

those whom God places in a position of authority are to be respected as having the authority God gives them.

In our text, there is no information regarding how the leaders were chosen nor is there any indication that Paul appointed the leaders in the Thessalonian assembly. The texts in 1Tim. 3:1–11 and Titus 1:5–9, which spell out qualification of leaders (*elders*), were given to Titus and Timothy to aid the choosing of leaders in Ephesus and Crete, but whether there were any such criteria available for the Thessalonian community is not known. Regardless, the need to follow the lead of those who were functioning in a leadership capacity was Paul's primary emphasis. Where an unwillingness to follow appointed leaders prevails, the "door is surely open for chaos."

Further, our text makes it clear that the duties of leaders within the local assembly of believers are to do their leading "diligently" (*κοπιᾶω, κοπιᾶθ*), a word which generally carries the meanings: "become weary or tired, to exert oneself physically, mentally, to work hard, strive, and struggle."¹ Clearly, the word Paul uses means that the position of being a "leader" in a local assembly is not for someone who just wants to be lauded and given authority. It involves genuine labor, caring, and not "giving up" when the going gets rough.

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

Having emphasized in the previous verse that those who fill the appointed office of "overseer" within a local body of believers are to be known as those who *diligently labor among you* (τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν), Paul now goes on to exhort the Thessalonian community to "esteem them very highly." The word translated by the NASB as "esteem" is *ἡγέομαι* (*hegeomai*) which has as one of its primary meanings "to think, consider, or regard," a sense which is clearly the case in our text. In our verse Paul surely uses it not merely to encourage people in a given assembly to "think well" of those who are leaders and teachers, but to recognize the appointed leaders within a community as having their position ordained directly by God. Thus "to esteem" them means to fully appreciate the God-given office they fill, and therefore to be grateful for their labors and to willingly follow their guidance as they endeavor to extol Yeshua and point the people under their guidance to Him.

The additional words, "very highly," which modify the manner

1 BDAG, "κοπιᾶω," p. 558.

in which the community of believers are to esteem overseers within their community, translate the Greek *ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ* (*huperekterissou* < *ἡγέομαι*), combined with the preposition *ὑπέρ*, *hyper*), thus adding the sense of “over and above, beyond, more than.”¹ It is therefore clear that in Paul’s admonishing the Thessalonian community to hold their appointed leaders with a very high regard, he is likewise teaching an important responsibility for believing communities throughout time and place. Clearly, appointed leaders in a given community must constantly seek to fulfill their office in accordance with the pattern set forth in the Scriptures, seeking to lead and nurture the community by teaching the word in truth, serving the members of the community, always pointing them to honor and obey the Lord Who is the very King and Savior of the *ekklesia*, which He purposed with His own blood. Note Paul’s admonition to the leaders of the church in Troas.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.
(Acts 20:28)

The obvious point that Paul makes here is that the supreme and high value of the local assembly of believers is based upon the price which was required to establish their community. And the price was nothing less than the very life of Yeshua, given to pay the penalty of sin for all whom He would redeem and thus to insure their eternal salvation.

... *esteem them very highly in love because of their work.* – Here the emphasis is upon the importance of their work in shepherding, teaching, and caring for the people of the community, with the ultimate goal that together the lives of all the people would honor and glorify the owner and sustainer of the *ekklesia*, Messiah Yeshua Himself.

What is obvious, however, is that appointed overseers in a local community of believers must remain faithful to their calling and thus to maintain as a primary goal to honor Yeshua in all that they do. This includes teaching the Scriptures, shepherding in a way that best meets the needs of the community, being a godly example in their own lives and family and keeping themselves “unspotted from the world.” As James notes:

1 BDAG, p. 1031.

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1:27)

In this text, James uses “orphans and widows” as an example of those who have nothing to “give back” and thus helping them would be done, not for payment or getting something in return, but purely out of a desire to help and in so doing, to honor the Lord. This then highlights the proper motivation for those men who are appointed as overseers in any local community of believers. An overseer must labor for the glory of the Lord, and not in order to gain power, personal prestige, or financial gain.

The positive reason that Paul gives us in our text, that overseers should be highly esteemed is because, when serving others as God intends, they will be used of the Lord to shepherd those under their care and thus cause the community more and more to honor the Lord for all of His grace, mercy and love.

MacArthur gives this summary of our text:

God has called pastors and set them apart for the important work of leading His church. Therefore the people under them are to lovingly acknowledge their ministry labors, greatly respect them, overlook their non-sinful human frailties (cf. Prov. 10:12; 1 Peter 4:8), speak well of them, encourage them, and give their best for them.¹

Live in peace with one another. – It is obvious that, because the sinful nature, the “flesh,” remains in all believers, proper submission to appoint leaders will sometimes be a struggle. This can lead to inner turmoil among the believing community, as dissatisfaction with leadership results in gossip and ultimately division. Thus Paul adds his admonition to “live in peace with one another,” which includes those who are appointed as overseers within a local community of believers.

What does it take to “live in peace” when things are taking place within a local community which would inevitably bring dissatisfaction, which in turn may bring about division and chaos? It requires a deep resolve to honor the Lord by refusing to initiate *lashon hara* as well as refusing to listen and receive the negative message that others may be seeking to broadcast. It requires a commitment to seek the Lord’s design and a willingness fully to submit one’s own desires to Him.

1 MacArthur, John. *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 1Thess., p. 172.

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

Once again (cf. v. 12) Paul begins his plea with a plural: “We urge you,” undoubtedly giving reference to all who were given the mission and authority to be apostles. In v. 12 Paul uses the language of “friendship,” writing “We request of you...” Here, he uses a stronger appeal with the word *παρακαλέω* (*parakaleō*), which in this context carries the sense “to make a strong request for something, request, implore, entreat.”¹ The tenor of the word is not “to command” or to “give an ultimatum,” but rather to “urge” in the sense of “to show how a given method will ultimately bring success.”

But what does it take for such an “urging” to be received? It requires a resolve to find what God desires and willingly to submit to Him. Thus, when Paul addresses the Thessalonica community of believers as “brethren,” he once again emphasizes the unity which must exist within the community of believers, for we have been “born again” by the work of the Ruach, thus knitting us together as members of the same “family of God.” In our times it seems to be necessary to make clear that the term “brethren” (*ἀδελφοί*, *adelphoi*) is not always gender specific, but, when found in the plural, could be used in ancient times to refer to “brothers and sisters”² and undoubtedly is used this way in our text. For here Paul is not addressing only men but also women. Clearly, the local body of Messiah is obviously made up of both men and women, and his admonition here is clearly to the whole congregation.

...*admonish the unruly* – We should note, first of all, that Paul’s imperative to “admonish the unruly” is not directed specifically to the overseers but to the whole community. Thus, the duty to admonish those who are causing disunity within the assembly is laid upon the shoulders of everyone. Obviously, quite often a friend and/or close associate will be received better when confronted than would someone who had little or no close relationship with the one being admonished.

The word translated “unruly” by the NASB is *ἄτακτος* (*ataktos*) which is the opposite of *taktos*, which carries the sense of “ordered” or “what is prescribed.” Some modern bible translations consider the word to carry the meaning “idle,” i.e., “lazy,” but this is not a good translation, as Beale notes in his work on our text:

1 BDAG, “παρακαλέω,” p. 765.

2 Cf. BDAG, “ἀδελφός,” p. 18.

...since the word never meant anything like that in the ancient world, where it was used fairly abundantly.¹

Thus, the translation of the word by the English “unruly” is more accurate, and yields the sense of “disorderly” or “disruptive.” Here, the word most likely identifies people within the believing community who are showing up now and again, but who, for all practical purposes, have left the community and are most likely busy spreading negative perspectives of people within the community from their viewpoint.

Here, it appears likely that Paul is urging the community in Thessalonica, not to allow gossip or *lashon hara* to exist within the believing community. The sin of gossip never brings a good result but always is used by the Enemy to divide and to create divisions within the community. Clearly the Scriptures have much to say regarding this kind of sin.

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Eph 4:29)

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless. (James 1:26)

Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the Torah and judges the Torah; but if you judge the Torah, you are not a doer of the Torah but a judge of it. (James 4:11)

With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered. (Prov 11:9)

What, then, should be the response to someone when that person comes to share gossip? With true kindness the best thing is to remind that person that God hates gossip and that it is a grave sin in His eyes. Perhaps the Lord would use such a rebuff to bring the person to seek forgiveness and to guard themselves from engaging in such a sin.

...encourage the fainthearted— The Greek has *ὀλιγοψύχος* (*oligospuxos*) which literally means “the small of soul” which in the Greek society of Paul’s day was a way of describing someone who was often “dis-

1 See Beale, “1Thess” in *IVP New Testament Commentary*, (IVP, 2003), p. 163.

couraged” or “fainthearted.” This admonition of Paul thus counters the previous one who is “unruly,” for a discouraged person may well be someone who is often the subject of gossip and evil reports. Rather than tearing down the reputation of someone who is “fainthearted” or regularly “discouraged,” Paul admonishes us all to help encourage such a person and help them gain strength through a full reliance upon God and His abundant love and ability to bring about that which honors Him and brings Him glory.

...*help the weak* – Paul does not give us enough information here to know whether by “weak” (ἀσθενής, *asthenēs*) he means “weak in faith” or “weak physically.” Since the previous admonition of the “fainthearted” seems to include those who may be struggling in areas of their faith, it is likely that here the term “weak” may point to physical weaknesses, i.e, the sick, lame, blind, or even economically destitute. Indeed, the word *asthenēs* is used in the scriptures to denote those who have a physical weakness.¹ Beale makes this comment regarding our text as it applies to people with physical disabilities:

The church is to be aware of such people within its midst and to take overt measures to meet their needs. Neglect of such disenfranchised people can lead to divisions and discord, as at Corinth when the well-to-do ate as much as they wanted at the Lord’s Supper while poorer church members had nothing to eat and went hungry (1 Cor 11:18–34).²

... *be patient with everyone.* – The word “patient” translates the Greek μακροθυμέω (*makrothumeō*), which carries the sense of:

...to bear up under provocation without complaint, be patient, forbearing.³

Paul often links “patience” with “kindness.” Note the following:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,... (Gal 5:22)

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been

1 Cf, for example: Mt 25:43-45; Lk 9:2; 10:9; Ac 5:15.

2 Beale, op. cit., p. 165.

3 BDAG, μακροθυμέω, p. 612.

called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1–3)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Messiah rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col 3:12–15)

It is when we strive to “put on the Lord Yeshua and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom 13:14), that we are more and more enabled and empowered by the Ruach to serve each other within the body of Messiah, first for His glory and then for the building up of each other in order to serve Him by truly helping one another.

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.

Here Paul gives us the foundational truth upon which the body of Messiah, the *ekklesia*, will function as God intends. Surely if we all were intent upon never repaying evil for evil, harmony within the local community would be greatly enhanced! To do so we first must commit ourselves to follow the admonition of Paul in Colossians:

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Messiah rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col 3:12–15)

It is clear that one of the most deeply seated aspects of the sinful nature is that of revenge. Here Paul counters this common response of revenge by instructing us to “put on love” even as we have been loved by God Himself. Undoubtedly it was the practice of this radical ethic that likely had a significant impact upon the spread of the gospel throughout the ancient world.