

## Len Griehs - Warning the Unruly

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Warning the unruly. I want to talk about First Thessalonians 5:14. We exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, Comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. Sounds pretty negative, doesn't it? But I think we'll find some good lessons in here.

It's meant to sort of encourage us along the steps of the way. In this scripture, Paul discusses three categories of brethren. This second one, the unruly, two, the feeble minded, and three, the weak. We say, wow, isn't this kind of going against what we think we should think about the brethren? But I think sometimes we misunderstand this scripture.

Now there is a whole section on this in volume six and organize the organization of the ecclesia. So some of the thoughts you'll see I take from there and some I want to explain a little beyond what is mentioned in there, and at first glance these can be fairly negative. Henry Ward Beecher, who actually Pastor Russell used his library, interestingly enough, said this about the church. Church is not a gallery for the exhibition of eminent Christians, but a school for the education of imperfect ones.

Brethren, that's the overwhelming theme we want to take into this presentation. We are all here because we're maturing Christians. We're not mature Christians at this point, and it's something we need to keep in mind as we look at those that are amongst us in this chapter listed here in volume six. I like this excerpt from the quote.

Pastor Russell says this exhortation is to the entire church. It takes cognizance that each and all of them have their imperfections according to the flesh. To take notice of each other's imperfections from the standpoint of criticism is entirely foreign to the spirit and intention of the apostles. Exhortation, and that's what we must remember.

Paul is not approaching a negative view of the brethren, but it's an exhortation to how we should be looking at the fellow members of our ecclesia or of our fellowship. So we'll take each of these. First the unruly, and here's the new American standard translates this as warn those who are idle and disruptive. Again, sounds a bit negative, doesn't it?

How many do you know amongst the brethren sitting in this room that you would call idle and disruptive? I haven't seen anybody with a banner here saying sit down or do anything else. The word unruly, if we look in Strong's 8, 13 is most often used in a military sense. It's like a soldier who's out of step. One of my favorite.

Well, of course, I remember going to Russ Martin's house when he's younger and we were watching the Three Stooges. I love the Three Stooges, but they did the step where they all went out of step in a rank and everybody did that. That's really what this is meant to be. A soldier that goes out of rank or out of step with the rest of the group, and so it's kind of a willful diligence, negligence of duty, and especially a duty to work.

In Paul's day, this was the context in which he was putting it. The warning was not saying, you better shape up or else, but it was to put some sense into them, to help them understand, you know, that we're in this together and everyone must put in their share. I think the answer, the best place we get an answer to what Paul means here is on his follow up letter in the second chapter or second book of Thessalonians, the very end, he gives what I think is a summary of this warning

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against idleness or what we would call passivity. I'm just going to read the parts that you see highlighted. But this is the passage you can read faster than I can talk so you can read it.

But he says, keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you receive from us. What teaching was that? Paul says, we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. We gave you this rule. The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.

Some among you are idle and disruptive. Paul could say that he was an apostle. Okay, we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and and earn the food they eat. Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them in order that they may feel ashamed.

But at the end he says, warn them as you would a fellow believer, not asking to ostracize them or kick them out. Recognize them as fellow believer, and Paul's day, remember, the church was still in a mindset of coming together in a commune type of environment where everyone shared all they had and it was divvied up among everyone equally, and in his day there were some that weren't doing that. We would call them today freeloaders.

But that's what he was talking about. Now we don't have that in our day because we're not have commune goods. But how can we apply it in a way that makes sense for us today. I want to go back to the Old Testament, to the time when Israel is journeying through the wilderness. This is at the very kind of, at the very beginning, before their 40 years of wandering, when God got upset with them and said, you're going to stay here for 40 years now and wander around because of your attitudes.

But the Reubenites and the Gadites, they had large herds and they saw how nice it was on the side of the Jordan where they hadn't crossed and they wanted to stay there, and they came to Moses and they said, if we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to us. Do not, don't make us cross the Jordan. Well, what did Moses say? Moses said to the Gadites and Reubenites, should your fellow Israelites go to war while you sit here?

They wanted to just settle down and be peaceful and enjoy the land, and Moses knew they had to conquer the land. That was their objective. But because they refused, Moses got upset with them and God actually got upset with them. When they finally did cross the land, obviously he said no.

And God said no. When they did finally cross the land into the land. The geographic location you see here where tribes of Gad and Reuben went was on the far east side, away from all the other tribes. Because of the indifference toward the welfare of the entire nation, they became selfish. They wanted only what they could get out of it themselves and not willing to participate and share into the work that had yet to be done.

Brethren, we have a very close knit clan like fellowship. That's important because it's how we develop, it's how we grow together. But remember, it's not just a place for my own personal self fulfillment. I go here because it makes me feel good. It should make you feel good, but it should also call you to action and say, I want to participate in this, I want to be part of it, I want to contribute.

And I think that's the message Paul's giving to us as we bring this admonition to our day. It's about what we contribute for the cause that we're serving. How many times have you heard said or

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maybe thought yourself, well, I didn't get anything out of that meeting or I really don't like that person leading the meeting. It's nothing to do. Well, I think that's the call to action that we must think about.

Say, what did we do to contribute to make things better, to help push along the way in the right way? I think that's what Paul's calling us to do. In this message he gives to the church of his day. He's saying, you know, you have to be part of what you're desiring to do and not just try to take, take, take. But brethren, let's be conscious of that.

If we're not getting things out of the meeting, if we're not getting things out of participation fellowship, what are we putting into it? Try a little harder to be part of that, not be part of the problem.

The truth movement rewards activity. We are not called to be passive and sit and listen and do nothing. We are called to grow and to help others grow, and that's what we need to be doing in our fellowship. Think about how you make others grow.

That's what Paul is saying in warning those that are not, admonish them to be part what they have, and if someone says, I'm not getting anything out of that, just ask, what are you doing to contribute to the cause? The second thing he says, the feeble minded. I don't know about you, but when I think about feeble minded, it doesn't bring a very good picture to me. The new American standard says encourage the disheartened.

And I like that idea better. There are people that get very depressed about things. They need comfort, they need encourage, and this word is translated comfort in the King James, and encourage, it means to speak to someone by coming close to them.

If I sit here and I tell brother Walter, how you doing today, Brother Walter, and I'm, you know, really glad to see you here, or I'm sorry, if he's having a problem, I go up and put my arm around him like you saw in those pictures that Tim, Brother Tim showed this morning. That brings a closeness, an encouragement and a comfort to someone, and that's really what this word is about, comforting. Those that are disheartened, for whatever reason it might be. Strong uses this only once.

It's the only time this appears, and the word combines two words that mean soul and small. Small. Souled. Do you ever feel small amongst those that are around you?

Certainly we all do. There are times we feel like we're nothing. But we are something. Yes, we are nothing, and we should have that attitude.

Oh, to be nothing. Nothing. But it doesn't mean that we shrink back from what we should do. But there are some that have timidity, they have worry, they have fear, just difficulty handling everyday issues. Those are the ones that we need to comfort.

We need to provide encouragement to those that are struggling a bit in life.

I want to Talk about a couple of people that were huge elements in my Christian life. This some of you knew Brother George Eldridge. George lived in Florida for ways. He lived in Jackson, Michigan where I was. He lived in Pennsylvania where I was.

We spent a lot of our Christian life together. Although he was a bit older than me, George had been a career soldier. He had some of the stories that you would not believe, but he said that, you know,

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the Lord preserved me so many times, Len, that I should have been dead, and he says I never knew it until I found the truth. He and Ruth, his wife, found it by accident.

They immersed themselves in the river, in New Jersey, in the Delaware, because they didn't know anything about the Bible students. But George grasped the truth and this was a piece in the paper that was done on him in the Trentonian Times, profiling his life from a 30 year soldier who fought in two wars in combat. If you saw Saving Private Ryan, George was the guy. His troop trained Private Ryan. So he had an illustrious career.

But now all he would say is, I'm a soldier for Christ, and George had the attitude, if I see somebody on the street standing there, I feel compelled to go up to them and talk to them about the truth. How many of us are like that? Not many of us, but there are some. But as we find in this.

I like this thought. The Lord is not seeking merely those who are strong and robust in mind, able to reason and analyze thoroughly every feature of the divine plan, and there are some like that. I count George one of those. Never step back from any kind of a challenge to the truth.

But not everyone can do that, brethren. Some have a great fear about witnessing or public speaking, even giving answers in class at times, and they'll never initiate conversations. They don't really give discourses. They're uncomfortable presenting themselves.

What should we do? Well, I want to talk about another sister, about a sister in class, and you won't recognize her unless you were part of the Jackson, Michigan class. This sister, Amy Ayton, she was an instrumental part with a big heart. She and her husband gave great support to Gretchen and I when we first got married.

But she had the more self sacrifice and dedication of any Christian I know. But yet she shrunk back from answering questions in class, intellectually felt like she didn't have that same level of knowledge. But the heart was there and the self sacrifice was manifested in so many ways with the brethren. So that's what the Lord is looking for too, and we need to encourage that kind of behavior.

Not to tell Them you should be out there witnessing, doing this, making them feel like they're shrinking back from something. But encourage them in their own dedication and self sacrifice. As someone once said, I may never do great things, but I can do small things great, and there are brethren that do small things great that we never know about. That should be an encouragement and we should encourage that kind of behavior, not make them feel like they're not living up to the expectations.

The third one, help the weak.

This quote from Oscar Wilde you may not be able to read, it says, I can resist everything except temptation, and there are some that have that problem. Some have real difficulty in growing spiritually and throwing off the old man. George Eldred, as I mentioned to you, he used to talk about getting up in the morning, and he said, every morning I get up and I stomp on that coffin of the old man.

Tell him, stay in there. Some people cannot do that. Some people continually fall, and that's why Jesus said, how many times should I forgive my brother who offends me? Oh, maybe once or twice, and if not, write them off.

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No, he didn't say that, did he? He said, not seven times, 70 times seven, and we know that was not a literal number, but it's a figurative sense of don't stop. Romans 14 and 15. Paul talks a lot about the susceptibility to sin.

Those that have a difficult time in overcoming the weaknesses of the flesh, and rather than make them feel guilty about it, he's saying, that's a duty. We have to help them. In volume 6, Pastor Russell writes this about First Corinthians 12:28. First, let's read First Corinthians 12:28 from the Complete Jewish Bible.

God is placed in the Messianic community. First emissaries, second prophets, third teachers, then those who work miracles, then those who with gifts of healing. Note now those with ability to help, those skilled in administration, those who speak in tongues, those with ability to help are part of the gifts that God gives to the church. Pastor Russell says in his passage, the Lord's good pleasure would be that each member should seek to occupy such a place of helpfulness. You don't think you have any gifts?

Well, this is a gift. The ability to help others that are having a hard time overcoming, not in a judgmental way, but in a spiritual way, to help and understand them. This Greek word means to keep oneself directly opposite to anyone. Similar that comfort. But it's like, I'm here for you and looking them straight in the eye and saying, I'm Here to help.

What can I do to cleave to. Just like the word we use for marriage when it says, a man shall leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife, we are to hang on to that person and pay heed to them and their struggle to overcome the weaknesses of the flesh, and I think I would answer this question. Yes. Are we too judgmental sometimes in our assessment of the weak?

I think we don't understand sometimes if we ourselves can resist. Talk to a smoker sometimes. You know, if you've never smoked, it's easy to resist. I've got relatives and others who. They fall back time and time again and they quit.

Those are weaknesses that are hard to overcome for them in that sense. But even for those of us who are committed to overcoming, there are weaknesses that we have that are very difficult to get through, and so we are to help those, not to judge them, but to help them. Paul gives us this admonition in Second Corinthians about himself when he asked the Lord to help him with his weakness and take away that weakness. He says of the Lord, but he said to me, my grace is enough for you.

When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you. So I'm very happy to brag about my weaknesses then Christ's power and live in me. Remember, when God looks, when we look at each other, we see the flesh, okay? God looks not that way, and we see you like you are today.

And I can say, mike, you really look like you're getting a lot older. But God looks at his heart and he says, mike, I can see you're getting a lot better. God doesn't see who we are. He sees who we are becoming and who we will become. Michelangelo, he wasn't a painter.

Even though if you've been in the Vatican and St. Peter's you've seen the paintings. He was first a sculptor, and one day, Michelangelo was plugging away at a block. Someone stopped by and said, michelangelo, what are you carving? And he says, I'm not carving anything.

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I saw the angel in the marble and I carved until I set him free, and that's what God is doing with us. He's carving away at the marble to see the angel, to see that new creature that's inside and trying to release it in us. Everyone, no matter what your weaknesses are, that's what God's goal is, to release that new creature that's inside of you. Brethren, can we help one another to release that new creature?

That's the encouragement we have to Give to the weak, those that have a hard time. You can do it. We all can do it.

Well, Paul's day when he said these words was a lot like ours. Even though it may not seem like it, but it was a time of really intense pressure on Christians. Paul's writing at the later part of his ministry here, those who were eyewitnesses to Jesus were starting to thin out. They were dying by attrition, by persecution. You can imagine if we were in the early convention in those early days, someone would stand up and say, I remember when Jesus said, I remember when Jesus did this.

We only know what the gospel writers have given to us. But imagine that if you were in a room with those that were walking with Jesus and could say, I remember when Jesus said this. The first gospel we have was published, either Mark or Matthew. I happen to think it was Matthew, the order we have, but some think Mark, that's okay. It was at least 65 AD before this gospel was widely published.

So it was largely word of mouth that was available. When that started to go away, people got farther away from understanding what was happening. If you haven't read the Book of James, you should do it very short. It's only five chapters. But each chapter deals with the rising issues that were coming up in the early church.

False doctrine, class distinctions, selfishness, evil speaking, jealousy and ambition. That's not unlike what we see today that's coming around the world.

Paul's day was one of intense challenges, some of it persecution on the true believers. When Peter writes his got his epistle first Peter 5, he says he tells them it was to feed the flock of God. He exhorts the elders of all those churches, five different ones in the provinces, feed the flock of God because he knew these issues were there. Brethren, that's our job, to feed the flock. We are to encourage and support one another in the struggles that we go through.

But it does imply even in Paul's day there was fiery trials coming out of everywhere. Read again first in First Peter, that whole first chapter, he talks about it. Secondly, where did was that those fiery trials coming from sources on like we had today? We heard about it from Nathan. Outside sources like the Roman world, the pagan world was coming at them, but also the religious world.

We had the infiltration of the Gnostics and others coming in with false doctrines, trying to persuade them. Not unlike us, brother. We have those same two pressures. We heard about the pressures from outside, but think about the pressures from inside. Peter came to Rome about 62 AD with Silas and he was put to death in what we think 67 AD and shortly before his death.

Well, wouldn't be shortly after his death he wrote the first Epistle and written in Greek from the Aramaic by Silas, who came with him, and it called upon those who were out in Asia Minor, where Peter had done a great deal of work, to remember the Christian principles in their daily activities. That was what he emphasized, the Christian principles. It wasn't so much what was going into their head as what was going into their heart.

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This is a little preview if you are going to the Grand Rapids convention or you tune in to the Grand Rapids Convention at the end of this month. To fit with their theme. I'm planning on giving a talk called Perils of the Late Harvest, which talks about the very things that we have from within and without that embrace us and many within the church itself. Just some ideas because I think that was. We've heard a lot what's coming in without.

But I think what's changed transforming in Christianity is putting a lot of pressure on us as well. The August 9th manatext from reprint 3436 says the tests of this harvest must be like those of the Jewish or typical harvest. One of them is the cross, another the presence of Christ, another humility. Another is love, and he goes concludes by saying it is for each of us to prove our characters having done all stand.

That's the ultimate challenge, brethren, to stand. As we've heard amidst all the difficulties we see. How can we stand and keep our faith only by encouraging and supporting one another in this walk. Think about what happened in the early harvest. The early harvest transformed Christianity.

It introduced the truth to many that were in spiritual Babylon. For the first time they understood the plan of God. The ransom rediscovered and redefining and helping to understand the permission of evil. I submit the permission of evil is one of the greatest doctrines we have in understanding what God is doing. Even the great preacher Billy Graham didn't have this concept.

When asked on 9 11, after 9 11, why did God permit this to happen? He said, I don't know.

Third, the Lord's invisible presence it redefined wasn't so much on the presence as it was the end of the world beliefs. What is to happen? Somehow now the Lord is taking control of the affairs of man to bring about a blessing and a kingdom on earth. The fourth thing it did was the selection and development of a bride class that redefined what it meant about being saved before accept Jesus and it's all done now. It was about the selection and development of the bride.

That's what brought in the time of the harvest.

And what was the ultimate character development, becoming Christlike. It redefined what it meant to be a Christian. Christian wasn't just going to church. It was living a life for Christ, to become like him, to be. To be that new creature that was inside the marble.

It redefined, and that's what we're still trying to do, brethren. We are still developing and trying to bring on that concept in our own lives.

There was a fourth admonition in that First Thessalonians, Paul said, be patient toward all men. I think today we need more than ever spiritual encouragement, and we need to focus on a lot of that in our discussions with one another to encourage each other spiritually. It's especially needful when we think about the hospital environment which we exist, like Paul's day. Think about the rise of cultural Christianity being defined within the culture of whatever you favor. Secondly, the rise of political Christianity, looking not so much inward as outward and being an influence in the world.

And the rise of syncretism, bringing all beliefs together and creating a whole new belief system. Those are the things we face again. I'll talk more about this later. Let's close with this word we have from volume six, with the world under the delusions of the God of this world who now blinds and deceives them. That's what Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 4:4.

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Surely this knowledge should give us patience with the world. Much more should we have patience with those who are no longer of the world, you and I. Brethren, let us never forget that we are in this together, and we should all be marching in step as that soldier was warned, ruled. Won't have time to read all of these, but these are 10 what I call house rules for living with each other in this fellowship.

I'll just read them. If any of you want a copy of this later, I can get it for you. Number one, always be honest. Second, count your blessings. Third, be kind, be tender hearted.

Four, comfort one another. Five, keep your promises. Six, be supportive of one another. Number seven, be true to each other. Number eight, show respect for one another.

Number nine, forgive and forget, and ten, most important, love one another deeply from the heart, as Peter tells us. Chapter one, verse 22, To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.