

## "HOW TO ESTEEM ELDERS"

### **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13**

**Theme:** Faithful men who serve the church as God's leaders must be honored by God's people.

#### **I. THE ATTITUDE TOWARD SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP - 5:12A**

##### **A. The Potential for the Disruption of Unity - *"But we request of you, brethren, that you ..."***

1. In light of the awareness of the imminent Rapture of the church and the Day of the Lord that will follow, Paul pivots and provide throughout the remainder of the book specific obligations that our expectations ought to produce - cp. **2 Peter 3:11**.
2. He had just commended the Thessalonian believers for the way that they had been encouraging one another and building each other up - v. 11.
3. However, because of the "adversative" "*but*" there was something that had either surfaced as a problem in the church or that was looming as a potential threat to unity that Paul desired to address.
4. It is interesting that he does not use his apostolic authority but appeals to them tenderly - modeling the very spirit that he is calling on them to honor.
5. He says: "*we request of you brethren ...*"
6. "*request*" [ἔρωτάω] - means to ask a question or to ask for something - and indicates that Paul was expecting an answer from them whether they will be willing to respond properly or not.
7. It is a very mild form of rebuke, but nevertheless, a clear obligating of these believers to do what Paul is asking of them.

##### **B. The Prevention of the Disruption of Unity - *"... appreciate those who ..."***

1. The best way to avoid controversy and disunity in the church is for the people of the church to foster a godly attitude toward those the Lord provides to them as leaders.
2. The specific instruction is that they "*appreciate*" - literally [οἶδα] - to know them - that is, to know them *by experience*.
  - a) The obligation to know your spiritual leaders (in this context) falls upon

the members of the church.

- b) When members seek to know their leaders, experience their heart and giftedness, there is the ability to see the value of their service.
- c) Too many church members don't know their elders - and then criticize the elders for "failing" to care about them; this text states that the responsibility falls upon the members to seek to get to know the elders.
3. When people are appreciating the spiritual ministry of elders, their response is one of respect and value enabling congregations to overlook varied flaws that leaders inevitably possess.
4. When you get to know them, you will be able to assess three very clear points of appreciation - activities that characterize the ministries of faithful pastors and elders ...

## II. THE ACTIVITIES OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP - **5:12B**

### A. **Toiling** - *"... who diligently labor among you ..."*

1. This first characteristic of spiritual leadership is that leaders must be working hard.
2. The term *"diligently labor"* [κοπιῶω] - means to work until wearied or tired, to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually; to strive or toil in the work.
3. Paul had already referenced the toil that he had exhibited among the Thessalonians - cp. **1 Thessalonians 2:9**.
4. Later, he would appeal to the example that he had set while among them of exercising self-discipline in managing his life - cp. **2 Thessalonians 3:6-8**.
5. If a man is not willing to work hard - to "diligently labor" among the people of God, he should not be in ministry.

### B. **Tending** - *"... and have charge over you in the Lord ..."*

1. Notice that they are to be *"diligently labor[ing] among you ..."* - the work isn't busy work or aimless efforts but it is to be focused upon the people of God.
2. They are to be "tending" God's flock - having *"charge over you in the Lord."*

3. This word “*charge*” [προϊστημι] - a term that combines two words to “stand” and “before” - and carries the idea of position of authority as one who presides.
4. However, it is not a position of autocracy - the authority that is wielded is not personal - it belongs to the Lord - “... *in the Lord.*”
5. Thus, an elder who exercises personal power independently of God and the word and will of God is a man who is a usurper - cp. **Matthew 20:25-26; 1 Peter 5:2-3.**
6. However, if an elder is honestly serving the Lord Jesus Christ and standing before other believers in the name of Christ advocating for the will of God through the Word of God, his authority must be honored.
7. As you get to know elders and witness their advocating for the interests of Christ as they “have charge over you in the Lord” - you begin to honor them and appreciate them - cp. **Hebrews 13:17.**

### **C. Teaching - “... and give you instruction.”**

1. Still another characteristic of a spiritual leader is that they “*give you instruction.*”
2. Instruction is provided in several ways:
  - a) **Example:** the example of their lives - exemplifying the power of God’s Word to transform and sanctify by means of holy living.
  - b) **Explanation:** teaching the truths of God’s Word - *focusing on the innate power of the truth to transform lives.*
  - c) **Exclamation:** preaching with the authority of God’s Word - *confronting the non-conformity to the truths of God’s Word and calling for compliance.*
3. A man who fails to distinguish between his opinions and the truth of God’s Word is not a trustworthy spiritual leader.

## **III. THE APPRECIATION OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP - 5:13**

### **A. The Respect for the Hardship of the Work**

1. As you see these characteristics evidenced the believer must “*esteem them very highly in love ...*”
2. “esteem” [ἡγέομαι] - comes from a word that basically means to be in a

supervisory capacity - that is, allow your love for them to supervise your perspective and thus to esteem or regard them *“very highly”* [ὕπερἑκπερισσοῦ] - or “beyond all measure.”

3. This is all *“because of their work”* - the energies that they must exert to “get the job done.”
4. One of the ways that saints are obligated to show honor to those who labor diligently, faithfully, and fruitfully among them is to take care of their financial obligations - cp. **1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:14.**
5. Essentially, there is to be a constant desire on the part of saints to show appreciation, respect, and love to those who have the difficult task of shepherding the flock of God.

## **B. The Responsibility for the Harmony in the Work**

1. In addition, the saints are personally to seek to maintain a relationship with each other and with their spiritual leadership that is healthy and whole - *“Live in peace with one another.”*
2. For the relationship with spiritual leadership to be peaceful, it is necessary for the people of God to “submit” to their leadership - **1 Peter 3:8-13.**
3. When spiritual leadership does something with which you do not agree (not violating Scripture), the only way to pursue peace is to submit to them.
4. If Scripture is being violated, then clearly there must be a confrontation for genuine affection and love to be displayed - seeking to help leadership be all that it ought to be.
5. However, if you merely do not like what they’ve decided, unity and peace is a great priority to God and His people than you being satisfied or getting your way.
6. “Stubborn, self-willed, and unsubmitive sheep steal the joy from their shepherds and give themselves and their leaders nothing but pain and an unprofitable relationship.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MacArthur, p. 174.