



Interacting with the Brethren

Living the Christian life is a struggle. "I have fought the good fight," was the apostle Paul's commentary just before he made his "departure" from earth, "I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). It is clear, then, that the Christian life is a struggle, and has to be fought successfully to the end. Brethren, then, coming from all sorts of backgrounds and home environments, have mental and attitudinal challenges in fighting that fight and hence have some need of help. Paul thus encourages the saints at Thessalonica, and through them the rest of us who have been designated to live out the earthly sojourn at a different time, to do their part to assist struggling disciples of Christ.

◆ **Admonish the unruly** — In earthly terms, an adopted child of an age to know that he is being adopted, might have a bit of adjustment to make to his new circumstances. Therefore, in the process of being accepted into a new family, and accepting his new family, the adoptee might have some emotional problems that play out as appearing to be "unruly." Wall-kicking, loud yelling and screaming, silent moods, and downright disobedience might be some of the exhibitions of this unruly behavior. Similarly, in coming out of the world and in being adopted into the family of God, the new saint may demonstrate some of this unruly behavior. "And we urge you, brethren," Paul calmly comments, "admonish the unruly" (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Tested and trusted church leadership knows how to handle these types of new kids who have come into the body of Christ. These kids do need this admonition, and they do need to accept it. Admonitions can be fairly strong words, and the usage of well-chosen words of those experienced in leading the flock must be accepted, not only by the brother who has been admonished, but also by the congregation as a whole.

- ◆ **Encourage the fainthearted** — Real and imaginary fears can govern a person's life, and some brethren are more likely than others to be subject to those fears and become what the word of God calls *fainthearted*. The loving Father in heaven does not wish for any to perish through being too fainthearted to keep moving forward. Hence brethren are pressed to "encourage the fainthearted."
- ◆ **Help the weak** — Every member of the body of Christ is important to the functioning of the local congregation. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,'" was Paul's analysis of the body, "or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary" (1 Corinthians 12:21,22). Since those perceived to be weak are very necessary to the functioning of the congregation, according to the will and design of God, then the brethren are exhorted to "help the weak."
- ◆ **Patience** — Different people do things in different ways. So when saints are working together as a team, there are many opportunities to be frustrated with a brother or sister because things do not mesh together as perfectly as they potentially could. But God expects His children to be as gracious as He is, and "be patient with all men." Yes, of course, that means be patient with EVERYONE!

The church universal is God's vehicle for victory over the forces of darkness. But where "the boots are on the ground" is the local congregation. This is where the work really gets done, and where the saints must function as a well-oiled machine to do their part to combat the rising tide of evil. The unruly and disruptive have to be tamed, the fearful have to be given backbone, the weak need to be helped and strengthened, and everyone must be patient as the brethren work their way through personal obstacles and foibles. Then the church will be ready for "the God of peace to crush Satan" under their feet!

JAY WILSON

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