace. That's what I'm going to share with you.

I'm going to read the passage to you in just a moment, but before I share this idea in the Old Testament where the priest had this responsibility to bless people and give them God's peace, I want to share this with you. In the New Testament we are the priests. You see when Jesus Christ died on the cross, the veil was torn in two that separated the priests from the Most Holy Place so we have access now to God. We don't have to go to a priest or a person to confess our sins. We can go directly into the presence of God and say, "God, please forgive me," and then God makes us these representations of Himself to other people so that we can go out and bless people. Imagine yourself laying your hands on people or blessing people and giving them peace. That is what God is telling the Israelites to do. I'm going to give you the exact words He says that you need to say to my people (the Israelites). These are the words I want you to say to them. He says in Numbers 6:24-27 – *The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.*

There's this very essence in which God is passing through a person. His supernatural peace. He passes it on so that other people can receive it. People need the blessing today. So many people didn't get the blessing from their own home from their own parents that they should have

received. There was chaos and turmoil and hurt in their family growing up. They don't have the blessing. And the blessing represents this peace. There are people who go into new relationships, marriage relationships, parenting relationships, they don't have the peace that they need. They need the blessing. You and I are those blessing givers. That we're the ones who go in and pass on God's peace. We share with others and we want to pray for them. You can say to anybody anywhere in the office that's not even a believer, "Hey, I'm going to pray for you that God will bless you and give you peace." Because you have something to offer. You know what that peace looks like. You've experienced that peace in your heart and you share that peace with other people.

The last part of that passage, verse 27, is this: *So they* (the *they* is the priests; that's us) *shall put My name* (that's Yahweh) *on the Israelites*. Wow, what a beautiful picture. He's putting His name on the Israelites. The name of Christ, Father, just the name of God on the Israelites. *And I will bless them*. God says *I will bless them* and I'm blessing them through you. He promised to Abraham *through you all of the nations will be blessed*. What is that blessing? That blessing is peace that we pass on to other people because they can come to know Jesus Christ personally themselves. They can experience the power of God in their lives. They can experience a supernatural washing over their heart to give them peace in the midst of whatever pain they are experiencing in their lives. That is the peace that God wants to have for each one of us.

I trust that you have that. I trust that you'll practice it in your life and that you'll pass it on to those you come in contact with in your life.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you now for this peace that we can have through Jesus Christ in our relationship with you. We thank you that it's so practical that we can put it into practice in our daily interactions. Lord, I pray that you'd give us peace and allow us to be able to spread that to others, to be a messenger on your behalf to others to share this blessing that people need. Thank you for this word in your word and I ask that you apply it to our lives today. In Jesus' name, amen.