

*The start of Term 1, 1985, a mum and dad dropped their little boy off at Ag College. Do you want to guess who their little boy was? Yep, it was me.*

*I was 15 years old at the time, and we'd been preparing for this for months.*

*Mum:*

- *bought me some new clothes;*
- *stitched all the name labels onto them;*
- *new work boots;*
- *new good boots;*
- *pens & notebooks & even a new hat.*

*And then the day came to drop me off. Dad was all very easy about it, but my Mum:*

- *now remember this & remember that;*
- *We've put \$100 into this account, and that's all you've got to spend for the whole year, so don't waste it;*
- *You let us know if you get sick.*
- *And don't forget to call. There's only a payphone and that \$100 is to go towards your phone calls as well... Every week...*
- *and don't forget this/that...*
  
- *all of the last minute advice a mother has to give her vulnerable son...*

We've been working our way 1 Thessalonians. It's a letter Paul wrote to a brand new bunch of Christians. And we've come to a part of the letter that reminds me of when Mum & Dad dropped me off at Ag college... All of the last minute advice.

The letter's drawing to a close. Maybe he's near the end of his sheet of paper/papyrus...

And as he gets to the end, it's like it occurs to him, all of these things that are really important, that he hasn't mentioned yet. And so he crams it all in to the one or two paragraphs. *It's a bit like going to the fridge, and making up a big goulash out of everything that hasn't been used already.*

And it is a preacher's nightmare... Am I going to talk about the cold meat, or left-over beans, or onions, or the egg that binds it altogether???

Do you know what I mean? I went through these couple of paragraphs, and I found 10 different topics, that we could have 10 different messages on...

And what we're going to do today, is we're going to look at the goulash as a whole (because that's the way it is in God's Word). And when we take it as a whole, we realise, just how important it is.

When Paul took the Gospel to Thessalonica, he was only able to be with them for 3 weeks. The persecution was so bad (the local Jews ran Paul & Silas out of town).

So, Paul only had 3 weeks, to teach these brand new Christians, all that they needed to know. And the purpose of **this** letter, has been to urge them on in the faith. He has focused on what is really, really important. For a start, he was worried that the persecution might have got the better of them,

and he was delighted to hear that, “Hey, you’re still walking with Jesus”...

And this letter has been about urging the Thessalonians, to keep on keeping on. Don’t give up on your faith. Keep following Jesus (no matter how hard it gets)....

But of course, “living the Christian life”, isn’t merely about “believing in Jesus”... If you and I are children of the Light, we must **live** as children of the light. We live a life that is pleasing to God, and last week, we talked about being ready for Jesus' return...

The importance of all of these things (that we’ve already covered) is massive...

And **just** as important, is this ending goulash of topics... Every one of these issues are so important, they had to get a mention...

Imagine if you were in Paul’s boat – Imagine if were writing to a bunch of brand new Christians, and you only had around about 2000 words (because that’s about how long this letter is) – if you only had around about 2000 words to tell these brand new Christians what they really, really needed to know about following Jesus,,,. What would you tell them???

Well, that’s what the goulash is. So, if you are a brand new Christian, “get this”. And even for those of us who have been Christians for a long time, it’s a good opportunity for us to return to “first principals”, and to be reminded of what is really important (as we follow our Lord).

And in a nut-shell, this is about encouraging one another, and building one another up.

Last week we ended with V<sup>11</sup> **Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.**

And today's reading puts legs on that... If you and I cannot see how this goulash of Godly instruction, is a means of encouraging one another, and building one another up, then we've missed the point entirely.

So, let's get into it.

**1.**

The first ingredient of the Godly Goulash (and I always feel a little bit awkward teaching on this topic, because I always worry that it might come across as me being self-serving).

We are to respect those who “labour” among us. Think:

- Pastors;
- Elders;
- Sunday School Teachers;
- Worship leaders;
- Musicians;
- The people who set up/pack up;
- Kids club leaders;
- people who visit & do pastoral care;
- cooks who make smoko, and deliver a meal to the sick...

You get the point...

Respect those who labour among us, but his particular point, is to respect those who are “over us **in the Lord**”. Think:

- Pastors;
- Elders;
- in some churches, Deacons...

God’s design, is that within His church, we are not a democracy, and we are not a social club. Within His church, there are some whom He calls, to servant leadership. Leaders are not in a position of authority for their own benefit. Nor are they there for others to serve them. They are in a position of leadership (sure enough) – they have a position of authority in the Lord. And that should always be a reminder to us, that this is **servant** leadership...

Jesus told His disciples, “You don’t lord it over one another. The leader is the one who serves.”

And Paul also uses a word here, that many people do not like (“admonish”). <sup>12</sup> **We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,...**

Now, “admonish”, is a word so unfamiliar to us, a lot of us won’t even know what it means... To “admonish”, is to warn another person – to set them straight. A couple of sentences later, he tells us to “**admonish the idle**”. In others words, “Tell them not to be idle... Being lazy bludger, is not a good

witness for Jesus... And if anyone **is** a lazy bludger, they need to be told not to be...

And maybe “being lazy” **was** an issue in Thessalonica, because in 2 Thessalonians, he had to admonish the idle again, and he said “Let the one who is not willing to work, not eat”....

And so, sometimes admonishment **is** required.... But how does one take that?

Have you ever been admonished? Have you ever had a brother or sister in Christ, take you to task, and call you out on a sin??? How did you respond to that??? It hurts, doesn't it... It's humbling...

And the natural human reaction to being admonished, is to retaliate... Or to be filled with bitterness and rage... Or to express denial...

Here is a spiritual truth: The Lord's good design for His church – and the way in which we encourage one another and build one another up, is for us to have Godly leaders who do not shirk their God-appointed responsibility, of doing what is sometimes tough job. Sometimes a leader in the church may need to admonish a brother or sister in Christ, when they are unaware of their sin, or unrepentant of sin...

You know, some Christians are of the opinion, “*Well, if God wants them to change, He'll convict them – that's God's job. And if we do the admonishing, it's just legalism – not grace*”... You know what: God's word says different... Yes, it **is** God who convicts them, but do you know how He

does that? ... God has placed leaders over us, and it is their God-appointed duty, to at times, admonish those whom they serve.

It is a means of encouraging one another, and building one another up. We are to **esteem them very highly in love because of their work.**

As so, as the leaders build you up, you build them up. As they encourage you, you encourage them...

## 2.

The second ingredient: Peace. **Be at peace among yourselves.**

Way too many churches, have factions and personal agendas... And sometimes it only takes one or two “strong personalities”, (BTW, “strong personalities” a nice way of saying “people who always expect to get their own way”)... and it can really muck up a fellowship.

This is really important – for us in the church, to be at peace with one another.

## 3. Thirdly

**we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle**

We’ve already touched on this one.

But I want you to notice, that part of us encouraging one another, and building one another up, is that we're not only responsible for ourselves. And this may irk you a bit (after all, we are products of a very individualistic culture, where "I want to be the boss of me", and "You want to be the boss of you". a culture of live and let live)... But when has the Christian church ever been the same as culture. In every generation, the Christian church is somewhat counter to culture... And as God's people, the Christian church is not an individualistic society. We are a fellowship. You are not only responsible for yourself. In Christ, I am responsible for you, and you are responsible for me...

And so, if any one of us (who can work), refuses to do so, others of us have the duty, to admonish...

#### 4.

The fourth ingredient: "encouragement".

*encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.*

You know as well as I do, "Some Christians are very strong. Others are more fragile, and their faith may fade very quickly"...

And I have to confess, "This is a downfall of mine". I'm generally very patient in most things, but when I've had to reassure the same person and encourage them on in their faith over the same issue, (for the 18<sup>th</sup> time), my patience begins to fade...



Are you with me??? It's my failing. And that's why this is something that I should not carry alone, and it is something that we as a **church** should carry together....

We are **all**:

- to encourage each other;
- to encourage the fainthearted;
- to help the one who is finding it difficult in faithfulness and obedience;
- to be patient with everyone
- to build up the fragile...

There are those who suffer depression/anxiety/lack of confidence, and they need:

- you;
- me;
- our encouragement; and
- they need us to do it together.

## 5.

The fifth ingredient of the Godly goulash, is forgiveness.

If a person does me wrong, “payback” is never the solution. Let us **always** seek to do good (both in the church, and outside of the church).

What sort of person are you really??? That's what people out in the community really notice. You might say that you are a Christian, but are you truly good??? And that is why we are to **always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.**

And once again, my responsibility is not only for myself.

**<sup>15</sup> See that no one repays anyone evil for evil**

If any **one** of us starts plotting a bit of pay-back, that's when the rest of us get along side of them and say, "Do not repay evil. Do good".... After all, that's what Jesus taught, isn't it???

**6.**

Sixthly, Rejoice. No matter what trials we encounter, rejoice. In the last couple of weeks, we were talking about the return of Jesus, and the **destiny** we have with Him. How can we not rejoice.

We even rejoice in the midst of persecution... Paul said:

**<sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

Do you have an enemy who is making life really hard for you? Give thanks, **for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

Woahh, now hold on there a minute, Michael... You cannot tell me that persecution is God's will for His beloved? Why not, the Bible does...

And you can't tell me that sickness and disease and cancer is God's will for His beloved... Well, whoever told you that???

You see, there's a line of theology out there (and it's quite popular today), and it says, "Deny it, and it won't be real." or "Claim it, and it will be done."... But that's not the picture we're getting here...

You see, there is a level of glory for God, if I give thanks when I am healed, and if I give thanks when I am going through good times... But there is **bucket-loads** of glory for God, when His faithful give thanks, in spite of their suffering, and in spite of their not being healed...

Why???? What is there, to give thanks for??? **Jesus**, of course. In Acts 5, the Apostles were beaten, and they rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer for the Name of Jesus....

And think of Job – Godly Job – suffering Job... The Lord gives; The Lord takes away; Blessed be the Name of The Lord.

7. And Pray.

<sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing

In other words, live a life of prayer....

"Prayer" isn't limited to the time you spend on your knees by your bed at night. Prayer happens as we commune with God, through every part of our day.

## 8.

The 8<sup>th</sup> ingredient of a Godly Goulash: **<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit of God, is the Powerhouse of Jesus' church. He is the fire that makes us burn...

And the command “<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit”, it encompasses pretty-much the entirety of the Christian life... If we are living by the Spirit, to quench the Spirit, is to quench our life in Christ itself...

Of course, the extreme of “quenching the Spirit”, is to lose faith altogether, and to stop following Jesus... And that’s what Paul was concerned about (before he sent Timothy to Thessalonica) – he was worried that the persecution might have caused them to lose faith altogether...

But there’s many ways to “quench the Spirit”.

To **quench the Spirit** is to:

- stay when God says “Go”;
- flee when God says “Stay & stick it out”;
- depend on ourselves, when He says “Trust in me”;
  
- hold back on ministry and mission, when the Holy Spirit is empowering us to get in and get it done;
- stay in bed on a Sunday morning, when the people of God are gathering to worship our Lord;
  
- hold back my tithes and offerings for myself, when the Spirit has provided for us to give;

- hold on to the ways of the world, when the Spirit is convicting us to repent of sin, and to be transformed to Christ-likeness;

**All** of these things, quench the Spirit of God... God is at work. And when we don't work with him, we **quench the Spirit**.

And when it comes to the **gifts** of the Spirit, because the Devil mimics gifts of the spirit, and false teachers/prophets mislead the People of God, some Christians are so fearful of being misled, they've come to the conclusion that particular gifts no longer exist... There's even a theological term for such a position (cessationist). They believe that some particular gifts of the Spirit, have at some point, ceased to exist...

My bible doesn't tell me that they have ceased. My Bible tells me that the Spiritual Gifts will only cease when "that which is perfect has come" (referring to the return of Jesus)...

**<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit.**

**9.**

And he gives us an example of this.

**<sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is good. <sup>22</sup> Abstain from every form of evil.**

The gift of prophecy is a blessing for the Christian church, but it's also one of the most faked and destructive of false gifts.

That's why in the Old Testament, the penalty of false prophecy was death. And because there are so many false prophets today, for many, our default position, is to despise all prophecy, and we just assume that all prophecy is false...

That's lazy. BTW, it is just as lazy to accept every prophet at their word. You see, there's another spiritual gift called "discernment". And the gift of discernment, tests everything.

And so the 9<sup>th</sup> ingredient of the Goulash, is discernment. Embrace what's good, and <sup>22</sup> **Abstain from every form of evil.**

Do you notice the singular and the plural there??? There is only one "good" – Our God; His Spirit; our Lord Jesus Christ... But there are many evils...

To hold fast to what is Good, is to hold fast to:

- faith;
- the Gospel;
- righteousness;
- justice;
- hope we have;

And in doing so, we abstain from every form of evil.

- greed;
- malice;
- slander;
- hate;
- selfishness;

- quenching of the spirit...

## 10.

That's a big ask... It is an **impossible** ask. And so, the 10<sup>th</sup> ingredient of the Godly Goulash, is what God does. "Sanctification".

Paul prays:

<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

You see, without that 10<sup>th</sup> point, we could walk away from here today thinking, "Man, that Paul bloke is hard on me. I could never do what he's demanding..."

But the 10<sup>th</sup> ingredient reminds us that God is at work. God Himself sanctifies you, just as God Himself sanctifies me...

In the original Greek, the word "Hagios" means "saint". The word used here is "ἀγιάσαι" (hagiasai), which means "make holy" "make into a saint"...

Sometimes we might feel:

- "I'm a real mess;
- I'm too far gone;
- I keep failing;

- I'm supposed to be this wonderful Christian, but I keep sinning..."

Well, don't give up. It is the **God of peace himself**, who sanctifies us – who changes us; who renews us; who is making us holy... .. But only if we don't quench the Spirit.

So there's the Godly Goulash, and the letter finishes with:

- a request for prayer.  
And let us always pray for those who are on mission for the Gospel.
- Christian closeness <sup>“26</sup> **Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.”**  
BTW, if I don't take the opportunity to trot out my old joke, I know you're going to be sorely disappointed.  
“What's the difference between a “holy kiss” and an “unholy kiss”?  
About 15 seconds.
- And there's a very strict command, that the letter is to be shared. And that's what we've done over the last few months – we've read it together and studied it together...
- And a final blessing.  
<sup>28</sup> **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.**

Now, we have flown through that. We haven't spent much time on any of the ingredients to the Goulash, but we know it's important hey...



## It's about:

- discipleship;
- following Jesus;
- living for our Lord, every day, as we await His coming.
- encouraging one another; and
- building one another up in love...

## Questions?

I'm going to finish with the prayer that Paul gave:

<sup>23</sup> Now may the *God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We trust that God is faithful, and He will do this.

And may the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us.  
Amen.