

It is sad but true that relationship breakdown, whether amongst celebrities, politicians or athletes, often seems to attract the media spotlight, and it is no different with the church. Rarely if ever, does news reporting feature something positive about the church - it seems that church in-fighting makes for much better news!

In our verses for this week, the apostle Paul recognises that relationship breakdown is a possibility for any church family, even a model church (1v7) such as that found in first century Thessalonica.

So as the apostle Paul draws to the close of the letter, he gives very practical encouragement to the Christians in Thessalonica, as to how they are to treat one another... how they are to love one another rightly

### **#1 - Loving your leaders: respect them for the work they do**

In vv12-13 Paul focusses on two things. Firstly he reminds us that a Christian leader is recognised by the hard work they do, rather than the title they hold. Whilst the job description in v12 is not exhaustive, it is instructive: leaders are to work hard in their leading/caring for others and in their admonishing/teaching of others.

He then encourages such leaders to be lovingly respected by all, for doing the task assigned to them (helping others grow in their love and knowledge of the Lord Jesus), as this is the way that peace can be maintained amongst the church family.

Paul's point is that each church needs leaders... and how leaders and people work together is important. It is when there is peace and unity amongst us, that we as a family are a small picture of the peace that comes from the gospel.

Paul's focus then moves from how to love the leadership in particular, to how to love the whole fellowship believers...

### **#2 - Loving each other: patiently care for one another**

Harmony within a church family does not only require a loving respect for the leadership, it also requires ongoing patience as we continually care for one another.

So whether our Christian brothers and sisters are feeling lazy, faint-hearted or weak, the rest of us are not to simply ignore them, but rather we are called to help, encourage, and admonish them if necessary.

Paul's encouragement to care for those in the church family who are struggling, and hurting, is a call to care for them and keep on caring for them.

However, he also recognises that such self-sacrificial care will present two particular temptations (frustration and retaliation), and so urges them to be patient and to repay evil with good.

For the local church, such advice is deeply practical, and helps us develop meaningful relationships with one another - so that we are not Christian brothers and sisters in name only, but also in practice.