

1 Thessalonians 5: 12 and 13; "Those who Labor among You", Sermon # 25 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 19th, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

This morning we had a time of recognition for the Sunday School teachers who labor among our children. We confessed that we are very thankful for them and we appreciate very much their labors among us. But the verses that we are considering this afternoon are related to "those who labor among you" and "are over you in the Lord", and "admonish you." I think that this is speaking of the office of the pastor or pastors 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 to labor full-time in the ministry of teaching, but to help in the work of visitation and counseling. The Lord would have to raise up such a man, but I am confident that He will be able to do this very thing, at the right time, in the years to come. You should pray for this, and be on the look out for such a person.

The passage that we are looking at begins with the words, "and I 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 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, urged this. This was something that Paul felt was both good and important to the life and usefulness of the whole church. This should tell us that this is what our God is pleased with; the unity of the church with their pastor or pastors, their care for them, so that Christ's kingdom can advance in the truth and in the strength of Christ's grace, and make progress in being useful and fruitful to Him. The words of these two verses are here so that God will be pleased with us as a church. There are 3 things which the Apostle Paul urges the Thessalonian believers to do in relation to their pastors. The first is to "recognize" them. The second is "to esteem them". And the third is "to be at peace with them". Let us pray that we will all benefit from our consideration of these verses at this time in the life of our church.

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

The word, "recognize", is *ei ldwonai* which 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 of those who are laboring among you in the word and doctrine. This sentence would not exclude that evaluatory process and the call extended by a church, based upon the knowledge that they have about the man who they would consider 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. The word "ordained" in the verse there means "stretching forth the hands". This, then, would indicate by the majority who should become an elder. But the way that the sentence is worded in verse 12 seems to me to indicate that Paul is telling them that they should not take either the man or his work for granted, but that they should really get to know him. They are being urged to come to see him as their spiritual shepherd and their friend. They are being urged to get to know him 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 pastoring. And all of this is done, not to be nosey about his life or to interfere with his work, but it

is done with a view to further helping the work that he has been called to do by supporting it and contributing to it wherever possible.

This could take many forms. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 16: 15. There are men in the ministry, and then there are men who see, and behold the needs of the men in the ministry, and they help them. "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." You see here 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 men who are helpers to them. Those men who are 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 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 *εἰσαγγινωσκω*, 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 1 Corinthians 16, one of the real ways that you can help the pastor of your church. It is that you study to see and know what he is like; yes, that is what you should do. But once you see this, that you try 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 in and outside of 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 serve one another and 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 visiting. You might be someone who can contribute in this way. Take personal initiative in thinking of how you can refresh his 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 and discuss those with him and tell him what you think that you yourself could do under his oversight.

The membership of the church should understand that the ministry of the pastor is an arduous labor if the man is carrying the preaching and the counseling load himself. At the end of the book of Chapter 12 in the book of Ecclesiastes, 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 and 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 words can he say, he thinks that will cause the people in his church to follow the Lord Jesus more closely. These words of the Bible have been given by the Great Shepherd, the One 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 built up by it and go about to live it." "But of the making of many books there is no end, 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 is not wearied to death by study and ministry, but that

somehow that he would be refreshed. Pray for me in this way. Pray that there would be newness and a freshness to my studies week by week. When one Sunday is over, I must start over and begin again to prepare something that will feed and satisfy the souls of the people of God again the next Sunday. Pray that God will lift me up in this holy work.

Then 2ndly - The members of a local church are urged to esteem their pastor .

"...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, that if you appreciate his labors on your behalf, in terms of his feeding you the word of God week by week, that you would occasionally tell him so. The pastors labors are like a chef going to all the trouble of fixing you a great meal. He spends time preparing it, looking to all the details of the choice of the food and the way that it is served so that you will be strengthened by it and your soul satisfied that God has many good and nourishing things for your soul to grow strong and healthy by. Just saying that you appreciate the preaching of the word goes a long way in the mind of the pastor in strengthening him to continue to labor and bring you the good things that are there in the word of God. Meditating on the things that he has brought to you in the preaching of the word is also a way that you can show your pastor that you esteem him very highly in love. You really think upon the things that are preached, you 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 the 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. Or if you do, you shouldn't. 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 us each Lord's day. But then to stop and think about the fact, and talk of it together, pastor and people, of what we 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 killed 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.

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 in relation to you by seriously considering how you can live out the truth of all that your pastor 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 he loves you as 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, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is in a category all His own as the Son of God and your Savior and Lord. 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 3rdly - The members of the church are urged to be at peace with their pastor. (Verse 13 b)

"Be at peace among yourselves." This exhortation is linked in with the previous ones. It is easy to be at odds with the 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 many different

areas of obedience in the practical outworking of your Christian life. This is not always conducive to peace in the church. It is easy to take offense when the pastor is trying to tell you the truth, but you think that truth is something other than what is being said. 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 is not put in the position that he holds in order to lord it over your faith. He is there to help you on to good discernment of how you should live, and to maturity in your faith. He is there to be an under-shepherd to you for Christ. I hope that you understand that it is good for you to receive his observations upon truth and upon yourself, even if you disagree with them. I have experienced this first-hand from being "under those" who had authority over me. It has always been for my good to have been told by my pastors where there were 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 over. I knew that it was right for me to ask the Lord to reveal to me if what they were saying concerning me was true. 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. Why fight with the very person or persons that God Himself has appointed to watch for your soul? 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." It is the peace of God ruling in the heart, combined with a clear conscience, that allows every pastor to speak to those under his charge. He is then desiring the right thing. It is the peace of God combined with a clear conscience that allows the believer to be at peace with those in authority over him. The responsibility of not only every pastor, but also 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 our 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, 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.