

“You Make the Call”

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

Sometimes doing the right thing can be difficult – in the very least, uncomfortable. 1Thessalonians 5:12-13 may make you feel uncomfortable, especially if you are a leader in your church. But this is God’s Word, and it is worthy of our attention, even if it does make you squirm a bit.

Leaders don’t lead to be seen, but they need to be seen. The call in v.12 is not for leaders to intentionally try and be seen, but for you to intentionally try to see what your leaders are doing on your behalf. Don’t watch over someone’s shoulder, of course, but make it your goal to notice what your leaders are doing on your behalf, and to thank them and honor them.

Respect (v.12) comes from the Greek word εἶδω, which means ‘To know, as if by seeing.’ They say a picture is worth 1,000 words. Seeing a work of art is so much different than being told about it. But when you see a painting or sculpture, remember that an artist is behind each one.

Sometimes, maybe you (or someone else) have noticed your spiritual growth – remember those who helped make that happen! Some church leader is partially behind part of your spiritual growth; they have had some positive influence in your life – in some great or small way, – you are the person you are today because of that leader’s influence. They said something that struck a chord in your heart or invested in you when you were feeling spiritually or emotionally bankrupt; they saw in you a diamond when all you could see was coal dust. You’ve got to see that – You’ve got to try to see that. That’s what v.12 means when it says to know them; to recognize them; to respect them.

Let us draw 3 observations from verse 12 on what great leaders do. The first is that great leaders serve (“**those who labor among you.**”) Jesus was a great leader – and He modeled servant leadership throughout His earthly ministry. Check out Matthew 20:25-28 to see how He taught and modeled servant leadership.

Secondly, great leaders provide oversight and accountability (“**Are over you in the Lord.**”) Scriptural authority has nothing to do with age or accomplishment; it is not based on wealth or success or power; it is a God-given call to help represent and minister to His people and is both a blessing and a blessed burden. It involves challenging beliefs you may have that are contrary to, or not supported by, God’s Word. That leads us to the third thing that we see about great leaders from v.12.

Great leaders correct. Think of a sports coach. Sometimes their job requires them to tell the players what they are not doing right. As a player, you never want to hear that, right? As a follower of Christ, sometimes you may need to be told something that you've said or believed is not Biblically accurate. Of course, you don't *want* to hear that, but you *need* to hear it. A leader's job is not to coddle you and make you feel all warm and fuzzy and comfortable – a leader's job is to call you into, or back into, alignment with God's Word. To neglect this responsibility would be as negligent and irresponsible as a parent who saw their child eating rat poison and you not saying anything. The word "admonish" comes from the Greek word *νουθετέω*, which is a gentle reproof, more like a big brother than a high school principal. Great leaders seek to gently and kindly redirect you toward the truth, not because they want to, or because it's easy for you to hear – but because they are called of God to do so.

Because of what they do, we respect and admire our leaders. "Esteem" (v.13) means to hold in high regard – to think grand thought about them. That doesn't mean expecting them to be perfect, but it does mean expecting them to act in a manner worthy of admiration and emulation and honoring when we see that in their lives.

We respect and admire our leaders because of what they do, not because of their success. For example, you may admire Billy Graham for his work, but not because of his results – the results are God's doing, after all, not Billy Graham's. What Billy Graham did, and was so blessed for, was to consistently point people toward Jesus and elevate the importance of God's Word being learned and lived out in people's lives. We honor our leaders when we see and hold in high regard... what they have done on our behalf, and when we implement in our lives that which they have called us to do.

So let's get really practical with this thing. What does it really mean for an individual to esteem/honor/respect their leaders? Esteem is not giving gifts, taking someone out to lunch, respect is not giving a raise; and honor is not saying "Great work this morning" on your way to lunch. Your leaders are esteemed/honored/respected when you hear, and are changed by, the Word of God. The greatest legacy any Christian leader can leave is you having a high regard for Scripture and allowing it to transform you. Let every action, every word, every decision that your leaders make drive you back to God's Word – into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

Think for a moment of what leader from 10 or 20 or 30 years ago did that for you. Or if you are new to the Christian faith, think of someone who is investing in you right now as a leader in the local church. As you think about that person right now, I am asking you to write a letter or make a phone call to someone who, somewhere in the past, encouraged you in your faith – someone who had a lasting impact on your spiritual growth. Do that this week – in the next seven days. Don't say it's because I told you to do it – do it because you want to, and because it will encourage them to know that their investment in your life was not for nothing.

Imagine if you got a letter from someone who you knew 20 years ago. FYI, 20 years ago the American television show *American Idol* premiered and gas cost \$1.36/gallon (www.energy.gov). Yes, that was a long time ago. But imagine if you were to receive that letter. Imagine if you got a letter that said, “Hey, we haven’t talked in a really long time, but I remember one day in youth group when you said you could see greatness in me. I didn’t see it then, and sometimes I still don’t see it now, but in that moment, that meant everything to me.” Or maybe you received a letter that said, “I remember one time in Bible study when I said something and you challenged me to defend my belief using only the Bible. I didn’t like that at the time, but it taught me the value of knowing what is really in the Word of God and not just believing what I had heard or what I had always thought.” What impact would that letter or that phone call have on you?

So who impacted your life in the past? Who have you been thinking about? Contact them this week to share a story of how they impacted you SPECIFICALLY – don’t be general. Be specific – “If you hadn’t showed up, I wouldn’t be the person who I am today, and here’s why...” Or maybe, “I am walking with the Lord today because of you. If you weren’t there for me, I believe I would have been going down a very different path...”

Tell those who have impacted your life, who have invested in your life, “Thank you,” and then live out that influence; that’s what it means to esteem someone. Imagine how much it would mean to a former pastor of yours if you wrote to him and said, “One day, many years ago, I was struggling, and you said something that you probably don’t even remember, but I’ll never forget.” Write that letter – make that call, to whomever it applies to for you, and then expand on that – be very specific – how exactly did that person positively impact your life?

How can you honor those who have been in leadership? How can you honor those who are currently in leadership? This suggestion is a great start; if possible, call them and let them know that they impacted your life in a positive way. Or if it is not possible, honor them by living out the influence they’ve had on you; by going all-in for Jesus, by knowing and living out the Word of God, and by investing in the next spiritual generation.

Takeaways from this message.

- ❖ Sometimes doing the right thing can be **DOING** – in the very least, **UNCOMFORTABLE**
- ❖ Leaders don’t **LEAD** to be seen, but they **NEED** to be seen
- ❖ To respect your leaders means ‘to know, as if by **SEEING**’
- ❖ What do great leaders do? (3 observations from v.12)
 - ✓ Great leaders **SERVE**

- ✓ Great leaders provide **OVERSIGHT** and **ACCOUNTABILITY**
- ✓ Great leaders **CORRECT**

- ❖ To esteem your leaders means to hold them in **HIGH REGARD**

- ❖ We respect and admire our leaders because of what they **DO**, not because of their **SUCCESS**

- ❖ This week – **you make the call!**

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. **Why do you suppose you haven't heard many sermons on this passage?**
2. **Why is it important to declare the whole gospel of God (Acts 20:27)?**
3. **Share a 'failure' you've had in the kitchen. Why did that not stop you from cooking again?**
4. **List as many individuals as you can think of who have dedicated their time and energy toward teaching you God's Word (parents, Sunday School teachers, missionaries, etc.)**
5. **How can you honor these people? What if they have gone on to be with the Lord? How are you still able to honor their investment into your life?**
6. **What warning does Matthew 6:1-4 give about serving in order to obtain recognition?**
7. **What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?**