

## Message #13

## I Thessalonians 5:12-15

One of the key themes of this book is that Jesus Christ is coming back to get us. There is coming a day when we will behold Him face to face. In the meantime, as we wait for this blessed event, what is church supposed to be like? What should be the testimony of the church? What is the reputation that we want to have as we wait for the coming of the Lord? That is the main subject Paul addresses in these final verses of I Thessalonians.

**AS WE WAIT FOR THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST, THE CHURCH IS TO MAINTAIN PROPER ATTITUDES TOWARD LEADERSHIP AND EACH OTHER.**

There are three specific areas that God wants maintained in the church in view of the return of the Lord and we will look at two of those areas today:

**AREA #1 – God requests His people maintain proper attitudes toward leadership . 5:12-13**

Now there are things here that God will demand, but this one is a request. It is not good for leaders to go around and demand that people have this kind of attitude toward them. But it is perfectly fitting to request it.

The situation in Thessalonica demanded this request. Most of the people came to faith in Jesus Christ at the same time, which was when Paul first went and preached the Gospel (Acts 17:4). There apparently was a “great multitude” of Jews, Greeks, and leading women who responded. So what we have are people who all believe in Christ at the same time. Out of that group, leaders were selected. Apparently, God had sovereignly chosen certain men to lead this church and some of the people who had not been chosen were feeling a bit slighted. One person saved on the same day as another person became a leader and the other wasn't.

Furthermore, the men chosen to be leaders had not received more theological training than the other people. They all had been involved in the same intense instruction that had been given them by the Apostle Paul. So the potential of some people not having proper attitudes toward leadership was very real in this church.

Now when it comes to leadership, some leaders naturally seem to elicit more affection than others. Some leaders are seemingly more loveable and admirable. There are some leaders who seem to manifest the stability and the integrity and the qualities of humble leadership more than others. However, all leaders are to be biblical and respectable and if they are, they should have the respect of the people. The flock should demonstrate proper attitudes toward them.

What are proper attitudes toward leadership? There are three:

**Proper Attitude #1** - God's people are to know and appreciate proper church leadership.  
**5:12**

Now the word “appreciate” (ειδεναι) is perhaps not the best translation of the word. The word means to visually look at someone and recognize that he is a leader (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 131). The obvious implication of this is that the leaders will be at the services where you can see them.

There are three present tense participles that describe the reasons for knowing and appreciating leadership. The present tense indicates that the action is to be a continual action.

In order to have a true church of God, there must be structured leadership and legitimate spiritual gifts. We must assume that God put His hand on some of these believers and they not only were saved, but He enabled some of them to become leaders and teachers.

**(Reason #1)** - Appreciate leadership because they diligently labor among you.

Being a leader in a church is an honorable work, but it is also hard work. Now the word “labor” (κοπιωντας) is one that means to work hard to the point of growing tired and weary. Leadership is demanding and draining. It is at times fatiguing. Any leader, who has tried to faithfully carry out his leadership responsibilities, knows that point. It is wearisome at times. It isn't just that there are physical things to do; it is that it is a spiritual war.

There are some times when the last thing you want to do is go to board meetings to see to it that the church's business is moving forward in a God-honoring way. Deacons always have to check on the physical welfare of the church and the Elders always have to analyze everything. So and so said this or so and so did this, so and so isn't coming anymore. It is fatiguing work. But those who faithfully stick to it and labor are to be seen and appreciated as leaders.

**(Reason #2)** - Appreciate leadership because they have charge over you.

In church life there is a God-ordained leadership that is at the head of things. In fact, the word “have charge” (προιστημι) means to have charge in the sense of presiding over, ruling, governing, directing, and maintaining (*Ibid.*, p. 381). It is the responsibility of leadership to watch over the flock as a leader and see to it that it is protected and moving in a biblical direction.

In fact, carefully observe the sphere of the charge; leaders are over you “in the Lord.” In the character and quality of things that are connected to the Lord and the Word, leaders are to be recognized as being over you.

They are not over you in every area of your life. This is important because cult leaders try to get charge over every area of a person's life including their financial, mental, and sexual life. That is not biblical leadership; that is satanic stuff.

Biblical leaders are concerned about the Scriptures, the church and the people. It is their job to see that there can be development in the Lord.

**(Reason #3)** - God's people are to appreciate leadership because they give you instruction.

Now the word "instruction" (νουθετουντας) is very important and very interesting. The word means to admonish and exhort by challenging a person's mind and reason (*Ibid.*, p. 305). The emphasis of the word is that true leadership continually works hard to challenge your mind with the truth of God and the Word of God. This is the responsibility of true leadership—to teach people God's Word in such a way that their minds are stimulated.

This specific ability would be given to a leader who had a gift to be able to teach. When Paul wrote his letter to Timothy, he said, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (I Tim. 5:17). We may assume that the leader who is able to give instruction is one gifted by God to give instruction.

This is eye-opening because **this word "instruction" would clearly indicate that when you go to church, you should go with an expectation that my mind is going to be challenged and stimulated by an accurate teaching of the Word of God.**

This is the kind of leadership that is to be appreciated. Frankly, when someone stands up in a church and says, "I didn't have time to prepare because of ..." or stands up and shares personal stories or tells jokes; or stands up and shares simple stuff that anyone knows, that is not the kind of instruction or instructor that should be appreciated or respected. Why should you bother to get in your car and take time out of your life if your mind is not going to be challenged to anything?

**Proper Attitude #2** - God's people are to esteem proper church leadership. **5:13**

Leadership is to be highly considered or calculated highly and deeply loved. The word "esteem" means to make a mental calculation. The adverb "highly" (υπερεκπερισσου) means to make a mental calculation to consider someone at an above the norm way. God wants faithful leaders in the church calculated at a super-abundant, above measure way (*Ibid.*, p. 458). God wants faithful leaders esteemed and loved. However, Paul is very careful to qualify the perimeters of this calculation. They are to be loved highly **because of the leadership work they are doing in watching over the flock and instructing the flock.**

That prepositional phrase "because of their work" (δια το εργον) refers to specific work of biblical leadership. The specific work is that of seeing to it that the church is carefully and accurately instructed in the Word of God and is moving in that direction. That kind of leadership is to be esteemed and loved.

Some leaders are esteemed for the wrong reasons. Let me give you some I have heard. He is a nice guy. He is a good family man. He is a good dresser. He loves to travel.

He can play the piano and organ. He is good with youth. He is funny. He is so personable. There is nothing wrong with any of that, except that is not the reason why a leader should be highly esteemed. A leader should be esteemed because of his work as a leader in giving instruction that challenges our minds.

**Proper attitude #3** - God's people are to be at peace concerning leadership. **5:14**

There is a definite correlation between proper attitudes toward leadership and peace among the flock. In order to have peace in a church, there must be leadership. You cannot have everybody doing and saying what they want. There must be some type of authority. As one commentator said, "It is possible to have way too many cooks in the kitchen."

**AREA #2** – God urges His people to maintain proper relationships with each other .  
**5:14-15**

The word "urge" is stronger than the word "request." There are three different classes of people mentioned here, who obviously were part of the church and needed specialized attention.

**Proper Relationship #1** - Admonish the unruly . **5:14a**

The word "admonish" is the same word used in **verse 12** where it is translated "instruction." It is the word that means to challenge a person's mind with the truth of God. It becomes the responsibility of the flock to stimulate each other's minds with true biblical knowledge and instruction. This is especially true when it comes to one "unruly."

The word "unruly" is the word that refers to those who are not marching in line with military orders (*Ibid.*, p. 66). Part of the responsibility of the flock is to put in the minds of those getting out of line the need for them to get back into line. Now one of the big problems in Thessalonica is that some of the people refused to get jobs and work (II Thess. 3:6, 11, 14-15). Part of the job of the church is to challenge one who refuses to work that he is out of line.

In view of the coming of Christ, we cannot force people to get in line, but we can admonish them to get in line.

**Proper Relationship #2** - Encourage the faint - hearted . **5:14b**

The faint-hearted people are people who are weak and little and small in their emotions, faith and development (*Ibid.*, 315). These people do not have strong emotions, strong minds or strong faith. They are discouraged and timid. What they need is encouragement. There are some people in the church who need more encouragement than others. Part of the job of the flock is to spot those people and encourage them.

**Proper Relationship #3** - Help the weak . 5:14c

The word weak refers to those who are sickly and frail and feeble. We may assume, in view of **verse 23**, this could refer to body, soul or spirit. Those who are weak don't have the strength they need to stand on their own. They need some help.

In fact, the word "help" means to hold firmly to, to hold out against so they don't fall down (*Ibid.*, p. 40). Stronger believers are to help hold up the weaker believers.

Some are weak because they lack knowledge of God's Word. Some are weak because they lack courage. Some are weak because they are legalists who don't dare use their liberty in Christ. Some are weak and can't endure persecution or criticism. Some are weak in controlling their bodily appetites or mental impulses. Whatever the weakness, we are called to help. We are called to give support.

**Proper Relationship #4** - Be patient with all. 5:14d

In any dealing with anyone, we need patience. Think for a moment the patience God demonstrates toward every one of us. Any church that will be honorable when Jesus Christ returns has to have this quality. We need patience to deal with each other and to put up with each other. We are to patiently give each other time to respond and adjust.

**Proper Relationship #5** - Do not pay back evil for evil . 5:15a

When people do things to us or against us we have at least six several retaliatory options available to us. In view of the coming of Christ, one is the better option:

**(Retaliatory Option #1)** - We can pay back nothing to those who do good - thankless.

**(Retaliatory Option #2)** - We can pay back nothing to those who do evil - non-retaliatory.

**(Retaliatory Option #3)** - We can pay back evil to those who do good - evil retaliation.

**(Retaliatory Option #4)** - We can pay back good to those who do good - normal retaliation.

**(Retaliatory Option #5)** - We can pay back evil to those who do evil - legal retaliation.

Most desire to get even. In fact, this is one of the strongest impulses we all have. This is an eye-for-an-eye mentality.

**(Retaliatory Option #6)** - We can pay back good to those who do evil - remarkable retaliation.

Now of all the options, it is number 6 that gets into the realm of award-winning spirituality when Christ returns.

**Proper Relationship #6** - Pursue that which is good. **5:15b**

Our goal is to always pursue and follow after that which is good, with all men. We are to pursue good with both believers and unbelievers. We should never be involved in pursuing that which is bad or evil with someone.

Think for a moment about the good that Jesus Christ has done for us in spite of our evil. He went to the cross to take care of our sin. Jesus Christ is coming back to get us and in view of that, we all have some work to do in our attitudes at church.