

Know and Esteem Them Over You

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Installation

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13
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We read now in the word of God as it's found in 1 Thessalonians 5. 1 Thessalonians 5. The text that God gives to us this morning is found in verses 12 and 13. 1 Thessalonians 5.

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. 5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. 7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. 8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. 9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. 11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. 12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour 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. And be at peace among yourselves. 14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. 15 See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. 16 Rejoice evermore. 17 Pray without ceasing. 18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. 19 Quench not the Spirit. 20 Despise not prophesyings. 21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. 22 Abstain from all appearance of evil. 23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. 25 Brethren, pray for us. 26 Greet all the

brethren with an holy kiss. 27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Verses 12 and 13 serve as our text for this morning.

12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour 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. And be at peace among yourselves.

Two thoughts by way of introduction. The first one has to do with the context of the end times and of Jesus' coming again. While we're meditating on the things that are to come, he doesn't want us to forget the duties that are now. In fact, it is by doing what God would have us to do now that we will be anticipating correctly the things that are to come. He's going to say in the next letter to the Thessalonians that they really confused that. Some of them so looked ahead to the coming that they didn't do what they were supposed to do in the present. But by doing what we're supposed to do now, we prepare ourselves for that which is to come. One of the things that we have to do now that prepares us for the things to come is: know them that are among you and them that rule over you in the Lord.

A second thought. He tells those that "are over you in the Lord," in the very next verse, to warn them that are unruly, literally, disorderly. He uses that same word in the third chapter of his second letter to the Thessalonians and there the disorderliness is exemplified. There are different ways in which to be unruly or disorderly. There it is: that they refuse to work and they expect to be fed, and in that refusal to work, he admonishes them. In chapter 4, verse 8, he describes more accurately what it is to be unruly and disorderly, "He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit." Despise not men, but God.

So know in our text the admonition comes to the flock at Thessalonica and at Grace this morning. Know them and esteem them very highly. First point: who are to be esteemed? Second: how are they to be esteemed? Third: why are they to be esteemed? Who, how, why.

Who. He never uses the title "elder or deacon" in the text. He doesn't use those names but when he says in their second duty that's described there, that they "are over you in the Lord," and when we realize that what the Apostle Paul, who's writing this, did very very quickly in his missionary work was ordain elders in every city, then we may rightly conclude that those to whom he is referring, even though he doesn't give the word "elder or deacon," is those that are put into office. We read he was frequently, that he was conscious of the need for the office of elder in those churches. We probably would say far too early, but he ordained elders in every city very very quickly and those are the ones that he is obviously referring to.

Who are they? Our text gives three activities that those elders, and by implication deacons, do. 1. They labor among you. 2. They are over you. 3. They admonish you.

1. They labor among you. Interesting word, "labor." I think all of you immediately catch the flavor of that word. It means "to exert one's self unto weariness; to put one's self to labor, to working so hard that one becomes weary; that it consumes time, effort and energy." A word that we can envision really accurately refers to physical and manual labor, but he uses that same word for the activities of the office-bearers.

They labor, maybe not physically, although last night I observed that a pastor was called away for two hours from his wife and friends because he had to do a pastoral labor. He had to expend himself, ready 24/7. The laboring that we do physically often results in the fact that we crash in our beds. We're wearied physically and we're tired and we fall immediately to sleep. The kind of labor here is often the occasion, when it's not handled correctly, that the elder or deacon lies in the bed wide awake, rolling things around in his mind that happened in the consistory room in a committee meeting, in a visit. A different kind of labor. Mental, spiritual, seeking the wisdom to bring the right word of God at the right time in the right way. Seeking to know what is the best way to respond.

Labor. A labor that is prompted by these men because they love Christ, love his church, love his truth. That's why they don't want to bring their words, their thoughts, they want to bring the word of the truth to bear. That's what everyone must bow to. Don't bow to the minister's word or to the elder's or deacon's words, but bow to the word of God before which they also bow.

But they labor and they keep laboring for three years and then maybe another three because they are motivated by love of service to him who loves them. Not always. We often have to remind each other, remind ourselves. It's a labor of love. And, again, they do that without any financial reimbursement at all. Maybe a word of thanks, maybe a word of encouragement, but it's a labor that's to weariness.

2. They are over you in the Lord. It's very interesting that the word that's translated "over you" is more often in the King James New Testament translated "rule." Rule. This word, this particular Greek word, means to literally "preside over as a protector and guard or an aide." And so immediately we get the Christian perspective of rule. The world's perspective of rule, Jesus said to his disciples is, "I am here for you to serve me." Jesus says in his kingdom, whether it be the office-bearers or members in our homes and families, the position of rule over is in order to serve the ones that we're over, to protect them, to care for them, to do what a shepherd does to sheep. Not dominate. Not tyrannize. But protect and care.

Notice that this rule over is "in the Lord." Two thoughts about that expression, that phrase, "rule over you in the Lord." 1. That question that was asked and answered by these men. You feel that you are called of God's church and therefore of God himself. The consistory room may never be thought of or spoken of as a fraternity that continues itself. I've heard that. They just pick on their own friends. This is not a fraternity. These

men have not wanted to put themselves into office. Sometimes they come and they say, "Please reconsider. Are you sure you want me?"

God, the Lord Jesus, the Lord of the church, is the one who puts them into office over us. He does it. He does that by a vote of many within the council and within the congregation, but these men answered that they believe that they are called into this office by God himself, the Lord Jesus.

The second idea of "in the Lord" phrase is this: by appointing office-bearers in the church, Jesus fulfills the promise that he made to his disciples just before, maybe even as, he was ascending. Remember the Great Commission? He followed the Great Commission in Matthew 28 with these words, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." How is he with us? Among the ways, among the primary ways in which Jesus shows that he is with this congregation and every instituted true church of Jesus Christ is to the office-bearers. There's how we see and realize and may experience that Christ is with us.

Now, that's striking. It is rather easy for us, well, they're men. They're just men. They're sinners like us. And that's true. That is true, but with these words the Lord Jesus says, "Well, that's all true. There is more to the story and there is a part that you may never forget, that though I am in heaven at God's right hand, I make myself evidenced, I make myself present in your midst as shepherding and caring and protecting and guarding you through the offices that are in the church." So just as in the old dispensation, God spoke to his people through prophet, priest and king, so now those same three aspects of the one office, and that one office is visible representation of the invisible Christ. Christ is visible, of course, when we get to heaven, but he's not visible to us here on earth. That invisible Christ is here and he makes himself visible through the office of elder, deacon and pastor.

They labor among you, they are over you in the Lord, and they admonish you. A very very interesting word. The Biblical Counseling Center for which we gave this morning, is built on a concept of counseling that takes this very word in the Greek. They take the Greek word and they put it into an English word and they call it nouthetic, nouthetic counseling. Put mind, put into, literally. Put into the mind. Put into the mind. A duty that here is ascribed to the office-bearers translated "admonish," but it means "instruct" as well and it's translated that way other places. Put into their mind. Set before. And by the way, the man who developed the concept of nouthetic counseling wrote initially a book entitled "Competent to Counsel" and he gave the concept of competency to counsel not just to office-bearers but to all believers who don't have to be smart enough, but have to know the word well enough to set the word before; to put into the minds whether it be by instruction or admonition, in a positive or in a negative way, but setting before the one that we're communicating with the truth of the word of God. Put into their minds. Admonish. Another part of the calling of office-bearers, deacons as well as elders.

Who are to be esteemed? Those who perform these three duties. How are they to be esteemed? Two ways the text gives: know them and esteem them very highly. That word

that's translated "to know" is also very interesting. There are two different words that are used in the Greek New Testament for "to know." One is a knowledge that comes to us by way of experience, by way of observation. We see it and thus we know. This word means knowledge that comes to us by information, by instruction. One thing we learn by feeling. We can go outdoors and we say, "I know it's cold. I can feel it." But it's possible to be inside and through instruction that's given to us, to come to the same conclusion. Knowledge gained in a different way.

The specific reference to the office-bearers and the "know them" means this: if you don't know them, you are not taught to know them because of how you see them or how you have observed them in the congregation. That may be necessary when you cast your vote at a congregational meeting, but the knowledge that you all must have now is a knowledge of them that arises from what God's word says about them. Not know them and judge them and determine whether you think they're doing a good job or not, but rather know that God says, 1. he has put them into office; he has appointed them; and he wants them to rule over you. It's not for you to decide whether they will. No, know them, that they are God's appointed rulers over you.

That's the same concept that children and all those who have to comply with the fifth commandment. Think of the words that conclude the Heidelberg Catechism's treatment of that fifth commandment. Know that God hath appointed them to be over you in this sense, that in spite of every weakness they may have, it pleases him yet to rule you by them. Know them. Again, not by observation and experience and how you feel, but know them by the way of information gained from the word of God.

That's first and if that's first, then the second will follow. Be aware, our human nature, my human nature, ours is if our knowledge of them is gained by what we feel or experience, then there are going to be times when we say, "I don't have to esteem him." God says that's not how you are to know them. Esteem them. To esteem is to recognize someone to be a leader. It's to accord to them honor. Honor because they are placed over us by the Lord himself.

Then Paul adds not a little. In Paul's first letter to Timothy 5:17 he said, "Let the rulers that rule well be counted worthy of double honor." Let the elders be counted worthy of honor. The elders that rule well are to be counted of double honor. Here, he takes what seems in 1 Timothy 5:17 to be given to those that rule well and he says, "It doesn't make any difference whether they're ruling well in your judgment or not, esteem them very highly."

The Hebrew is always very descriptive in its words. Here's a Greek word that's very very descriptive. Think of what it was like on the East Coast and maybe go further North where the tide goes down and up more extremely. So you've got a boundary, the tide is down, esteem them. The tide comes up but then it goes beyond the normal bounds and we get scared and afraid because it exceeds it. That's the word that he's using here. In fact, in chapter 3, verse 10, he takes the same word and he it's translated "exceedingly." God

takes away from us the right to determine how much honor we're going to give. He doesn't let us have a choice. He tells us, "Esteem them very highly. Period."

How did you do in obeying this part of the word of God? How are you doing? It does not make any difference if you like them or have preferences for personality. That doesn't play a role. That's knowledge by observation. Knowledge that comes from information and instruction from the word of God says honor very highly.

Then it isn't finished, "in love," in agape, in the spirit of love. Not just respect them but hold them in affection. The honor and esteem that is to be given is to be given not grudgingly, not just because I have to but the secret is always this and this is true agape: I know what God has done for me, I know his love for me. Don't start out, "I've got to love them." Start out, "I know, he tells me so, of his love for me too. I love him because he loved me first. I love him. I love him with everything that I have because the more that I think about his love for me, the more I love him. When I am weak in my love for him, then it's because I'm not thinking sufficiently and at greater length of his love for me. He loves him, I love him."

Now you're ready to love them. It's that knowledge of God's love, returning love, and then to see these men as the representatives of Christ himself loving and caring for you. We take the doctrines of the word of God as summarized in the creeds and we learn to love them because they tell us about him, as we hold them dear, and that's why we reject everything that's contrary to it. So we are to hold dear them, elders and deacons, who bring us those same doctrines of salvation and ask us, yea, demand us to live according to them.

Who? Three things. How? Two things. Why? Why is such an admonition necessary? Negatively, it is necessary because as he just said in the context, the end is drawing near and Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:12 that that which will increasingly characterize this age as we get closer to that return of the Lord Jesus Christ is that "iniquity will abound." Iniquity is lawlessness will abound. Dishonor. Violations of the fifth commandment will abound.

Secondly, it is our human nature always to place an emphasis on personality and preference rather than office and work. So we need this admonition. Positively, compliance to this admonition, how to know them and how to esteem them very highly is because the glory of the work of representing Christ and shepherding and guarding the flock is in God's mind beyond a price that you could put on it. It's the work of the salvation of souls. What value, what price can you put on a soul? It's the value of the edification, the strengthening, the building up of the flock. God will show us the value in the judgment day but it's really really hard for us today other than saying it's high to know how extremely valuable and precious to him is the edification of the flock.

This admonition is necessary because it reminds us of something that's always easy to slip. We've talked about it. Quickly, it means that we forget that they are appointed by God for our spiritual well-being. We can become selective. "This one maybe. That one

less. This time, yes, that time, no." No, they are appointed by God. That's what we have to remember.

And it is, thirdly, this admonition is necessary because of what he says at the end of 13. This is the direction in which he is going. It is by esteeming them that peace and unity is brought to the church experientially on earth. There is a question, maybe one of the most important questions that's asked by church visitors of the council, pastor, elder and deacons every year and the question goes like this, "Gentlemen, what is the spiritual condition of the congregation?" That's quite a thought-provoker. And then it narrows it down and asks, "Is there unity, peace and love?" And while we may ask other related questions about other characteristics, when you go through the Scriptures, and especially the New Testament in the letters of the apostle, you begin to understand why our fathers picked those three things: unity, peace and love.

Peace. The peace of the church. Pray for the peace of Zion. Never stop praying for it. Pray without ceasing for the peace of Zion. What removes and destroys peace? Many things. 1. Conducting one's self disorderly, unruly. Another is not esteeming very highly them for their work's sake.

The form identified the duties of elders and deacons, the form also talked of the congregation. God gives to all of us constantly a calling. One of our callings is to serve the church. You children, maybe you're not thinking about it yet but you ought to. God puts you in a body, every single one of us, and you children aren't there to have the parents and the adults took care of things for you. They are but you too have to be aware that God wants you to do things for others.

There is not one part of my body, one member of my body that is not called to give itself for the service of everything else. Pick my thumb. My thumb cannot say to the rest of the body, "You have to take care of me." My thumb has to work. It doesn't go over here and it doesn't go down over there, it stays right here. But right here it has to do all kinds of things and when it does it for the hand, it's doing it for the whole.

So, you, when you go out there, you don't want to run, especially when the older people are there and the ones with canes. You've got to be careful. You want to serve the other parts. Sometimes you go to your grandmas and grandpas and you hold out your hand because you know they've got candy in their pockets or purses. Think about this: maybe you ought to have a piece of candy for them, not just for you, but you to give.

Now, that's just a tiny little example. We are all to serve and one of the ways in which we all serve is that we esteem highly the office that God puts in the church. Sometimes we get the idea, "Well, the only ones who serve in the church are the office-bearers." If we cannot serve in small things, we won't be given the privilege to serve in big things. If we can't esteem highly always but we desire to be in the office, maybe the reason we're not in the office is because we're evidently not able to serve in the body in small things first. But we all serve and we're all serving all the time, whether we're thinking about it or not. We are called to serve in that body. One of the frightening things that God does in the old

dispensation is that when the church does not honor, then he creates a famine of the word. He takes faithful office-bearers out and he puts poor office-bearers, poor watchmen in.

So we labor for the well-being of the body and we do that by encouraging. When they're not esteemed, they still do their work. When they're not honored, they're still going to give themselves and do what God tells them to do. They might breathe a huge sigh of relief when three years is finished, but if they're esteemed in the performance of their work no matter how difficult it may be, that encouragement is a tremendous impetus for them in the performance of that work. You help them. You help them. God uses you to help them when you think to say, "Thanks." When you think to send a card saying, "I'm praying for you." Amen.

Bless thy word, O Lord our God. It's a good word. It's thy word. We thank thee for it. Work it in us that the wonder of it, the truth of it, may be impressed upon our understanding and may be believed in our hearts. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

I Thessalonians 5:12,13
KNOW AND ESTEEM THEM OVER YOU

- I. Who esteemed?
 - A. The second duty with the modifier (“in the Lord”) points to those who have been invested with the office in the church.
 - B. Those “which labor among you.”
 - 1. They exert themselves in the interesting of Christ and His church.
 - 2. They perform much spiritual labor (a work requiring strenuous effort).
 - C. They “are over you in the Lord.”
 - 1. They are set over, superintend or preside over as protector and guard or to give aid.
 - 2. This position is by virtue of appointment by the Lord and through qualifications derived from the Lord.
 - D. These also “admonish you.”The word means literally to “put in mind” to obey God’s ordinances.
- II. These office-bearers are worthy of honor.
 - A. The members are to “know” them.
 - 1. This is a knowledge gained by information (rather than by observation or experience).
 - 2. This means that we do not go by what we physically see, but by what we know from God’s Word.
 - B. “Esteem them very highly in love.”
 - 1. To esteem is to account them to be our leader, according them honor as placed over us by God Himself.
 - 2. But here Paul adds “very highly,” i.e., over and above, exceeding abundantly.
 - 3. This esteem is to be given in the spirit of agape. We are not just to respect them, but hold them in affection.
- III. It is in the best interest of the whole and its peace that esteem be given.
 - A. Why is this admonition of esteem necessary?
 - B. The esteem given by the members to their office-bearers is a way all serve in the church (not an end in itself).
 - 1. The unruly weaken the church and gives the devil reason to rejoice.
 - 2. Encouraged laborers is for the well-being of the body.