

ECCLESIOLOGY 101

How the Local Church Lives and Breathes

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

1 Thessalonians 5:12–28 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.¹⁵ See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

MUCH is said today about COMMUNITY; about the great need for community; about the need to create community within the local church. Community is not some philosophical/esoteric thing for Christians to talk about, dream about. It's not something to manufacture or fabricate. Biblical Community **is a very real way of living.**

Paul closes his first letter to the Thessalonians with a series of requests, exhortations and commands — **NOT to the leaders** of the church in Thessalonica — but to the community of believers as a whole. In those requests, exhortations and commands the Holy Spirit gives to us a clear picture of a living, breathing community of believers.

¹²**We ask you, brothers,**

I think it's so important for us to see how Paul doesn't wield his **apostolic authority** here. The verb used here — **ask** — is one that would be used by a **friend** making an **urgent appeal** to a **friend**.

¹²**We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,**

Respect — What this is NOT: This is not bowing before the pope and kissing his ring. **Respect** comes from the Greek word *eidō*. The Latin equivalent of this Greek word is *video* (I see)

Thayer Definition = **to see**

to perceive with the eyes
to perceive by any of the senses
to perceive, notice, discern, discover

In its most obvious meaning — **the community of believers** is to **KNOW by observation** those who labor and teach. This is **simple** but **huge** —

Paul told the elders of Ephesus —

***Acts 20:30** and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

Paul wanted the community of believers to be able to say — *Hey — wait a minute — Is this guy in leadership? And if not — why are people following him and where is he leading them?*

BUT THERE IS MORE HERE — The translators consistently see that this word is **not just about** mere facial recognition. They see this word as meaning that they were by observation to know — and in knowing — have an **appreciation and respect** for specific individuals. Hence they translate the word as **Respect** or **appreciate the worth of**

KEY QUESTION: WHO is it that they are to **know** by way of observation **and in turn** respect and appreciate?

¹²....**respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you**

those who labor among you

Labor** = to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually, **work hard, toil, strive, struggle

We find this word used in

***Matthew 11:28** Come to Me, all who are **weary** and heavy-laden, and I will give you **rest**.*

*Luke 5:5 And Simon answered, "Master, we **toiled** all night and took nothing!*

*1 Timothy 5:17 NLT Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who **work hard** at both preaching and teaching.*

So — The Holy Spirit, through Paul— is talking to those in that community of believers who are NOT in leadership. He is **informing** them **how** they are to **relate to** those who **lead**. But in doing so — the Holy Spirit is informing those who DO lead and teach about the NATURE of their task and the EFFORT they should exert in it.

*1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me **was not in vain**. On the contrary, I **worked** harder than any of them, **though it was not I**, but **the grace of God** that is with me.*

AS THOSE LEADING the Thessalonian church read Paul's letter they would should step back, and think, "*THAT is the nature of my task — THIS is what I do — and HERE's the effort that should be exerted in it.*"

HERE'S THE DEAL — If you're in ministry — if you're in leadership, if leading doesn't cost you, if leading isn't fruitful — it isn't ministry — and it's not real leadership. Leading is not a thing that won't drain you, that won't draw on all of your resources.

FOR THOSE BEING LED — for the community of believers at large — he Holy Spirit was saying that they were to observe the effort of those leading and teaching, and appreciate them for it. They were to **recognize** and **appreciate** leadership **not by** their title but by their *service*.

to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord

Over you = pro-is-temi

from **pró** = before, over — **hístemi** = put, place, stand

literally means those who are **put** or **placed before** you or **over** you.

It carries the basic meaning of “standing before” others; hence the idea of leadership.

It describes one who presides over others, and exercises a position of leadership (rule, direct, be at the head of.)

Romans 12:8 *he who leads (stands on the first place), (lead) with diligence*

This is IMPORTANT and so RELEVANT to 21st century Western church culture. The Holy Spirit was informing this **1st century community** of believers to **recognize** that those who lead were not over them by virtue of natural things. They weren't over them because of a talent. They're weren't over them because of their wealth. They weren't over them because of their influence. They weren't over them because of their popularity. They're over them — but they were just saved sinners like anybody else in the community of believers. They were over them — but they were sheep in the flock of God just like anyone else. They did not apply for the job — they didn't attain to leadership. They were **placed** — that's what it means — 'hístemi' – to **be placed** in front of — to be **placed** over.

And they were **placed there “in the Lord”**. It is **“in the Lord”** – and **only** there that those in leadership in the 1st century church found their authority — found their position.

Those who are over you in the Lord and admonish you

admonish = Noutheteo — The idea is to counsel someone to AVOID or CEASE an improper course of conduct.

Noutheteo literally = *“to put in mind.”*

QUOTE — *They instruct and inspire you, **reminding you** of truth that is easily forgotten in these days. **The only voice** that is speaking powerfully against the spirit of the age, the self-centered, self-sufficient, restless spirit of the Me generation, **is the voice of the church.** We **need** to be **reminded continually** of the danger in that kind of philosophy. This is done **by the leadership** who instruct, warn, and point out folly. They help us to **keep our feet on the right path.***

and admonish you is in the PRESENT TENSE

Which means that it was the continual undertaking of those in leadership.

EXAMPLE: Paul —

Acts 20: 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.

How continuous was that?! How non-stop was that?! How prolonged was that?!
Three years — day and night — with tears!

I say this with all humility — as one who stands as a leader **“in the Lord”**
It is hard work! It’s hard! It’s hard **because** it is not (by nature of the work)
something that is usually enjoyed by the recipient. You’re warning them.
You’re confronting them. People see you — and think, *‘Oh boy, it’s Pastor Richard
— And he’s going to tell me what to avoid — again. I can’t wait.’*

When Valerie and I were doing high school ministry at CCCM the church started a
high school. And for the first few weeks the principal of the high school and I
would be walking around at break and during lunch and you just knew that the
students saw us like the Earpp brothers in the movie Tombstone — *‘Here they
come.’* It was laborious — It was non-stop. It’s **rarely** an appreciated ministry.

And **that’s why** Paul asked these believers (he wasn’t asking the leaders — he was
asking the community of believers) to **observe** those leading the church in
Thessalonica, and as a result **respect** them **because** they have spiritually —
physically and emotionally spent themselves in the work of leading and teaching
and warning and reproofing that community — and the individuals within it.

¹³**and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.**

esteem Is an interesting word. It has two basic meanings in the NT.

1. Used in describing men in any leading position. In **Acts 7:10** it’s used to
describe a governor. A lot of times the best way to understand a word is to think
of its anonym. The opposite of this word is ‘diakonos’ — **servant**.

2. To engage in an intellectual process. In this sense it pictures one giving careful thought to something and not making a quick decision. The picture is that of one leading his or her mind through a reasoning process to arrive at a conclusion. In this context, they are to give **careful thought** in regards to **respect** and **esteem**

What a HUGE WORD — HUGE CONCEPT for the 21st century church culture. We live in a culture that is QUICK to LAVISH esteem and respect on “personality”! *Oh this guy is so charismatic — so dynamic — so funny — so talented.* If a guy comes into the church that’s a former pro athlete, or is a pro athlete, or is a known actor, or in the performing arts, Christians think he or she is should something in the local church — when in reality he or she is just a Christian. But that’s our culture, isn’t it?

Personality or celebrity **does not disqualify** an individual from leadership or ministry — but it surely doesn’t automatically qualify them for the incredible weight and responsibility of pastoral leadership.

The Holy Spirit **informed** this **1st century** community of believers in Thessalonica — and He is informing this **21st century** community of believers to **lead their minds through a reasoning process** in regards to respect and esteem. They were to **esteem** them **because of their labor** on behalf of God's people. Paul is calling for saints to **make a conscious judgment** of their leaders **after a deliberate weighing** of the facts. They’ve observed their diligent labor even to the point of exhaustion among the saints.

The TENSE of the verb here calls for the flock to **continually** esteem their leaders — and in context to esteem them even “beyond measure! **esteem them very highly in love because of their work.**

I can tell you that I LOVE and ESTEEM the pastors along side of me at Metro **because of their labor** on behalf of God's people. I LOVE and ESTEEM the men and women who lead areas of ministry **because of their labor** on behalf of God's people.

QUOTE: John Calvin — In his commentary on Galatians

"It is not enough that pastors be respected, if they are not also loved. Both are necessary; otherwise, their teaching will not have a sweet taste."

QUOTE: J. Vernon McGee —

I have always appreciated people who love the Word of God because I have found that they become my friends. One of the things I have so appreciated about my radio ministry is the number of friends that God has raised up for me across this country. Many of them have written to say their home is open to me (of course, I can't accept all those invitations), but when I am in their town, they do nice things for me. They reveal their love. When they reveal that love to me—and I'm hard to love—it reveals that they honor the Word of God since I teach the Word of God

This is a HUGE concept — and it's lost on a significant slice of modern church culture **because** we live in a society that loves to **make** celebrities of those in the pulpit; that loves to **put** celebrities and personalities in the places of leadership. In today's church culture — **the position** of leading from the pulpit — leading in worship — is desired **because** of the trappings in that come with it. If you can get a big crowd — you can get a big church — you get a massive income. But in the mid-1st century A.D. — the local church loved and esteemed very highly those who labored and taught them because it was a costly position. Those in leadership were **the first to be arrested** in the mid-1st century A.D. They were the **first to be fed** to the wild beasts. They were **the first to be thrown** into the boiling oil. THAT'S WHY those who ruled well and taught well were worthy of double honor (double income). They were **risking their lives to be the point man** in a community of believers!

QUOTE: David Guzik — *If a Christian can't esteem and love their pastor, they should either get on their knees and ask the Holy Spirit to change their heart or put themselves under a pastor they do esteem and love.*

SO — Here we see the Living — Breathing Community of Believers in regard to the relationship between congregation and leadership.

Paul is going to begin to address the community of believers at large.

The mindset of each believer in the community of believers is to be one of continual — complete dependence on — and yielding to — the Holy Spirit

Be at peace among yourselves.

LITERALLY — *Live in peace*

INTERESTING: This is **not** a **suggestion** — **but a command** for this to be their lifestyle.

***Romans 14:17** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

Paul's next words are a practical way to preserve and maintain peace.

¹⁴And we urge you, brothers

CHECK THIS OUT — Paul uses the word *BROTHERS* some SIXTY times in his writings. Twenty Seven of those sixty times are in his two letters to these believers in Thessalonica. I believe it's because the church in Thessalonica was so YOUNG. He was there for **just three Sabbaths** — and then he was driven out of the city. So by inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paulk is reinforcing the reality of their nature and relationship to one another.

The word Paul uses for *brothers* is **Adelphos** — *from the same womb*. Begotten of God — by the will of God — by the Word of God.

AGAIN — The Holy Spirit was incredibly deliberate here

He wanted these young believers — this young community of believers to understand **the very NATURE** of this community in the midst of an environment hostile to the Gospel.

¹⁴And we urge you, brothers, admonish (warn) the idle (unruly), encourage the fainthearted (KJV – feeble-minded) help the weak, be patient with them all.

CRUCIAL OBSERVATION — It **doesn't** say: We exhort you pastors. It is an exhortation to the community of believers at large. This was a corporate responsibility. It echoes Paul's words to the Colossians

Colossians 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in **you** richly, **teaching and admonishing one another** in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

admonish (warn) the idle (unruly)

This is not just talking about those who are **hard** to lead. It was a word commonly used in the military in describing a soldier **out of step** — or an army **moving in disarray**. Then it was **further applied** to those who **quit** the ranks and **did not** perform their duty.

Paul says this to the community at large — that **they** were to WARN those who were OUT OF STEP — DOING THEIR OWN THING

THIS IS SO CRUCIAL — It **does not** necessarily mean that someone is doing a BAD thing — but they are doing THEIR OWN thing.

We have already learned that within a community of believers there are men — who *IN THE LORD* are *PRO-IS-TEMI* — place in front of and over to lead. They are **responsible to the Lord** for the **vision** and **mission** of that local community of believers.

Listen — If the devil can't undermine a community of believers through blatant sin — THIS is the way he comes at them by way of the person who isn't leading people to do a bad thing — their just wanting to do their own thing — and they getting other people to march in step with them. The unruly person will say to himself — or to others: *I think we should be doing this or that or the other; I don't know why we have to do this! I don't know why we have to do this this way.* The next thing you know — otherwise well fed — contented — growing sheep — are wondering: *WHY can't so and so can't do such and such? Why aren't we doing this or doing it this way?*

It is the **responsibility** of the **community** of believers to WARN those that are marching out of step. Because IF you don't WARN that person who is not at his or her post, marching out of step with the vision and mission that Jesus has for that community of believers, that community will end up like an inefficient — undisciplined army in battle

It doesn't say to kick them out. It says WARN them. But if they are warned and continue to march out of step with the direction of the fellowship — there will come a point when they should find the place that they can be in step with.

encourage the fainthearted (KJV – Feebleminded)

fainthearted is a **compound** Greek word.

oligos — puny in extent, degree, number, duration or value
psuche = soul, mind

SMALL SOUL!

It's a reference to those who **really struggle** with **believing** that God loves them — or **struggle to believe** that God can use them. They're just **small souled**. But the truth is that God has **begun a good work in them** — and the community of believers is to **COMFORT THEM**.

ILLUSTRATION: Valerie and I have four children and they are all different. As we have watched them grow up — we have seen each of them — at different levels — throw in the towel! As they went through the school thing they all ran into the same projects and same math issues. Some just threw in the towel. Others didn't throw it in at all. Our oldest — she's a steam roller. At the end of 6th grade, "*Dad, Mom, I've decided I'm getting a 4.0 through Junior High and High School.*" And you know what? She did! She'd come home every day from school. Nobody said — "Deb, do your homework." She just came in — "*Hi mom, Hi dad*" — upstairs, homework — come down for dinner — "*I've got to go finish my homework*" — back upstairs. She just did it. She **never** threw in the towel on anything. Bless her husband's heart. She is not going to quit on anything.

What are you to do with the person who seems to **quickly** and **regularly** says:
I guess God doesn't love me — I'm never going to mature — I'll never be used? Are we to say — GET LOST ya big quitter!

Paul says that **the community** of believers is to **WARN** the one marching out step — but they are to **ENCOURAGE** those who are *small-souled*.

Encourage = is a BEAUTIFUL word

Come along side with your mouth and speak kindly to that small soul to build it up and encourage it.

This is not just for me or the guys in leadership — this is for YOU the community of believers at large to **individually** come along side — with your mouth — and speak kind words that will encourage that small-souled individual.

My wife Valerie is such an amazing example of this! When we were doing high school ministry there was this one young lady we ministered to who, when she graduated, went to USC. Valerie would get phone calls at Midnight or 1:00am from her. And they'd be 2-hour phone calls. And I would just listen to my wife just come alongside and speak encouraging words.

When that phone would ring, and I'd pick it up, and I'd hear that young girl's voice, I'd just want to go 'click' — but not my wife. **There was another young lady.** She's married now — walking with Jesus. But when she was in high school and early in college — she had some really **huge emotional setbacks** — **huge!** And she came up one summer when we were about to go on summer vacation. She was on medication. And we took her on vacation with us. And we had to watch her constantly for fear for her life.

She was so sweet — but small-souled. And my wife would just take time after time and take walks with her on the beach speak encouraging words to her — “You're a blessing.” She was artistic. Should would always just encourage her, — “That's great. When did you do that?” And that's what Paul is saying to the individuals in the fellowship.

“help the weak”

Look at this range of persons and behaviors

Unruly/out of step — small-souled — and the weak. In every living, breathing community of believers there will be that same range! That's **just** who **we are**.

The word **weak** describes a **state of limited capacity to be** something or **do** something. It's used literally of physical weakness. (we find this word most in the Gospels)

But it's also used **figuratively** of weakness in the spiritual arena. Weakness — in an area of the flesh. Weakness — in regards to liberty in Christ. Remember how Paul wrote of the weaker brother who couldn't eat meat.

What are you to do with that person? Well, they're weaker in the faith. Don't stumble them. Don't use your liberty to be a cause of stumbling to someone who is weaker. Don't eat meat in front of them, because they're weaker than you.

There are those who are weak in their understanding of the doctrine of the Christian life; And they have not yet been set free by the truth. **Whatever it may be** — Paul says to the community of believers at large — to **HELP** them.

HELP = "**Lay hold of the weak**" with the idea of **supporting** them. The idea is of supporting another **by keeping** one's self directly over against the weak one so as to sustain him.

Listen to this — this is so beautiful

QUOTE: Hiebert — *Let the strong put their arms around the weak and hold them up. They need to be assured that they are not forgotten or despised because of their helplessness.*

Whatever it may be — Paul says to the community of believers at large — to **HELP** them! "**Lay hold of the weak**" with the idea of **supporting** them. That demands a little extra effort — a phone call — an invitation to lunch — a quiet talk about their needs.

This is addressed to us all. We are **all** to **watch out** for **one another** like this.

MOVIE — The Professor and the Madman — Mel Gibson played the man who led the compiling of the Oxford English Dictionary — He befriended a man who was a madman — he would go to asylum to be with the madman — “I’m here to see my friend!” He held him and showered him with love

I love how the Lord has directed us here at our church Metro to have that time between worship and the Word to rub shoulders and have coffee on a Sunday — have dinner on Monday nights. There was a Monday night early on when a particular sister ask me, “How can I pray for you?” When I thanked her for her prayer she said, “*Well, I could tell. I looked at you. I could tell you needed prayer.*” And I said: “*Well, that’s one thing about me — You won’t have to look far to know whether or not I need prayer. Just look at my face. You’ll know when you need to fall on your face and start praying.*”

But some of us aren’t so easy to read. But isn’t it great how on Monday nights we get in line, and we’re standing around one another for a period of time to get some food. And you’re seated at a table with them. And you get to know that brother or that sister. And you begin to discern: ‘This is my small-souled sister — And I just want to love on her today. I just want to call her.’ ‘This is my brother who is weak in this area in his life.’

By the way — Sometimes spiritual weakness is readily observable. One of the symptoms is legalism. If you’re weak in faith you just live legalistically. You measure your relationship with God on how good you do, or how good you don’t do, how much you obey, or how much you disobey. And you begin to make rules for — what’s good, and what’s bad. And you build your confidence in the Lord based on legalistic performance.

CLOSING

be patient with them all. ¹⁵See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

PATIENT — Makrothumeo

makros = long, distant, far off, large

thumos = temper, passion

The picture of this word is that of a person who **takes a long time** before fuming and breaking into flames towards those who fail!

¹⁵**See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.**

When we think of the kinds of people that make up a living, breathing community of believers — the responsibility of the community of believers to LIVE in relationship to their leaders and to one another — we discover that REAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY can only be lived **BY** the SPIRIT — **THROUGH** the SON — **TO** the FATHER.

AGAIN — It's ALL ABOUT JESUS

***John 14:5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

