

*1 Thessalonians 5:12-13***PREFACE**

There are many ways that the church is different from the society in which it must dwell. There are, of course, exceptions on both sides, but generally speaking,

- the church is not a business, or a club, but a *family*;
- the individual members of this family are viscerally connected to one another by the blood of Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit;
- it actually practices what (at least in the United States) remains mostly just a high concept;
  - unlike civil society, which in practice is mostly *linear* in its hierarchy (governance and accountability flowing in one direction), church structure is truly *circular* in nature:
    - those in charge (its shepherds) govern, but work for and remain accountable to its members;
    - they remain approachable “first among equals,” rather than unapproachable rulers.
- Thus, in the church, *every* member is accountable to someone above them, and accountable to everyone “below” them and, ideally, is to graciously receive (or at least consider) counsel from those over which they have charge.

The only one who answers to no one else is God the Father. To the Corinthian church the apostle Paul set down the *linear* hierarchy.

**Read 1 Corinthians 11:1-3.**

But note further down his reference to how it is also *circular*. The topic he is addressing is the proper order of worship, but from this we see how, unlike in general society, things are *reciprocal* in the church.

**Read vv7-12.**

This brings us to our passage in 1 Thessalonians 5, which speaks of *mutual edification*. The first half of the chapter was given to the church's behavior and mindset in light of Christ's impending judgment and wrath. He teed up the second half of the chapter and the close of this letter with vv11:

**Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.**

Paul is now shifting gears from eschatology (study of the end times) to family life in the church, addressing in vv12-22, our responsibilities to

1. our leaders (vv12-13)
2. the members of the body (vv14-15)
3. oneself (vv16-18)
4. public worship (vv19-22)

**Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.**

*we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you,*

There are supernatural benefits from being a part of the body of Christ; there is no other institution like it on earth. But these supernatural benefits come with supernatural *responsibilities* as well—especially for the body’s leaders.

### Read Acts 20:28.

Because they—principally pastors and elders—bear a greater burden, a greater responsibility before the Lord, they are to be recognized and respected.

**appreciate**<sup>nasb</sup>, **recognize**<sup>nkjv</sup>, **know**<sup>kjv</sup>, **respect**<sup>niv, esv</sup> = *eidenai* = **Recognize them for what they are, and as entitled to respect because of their office.**

This respect is due them because of their office and their calling, but also because they will have to answer to the Lord for their leadership and teaching.

### Read Hebrews 13:17.

#### Read James 3:1. (NOT KJV)

The God-ordained work of these men is described in three ways—or three reasons they are due this respect. First, their service is hard work.

those who **diligently labor**<sup>nasb</sup>, **labor**<sup>kjvs, esv</sup>, **work hard**<sup>niv</sup> = *kopiaio* = from a derivative of <G2873> (kopos); **to feel fatigue**; by implication to work hard :- (bestow) labour, toil, be wearied.

*and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction*

The second is that the Lord has placed them in a position of authority over the church.

**have charge/are over you** = *proistamenous* = from <G4253> (pro) and <G2476> (histemi); **to stand before, i.e. (in rank) to preside**, or (by implication) to practise :- maintain, be over, rule.

#### Sidebar:

To my mind the definition of this word—“to stand before”—can have two meanings. The essential meaning of the Greek is that these individuals stand in front of the church to preside over it; they are higher in rank. So, initially, we have a kind of military picture of a leader standing in front of *and facing* those in his charge, keeping order.

But just turn that leader around, facing *away from* the troops, and suddenly we have a very different picture. First, now the leader—the pastor, the elder—is leading the charge against the enemy; he is placing himself in the most vulnerable position as the one who will meet the enemy first as the church does battle with those against it. Second, when the day of judgment comes, he must stand before the Lord first, to answer for the souls that were placed in his charge.

The third reason we are called to respect these men is that they have been placed, by the Lord, in a position to keep the church in-line: “correction administered either by word or deed” (Thomas).

**give you instruction**<sup>nab</sup>, **admonish** = *noutheteo* = from the same as <G3559> (nouthesia); to put in mind, i.e. (by implication) **to caution or reprove gently** :- admonish, warn. **Morris: While its tone is brotherly, it is big-brotherly.**

### v13

*and that you esteem them very highly in love...*

Based on these reasons, in v13 Paul encourages the Thessalonians to have a certain response—and here the difference between the church and the world is set in bright lights. No doubt most of us have had jobs at some time in our life where an employer or supervisor—someone who “had charge over [us]”—would discipline, correct, admonish us for our behavior. Perhaps it was in a school situation, when we were sent to the principal’s office for punishment, or scolded in the hallway for something we did.

In that situation we probably, outwardly, accepted the reproof—but resented it in our heart. We may even have shown our superior a measure of “respect”—but grudgingly. We certainly didn’t *love* them for it.

Yet here Paul says that this is precisely what our response should be to our shepherds in the church: “esteem them very highly in love”.

**esteem** = *hegeisthai* = middle of a (presumed) strengthened form of <G71> (ago); to lead, i.e. command (with official authority); **figurative to deem, i.e. consider** :- account, (be) chief, **count**, esteem, governor, judge, have the rule over, suppose, think. **Vincent: To lead the mind through a reasoning process to a conclusion, and so to think, to estimate. Webster’s Dictionary: esteem—to have great regard for; value highly; respect.**

The conclusion is truly remarkable when we combine the three elements of this phrase—and note: there is Biblical balance to this, regarding concomitant responsibilities and behavior of the church’s shepherds to the flock; just not here in our text. The word “esteem,” all by itself includes the idea of generous, high regard; yet this is modified and expanded with “very highly,” superabundantly (the strongest intensive possible to the language); finally, all of this is wrapped in the mantle of *agape* “love.”

*Matthew Poole:* The words in Greek carry such an emphasis as cannot well be expressed in English, importing esteem and love to a hyperbole; their love was to be joined with esteem, and esteem with love, and both these to abound and superabound towards them.

*Adam Clarke:* Christian ministers, who preach the whole truth, and labor in the word and doctrine, are entitled to more than respect; the apostle commands them to be esteemed abundantly, and superabundantly; and this is to be done in love.

This is not a command; Paul opens this topic with the word *erotao*: he *requests*, he *asks*, he *urges* the church to behave this way toward its leaders. This is a request from a friend who knows what is best for them as individuals, and as a church body.

*because of their work.*

Here it is again; Paul raises again the first reason he gave for his request: the work of these men.

Note that none of this counsel for how we are to regard the church's shepherds is based on the elder's personality, whether we enjoy being around them or not. It is based on *what they are, whose they are* (the Lord's), *and what they do*.

**work** = *ergon* = from a primary (but obsolete) *ergo* (to work); toil (as an effort or occupation); by implication an act :- deed, doing, labour, work.

*Rev. George Barlow* (in *The Preacher's Complete Homiletical Commentary*): Love them for your own sake; you have life and comfort by them. Honour them for their office's sake; they are your fathers; they have begotten you in Christ; they are the stewards of God's house, and the dispensers of His mysteries. Honour and love them for God's sake; He has sent them and put His word in their mouth. (I have left in place the original, uncomfortable "fathers" because Jesus, in Matthew 23:9, refers to how this was the title given to eminent teachers and founders of schools, to whom the people were taught to look up rather than to God. Good teachers would make men look to God, and not to themselves, as the source of power and truth.)

*Live in peace with one another.*

Paul closes these two verses not with a polite request, but more of a command—which suggests that the foregoing is less a philosophical exercise than Paul's addressing a specific laxity in the church at Thessalonica.

This passage tells us that there *were* individuals in the young church in a position of leadership, authority. And this last command suggests that perhaps they were *not* receiving their due recognition, that there was *not* an atmosphere of peace and brotherhood within the church.

If it goes too far to say that this is a commandment from Paul—to love and be at peace with one another—we can safely say that it *was* a commandment from Christ Jesus.

**Read John 13:34-35.**

The church is not of this world; it is from above. There is nothing else like it in this world. It is unique, and part of what makes it so is that within its structure of leadership and membership there exists a God-given, mutual respect, love and peace. That peace is not of this world; it is from above.

**Read John 14:27**