

The Pastor's Priorities

I Thess 5:12-13

¹² And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

INTRODUCTION:

One rather cynical writer looking at the church said that the church reminded him of Noah's ark, of which he said, "If it weren't for the storm outside, you couldn't stand the stench inside." That's a cynical view of the church. That's a jaded view of the church. And it's far from the reality of what the church should be and what the true church is. The church is the most blessed institution on the earth, the only one built by the Lord Jesus Christ, the only one He said He'd promise to bless, and the gates of hell would never be able to hold it in. Now, we're not saying the church doesn't have difficulty; it does. The reason the church has difficulty is because the church has people, and we're all fallen, and we're all sinful, and we're all imperfect, and we have weaknesses, and we face difficulties. Fallen and sinful people make up the church. Weak people make up the church. And in many ways we have to say the church is a hospital. It's not a place for perfect people. It's not a place for people who imagine they're perfect. It's a place for people who admit they're not and they want help. And it isn't until the church admits that that it begins to move in the right direction. Certainly the church has faults. You always hear people say, "Well, I don't want to join the

church. There's too many hypocrites." To which the proper response is, "Well come on in, we've got room for more."

Sure, we have faults. The admission of that, the recognition of that is the basic stance from which you begin to grow, from which you begin to move in the right direction. We have to start with the confession of our failures and our weaknesses. So we acknowledge the church is going to have trouble. I've never seen a church that didn't. That's because people have problems and leaders have problems; relationships therefore are stretched and strained and made difficult. Then you can add to that the reality that Satan works hard against the church, and so do his supernatural agents, and so do his human agents. But still, the true church is far better than any other organization, association, or institution on the face of the earth, because it moves toward being like Jesus Christ, because it represents Him in the world, because its life is energized by the Holy Spirit, because it lives under the instruction of the Word of God, because it applies spiritual power mutually through fellowship and service among its members. It therefore is the greatest association, organization, institution in the face of the earth. But it is admittedly people in process. We're not where we ought to be but we're not where we were. We're moving in that direction.

Review

Now remember, he had commended the Thessalonian church on a number of occasions in this letter. Back in chapter 1, verse 2 he says, "We give thanks to God for you all making mention of you in our prayers." He was thankful for all of them. He tells why in verse 3, "Their work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope was consistent." And then down in verse 6 he says, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord, you received the Word and much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, you became

an example to all the believers." Then in verse 8, "The Word of the Lord sounded out from you." In verse 9, he said, "You turn to God from idols to serve a living and true God." In verse 10, he says, "You're even waiting for His Son from heaven." And over again in chapter 2 and verse 13, he says, "We constantly thank God that when you received from us the Word of God's message, you accepted it not as the Word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." And then again he says, "You became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus, and you endured the sufferings that come at the hands of your own countrymen." They were dedicated folks, and they had believed the truth, and their faith was real, and their love was strong, and their hope was firm. Down in verse 17, they were such a beloved church that he wanted to see their face so badly. He had desired it. He had tried to come. He says in verse 19, "You're my hope, my joy, my crown of exaltation." In verse 20, "You're my glory, you're my joy," he says. And over in chapter 3, verse 6, Timothy came back from a visit and "brought us good news of your faith and love and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you." Verse 8 indicates that they were standing firm in the Lord. In verse 9 he says, "What thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account." They were a good church. They were a wonderful church. They were an excellent church. They were moving in the right direction. They were in process. And yet he can say in chapter 3, verse 10, "We still want to come and complete what is lacking in your faith." You're doing well; you could do better. You're moving on the right track; you could even go faster and farther.

But whatever spiritual deficiencies existed in Thessalonica, they were not life threatening to the church. They were not fatal. There was just room for growth. Here was a truly saved church. Here was a sanctified church. They were moving toward the direction of holiness. Here was a surrendered church, yielded to

the lordship of Christ, and following Christian duty to do the will of God with excellence. And here was a soul-winning church, evangelizing, sounding forth the Word of God, far and wide. Here was a Second Coming church, waiting for the return of Jesus Christ. All things being considered, this is a noble group. But they could do better. They hadn't arrived. They weren't perfect. There was still process to follow. There was still progress to make.

LESSON

Now, the section falls into four categories.

There is a discussion of responsibility regarding leaders, responsibility regarding brothers and sisters mutually, responsibility regarding worshiping God, and responsibility regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Those four dimensions are discussed. For this morning, we're just going to begin with the first category. In giving them instruction as to how they are to live in the church in order to work toward being a healthy flock, he starts with a relationship between the sheep and the shepherds.

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this is where health in the church begins. Nothing is more devastating to the spiritual progress of a church than an unwholesome relationship between the shepherds and the sheep. You can't have a healthy flock with that kind of problem. If shepherds are not fulfilling their proper spiritual responsibility to the sheep, and sheep are not fulfilling their proper spiritual responsibility to the shepherd, the church can never be what God intends it to be. It cannot break down at that very, very significant level. The relationship that we have with you and you have with us as leaders is crucial in the church. And, frankly, devastation of a massive proportion occurs in churches where there is a breakdown of confidence, trust, love, affection between shepherds and sheep.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SHEPHERDS TO THE SHEEP

FIRST ECCLESIOLOGY

The leaders are Identified in the New Testament

1. Elder
 1. Acts 20:28
 2. I Peter 5:1-4

presbuteros. Now, that identifies a church leader as one characterized by – mark this – spiritual maturity and wisdom – spiritual maturity and wisdom. The leaders are those who are spiritually mature, spiritually wise. That term, elder, is used over and over and over again in the New Testament. Very early on, as the church is being established in the book of Acts, it is a high priority to make sure that those churches have elders; that is, men

who are characterized by spiritual maturity and spiritual wisdom, who can lead the church.

2. Bishop

1. Acts 20:28
2. I Peter 5
3. I Tim 3:1

that is the word overseer, sometimes translated by the Old English word bishop. It is the word *episkopos* in the Greek; it means to look over, to oversee. This indicates that the church leader is not only characterized by spiritual maturity and spiritual wisdom, but by spiritual oversight and spiritual authority. In this word, you have oversight and authority. They go together. And you find, for example, that word used in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus chapter 1 as the word to describe church leaders. They are overseers. It is also used in **Philippians 1:1** and **Acts 20:28**.

3. Pastor- Shepherd

1. Acts 20:28
2. I Peter 5
3. I Tim 4 whole chapter
4. II Tim 4

It means shepherd, it comes from *poimēn*. This indicates that the leader in the church is characterized by spiritual feeding and spiritual protection. Here you're looking at the duty that he has to feed the flock and protect them from the wolves. So the leader in the church is characterized by spiritual maturity, spiritual wisdom, spiritual oversight, spiritual authority, spiritual feeding, and spiritual protection.

4 Those who Lead you

the word *hēgoumenois*, which literally means “those who led you.” And we'll just use the word leader, or chief. This indicates that the one who is responsible as an overseer, elder, or pastor should be characterized by spiritual discernment and spiritual guidance. In other words, he is effective as a leader because he can assess the condition, and move people to a better condition, guide them in a right path.

I. First Responsibility LABOR

recognize those who labor among you

Diligently labor (2872) (**kopiao** [word study] from **kopos** = labor, fatigue) This root word **kopos** (see word study) is used in secular Greek of “a beating,” “weariness” (as though one had been beaten) and “**exertion**,” was the proper word for physical tiredness induced by work, exertion or heat.

Kopiao means to physically become worn out, weary or faint. To engage in hard work with the implication of difficulty and trouble. **Kopiao** speaks of intense toil even to the point of utter exhaustion if necessary (cp elders preaching and teaching [1Ti 5:17](#)). The work described by **kopiao** was left one so weary it was as if the person had taken a beating (Paul calls Timothy and all disciples to this "backbreaking labor" [so to speak] in order to make disciples - [2Ti 2:6-note](#)). **Kopiao** describes not so much the actual exertion as the weariness which follows the straining of all one's powers to the utmost.

Stedman writes that those in **leaders** word hard...

They spend hours toiling in difficult and sometimes demeaning work. Contrary to what some people think, it is not true that pastors work only one day a week. The ministry is a very demanding job. (Ibid)

MacArthur adds that **kopiao**

does not stress the amount of work, but rather the effort. A man's reward from God is proportional to the excellence of his ministry and the effort he puts into it. Excellence combined with diligence mark a man worthy of the highest honor. (MacArthur, John: 1Timothy Moody Press or Logos)

ACTS 20:35 In everything I (Paul) showed you that by **working hard** in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Romans 16:6 (note) Greet Mary, who has **worked hard** for you...

16:12 (note) Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has **worked hard** in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:12 and we **toil**, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. (**Comment:** Note the juxtaposition of human effort and God's grace. We are to work hard and yet it is God working in and through us and thus He alone receives the glory!)

Galatians 4:11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have **labored** over you in vain. (Comment: Paul fear that some might

fall prey to the false teaching of the Judaizers who added works and legalism to salvation by faith alone.)

Philippians 2:16 (note) (The saints at Philippi were to keep holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor **toil** in vain.

Colossians 1:29 (note) And for this purpose (to present every man complete in Christ, a mature believer ever being conformed to the image of the Son) also I **labor** (*kopiao*), striving (*agonizomai*) (How?) according to His power, which mightily works (Greek = *energeo* ~ God's power, His grace, His Spirit, "*energized*" Paul) within me.

1Timotny 4:10 (note) For it is for this (with a view to the promise which godliness holds forth so that it might actually be fulfilled -- see note 1Ti 4:8) we **labor** (*kopiao*) and strive (*agonizomai*), because we have fixed our hope on the living God, Who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who **work hard** at preaching and teaching.

2 Timothy 2:6 (note) The **hard-working** farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops

II. Authority over the Sheep

and are over you in the Lord

Have charge over (4291) (**proistemi** from **pró** = before, over + **hístemi** = put, place, stand) literally means those who are put or placed before you or over you. **Proistemi** has the basic meaning of “standing before” others and, hence, the idea of leadership. It describes one who presides over others, and exercises a position of leadership (rule, direct, be at the head of).

Rogers writes that **proistemi** has two possible meanings in this passage

either to preside, lead, direct or to protect , to care for.

(Rogers, C L - originally by Fritz Rienecker: *New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. Zondervan. 1998)

In secular Greek **proistemi** was used in some context (not these ways in NT) meaning to put forward as a pretence or use as a screen. To stand before so as to guard.

Proistemi (as in this passage) also includes the idea of having an interest in, showing concern for, caring for or giving aid.

Hiebert adds that **proistemi**...

literally means "standing before," hence to be at the head, to direct, to rule. It may denote informal leadership or management of any kind, but papyrus usage establishes that it can be used of various kinds of officials.' It points to the spiritual guidance these men are giving to the church, a recognized function of the elder. It combines the concepts of leading, protecting, and caring for.' (Ibid)

Here are the 7 other NT uses of **proistemi** and is rendered -- engage in (2), have charge over(1), leads(1), manage(1), managers(1), manages(1), rule(1).

Romans 12:8 (note) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who **leads** (stands on the first place), with

diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Timothy 3:4 He (**overseer**) must be one who **manages** (**proistemi** - to stand before, to rule over, to manage. Note that in the ancient Greek culture, the authority of the father was exceedingly great.) his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to **manage** (proistemi) his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)

1 Timothy 3:12 Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.

1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who **rule well** (Guthrie notes that the word means general superintendence and describes the duties allotted to all presbyters) be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Titus 3:8 (note) This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God may be careful to **engage** (here **proistemi** speaks of a responsible preoccupation with something. Take the lead in. Be careful to busy yourself with. The word also has a technical meaning - "to practice a profession") in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

Titus 3:14 (note) And let our people also learn to **engage** (proistemi) in good deeds to meet pressing needs, that they may not be unfruitful.

There are 5 uses of **proistemi** in the non-apocryphal Septuagint - [2Sam. 13:17](#); [Pr. 23:5](#); [26:17](#); [Isa. 43:24](#); [Amos 6:10](#)

In the Lord - This phrase clearly identifies these men not as secular leaders (as one might think of leading men in the community) but as those who lead in connection with spiritual

concerns **in** the sphere of the Lord -- as His appointees, under His authority, etc

Stedman comments that...

Leaders have been appointed by the Lord Jesus, regardless of the human process by which they were chosen. That does not mean that they cannot be changed or that in the course of events they will not go someplace else. What it means is that when they are in leadership they are to be regarded as the Lord's men and the Lord's women. He has sent them among us. (Ibid)

Hiebert adds that...

Their position does not stem from personal ambition but rather from their spiritual maturity. Their position of leadership in the church is based upon the recognized fact that both they and those being led are **in the Lord**. "His Lordship underlies their leadership." Their authority is not that of a formal ecclesiastical hierarchy but rather is "one exercised in the warmth of Christian bonds." (Ibid)

We're not self-appointed. It's not manmade. You didn't give us that authority. We didn't take it on our own. It's not from men. We are called, equipped, appointed by God. It is our duty to rule for His sake, the Lord's sake, not for personal power, personal prestige, personal gain, personal career advancement, but for the Lord. That little phrase "in the Lord" is the sphere in which our authority rests. Our authority is in Him. He delegated it to us. We only have it as we're obedient to His Word and His will. We have a delegated authority. It is not our own, and it does not go beyond the expression of His will, in His Word and through His Spirit. And so, we are given authority, but only in the Lord, not beyond that.

III. Instruction

admonish you,

Give instruction (3560) (warning, cautioning, gently reproving, exhorting) (**noutheteo [word study]** from **noús** = mind + **títhemi** = place) literally means to place in the mind and so to warn or give notice to beforehand especially of danger or evil. The idea is to lay it on the mind or heart of the person, with the stress being on influencing not only the intellect, but also the will, emotions and disposition. The idea is to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct. **Noutheteo** has the connotation of confronting with the intent of changing one's attitudes and actions.

Noutheteo is in the **present tense** which indicating that these leaders were continually admonishing, warning, cautioning, etc. It often conveys an implication of blame attached or of calling attention to faults or defects. It follows that noutheteo speaks of the activity of reminding someone of what he has forgotten or is in danger of forgetting. It may involve a rebuke for wrongdoing as well as a warning to be on guard against wrongdoing. It directs an appeal to the conscience and will of one being admonished in order to stir him to watchfulness or obedience.

Morris remarks

While its tone is brotherly, it is big-brotherly

English dictionaries state that to **admonish** is to indicate duties or obligations to; to express warning or disapproval to especially in a gentle, earnest, or solicitous manner; to give friendly earnest advice or encouragement to; to reprove firmly but not harshly; to advise to do or against doing something; warn; caution.

Paul in his parting words to the Ephesian elders reminded them that

"from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" and therefore they had to "be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years (note what Paul did for 3 years! **Is this an active aspect of ministry in the modern day church?**) I did not cease to **admonish** (noutheteo) each one with tears." ([Acts 20:30, 31](#))

In a note on the [Romans 15:14](#) passage **John MacArthur** writes that **noutheteo**...

is a **comprehensive term for counseling**. In this context, it refers to coming alongside other Christians for **spiritual and moral counseling**. Paul is not referring to a special gift of counseling, but of the duty and responsibility that every believer has for encouraging and strengthening other believers. Tragically, many Christians today have been convinced that competent counseling can only be accomplished by a person who is trained in the principles of secular psychology—despite the fact that the various schools of psychology are, for the most part, at extreme odds with God's Word and frequently with each other. Although they may profess that "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" ([2Ti 3:16-note](#)), many evangelicals—both those who give and those who receive counseling—do not rely on the full sufficiency of God's Word.... When God's Word rules our hearts (cf [Col 3:16-note](#)), His Holy Spirit makes us "rich in the true wisdom" and prepares us to admonish one another, to "teach and help one another along the right road." The place for Christians to counsel and be counseled is in

the church. That is not, of course, to say that it must be done in a church building, but that it be Christian counseling Christian. That principle applies to general admonitions among fellow believers, as Paul mentions in this text, as well as to counseling regarding more serious and prolonged problems confronted by a biblically oriented and spiritually gifted Christian minister." (MacArthur, J: Romans 9-16. Chicago: Moody Press or Logos) (bolding added, reference links added)

Paul considered himself a spiritual father to the local churches, and it was his duty to warn his children --

"I do not write these things to shame you, but to **admonish** you as my beloved children" ([1Corinthians 4:14](#))

Children who are not warned can get in a lot of trouble! Using the noun form (nouthesia) Paul instructs fathers, writing...

"And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and **instruction** (**nouthesia**) of the Lord." ([Ep 6:4-note](#))

Fathers, are you warning your children? It is critical for their well being in a amoral society which has run amuck and scoffs at the life giving Biblical principles like this one in Ephesians!

In **admonishment** there is a moral emphasis, in **teaching** a doctrinal emphasis.

The **Wycliffe Bible commentary** says that

"The 'doctor of souls' has a warning and teaching ministry, not self-centered but patient-centered."

Listen to what Richard Baxter said several centuries ago. "To preach a sermon, what skill is necessary to make the truth plain, to convince the hearers, to let irresistible light into their

consciences, and keep it there, and drive all home; to screw the truth into their minds, and work Christ into their affections; to meet every objection, and clearly to resolve it; to drive sinners to a stand, and make them see that there is no hope, but that they must unavoidably either be converted or condemned – and to do all this, as regards language and style, as befits our work, and yet as is most suitable to the capacities of the hearers? This, and a great deal more that should be done in every sermon, must surely require a great deal of holy skill.

So great a God, whose message we deliver, should be honored by our delivery of it. It is a lamentable case, that in the message from the God of heaven of everlasting moment to the souls of men, we should behave ourselves so weakly, so unhandsomely, so imprudently, or so slightly, that the whole business should miscarry in our hands, and God should be dishonored, and His work disgraced, and sinners rather hardened than converted; and all this through our weakness or neglect. How often have carnal hearers gone home jeering at the palpable and dishonorable failings of the preacher? How many sleep under us, because our hearts and tongues are sleepy, and we bring not with us so much skill and zeal as to awake them?", end quote.

No king, no President, no politician, no doctor, no lawyer, no judge, no military commander on earth has such an awesome responsibility as the one who shepherds the sheep by giving instruction out of the Word of God. To prostitute that is a frightening, frightening error.