Shepherds And Sheep
1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Introduction

Paul began the letter with a note on how the church was born (chapter 1); how the church was nurtured (chapter 2); and how the church was established (chapter 3). Paul has exhorted the believers to walk in holiness (chapter 4:1-8); harmony (4:9-10); in honesty (4:11-12) and hope (4:13-5:11). In chapter five the believers are exhorted to watch (vv.1-11); to be respectful towards leaders (vv.12-13); to be mindful of one another (vv.14-15) and to be thankful (vv. 16-18). The letter addresses the Pastor and the flock; personal purity and prophetic urgency. Paul warned; stay alert; continue to encourage one another and now the command to live in peace! Paul now gives two charges; one charge is given to leaders and the other charge is given to those who are being lead. **One charge takes the form of a kind request; and the other charge takes the form of a common command.**

We sometimes forget that the Church is Jesus’ idea. The Church is the only institution that Jesus promised to eternally bless (cf. 5:25-27). Clearly the Church is not a building; though people may meet in a building.

*Matthew 16:18 (NKJV)* And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Some mistakenly believe that Jesus established the Church based on Peter’s apostolic authority; but nothing could be further from the truth. Peter himself rejected such an idea. “This rock” was the declaration of Peter’s previous statement; “You are the Christ the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). The person, work, and character of Christ is the eternal foundation of the Church; the Apostle Paul was convinced of the significance of the Church and described it to Timothy as “the pillar and the support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). The Church is a “living building” (1 Cor. 6:19); and we learn from the Book of Revelation and Christ’s address to the seven churches that Jesus cares deeply about the local church. The priority of the Church is Worship and the Word; “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, encourage--with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim. 4:2 NIV). Another priority of the Church is discipleship; we make disciples in every nation (Matt.28:18-20); “Why is it that he gives us special abilities to do certain things best? It is that God’s people will be equipped to do better work for him, building up the Church, the body of Christ, to a position of strength and maturity” (Eph. 4:12; TLB).

In spite of all those descriptors; the Church is not free from problems. The true Church of Jesus Christ is made up of all those who are born of the Spirit of God and who possess a new nature given by God (1 Peter 1:22-25; 2 Peter 1:3-4). No family is perfect and the same is true of the local church. People who occupy local churches are sometimes spiritually immature; some are not even born again. Churches may be tax exempt but they are not exempt from sin. We as Christians are to guard against sin; we are to confront our prejudice, our weakness, our imperfections, our difficulties that are caused by sin and we are to commit to personal and
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corporate maturity. We are to grow up spiritually. Paul reminds his readers in a series of direct exhortations to persevere and grow in the Lord Jesus Christ;

“Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God” (1Thess. 4:1).

The Shepherd’s Charge For The Sheep (v.12a)

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

When Paul planted churches; Paul made leadership a priority. Leaders labor in the work of the ministry; leaders exercise authority; and leaders provide instruction. The most popular phrase Paul uses to describe believers is the word brethren. Paul uses the phrase some 60 times in his letters; and the 2 letters we call Thessalonians he uses the phrase 27 times. The church is called a body and bride but Paul also sees the Church as a family. In the ancient world everyone understood the value of family, families were imperfect and families often failed; but families provided a place for nourishment, fellowship and protection. A child without a family in the ancient world, was a child destined to die. Paul gives us insight into what makes families grow. Jesus has promised the Church will survive. Paul helps us understand how we can thrive.

Work Hard (12b)

“labor”

Some translations read; “diligently labor”. The word is kopiao. The word means to work with great effort; to the point of sweat and sometimes even exhaustion. The faithful Pastor and leader has the charge to work hard among the people and to minister to them like a faithful shepherd.

“Spiritual shepherds must proclaim the gospel (2 Tim. 4:5), explain and apply the truth (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9), warn and admonish the sheep (cf. Rom. 15:14; Col. 1:28’3:16; 1 Thess. 5:14), and counsel them from Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-4:4; cf. Prov. 17:17; 27:6,9,17)” (see The MacArthur New Testament Commentary; 1 Thessalonians p.168).

Paul doesn’t simply tell the leaders to work hard; he models hard work. “For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God” (1 Thess. 2:9).

In the next letter Paul sends to the Thessalonians (Second Thessalonians 3:6-7); “Keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you.”
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Exercise Authority (12c)

“and are over you in the Lord” or “and have charge over you in the Lord”.

Paul uses the phrase “proistemi” which literally means “to stand before” and carries with it the idea of the notion of authority and accountability, leading or directing (MacArthur p.169). In Paul’s first epistle to Timothy the Apostle uses the same word four times to describe the character and the duties of church elders (1 Tim. 3:4,5,12, 5:17). Jesus is the Shepherd. We are under-shepherds; we exercise oversight and authority in His name (cf. 1 Peter 5:1-4).

The key phrase to understand is “in the Lord”. The true shepherd is not a self-appointed or self-anointed shepherd; the shepherd is equipped and appointed by God; but remember the shepherd also reflects the character of Christ and the truth of the Gospel. The Shepherd who is consumed by personal ambition, lust for power, prestige, wealth, or personal advancement cannot be characterized as being in the Lord. The Biblical Shepherd exercises authority in light of God’s Word and Christ’s character.

Provide Instruction (12d)

“and admonish you”

The Shepherd works hard; exercises authority but now the Shepherd provides instruction. The word translated “admonish” is noutheteo which can mean to instruct or to caution or to warn. It doesn’t simply mean to provide accurate information or factual information; but it is information for the purpose of correcting or redirecting; we might even say to change people. It is instruction that contains warning; “designed to direct the sheep to holy living” (MacArthur p. 170). The Shepherd or the leader must be a skilled instructor in the Word of God; the Bible.

The Sheep’s Charge For the Shepherd (v.13)

1 Thessalonians 5:13 (NKJV) and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

Paul gives three specific charges to the believers and their duties towards the pastor; to appreciate the pastors; to esteem them and to submit to them. People intuitively know it is right to appreciate the pastor, and esteem the pastor but to submit to the Pastor makes most people’s hair stand on end. It is happening right now. A knot in the pit of your stomach, a subtle resistance that is growing into a major protest. What if I don’t want to submit to the Pastor? What if the Pastor asks me to do something I am unwilling to do? Leaders are not dictators sent to oppress the Church; but servants sent to serve as godly examples.

Pastor Appreciation (12a)
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We need to return to verse 12 just for a moment.

“and we urge you, brethren, to recognize” or “that you appreciate those” “oida”

“To know by experience”

The implication seems to be that believers are to know their shepherds, recognize them, appreciate them, to treat them respectfully and to value their service. I think it means more than just remembering their names or a general awareness of the facts surrounding their personal lives. It seems to indicate an acquaintance that results in caring appreciation of the Lord’s servant. **We appreciate leaders for Christ’s sake and the Father’s glory.** You have all heard the expression “familiarity breeds contempt” but that is not always true. We are all tempted to be unkind, uncaring, critical, or indifferent. Appreciation can also include giving financial support for the work of the ministry.

1 Timothy 5:17 (NKJV) Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

The word “honor” is the Greek word “time” (pronounced teemee long “e”) and means high regard; and in context seems to indicate financial support. I don’t think it means the teaching Pastor should get paid twice as much but rather that the congregation should be generous. Paul’s train of thought seems to be know your Pastor; know him in such a way that it leads to loving respect, sincere admiration, and generous financial compensation; that indicates the faithfulness and trust he has given to the faithful teaching and preaching of the gospel.

**Respect Leaders (13a)**

“esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake”

The congregation of believers are to “esteem” which means regard or ‘think about’ its pastors ‘highly’ (beyond all measure). Clearly this word is related to “appreciate” but the idea is promote respect. Few people understand the life of a rancher or a sheep herder. The work is dirty and demanding. If you are a rancher or sheep herder you will approach your job with one of two attitudes; you will love your work or hate your work. Paul encourages esteem based on “love” (agape). The esteem in love is not based on their age or personality, or approachability, or favors rendered, but because of their work. **Beyond the appreciation that comes from knowing the person; comes the appreciation and respect that comes from the ministers labor in the Word of God; the feeding of the sheep; the imparting of God’s instructions in the Bible.**

Paul is in effect answering the question; “Why should I esteem the leadership in love?” Paul’s answer is that you should do it “because of their work”. **The nature of the work and the exercise of those responsibilities are to generate expressions of respect and admiration.**
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It makes perfect sense to me that some people come to this church for other reasons other than the teaching of the Bible.

The Bible makes it clear that the job of the Pastor is to lead and feed; guide and guard the flock of God. Therefore the people under them are to acknowledge with affection their ministry labors; greatly respect them; be patient—real patient with non-sinful human weakness; the person in the congregation does not have to excuse, or hide, or commend, or pretend, the pastor is without sin; because the Pastor is not simply accountable to God for his sin; the Pastor is accountable to the leadership of the Church and the scrutiny of the congregation for his sin. When possible we are to speak well of our pastors; encourage them; and give our best to them. I came across someone's view of the ideal Pastor:

*The Perfect Pastor preaches exactly 10 minutes. He condemns sin roundly, but never hurts anyone's feelings. He works from 8 a.m. until midnight, and is also the church janitor. The Perfect Pastor makes $40 a week, wears good clothes, drives a good car, buys good books, and donates $30 a week to the church. He is 29 years old and has 40 years' worth of experience. Above all, he is handsome. The Perfect Pastor has a burning desire to work with teenagers, and he spends most of his time with the senior citizens. He smiles all the time with a straight face because he has a sense of humor that keeps him seriously dedicated to his church. He makes 15 home visits a day and is always in his office to be handy when needed. The Perfect Pastor always has time for church meetings and all of its committees, never missing the meeting of any church organization. And he is always busy evangelizing the unchurched.*

Promote Peace (13b)

“Be at peace among yourselves.”

Peace in the Bible is more than the absence of conflict. Peace is the powerful condition when two or more parties decide to get along. Here the context is between the Pastors or leaders and the believers in Thessaloniki. In order for their to be peace; there must be a willingness and a way for people at odds to resolve conflict and solve problems. This means that members in the Church must actively seek peace.

“With this simple command Paul said Christians should simply put away all their squabbles and arguments. This is a great way to esteem and love the leaders of your church” (David Guzik notes on 1 Thess. 5:13 Blue Letter Study Bible).

*Hebrews 13:7 (NKJV) Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.*

The writer of Hebrews asks the people to obey their leaders and submit to them; for they keep watch over the souls and will give an account—that is give an account to God.
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Shepherds never have the right to ask people to do something that is wicked, perverse, inconsistent with the Word of God or the character of God. But sheep should never ignore or disregard the instructions given; when the admonition is consistent with the Word of God or the character of God. Sinful disrespect hinders the work of the Pastor. “Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you”.

“Stubborn, self-willed, and unsubmissive sheep steal the joy from their shepherds and give themselves and their leaders nothing but pain and an unprofitable relationship” (see John MacArthur p. 174).

Conclusion

A healthy church includes pastors who labor faithfully in the Word of God; who exercise godly authority based on the Word of God and the character of Christ; who provide godly instruction in keeping with the Scriptures. At the same time the people have the responsibility to appreciate their pastors, esteem them, respect them, and submit to them.

Pastoral Search Report

We do not have a happy report to give. We’ve not been able to find a suitable candidate for this church, though we have one promising prospect still. We do appreciate all the suggestions from the church members, and we’ve followed up each one with interviews or calling at least three references. The following is our confidential report on the present candidates.

- **Adam**: Good man but problems with his wife. Also one reference told of how his wife and he enjoy walking nude in the woods.
- **Noah**: Former pastorate of 120 years with no converts. Prone to unrealistic building projects.
- **Abraham**: Though the references reported wife-swapping, the facts seem to show he never slept with another man’s wife, but did offer to share his own wife with another man.
- **Joseph**: A big thinker, but a braggart, believes in dream-interpreting, and has a prison record.
- **Moses**: A modest and meek man, but poor communicator, even stuttering at times. Sometimes blows his stack and acts rashly. Some say he left an earlier church over a murder charge.
- **David**: The most promising leader of all until we discovered the affair he had with his neighbor’s wife.
- **Solomon**: Great preacher but our parsonage would never hold all those wives.
- **Elijah**: Prone to depression-collapses under pressure.
- **Elisha**: Reported to have lived with a single widow while at his former church.
- **Hosea**: A tender and loving pastor but our people could never handle his wife’s occupation.
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- Deborah: Female.
- Jeremiah: Emotionally unstable, alarmist, negative, always lamenting things, and reported to have taken a long trip to bury his underwear on the bank of a foreign river.
- Isaiah: On the fringe? Claims to have seen angels in church. Has trouble with his language.
- Jonah: Refused God’s call into ministry until he was forced to obey by getting swallowed up by a great fish. He told us the fish later spit him out on the shore near here. We hung up.

- Amos: Too backward and unpolished. With some seminary training he might have promise, but has a hang-up against wealthy people. Might fit in better in a poor congregation.
- John: Says he is a Baptist, but definitely doesn’t dress like one. Has slept in the outdoors for months on end, has a weird diet, and provokes denominational leaders.
- Peter: Too blue collar. Has a bad temper—even has been known to curse. Had a big run-in with Paul in Antioch. Aggressive, but a loose cannon.

- Paul: Powerful CEO type leader and fascinating preacher. However, short on tact, unforgiving with younger ministers, harsh and has been known to preach all night.
- Timothy: Too young.
- Jesus: Has had popular times, but once when his church grew to 5000 he managed to offend them all and this church dwindled down to twelve people. Seldom stays in one place very long. And, of course, he’s single.
- Judas: His references are solid. A steady plodder. Conservative. Good connections. Knows how to handle money. We’re inviting him to preach this Sunday. Possibilities here.