**Lesson 7**

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Verse 12 🙠**

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.

*So the very length of this material should be thought of in terms of a relationship between “friends,” more than that of “mentor-student.” Any parent who has sent off a first child to university will understand very well this reluctance to let go, on the one hand, and the felt need to cover all the bases, on the other. Fee*

*In any case, the entire section has been set up by the concluding exhortation in verse 11: “encourage one another and build one another up” — which is what Paul himself now sets out to do for them. Fee*

1. **This can be a very delicate topic for those who have experienced spiritual abuse.[[2]](#footnote-2) As we lay aside our own experiences that may not have been positive and seek to find the true meaning of this section, we discover that God desires a very tender relationship between the brethren and those who labor among them.**

*Thus the two verbs that control the long sentence of our verses 12-13a) — eidenai (= “recognize, acknowledge”) and heigeisthai (“esteem”) — are a long way from the kinds of imperatives that call for obedience or submission to their leadership. Fee*

* 1. ***It is important to recognize that God NEVER wanted a religious hierarchy. No matter what our calling or ministry within the body of Christ, we are all equal. No one is more loved or anointed than another. Elders/pastors are to serve/to shepherd the flock. The flock is to cooperate with their loving guidance.***

***Matthew 23:8-12***

*But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and* ***you are all brethren****.****9****Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.****10****And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.****11But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.******12****And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

***1 Peter 5:1-4***

*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:****2Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock****;****4****and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*

* 1. ***Paul is “requesting” not commanding.***

**Thayer Definition:** 1) to question, 2) to ask, 2a) to request, entreat, beg, beseech

* 1. ***“Appreciate”*** *those who*

**Thayer Definition:** to perceive, notice, discern, discover, to pay attention, observe, to know, to have regard for one, cherish, pay attention to

*Paul’s request comes by way of two infinitives; he wants the believing community to “acknowledge” and “esteem” those who work hard among them. Fee*

*As in English, the verb “know” (appreciate) in Greek has a considerable range of meaning. Here Paul most likely intended the nuance indicated by the TNIV’s “acknowledge.” That is, the believers are to “know” them in the sense that they recognize or acknowledge their activities of leadership among them. Fee*

* 1. ***Appreciate those who:***
* **“Diligently labor” among you,**

***Strongs:*** *to feel fatigue; by implication to work hard: - (bestow) labour, toil, be wearied.*

*Although this is the only occurrence in these two letters, this first verb is one of the most frequent words in Paul to describe “ministry.” Fee*

*This verb thus puts emphasis on the “labor, toil, grow weary” aspect of ministry, with no hint in most of these passages as to what this “labor” might specifically entail. Here, then, in its first occurrence in Paul’s letters, those who are recognized and esteemed as leaders are characterized first as “working hard” at it. Fee*

* **“Have charge over” you in the Lord**

***Thayer:*** *1) to set or place before, 1a) to set over, 1b) to be over, to superintend, preside over, 1c) to be a protector or guardian, 1c1) to give aid, 1d) to care for, give attention to*

* **Have charge over you “in the Lord”**

***Unfortunately, some spiritual leaders have taken it upon themselves to oversee every aspect of a person’s life. Believe it or not, many have sought to determine areas such as these:***

* + *What one will do in ministry, some even to the point of manipulating the flock to serve them (the elders)*
  + *Whom one will marry (and what that marriage will look like)*
  + *If/where someone will go to school*
  + *Career/job choice*
  + *How people dress*
  + *What people eat*
  + *What they do in their spare time*

***We are each able to hear God’s voice in these areas and do not need a spiritual leader to tell us how to live. Certainly, there will be times when we want their opinion or counsel, but NEVER CONTROL.***

*“which the TNIV renders “care for you,” but where most other English translations (including the NIV) have something like “who are over you in the Lord” (“who have charge of/over you”; NRSV/NASB). Both of these options, it should be noted, are legitimate renderings of the participle proïstamenous in terms of the possible meanings of the word; Fee*

*That is, “giving,”“caring for,” and “showing mercy” make far more sense contextually than do the “giving,”“ruling” (as KJV), and “showing mercy” found in most English translations, Fee*

*Thus one may rightly argue that the evidence here leans substantially toward describing their task, not their position. Fee*

* **Give you instruction**

***Strongs:*** *to put in mind, that is, (by implication) to caution or reprove gently: - admonish, warn.*

***AMPLIFIED***

*Now also we beseech you, brethren, get to know those who labor among you [recognize them for what they are, acknowledge and appreciate and respect them all]—your leaders who are over you in the Lord and those who warn and kindly reprove and exhort you.*

***WuestNT***  *Now, we request of you, brethren, that you recognize those for what they are and as entitled to the respect due them who work to the point of weariness among you and who are in authority over you in the Lord and admonish you.*

**Verse 13 🙠**

And that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

1. **Paul is describing the relationship between the appointed elders (shepherds) of the church and the people to whom the elders are ministering. He paints a very tender picture.**
2. ***Esteem them means to “***to consider, deem, account, think”.-Thayer

**AMPLIFIED:** hold them in very high and most affectionate esteem

1. ***“Very highly” is very*** exceeding abundantly, supremely
2. ***Why? It’s because of their labor.***

***AMPLIFIED:*** *And hold them in very high and most affectionate esteem in [intelligent and sympathetic] appreciation of their work.*

***WuestNT:*** *And be esteeming them most highly with a divine and self-sacrificial love because of their work.*

*First, those who labor among them are to be held “in the highest regard,” which does not mean, as often has happened in later times in the church, to “exalt” them in some way. The leaders are protected from any form of people’s “fawning” over them by the modifier “in love,” which eliminates the option of thinking more highly of their leaders than they Christianly ought to. This operative phrase, “in love,” means to care for them as fellow believers, in this case as “brothers” in the Lord. No room for titles or fawning here; love eliminates such ingratiating behavior. And the reason they are to hold them in such high regard is not because of their position, but “because of their work.” Fee*

*What these admonitions to the community as a whole do indicate is that in the early Pauline churches their leaders were within the circle as it were, not outside of it in some way (as, e.g., “clergy”), and certainly not above it. Fee*

1. ***The instruction to “live in peace with one another” is in direct context of the relationship between elders and the church.***

**Verse 14** **🙠**

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

1. **Not every problem in the church can be addressed identically. Here Paul gives some guidelines for different types of people.**

*Paul simply puts in staccato form the basic concerns of the letter, a kind of summation of all that has preceded. Given what has immediately preceded, one could argue that these imperatives are now addressed to the leaders themselves. Fee*

1. ***Admonish the unruly.***

**Amplified:** admonish (warn and seriously advise) those who are out of line [the loafers, the disorderly, and the unruly];

***2 Thessalonians 3:10-12***

*For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.****11****For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.****12****Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*

• Sometimes there will be those among us who are truly in need and can benefit from our assistance. In other situations, people are “unruly”. They refuse to work or seek work and expect others to provide for them. It’s difficult sometimes to distinguish from those truly in need and those who are “loafers”. We have to trust the Holy Spirit to give discernment.

*The word ataktos (unruly) meant literally to be “out of line”; at the same time it always carried a pejorative sense of being disruptive in some way. Fee*

*Given the rest of the evidence of these two letters, they were most likely “out of line” not simply by not working, but also by their depending on others to take care of them; and in this sense, then, they were also being disruptive of the “shalom” that should otherwise exist within the community. Fee*

1. ***Encourage (console) the fainthearted (weak-minded).***

*The second admonition is directed toward “the disheartened,” which the KJV had the misfortune to render as “comfort the feebleminded.” It is doubtful whether even in 1611 the word “feebleminded” pointed to people who had been so thoroughly overcome by present circumstances as to feel themselves unable (or simply unwilling) to continue (on in their service) within the beleaguered Christian community. Fee*

*In such a case they would probably have become disheartened because they had incorrect expectations about the “soon” coming of the Lord. But it is equally possible that Paul is simply referring to those who have become disheartened by the constant barrage of opposition from their fellow townsfolk. In either, or any, case there are some within the believing community who needed encouragement, cheering up, as it were. Fee*

1. ***Help (and give your support to) the weak.***

*But whoever they are, they need the support, or help, of the rest of the believing community. “Weakness,” it should be noted, has very often been held in disdain by others, who think of themselves as the “strong”; however, Paul has here captured one of the marks of truly Christian faith, as it has been exhibited in full by our Lord himself in his earthly life. Fee*

1. ***Be patient with everyone.***

***WuestNT:*** Bealways patient toward all with that patience which endures ill-treatment meekly and without retaliation.

***Amplified****:* Be very patient with everybody [always keeping your temper]

*It should (especially) be noted that the verb in this case is not Paul’s usual one when the concept of “patience” as such is involved. In contrast to his more usual hypomonē, which is regularly translated “patience” in English, the present word apparently originated as a way of describing those who were “long-tempered” vis-à-vis the “short-tempered.” Thus, in contrast to hypomonē, this verb (makrothymeite) carries the sense of “suffering long” with regard to someone else. Fee*

*Paul’s own usage. “Patience” (hypomonē) is needed in trying situations; “forbearance [long suffering]” is what is required in interpersonal relationships — “with everyone.” Fee*

**Verse 15 🙠**

See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

1. **This deeply reflects the teaching of Jesus.**

***Matthew 5:38-48***

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’****39****But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.****40****If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.****41****And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.****42****Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.* ***43****“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’****44****But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,****45****that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.****46****For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?****47****And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?****48****Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

[***Romans 12:21***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+12:21&version=NKJV)

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

***Galatians 6:9-10***

*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

*The real difficulty most of God’s people have with this admonition is that God may not give such people what they deserve, but may show them the same kind of mercy that he showed to themselves! Fee*

*The second imperative then offers the truly Christian form of “paying back”: “but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.” Here Paul’s own word order catches his emphases. In contrast to paying back wrong for wrong, “always the good pursue,” he insists. It must be “always,” rather than “hit or miss”; it must be “what is good,” rather than “wrong for wrong”; and it must be “pursued,” rather than done occasionally and at one’s convenience. Fee*

*But the God of Scripture is fortunately not a “typical American”; rather, he has revealed himself, both in the Old Testament and especially in the Incarnation, as the “God of the humble,” the God who pleads the cause of the poor and indigent. Thus at this point Paul, by the Spirit, has placed himself in the long line of biblical authors who “plead the cause of the needy.” Fee*

1. Unless stated otherwise, all scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible, **(NASB)**

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2. If you would like to read a book on the topic of spiritual abuse, we highly recommend, The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse by Jeff VanVonderen. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)