

1 Thessalonians 5:12–28 (ESV)

12 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. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil. 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. 25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul is coming to the end of his letter. We can almost see his mind working. “I want to get this letter to my friends in Thessalonica as soon as possible. But there is **so much** to say. I just want to leave them with a little more guidance on **how to live**. I know there are some important things that need said that I said nothing about. So I will take this time to hit the points in a broad fashion.”

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

We need to recognize something here right away. God intends there to be leaders in the church. When God says they are over you, He doesn't mean they live on the balcony and you are on the first floor. No. Elders have authority over those in the church. But think about that a little bit. Who? Which ones? Do the elders have authority over visitors? Do the elders have authority on those who come to church but have not verbally committed to being part of the body?

Our membership contract says this:

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP, for those who desire active fellowship with us, is available to born again believers in Jesus Christ who declare Jesus Christ Lord of their lives and commit themselves to discipleship and service of His cause, making a commitment to unity and oneness with this congregation. Members will furthermore be baptized according to the New Testament.

Membership privileges may be requested by those who meet the above criteria and who attend services and are in fellowship regularly for two months.

Membership may be revoked in the case of a six weeks consecutive absence of attendance or fellowship.

Membership in this church is a privilege, not a right and includes submission to the rule of Scripture in all matters of lifestyle and personal life. Sinful rebellion against Jesus Christ will be confronted and judged and if need be, disciplined, according to the New Testament. Such discipline may include withdrawing membership.

Membership assumes that submission to the Lordship of Christ in the Body of Christ also includes submission to fellow believers and submission to the ruling elders of this congregation.

Membership includes the responsibility to tithe one's income to finance the work of the church and to additionally practice generosity and charity in giving offerings to meet the needs of others. If your conscience will not allow you to tithe, approach the elders with an alternative plan of support.

You might wonder, why have membership at all? Our text hints at it. The **church leadership** and all **the committed fellowship** need to know who is saying, "Count me in. I want to submit to this body of believers. I want to be under the leadership of the elders. I want this church to be able to vouch for me in the world. I want them to be able to say, yes, he or she is a Christian in our fellowship. This person is walking in the Lord."

We all **need to know** who is **in** and who is **out**. Paul assumed that both the **leaders** and the **body as a whole** will know **who to consider** part of the body. We are going to begin a study in three weeks on the importance of church membership. It will also be the framework for a church membership class for anyone who wants to join our church in the future. This series is going to be different than most sermons. These will be mandatory for all members to listen to. They will be available on Sermon Audio if you cannot be here on any Sunday. It is vital, if we are to be a church like Paul modelled, that we all understand the **importance** of church membership, the **responsibilities** of church membership, and that we agree on what **church membership really means**. Then we will again have the opportunity to sign the membership agreement to affirm our commitment to the Ferndale body of believers.

OK back to the text.

We ask you, brothers, to respect those

Respect- This word involves the ideas of both **personal acquaintance** and **acknowledgment**. It carries the idea of being **respectfully appreciative**, like a child is to the father he or she loves. The amplified Bible catches it well, I think. It says

get to know those who labor among you [recognize them for what they are, acknowledge and appreciate and respect them all]

The Amplified Bible (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1987), 1 Th 5:12.

Part of what Paul is telling these people is that they need to understand who these people are and the authority that they have. The Thessalonians should recognize that these people are tasked with their duties **by God**. It is serious stuff. You can't just blow off their work with you as if it is a **person off the street**. Something spiritual is going on here.

At this point I feel like saying to you all, just keep doing what you are doing. If what you do and say **in your homes** and **to other church members** about the leaders is what you do **when we are together**, it appears to me that you normally show proper respect to your leadership. I watch how you treat Jeremiah and Mark, and I see that you are careful in how you display your regard for them. Now, maybe there are things you know about that I do not. But it appears to me that generally you treat your leadership with proper respect.

I would be interested to hear what you think. Pull me aside and let me know if you like.

those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you

Paul tells us at least 3 things that elders are tasked with doing.

Elders, we should be asking ourselves, "how are we doing at this?"

Labor among you- Paul actually uses a word that is usually used for **hard physical labor**. I don't think he is saying we should be out laying bricks and building houses for those we serve. Although, for sure, we should never be **above** such service. But the idea is that **elders work hard**. They are not like the lazy persons Paul already addressed who never seems to meet their responsibilities. No. The work of an elder is not a committee job. It isn't a meeting you show up for a few minutes. Eldering requires **studying issues**. It requires **intruding into people's lives**. It requires **thinking deeply** and **moving intentionally**. It requires preparing all week for whatever part of the Sunday service we have part of. The responsibility of leading people into God's presence in worship is one of the most important things we do. We should prepare to do the **best job** we can. This eldering isn't primarily a **delegation** job or an **administrative** position. It is a "**get the need met job**". It is a "**drop everything and go help**" job. It is a "**let me get my hands dirty**"

to help you with this problem” job. It is not usually hard physical labor. But it does involve hard and costly labor.

Elders, how are we doing at laboring among our brothers and sisters?

Are over you- Elders have authority, but it is like a husband’s authority. It is **consultative** authority. I am Carla’s husband. But I have no tools to **make her** do what I say. There may be some consequences if she were not to do what I say. But all I can really do is **provide leadership through counsel**, and when required, **commands**.

Elders are in the same boat. We can declare the truth emphatically and accurately. We can tell a person that they must **repent** if they want to **follow Christ** in our church. We can represent God’s authoritative word accurately. But we have no method of making a person repent. There is ultimately a consequence we must apply if a person refuses to submit to Christ’s Lordship. We can bring the problem to the church and have us all work to help this person make the necessary changes. But if that person chooses not to change, it is not even the elders that disfellowship them. It is the church, as a whole, that does this.

As parents, we **have the tools** and the ability to make children submit up to a certain age. And God expects us to use those tools. But husbands and elders do not have those tools. So we are required to communicate clearly. And we can lead by example. We can do things consistent with our position. But there is no force we can apply.

But even though an elder and husband cannot **make** a member or wife obey, that does not mean that God does not **regard the wrong** that the member or wife is committing by disobeying a biblically valid command or instruction. Remember this, just because these offices cannot **force** obedience, that does not mean that God does not **demand** obedience. Verse 12 says they are over you in the Lord. In other words, it is by **the Lord’s authority** that these individuals have authority over you when they stay in the proper sphere. If a person is in Christ, God will do what the elder or husband cannot do. So we better not play fast and loose with authority. God placed elders over the church to serve the church with authority. And as they are serving under God’s authority, members are tasked with submitting to the properly implement authority by elders.

and admonish you

OK elders **labor among you**, are **over you**, and they **admonish you**.

Admonish is not a harsh word, but it is often confrontive. It confronts our lives with God's truth. And we all know that sometimes truth is not a chummy buddy. Admonish means that **there is a fault** with the one **being admonished**. There is an error needing corrected.

When admonishing, elders, as well as anyone in the body, should always try to use the right size cannon, only use as much vehemence as is necessary. But sometimes we may err. Sometimes we are far too harsh, too quickly. Sometimes we don't ask enough questions first. Sometimes we read things wrong. Sometimes all that is needed is a soft word of warning. We may have worked ourselves up to deal with the issue and we are too harsh. We are not Jesus. But admonishing is the ministry to those who are going astray in large or small ways. We as elders must do this job. And as we do it, the goal is to win our brother back to conformity of Christ for the good of his soul and the church.

Now remember, Paul is telling this church to respect the elders. Respect their efforts. Give yourself over to their ministry to you. Give them the benefit of the doubt when they intrude into your lives. Unless proven otherwise, believe that they have your best interest in mind. That is what you will do if you respect them. Sure, they might be wrong at times. If so, address the issue respectfully and honestly. But listen to them very carefully. Odds are that if they approach you with a problem, they are likely not imagining it. I think we get the idea of what Paul is saying. And he goes on saying it.

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

This is very interesting. There is a "**because**". We esteem because of their work. Esteem is like honor. It is to place a very high value, a very high regard. Essentially we should think of it this way. The elders have accepted the work of looking out for the flock. While those who are not elders are free to tend to your own affairs, the elders have added you **TO** their own affairs. They have added you to their official responsibilities because they love Christ and they love you. That responsibility earns them a privilege. The privilege is that you treat them as people who are paying a price to **help you** and **the rest of the church**. From what I can tell, we are to esteem our leadership, not due to the **quality** of the work but due to the **nature** of the work, the **scope** of the work. If it is the **quality**, we can easily come up with an unrealistic standard that they do not meet. But if it is the **nature** of the work, we are respecting the position. We are to apply ourselves to think and speak well of them lovingly. And they appear to get an extra benefit of the doubt.

In a church like ours, no one is clamoring to climb to the top. Even a person who loves status is not likely to attend here. So you can know, your leadership here is here for the right reasons. We want to serve our Lord by serving you. And I want to thank you for making our jobs very easy for the most part. Thank you for the love and esteem you have shown us. Then Paul continues and may be showing his hand a little.

Be at peace among yourselves.

It is very likely that there were people in the Thessalonians church that did not properly regard the leaders. Isn't it easy to think that **I know** every bit as much as **they do**. Who do they think they are? I am not going to bow to their requests.

Then, likely, the leaders were put in a bad spot of having to **push** their authority. Which would cause the trouble makers to increase their belligerence.

Paul is saying- knock it off. You guys should be living in peace, not in enmity. The fault, in this case, seems to be on the side of those who are disregarding those in positions of authority.

Paul is telling the trouble makers to fix the problem, which is their attitudes. Next Paul tells us who the problem children are, or at least what the issues with the people are.

**14 And we urge you, brothers,
admonish the idle,
encourage the fainthearted,
help the weak,
be patient with them all.**

Now remember that these instructions are being given to the whole church. I earlier addressed a challenge from some of the text to the elders, but the letter is being written **to the church as a whole**. So this request is not going to the leadership of the church. It is going to **all of us**. It is not just the leaders who need to do admonishing. It is all of us. If you see a need, meet it. That is how the church is to operate. Approach someone who is clearly sinning and show them what scripture says. Then see how they handle it. If you need help, get it.

Ok, so the first instruction is to **admonish the idle**.

The Greek word for idle, or unruly was actually used in a military context. It was used of a soldier who was out of rank, disorderly, insubordinate and generally did not carry through with his responsibilities. So it is idle with an

attitude. It is not that they do nothing. They just do not do the useful things they **are required to do**.

When I think of this description, I think of a staff person that Carla had on a bike trip. He just would not **walk in step** with the plans. If Carla had planned **one activity**, he would drum up enthusiasm in the kids for **another activity**. He had not done any of the arduous planning that Carla had to do for those trips. But he thought **his imagination** was as valuable as **her hard work**. And he flaunted his super spirituality as a touch above everything else we were offering. That was a very frustrating experience.

Anyway, that kind of activity needs reigned in. I think it is obvious that to be a good member of a church, you don't need to give up **all ideas of your own**. But they should **add** to the direction of the church and not **distract** from it. They should add to the preaching and teaching and not distract people from it. I think Suz's monthly family nights is an example of a ministry that came out of a zeal to provide something for the church. Brad has often suggested things as well. Some others of you have led in additional ministries as well. There are many ways that God wants to use the gifts he gave you to improve things. But it is important that we all **walk in step**.

The problem with those who won't is that they have not respected the authority of the position that the elders hold. They don't respect that Christ is using them as under shepherds of His church. This passage all fits together. **encourage the fainthearted,**

This is the second problem the Thessalonians were having. Some were **out of step**. Others were **faint of heart**. The literal meaning is small souled. The image is of a Christian huddled in the middle of the flock afraid to do anything that challenges their comfort or safety. These people cling to what they know. They will not take risks to branch out into new ministries or responsibilities. They fear change and anything they are not used to. They want a life that is risk free and secure.

It is likely that there were some in Thessalonica that were afraid to witness because it might bring about persecution. Paul is telling the body there to **help these people**. Don't let them accept the **status quo** as being **ok**. It is not. Stand for Christ. Do those hard things. And trust Christ while you do them. He has made lots of promises for this purpose.

To encourage means to speak alongside. I think of a parent teaching a child to ride a bike. Haven't we all run alongside giving instructions until the child finally gets the hang of it? That is what we are to do with the faint hearted. We

do whatever we have to do to give them the support and the incentive to do that which Christ calls them to do. What we will be **speaking** is **God's word**, God's **reasons** to do what **God says**.

Then next

help the weak,

Help means, to hold up. The weak are helped by relationships. I think of the time Jonathan fell off a makeshift bridge crossing our little stream and a stick lodged in his ear. Instantly he could not even stand up. He was completely dizzy and disoriented. The only way he could make it to the house was by tightly clinging to me. It would have been cruel for me to say, Jonathan you know where the house is. You will get there eventually. It is inconvenient for me to help you right now.

No. We are to help the weak.

Now who are the weak?

Maybe those who are plagued with doubts and struggling with faith. Rom. 14:1–15:13; 1 Cor. 8:1–13; 9:19–23; 10:23–33

Maybe those who cannot cling to the freedom they have in Christ. Gal. 5:1; Col. 2:16–23

Maybe they have overworked consciences on things that are not actually wrong. 1 Cor 8:7

Weak in scripture is usually talking about people who are struggling with sin and are not doing well. They are having trouble doing what God says to do and not doing what God says not to do. It is not that they do not know. They are just having trouble doing it.

Or sometimes scripture talks about those who hold to a position that is weak and their consciences will not allow them to be free of it. They are convinced and therefore bound by conscience.

Now it is interesting that Paul does not say here, pity the weak. This weakness isn't any excuse. The weak person cannot remain in that state because it is unfaithful to remain in that state. The weak person must be helped to become strong.

The weak person is not to be given any power over others by their weakness. They are not allowed the power to instruct others to change to accommodate their weakness. They are not allowed to blow off those who would help them by saying, I can't. It is just too hard. I am so weak. No. If God has given them responsibilities or directions or commands, they are to be helped to keep them. They are not to be helped by accepting excuses for why they cannot do

them. The weak need help and the strong are to provide help. And neither party is allowed to say no.

be patient with them all.

The “them all” is probably referring to the three classes of people he referred to earlier. Clearly the weak, the fearful and the out of step Christians can be exasperating. One won’t stay in step. One is afraid to take a step. And the other thinks he or she is too weak to take a step. Faithful Christians will pour themselves into helping these people. And the most common result is that the problems persist. Sometimes the growth is so slow that we cannot even see it.

I have found myself facing growth that is much slower than what I think it could or should be. And I have lost patience. I have spoken out of anger and frustration. And that is exactly what we should not do. It does not do the weak person, the out of step person, or the fearful person any good. In fact it often makes it harder for the person to listen to us in the future. The fact that a person should be more mature than they are is not actionable. It may be regrettable, but ultimately it is irrelevant. We start where **they are** just like every morning we start **where we are**. It is never as far as it **should** be. But we cannot start **where we are not**. We must start where **we are**. **Patience is willing to start over and over where a person is without giving up on them.** Now all this assumes that the fellow struggling believer is voicing and showing that **they want to grow**. They **want** to overcome. They **want** to honor Christ in this area of their lives. They are not playing games or bailing out. As long as they are willing, we keep trying.

That is what patience does.

I think of my parents. I had 5 accidents with cars in the first two years of driving. I demolished a car that was 6 months old. I asked my mom yesterday which was her favorite car. She told me it was the one I wrecked. The first three were my fault. The last two were unavoidable. But my parents, as inconvenienced as they were and as frustrated as they must have been, never gave up on me. In fact they never spoke harsh words to me. There were some consequences. But they showed me patience. It was kind of funny that after my last accident my father suggested that I may want to think about not driving for a while. In that accident I was parked at a friends house and a drunk driver ran into me. I guess my dad had a limit to his patience too. And sometimes our frustration shows itself at the least appropriate time.

So we see that the church at Thessalonica had its issues, just like **we all do**. There were obviously some people who were not yet where **they should be**. Some were giving into their natural dispositions and it was causing friction in the church. Undue attention was necessary to help them. And Paul was making sure that they got what they needed and he was encouraging all to have the right attitude.

What are the applications.

First- don't be that guy.

We should look at our lives for signs of being the “out of step” fellow, the “faithless and fearful” person, or the “weak” person. If we are, we need to take any steps we can to overcome our failures. The failures are costing the church, some-how in some way. Reach out and get whatever help you need.

Second- keep reaching out.

We should be looking for ways to help and we should not give up unless the person we are helping refuses any further help.

Third- Think correctly about the elders

You know that we are far from perfect. But we are dedicated for your good. We will do whatever we know to do to help you be the follower of Christ you were created to be. So, as you have the chance, work **with us** as opposed to **against us**. Hold the position in its proper regard.