

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

- A. For the past several weeks, we have been talking about the return of Christ. And Paul, after exhorting us to live godly in light of and in preparation for Christ's return, finishes his letter with practical advice on how to live the Christian life so as to be prepared for the return of Christ.
- B. **1 Thessalonians 5:12-22** . . . But we request of you, brethren, that you 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. Live in peace with one another. [14] We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. [15] See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. [16] Rejoice always; [17] pray without ceasing; [18] in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. [19] Do not quench the Spirit; [20] do not despise prophetic utterances. [21] But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; [22] abstain from every form of evil.
- C. Today, we are going to look at **vs 12-13**.
- D. Pray

II. Proper relationship between church members and church leadership

- A. [12] But we request of you, brethren, that you **appreciate** those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,
 - 1. According to the NASB translation of this verse, it appears Paul is asking the believers to appreciate their church leaders, such as the pastors, elders, deacons, SS teachers, youth workers, and so on.
 - a. By definition, to appreciate someone is to recognize the effort or the quality or the worth of someone and value them accordingly.
 - b. Therefore, if we accept the NASB's word choice as the best choice, it means I should be teaching you to appreciate your leaders – including me. In other words, we should begin today's teaching with me telling you to recognize the effort the leaders of our church are putting forth, what to look for, and why you should value them accordingly.

- c. And though such a mindset and attitude would be godly on your part, teaching you to do this goes against the humility and the servant's mindset that I myself and the rest of those in leadership ought to have. And so it was in wondering how I could humbly teach you to appreciate your leaders that I began to look deeper into the word choice used by the NASB.
2. The Greek word that the NASB translates "appreciate" is "*oida*" and means to "**know**." In fact, if you look in the margin of the NASB, you will see that they acknowledge the literal meaning is "**know**." And **know** is not the same as appreciate – even though getting to know your leaders may result in you appreciating them.
 - a. Now to be fair to every Bible translation, I want to acknowledge the difficulty the translators had in deciding what Paul meant when urging you to "**know**" those (1) who diligently labor among you, (2) and have charge over you in the Lord (3) and give you instruction.
 - b. And to prove how difficult this was for the translators, I will give you a few examples of what other translators chose.
 - (1) ESV and NIV translate *oida* as "respect"
 - (2) NKJV translates it as "to recognize"
 - (3) NJB says "to be considerate of"
 - (4) NLT uses "honor" – and that is just four examples of the various ways "*oida*" is translated – which I hope shows the difficulty the translators faced with this verse.
3. For me, the best translation is the literal translation. And I see it as the best one because it has practical support by at least four other scriptures: Matthew 7:15-20, Luke 6:39, 43-44, Acts 6:1-6, and Revelation 2:1-2. Let me explain.
 - a. In **Matthew 7:15-20**, Jesus warns us about false teachers who act and teach as if they are godly, but behind their religious facade are ungodly intentions and ungodly behaviors. The next thing Jesus says is that you can recognize a false teacher by examining the fruit of his life and ministry. Then Jesus gives us help in discerning false teachers from good teachers by saying that bad trees bear bad fruit while good trees bear good fruit. Therefore, one way to tell what kind of person a leader is, is by observing his fruit, such as how he treats his wife, raises his children, treats those under his authority, and the quality of his teaching or service. However, you have to get to **know** your leaders to make these observations.

- b. In **Luke 6:39, 43-44**, Jesus uses short parables to make a similar point. For example, an ungodly leader cannot lead his followers to godliness, and a godly leader cannot produce ungodly Christians. Therefore, if you want to become a godly Christian, attach yourself to a godly leader. But here again, this requires **knowing** the leader well enough to know if he truly is godly or if he is pretending to be godly.
 - c. In **Acts 6:1-6**, the disciples are dealing with a problem in the church and decided they needed seven men of good reputation, and full of the Spirit and of wisdom, to put in charge of the problem situation. Among those chosen by the congregation was Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. The point here is that the congregation had to “**know**” these men well enough to know they were godly enough to fill the requirements of leadership.
 - d. In **Revelation 2:1-2**, we read, “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: [2] ‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false.’” The inference here is that in order to test or discern if a leader is godly, you have to get to **know** him well enough to make that determination.
4. It is because of these four scriptures – and life experience – that I prefer to translate **vs 12** as, “But we request of you, brethren, that you **KNOW** those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord, and give you instruction.”
- a. The importance of knowing me and every other leader in our church, or any leader you attach yourself to, is so that you can know where you are being lead and then decide if that is where you want to go.
 - (1) Without question, getting to know your leaders will take some effort on your part – such as listening to how they talk to people and about people – including their spouse, and observing how they deal with those under their authority, how they use their finances (*are they repeatedly in debt*), how they deal with conflict, and how they handle criticism.
 - (2) You see, leaders can act and sound godly, but only a godly leader can lead you or show you the way to godliness. Why?

Because when it comes to godly living, a leader can only lead as far as he's gone – no matter how godly he sounds.

5. Returning to the NASB's translation of "appreciate," there is no doubt that it is nice to be appreciated, and it is good to show appreciation to any leader who helps you move God-ward.
 - a. However, any leader who needs the appreciation and praises of those he or she serves to continue making a diligent, God-honoring effort in fulfilling the work they have been called or asked to do, is in it for themselves, not God.
 - b. As for me, I am not doing this work to be appreciated. I am not seeking or longing for your approval or your gratitude. My purpose, my goal, my intention is to point you toward God, toward whole-life, whole-hearted holiness, and toward godly living – in your home, your extended family, your neighborhood, your work, and in our church. And it is my opinion that this ought to be the motive for any leader in any church – including our church.
 - c. It is not that I don't appreciate being appreciated, but my joy as your pastor comes from your growth in godliness and Christian maturity, not your praises or kind words of appreciation.
6. And so I urge you, do what you can to get to **know** those you follow, whether it is a pastor, elder, counselor, BS leader, singer, or author. If you accept their influence in your life, make it your aim to do what you can to know the spiritual quality and daily living of the person you are following so that you know where they can and can't lead you – and from there decide if you want to follow them.

B. [13a] and that you **esteem them** very highly **in love because of their work**.

1. To esteem someone very highly is to highly value them and treat them accordingly. Webster's adds, "to regard with reverence, or respect." To esteem someone in love is to love them in ways that verifies the value you hold them to be in your life.
 - a. As Christians, we ought to esteem leaders according to the quality of their work, not because of their position.
 - b. In other words, though we ought to have respect for the various positions within the church, we ought not set church leaders above the rest as if they are better or deserve more respect or better treatment than the rest because of their position.

- c. When we highly esteem any leader because of his position, or any Christian because he has gained fame within the Christian community, and follow him as if he deserves our respect and reverence, we are no longer concerned with the quality of his spirituality, the whole-heartedness of his godly living, and the spiritual worth of his service or work. And when we are no longer concerned with these important things, we open two doors that lead to unworthy outcomes.
 - (1) **First**, we open a door for that leader to live a double life – one life that maintains his position and importance in the church, and a second life that allows him to feed his self-centered and fleshly desires – either through his position or in more hidden, less obvious ways.
 - (2) **Second**, we open the door to spiritual negligence and Christian immaturity because we become more concerned with aligning ourselves and following a leader because of his position or one who is popular than following and learning from those who are spiritually fit and genuinely godly – be they pastors, authors, leaders, teachers, songwriters, or singers.
 - d. Paul put it this way in **1 Timothy 5:17**, “The elders who **rule well** are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who **work hard** at preaching and teaching.”
 - e. Therefore, to paraphrase what Paul is saying here in **vs 13**: “Show high regard to your churches leadership or any other spiritual leader that you follow through your love for them – however you may express that love. And do this because of their efforts and work on your behalf.”
2. Though Paul is not exhorting church leaders in **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13**, I want to read two portions of scripture for the sake of reminding all of us who lead, or who might one day lead, to maintain a godly mindset, purpose, motivation, attitude, and life.
- a. **Matthew 20:25-28**, “Jesus called [the disciples] to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over [those under them], and their great men exercise authority over [those under them]. [26] It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, [27] and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; [28] just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’”

- b. **1 Peter 5:1-3**, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, [2] shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight **not under compulsion**, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and **not for sordid gain** (*such as power, money, fame, or any other ungodly purpose*), but with eagerness (*eager to serve God rather than self*); [3] **nor yet as lording it over** (*commanding and demanding*) those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock (*by practicing what you teach so that you show them the way by how you live*).