

“Esteeming our Leaders”
1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
(Preached at Trinity, December 1, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Verse 12** begins the final section of Paul's letter which will bring it to a close. He begins with several points of admonition that we might consider universal Christian conduct.
Verses 12-13 describe Christian conduct with respect to the elders of the church
Verses 14 describes Christian conduct with respect to the disorderly, fainthearted and weak, and everyone else
Verse 15 describes Christian conduct with respect to those who have injured you
Verses 16-18 describe Christian conduct with respect to God
Verses 19-22 describe Christian conduct with respect to the Holy Spirit and prophetic utterance or preaching.
2. Then in **Verses 23-28** Paul will give statements describing sanctification, intercessory prayer, and then some final greetings.
3. This morning I want us to focus on **Verses 12-13** in which Paul describes the Christian's conduct with respect to the elders of the church.
These two brief verses are packed with information regarding elders and members in the local church. Paul knows how to say much in a few words.
4. Paul is making a couple assumptions in these verses:
First, the New Testament infers that every Christian will be under the authority of a particular local church and that he'll be in submission to particular elders. The NT really doesn't envision a Christian disconnected from a local church, unless he is under discipline. Few today see the local church as being essential to the life of a believer.
5. Second, Paul is making the assumption that every local church should have the benefit of elders.
 - A. This was Paul's instruction to Titus:
Titus 1:5 NAU - "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,"
 - B. It is interesting that even though the Thessalonian church was still in its infancy they already had the benefit of elders. Paul doesn't name them specifically, but we can read of various men in the Book of Acts who stand out as leaders.
Jason – Acts 17:6-9
Aristarchus – Acts 20:4; 27:2; Col 4:10; Philem 24
Secundus – Acts 20:4
Perhaps Gaius – Acts 19:29
6. Paul describes two aspects regarding the elders at this local church.
First, he describes the nature of the elder's work.
Second, he describes the conduct of the members towards their elders.

- I. First, the nature of the elder's work
- A. First, we need to identify who Paul is referring to
1 Thessalonians 5:12 NAU - "those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord"
1. Paul is referring to the elders or pastors of the church – those who diligently labor among them.
 2. Paul doesn't give us the titles given to the office.
 There are three synonymous terms:
 - a. ποιμην - usually translated "Pastor" - describes the one holding the office as one who shepherds the flock of Jesus Christ.
 - b. πρεσβυτερος - translated elder. Generally, the word refers to maturity. But it also describes the ruling aspect of the office. It carries forth an OT concept.
Exodus. 4:29 NAU - "Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel;"
 The church was modeled after the synagogue which had elders that ruled.
 - c. επισκοπος - translated in the King James version as "Bishop," it literally means "overseer." This word describes the official capacity of the one holding the office as one who governs or oversees the affairs of the local church.
 3. Alexander Strauch: "According to the New Testament concept of eldership, elders lead the church, teach and preach the Word, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, visit the sick and pray, and judge doctrinal issues. In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church."¹
 4. Rather than using these titles Paul simply describes the nature of the pastor's work.
- B. They labor diligently – "who diligently labor among you"
1. "Labor" - κοπιᾶω • to grow weary, tired, exhausted, wearisome effort, to toil
 2. Paul described Timothy's position as pastor as that of a Bible laborer –
2 Timothy 2:15 NAU - "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."
 3. Pastoral work can be spiritually and emotionally draining, and at times physically exhausting.
 4. A vocational pastor should maintain full days of labor so that he can feed Christ's sheep – they must never be neglected. If the other men of the congregation rise early to begin their day, should not the pastor do the same?

¹ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership, an Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), Page 16.

5. Paul considered his care of Christ's church his most arduous labor
2 Corinthians 11:27-28 NAU - "*I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches."
 6. The pastor must spend hours pouring over the Scriptures. He must teach himself before he can teach others.
1 Timothy 4:6 NAU - "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *constantly* nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."
 7. Study demands the careful guarding of time - There are many distractions
 - a. Being the pastor of a large church fills the pastor's day with endless interruptions and the pressures of managing a large organization often with a large ministerial and administrative staff.
 - b. Being the pastor of a small church involves endless diaconal duties (IT, keeping supplies stocked, maintenance, custodial, office work, bookkeeping & finances— added to the care of the flock - often before study can begin.)
 - c. Being a bi-vocational pastor creates a high demand upon his time (all of the above plus holding down a secular job)
 - d. Whatever the nature of a pastor's field of labor it will demand diligence and careful time-management.
- C. They have charge over the church – “have charge and over you in the Lord”
1. The pastor is to be the administrator of the church
 It is from the word προϊστημι - to be over, to superintend, to preside over. Paul uses the same word in 1 Timothy
1 Timothy 5:17 NAU - "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."
 2. The pastor's duty is to oversee the program and direction of the church. God has granted him the authority to lead the church.
 This is chiefly spiritual in nature but includes the practical and physical administration and management as well.
- D. They teach – “given you instruction”
1. This carries the idea of teaching with authority
 νουθετέω can refer to admonishment or correction.
 - a. It's the same word Paul uses in **Verse 14**
1 Thessalonians 5:14 NAU - "We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone."
 - b. It is not an admonishment of harshness but of loving admonition.
 2. The Pastor's primary duty is to be a teacher of the Scriptures
1 Timothy 3:2 NAU - "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,"
1 Timothy 4:11 – “These things command and teach.”

- a. This isn't limited to preaching from the pulpit. Although the senior pastor will be charged with most of the pulpit ministry, every elder teaches.
- b. Pastors takes every opportunity to teach and instruct God's people. Paul told the elders at Ephesus, **Acts 20:20 NAU** - "how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,"

II. Second, the conduct of church members towards their elders

- A. Appreciate them – from the word literally meaning “to know” - οἶδα
It also carries the meaning, *respect, appreciate, have regard for*.
 1. This is referring to respect for their office. **Verse 13** refers to value placed upon their work.
 2. In our culture we place great value on carnal icons—the wealthy are held in high esteem. Athletes are idolized. Entertainers are held in great honor. We give great weight to their ideas and opinions. The Bible admonishes us to give honor those to whom honor is due. But are we able to discern those worthy of honor?
 3. Dale Ralph Davis – “Christians frequently show more skill using the critical knife than tendering grateful thanks to parents, pastors, mentors, friends, or educators who have labored to lead them in the grace and wisdom of God. When we ignore the instruments of God's grace we demean the Giver of that grace.”
- B. Esteem them highly in love because of their work
 1. The phrase “very highly” is from a word that means “beyond measure”
 2. We value those most who provide the things we value most
Some people place great value upon their doctor – they quickly recommend him to others. The same may be true for an auto mechanic or AC technician, a barber or hair-stylist.
For some it may be a sports figure – they are valued highly. They pay great attention to the college recruiting season or the NFL draft.
 3. Paul is making several assumptions here.
 - First, the Christian places great value upon the Word of God – it is the means by which we grow in our knowledge of Christ.
 - Second, the Christian places great value upon being taught the Word of God
 - Third, the Christian places great value upon those teaching the Word of God. We honor those who teach the Word. We value them because we value their teaching.
 - Notice the motivation is love. They are esteemed because love demands it.
 4. To esteem their work is to receive their instruction.
 - a. To make attendance a priority
Teachers and pastors study hard in order to teach you. It takes many hours of preparation. You must give as much attention to receiving the Word as they do in preparing to teach it

- b. Richard Phillips says it well: “If Christians are served by pastors and elders who are laboring hard for their well-being, how important it is that they should make every effort to benefit from those vitally important labors!”²
 - c. Come prepared to hear their teaching. It has been said that when the Word of God is faithfully preached Christ is speaking. *Augustine*: “It is the pastor who teaches. But it is Christ who commands through me. The preacher explains the text; if he says what is true, it is Christ speaking”
 - d. You should endeavor to follow their leadership. Richard Phillips again: “I am often astonished at how ready church members are to elect men of spiritual quality and judgment to serve as their leaders, and then to jump to the worst possible conclusions when those same leaders make decisions after hours of prayer and scriptural deliberation! Paul had this very kind of unruly Christian in mind when he urged the Thessalonians “to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord”³
5. To esteem their work is to believe it has power to transform. We invite our neighbors because the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We invite our neighbors because preaching is a means of God saving the lost. **1 Corinthians 1:21 KJV** - "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." y
- C. The final admonition from Paul, "Live in peace with one another."
- 1. Paul doesn't go into detail – The idea is there can be conflict between the pastors and congregation. It would seem that within the church of Thessalonica some had become “unruly.”
 - 2. This is never profitable. **Hebrews 13:17 NAU** - "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."
 - 3. God would have us to be at peace. Bad behavior in the church should never be tolerated. **Titus 3:10 NAU** - "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning"

² Richard D. Phillips, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 232.

³ *Ibid.*, 233.

Conclusion:

1. Christ loves His church. The church is a blessed institution for the care of His people. Every Christian must give himself for the wellbeing of the church.
2. And he should recognize those Christ has placed in spiritual authority over him.
1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 NAU - "appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, ¹³ and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work."
3. This is difficult for us as fallen human beings. We despise authority and treasure independence.
4. As we will see next time in **Verse 14** every member has the duty to watch over his brothers and sisters and admonish them when needed. But this doesn't overrule the need for pastoral leadership.
 G.K. Beal writes: "Too often churches pro-claim that their goal is that every believer become a "minister." The implication is that every believer is to be equal with every other believer and that, ideally, there should be no one in an authoritative position over anyone else. Of course, it is true that everyone in the church is equal in the sense of being in the image of God and being in Christ as a citizen of the kingdom of God. Accordingly, all should grow in their recognition and exercise of the diverse gifts that they have received from God. But Christians are not equal in the sense that they have functional equality in the church. Rather, they have different gifts that entail different kinds of functions. Leadership is among these gifts."⁴
4. When we labor together with the same goals, maintaining the same love, serving the same Lord, we maintain the peace and harmony that is essential for the strength of every local church.
1 Thessalonians 5:13 NAU - "Live in peace with one another."

⁴ G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 159.