

1st Thessalonians 5: 12 and 13; “Esteeming Your Elders in Love”, Sermon # 25 in the series – “A Persevering Faith”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 7th, 2018, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

I must confess that I am very thankful for all those who labor among us; all those who are full of love for the Lord and love for the brethren, and all who show that love in good works. But the verses that we are considering this morning are related to “those who labor among you” and “are over you in the Lord”, and “admonish you”. I think that this is speaking primarily of the office of the pastor or the elders of the church. The elders of the church are the ones who “admonish” the brethren and are “over them in the Lord”. The fact that Paul uses the word “those”, instead of the words, “the one” who labors among you, I think, is indicative of the fact that it is the Apostolic teaching and pattern for all New Testament churches that there be a plurality of Elders in any local church. I would like to ask that you would pray for this, for our church, because even though I as your pastor have been given grace for this ministry among you, I believe that it would be good to have another elder to help in the work here; not so much to be a full-time laborer in the ministry of preaching and teaching; although an elder must be able to teach, or given to teach. But I believe that it would be very desirable to have another man or men, to be able to help, not only in the work of teaching and preaching, but also in the work related to pastoral visitation and counseling. The Lord will have to raise up such a man, I know, but I am confident that He will do this very thing, at the right time, in the years to come. You should pray for this, and be on the lookout for such a person to recommend him to the church that we might recognize him.

The passage that we are looking at begins with the words, “And we urge you, brethren”. Paul does not begin this subject by demanding a submission to his Apostolic authority, so that you who are members of the church will feel that you are commanded to do the things that he mentions in these two verses, in relation to your pastor. Instead, he and the others who had labored with him, Silvanus and Timothy, were all urging this. It was something that Paul felt was both good and important to the life and usefulness of every Christian person in the whole assembly. This should tell us what our God is pleased with. God is pleased with seeing the unity of the church with their pastor or pastors established; the congregation’s care for them, so that Christ’s kingdom can advance in the truth, and in the strength of Christ’s grace, so that each member would make progress in being useful to Christ, and bear fruit to Him. The words of these two verses are given to us here so that God will be pleased with us as a church in His sight. There are 3 things which the Apostle Paul urges the Thessalonian believers to do in relation to their elders. The 1st is to “recognize” them. The 2nd is “to esteem them in love”. And the 3rd is “to be at peace with them”. Let us pray as we listen, that we will all benefit from our consideration of these verses at this time in the life of our church.

1st of all – The members of a local church are urged to recognize those who labor among them.

The word which is translated “recognize” here, is εἶδω in the Greek. It means to see, to know, to be aware of, and to consider. It is true that there ought to be a formal call and recognition, by the congregation, of those who are laboring among us in the word and doctrine. This sentence would not exclude that evaluatory process, or the call extended by the church. For that formal call will be extended to a man, based upon the knowledge that the members of the that church have, about the man who they would raise up to be their pastor. But this word “recognize” means something more than that, here in the context. The men being spoken of, here, were men who were already engaged in the work to which they were appointed. They were already laboring in the word, and so the work of preliminary investigation into their life and character had already taken place. Either these men were elders appointed for them by Paul, or what is more likely, he helped raise these men up to the work by asking for a show of hands from the church itself, as he did in

Acts 14: 23. It says there in Acts 14: 23 – “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

The word “appointed there can be translated “ordained”. In the context of that setting of Paul’s apostolic oversight of the churches of Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, and Derbe, the word appointed here literally means – a “stretching forth the hands”. This stretching forth of the hands, then, was a vote which was taken in the presence of the apostle, by which the majority in each church would decide who would become an elder. But the way that the sentence is worded in verse 12 of our text seems to me to indicate that Paul was telling them that they should not take either the man or his work for granted, but that they should really get to know him; that is, the pastor or elders of the church. “We urge you brethren that you “know those who labor among you, and *who* are over you”, it says in the King James.

So Paul is urging them to come to see their pastor or elders in this holy way, as their spiritual shepherds, and to actually attempt to get to know them and interact with them as their close spiritual friends. Paul is urging them to get to know their pastor in the way that he thinks, and the way that he leads, and the holy ambitions that he has for the church that he is overseeing. And all of this is to be done by them, not to be nosey about the pastor’s life or to attempt to control or interfere with his work; but it is done with a view to further helping the whole work of the church forward. The way that they can do that, Paul is saying, is by consciously mentally and spiritually supporting the man’s teaching and shepherding work, and by contributing to it themselves, with their own supplemental labors, wherever and wherever possible.

Now, the way that this works out in actual practice could take many forms. Turn with me to 1st Corinthians 16: 15. “I urge you, brethren – you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints – that you also submit to such and to everyone one who works and labors with us.” From these verses we see that there are men in the ministry of the word, and then there are men and women who pay attention to the word preached, and they behold the needs of the saints in relation to the truth that has been preached to them, and they help those saints out in terms of the gift that is given to them. I want you see from these verses that there are persons who are called to the ministry of the word, and then there are those who are called to devote themselves to the ministry of the saints, under the leadership of the elder or elders. Both are extremely important, and it is extremely important that the man or men in the ministry have gifted men and women who are willing to become helpers to them.

Paul is saying that those men who have been delegated responsibilities within the church by the elder or elders, ought to be submitted to, because they have an approved mission within the context of the ministry carried on, by the elders with the word of God. They are laboring together with them. The pastor is laboring in the word and doctrine, and the deacons and others who are devoted to serving, are laboring in the ministry to the saints. Now look at verse 17. “I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied.” “For they refreshed my spirit and yours.” “Therefore acknowledge such men.” The word “acknowledge” there is *επιγνωσκει*, and it also means “to recognize” or “to perceive”; “to become fully acquainted with”. This is what you should do with the man who is your pastor, as well as with all the men who are supporting his labors in the ministry.

You will notice from the verses that I just read to you from 1st Corinthians 16, one of the real ways that you can help the pastor of your church. It is that you study to see and to know what he is like as a person, and as a man, and do all that you can to attempt to work with him. Yes, that is what you should do. But once you begin to do that, you will begin to look around you and see what you can do to help him, and to help the church, in your supplying what is lacking. I mean the things that you think that you can do, to contribute to the building up of the church, and to contribute in reaching out to others, both inside and outside the church. The ministry of the church is not a one man ministry. The pastor of the church needs others to take the initiative and to serve one another and to serve the needs of the church. The pastor cannot be in all places at all

times. The pastor cannot meet all the needs of the membership for friendship or companionship or visitation.

If you will think upon this, and pray about it, you will soon become someone who can contribute in this holy way. Take personal initiative in thinking of how you can refresh your pastor's spirit and the spirits of people in the church who do not get a lot of attention. Try to think of ways that you might be able to strengthen your pastor in the ministry, and if you have ideas of what could be done in some aspect of ministry, that you would come to him in the spirit of friendship and brotherhood, and discuss those things that you think that you might be able to do, with him, and ask him whether he thinks that this would be truly helpful. And in many, if not in most cases, your pastor will approve of your initiative. If you are faithful in your labors and the work that you are doing for the Lord and the church, this will set the state for your being recognized by the church as someone who is devoted to the ministry to the saints, and you will be seen as a pastor who can be submitted to, in regard to the particular area of responsibility that you have been delegated. This will be a great help to the pastor and to the whole church.

The work of the whole ministry of the church is very important to Christ. It begins with the preaching of the work, and counselling in relation to that preaching, but it ends in the people of the congregation becoming Bible scholars in the sense that they are doers of the work and not merely hearers. At the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, in chapter 12, Solomon gives us an indication of what the life of a preacher is like, and what it means to be week after week engaging himself and all of his powers to the study of the word of God, in order to bring forth what God would have him to bring forth, for the building up of God's people. Verse 10 says, "The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright – words of truth." "The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd."

The preacher and minister of the assembly is in his study often, praying and meditating over the words of truth. What are the words can I say, he thinks, that will cause the people in this church to follow the Lord Jesus more closely? These words of the Bible have been given by the Great Shepherd, by the One Good Shepherd. And if he can preach them with the power of the Holy Spirit, then the truths that he sets forth on Sunday will be like well driven nails. Verse 12 says, "And further, my son, be admonished by these." The minister himself has to be admonished by the word. He himself must be fed by it, and he himself must be built up by it and go about to live it. "But of the making of many books there is no end," it says here, "and much study is wearisome to the flesh." The congregation of a church which is serious about learning the word of God needs to realize this, and pray for their pastor that he will not be wearied to death by study and ministry, but that somehow that he would be refreshed by it. Pray for me in this way. Pray that there would be a newness and a freshness to my studies week by week. When one Sunday is over, I will start over and begin again to prepare something that will feed and satisfy the souls of the people of God again this next Sunday. Please pray that God will lift me up in this holy work.

Then 2nd – The members of a local church are urged to esteem their pastor in love.

Verse 13 says, "...to esteem them very highly in love for their works sake." This can be done in several ways. It can be done by your words. And it can be done in your attitude. First of all, if you appreciate the labors of the pastor on your behalf, in terms of his feeding you the word of God week by week, that you would occasionally tell him so. The pastor's labors are like a chef going to all the trouble of fixing you a good meal. He spends much time in the preparation of it. He looks into all the details of the choice of the food that he will give to you, and the way that it is served, so that you will be strengthened by it. He does this in order that your soul might be satisfied and nourished by it, because he knows that ultimately it is God who has given you so many good and nourishing truths in His word, so that you would be made strong and healthy by them. Your just saying that you appreciate the preaching of the word goes a long way in the mind of the pastor to strengthen him to continue to labor and bring to you the good things that are there in the word of God.

Meditating on the things that the pastor has brought to you in the preaching of the word is also a way that you can show him that you esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake. You really

think upon the things that are preached; you really ponder them and digest them and think about them. You don't just wolf your food and rush out the door. You linger over it, and you speak about it with your pastor; the details of it, just like you would a good meal at home. If your wife serves you succulent food at home, men, you don't simply eat it up and say nothing about it, night after night. If you are silent all of the time, you shouldn't be. You should think to yourself: That was really good. You mention it, and you continue to appreciate it. You talk about it together.

The Word of God and God Himself are worthy for us to speak about; all the good bread, and meat, and milk and honey that are given to you each Lord's day. But then, if this is true, you ought to stop and think about the fact, and talk of it together with your pastor and with other people; of what you can do on the strength of that food. Elijah went 40 days on the strength of that angelic food that was given to him; to Horeb the mountain of God. He had been discouraged because Jezebel was seeking him, to take his life, because he had proved that the worship of Baal was false and the worship of God was true. He had ordered the death of all of the prophets of Baal and had hoped that God would restore the kingdom to His favor, and bless the nation with better things. He needed a word from God. And God would give it to him there. Sometimes your pastor needs to be strengthened in his times alone with God so that he can go on in the ministry, but sometimes he can be strengthened and encouraged by you.

This is what you should pray for. Esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake. Receive his teaching and admonitions. Receive his words and counsel to yourself, and then show your appreciation for his work by seriously considering how you can live out the truth of all that your he has preached to you. Esteem him in this way; that you thank God for his ministry to you. If sometimes you feel convicted by his preaching, esteem him highly because he is the one whom God has appointed to preach to you, and to tell you where you need to change or to improve in relation to keeping the commandments of God. It is good to receive the words of truth that convict, knowing that your pastor loves you as he would his own child, as his own friend, as he would a member of his own family; for you are his mother and sister and brother.

Remember Proverbs 28: 23 – “He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue.” And Proverbs 27: 5. “Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.” “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” The pastor is the friend of your soul. There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is in a category all His own, as the Son of God, and He is your Master, your Savior your Lord, and your ultimate Friend. But the pastor should be esteemed as one of your next closest friends because he tells you the truth about God and about the things of your soul.

And then 3rd – The members of the church are urged to be at peace with their pastor and among themselves. (Verse 13b)

“Be at peace among yourselves.” This exhortation is linked in with the previous ones. It is easy, sometimes, to be at odds with your pastor because he is the one who is responsible before God to preach to you the truth of the word, and also to counsel you, when the occasion arises, in relation to the many different areas of obedience in the practical outworking of your Christian life. This authority that he has, in the sight of God, is not always conducive to peace in the church. It is all too easy to take offense when someone is trying to tell you the truth, but you think that the truth is something other than what is being said by your pastor. But if you love the Lord and you know that the pastor loves your soul enough to tell you the truth in every situation, then it is the best possible combination for ensuring that you will grow in Christ. The pastor has not put into the position that he holds in order to lord it over your faith. He is there to help you on to maturity in your faith. But he is there to be an under-shepherd to you for Christ, for your good.

It is good for you to receive his observations upon truth and upon yourself, even if you disagree with them. I have had experience of this first-hand. It has always been for my good to have been told by my pastors where there things in my life that they thought were not in line with what the Bible commands and commends in a disciple. Even if I disagreed with their analysis, it was something which I received, and thought about, and prayed about, and asked the Lord to reveal to

me if what they were saying was true of me. If my attitude towards receiving the reproof or correction of those who were over me in the Lord was a good one, then the Lord mightily used what they said in my life. What is the right attitude? It is the attitude of being at peace, instead of being at war with the ones who are in authority over you in the Lord.

Psalm 141: 5 is a verse that I often think about in this connection. "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." "Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies." "Let the righteous strike me (or smite me); it shall be a kindness." "And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it." Let me ask; is this your attitude toward those who are in authority over you in the Lord? Then nothing but good will come to you in terms of the Lord's blessing. You say, but I would like the pastor to recognize me, and the gifts and abilities that I have. I have a desire to hold office in the church. Then my friend, why not draw near to the pastor and think of him as you friend, and a chief spiritual confidant. Think of him as the person under God's good hand who can help you to fulfill every legitimate desire that you have, in terms of service in the church. To be truly blessed by the Lord, only the Lord can raise you up to a position in the church where you will be useful to Him and glorify Him, in your service to him. But I appeal to you, do not see the pastor as the one who is hindering you. Rather see him as the one who is helping you to be all that you can be, to His glory.

Sometimes a Christian man may come to the place where he thinks that the pastor of the church, or other leaders in the church are holding him back. He can't seem to become what he wants to become in the sight of the Lord. And so he comes to see the pastor as a problem and he thinks that he cannot support the pastor's ministry because of it. But the question that should come to that man is this: Why fight with the very person or persons that God Himself has appointed to watch for your soul? And why should you disdain their counsel or admonitions? How much better is it to be at peace with them and with everyone else in the church who is attempting by the grace of God to do His will in accordance with His word. Hebrews 13: 17 says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give an account." "Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." "Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably."

Let me say this in closing: It is the peace of God ruling in your heart, combined with a clear conscience, that will allow you to be at peace with those in authority over you. The responsibility of every pastor, and of every Christian, is found in Hebrews Chapter 12, verses 14 and 15. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble and by this many become defiled...." Again; being at peace among ourselves is a most precious thing. But it can easily be destroyed if bitterness or resentments or a critical spirit take over that place in your heart where peace and love, patience and gentleness, are supposed to reign. But if the heart of a believer is looking to God to supply all of his or her spiritual needs, then they will also learn to trust that God has been right in giving them the pastor that He has given to them; one who loves them and prays for their greatest spiritual welfare.