

Godly Leaders And Loving Churches

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[0 : 00] The following sermon is made available by Lakeside Bible Church in Cornelius, North Carolina.

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Philippians chapter 2, we're going to start reading at verse number 19. But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort when I know your state.

For I have no man like-minded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ. But ye know the proof of him, that as a son with the Father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

[1 : 11] Him, therefore, I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly. Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and companion in labor and fellow soldier, but your messenger and he that ministered to my wants.

For he longed after you all and was full of heaviness because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick, nigh unto death, but God had mercy on him.

And not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sit him, therefore, the more carefully or eagerly, that when you see him again ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.

Receive him, therefore, in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such in reputation. Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service towards me.

Beyond its immediate purpose of delivering administrative details of Paul's ministry, this passage really demonstrates for us a mutual love that existed between this church and its leaders.

[2 : 30] In fact, the whole reason that Paul is writing this letter back to the Philippians, as we actually discover here in these verses, is because of the Philippians' love and concern for him.

We know that he'd spent nearly four years at this point in prison for preaching the gospel, and after being in prison for that long, the Philippians cared so much about knowing what his current state was and knowing what the state of his ministry was, that they sent this man Epaphroditus, one of their own members.

He traveled 800 miles to get to Rome in order that he could take some money to Paul first. In those times, in the prison scenario in Rome, especially in Paul's situation, the government didn't take care of their food, it didn't take care of their clothing, it didn't take care of their daily expenses.

That was at the expense of the prisoner himself. So they delivered this large sum of money to Paul that actually came out of their poverty in order that they may show their concern and their love for him.

Epaphroditus carries this, the 800-mile journey to Rome, in order to provide Paul with him, and then to stay and minister to his needs there. This showed great love on the part of the Philippian church.

[3 : 44] And then that love is then reciprocated on Paul's part, as not only he sends this letter to them that is clearly endearing in its language, but as we find out in these passages, he cares that the church not be left on its own.

He's going to send somebody along with the letter, not only Epaphroditus, but he's hoping in addition to coming himself, that he can send Timothy, his companion in the ministry. Unfortunately, the relationship between a church and its leaders is often marked by tension rather than love.

And given the fact that even the best of Christians still battle and struggle with sinfulness, this is not necessarily unexpected. The Scripture is clear that our enemy desires to destroy the church. It comes as no surprise that he would assault the relationship between church leadership and the congregation itself. At times, this shows in a prideful pastor that's more concerned about his own interest than he is with actually shepherding the flock.

Other times, it reveals itself by a congregation that questions constantly the motives of their pastor, refuses to submit to the authority that's been given.

[5 : 04] Really, what this passage does for us, and to better aid our study this morning, is it gives us three examples of what the church is supposed to look like in this regard.

Two of them are church leaders in Timothy and Epaphroditus. And the third example is the church itself. Well, let's first look at Timothy, which is for us the caring pastor, the caring pastor.

Look with me again at verse 19. Paul says, I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort when I know your state.

Again, showing the mutual love and concern that even existed in Paul's part, though he's not one of the examples we will study in depth today. Not only were the Philippians concerned with knowing Paul's state in prison in Rome, but one of the reasons Paul is sending Timothy and Epaphroditus is so that they could report back to him of how things are going in Philippi.

It was this mutual love, he cared. Verse 20, for I have no man like-minded who will care in this same way as I care, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ, but ye know the proof of him, that as a son with the Father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

[6 : 25] Of the three examples we're considering in this passage this morning, Timothy is the one about which we know the most. We're first introduced to him in Acts chapter 16 when he joined Paul's ministry team.

And it's actually interesting to note as you study that chapter that the Philippian church was the first one that he assisted Paul in starting. We know that he returned to Philippi on a number of occasions.

In fact, we believe that it was actually in Philippi in Macedonia when Paul wrote one of his letters to the Corinthian church. And in that letter, he attributes part of the letter and its writing to this man, Timothy.

There's little doubt that there was a unique bond between he and the church. And he was more than just a pastoral associate to Paul, as often Paul refers to him as, like he did in this passage, as his son in the faith.

Having been taught the scriptures from a young age by his mother and his grandmother, Timothy was a gifted pastor. And he was often Paul's representative to churches when he couldn't be present himself.

[7 : 32] He eventually became the pastor of the church in Ephesus. And we have two letters in the New Testament written by Paul directly to Timothy that describe for us in detail for us the nature of his pastorate there.

Timothy was an exemplary elder or pastor in the church. And though he had his own struggles with timidity, the reality of his calling and the effectiveness of his influence in the early church is unmistakable as we study the scriptures.

Now that's not to insinuate that Timothy was the pastor of the Philippian church. That's not what it's saying here. But because of his relationship with this church and time and time again, revisiting it in order to counsel it and encourage this congregation a pastoral way, there's no doubt that they certainly would have looked at him in a pastoral way.

They would have received him certainly as a leader in the church. And so Paul endeavors to send Timothy to them because he would show this care. But then Paul tells us in verse 21 that there is no one else who will care for them the way that Timothy will care for them.

No one will be concerned for them the way that Timothy and Paul would be concerned for them.

And so it's not so much Timothy's background that provides the example to us in this passage, but rather it's the example of his life as a pastor that stood in contrast to the other pastors in Rome.

[9 : 03] We already looked at that in chapter one. In fact, flip back just a page to Philippians chapter one in your Bibles and look at what the nature of the other pastors were there in Rome that Paul was dealing with on a regular basis.

Look at verse 12. Paul in prison says, I would that you understand brethren that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather into the furtherance of the gospel so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace and all other places.

And many of the brethren, he says in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds are much more bold to speak the word without fear. And then he says, some of them indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, but some also of goodwill.

Now, the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely supposing to add afflictions to my bonds, but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel.

It's not surprising that Timothy, that Paul trusted Timothy to care for the people in Philippi, but it is surprising that he was the only person that Paul trusted to care for the people in Philippi.

[10:11] We know that there were other people on Paul's ministry team like Luke and Aristarchus, but obviously they were unavailable at this particular time. And the faithful pastors that were in Rome that we just read about, obviously with the state of the church there, it was necessary for them to stay.

So Paul looks around and he has no one because many of the others that he could have sent wouldn't have actually cared for the people. They would have cared only for themselves.

Paul's options were either to send his closest companion and helper in Rome or risk the health of the church by sending a Roman pastor that cared more about himself than the people in Philippi.

And this is a testament to Paul's character. He would have rather suffered himself in prison without the aid of Timothy or Epaphroditus than he would have allowed for the church in Philippi to suffer with poor leadership.

The sinfulness among the pastors to which Timothy is being contrasted is not the content of their preaching, but it's in the spirit of their pastoring.

[11:22] These men were not heretics. As we just read in chapter one, it wasn't that they were preaching a false gospel. If Paul were to send them to Philippi, it wasn't that he was worried that they would come to Philippi and preach a gospel other than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Their problem was not in the content of their preaching. It was in the spirit of the way that they pastored. He rejoiced that they preached the gospel, but he said that at least in Rome, they were doing it with selfish ambition and conceit.

The fundamental difference between Timothy and these other men was not their message, but it was their focus. It wasn't the message that they were preaching in Sunday morning worship.

It was the way that they were leading, caring nothing about the flock of God, but only caring to build their own following in order that they may achieve what they thought Paul had achieved as far as ministry was concerned.

In fact, that was part of the problem in Rome. As Paul was in prison there in chapter one, part of the issue wasn't that they were preaching a false gospel, it's that they were taking advantage of the fact that he was in prison, hoping to pull away his following in order to build their own following.

[12:38] Yes, they preached the gospel, but their motives were not pure motives. They weren't gospel-purposed motives. They were motives that cared only about themselves and only about their own interest. So when Paul writes that he's gonna send Timothy to Philippi, he says, the reason I'm sending Timothy is because, in contrast to all of these other pastors around me, he's the only one that will legitimately care for your soul.

It wasn't in his message. It was in his focus. And there's two parts to Timothy's focus that Paul alludes to here. The first one is in verses 20 and 21, and it was the fact that Timothy's focus was on caring for the church.

It was on caring for the church. Verse 20, Paul says, there's no person that would naturally care for the church the way that Timothy would. Like-minded in verse 20, it leads one sold, indicates that Timothy had the same genuine love for these people that Paul had for them.

Of course, the care that Paul is referring to is a selfless spiritual care. It wasn't that he was saying that when I send Timothy to you, he's gonna be concerned with caring for you in a physical way, though that is a part of pastoring, it would have been a part of what he did.

He would have cared for the people in a physical way. But Paul wasn't saying, I'm sending Timothy your way because I know Timothy's gonna be the one that comes out and cuts your grass for you every week. That's not what he meant. He's not saying, hey, I'm gonna send Timothy your way because I know Timothy's gonna be the one, he's gonna be on your doorstep every day to make sure he can cook you meals and he can do all, that's not the type of care that he's talking about.

[14 : 15] He's saying nobody's gonna care for your soul the way that Timothy will care for your soul. Timothy would have their spiritual life as individuals and as the church body as his primary concern.

Rather than format his ministry to elevate himself or gain a paycheck, Timothy would genuinely care to preach the truth and lead the church to please the Lord.

That was the nature of his care. Sure, he wanted to help them in whatever way he could help them. But the focus of his care was on the spiritual side of their life.

And just as a side note here as your pastor, while this isn't commanded necessarily in scripture, I do think that this is an example of why there's wisdom in first seeking pastoral leadership from within the local church before considering it from outside of the local church.

And I hope you pray for that. That as the Lord blesses our church and as we grow, I hope part of your prayer is that the Lord would raise up leaders among us, men that are proven.

[15 : 25] Did you see that in Paul's statement as to why he would send Timothy? He said, all these other people, they seek their own, but you know the proof of him. You know him. He's been there.

You've heard him preach. You've seen the way he cares. You've seen the way he carries his life. You've seen the righteousness that he's exhibited. You know what probably is the motives of his heart.

He's been proven. He's been among you. And I think there's wisdom in that. It's not that we can't always look outside of the walls of our church, but I think we first should look inside of the walls and we should pray to that end.

Pray that God would raise leaders in our church in this way. Not only was he focused on caring for the church, but Timothy's primary focus was on faithfully preaching the gospel.

It was on faithfully preaching the gospel. Look again at verse 22. But you know the proof of him that as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

[16 : 28] The specific proof that Paul was alluding to was Timothy's faithfulness in preaching the word. In fact, the natural care for the spiritual well-being of the church on Timothy's part was just an extension of his commitment to faithfully preach the gospel of Christ.

Of course, we understand through the scriptures, this is the primary role of pastoral leadership, to teach and preach the word. Acts chapter six says that the pastors and apostles there devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

Paul would reiterate later in one of his letters to Timothy in the pastoral letters, he would say, Timothy, preach the word. Be instant in season and out of season.

Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. Peter encouraged elders and pastors in his letter in 1 Peter chapter five, he says, to the elders which are among you, I exhort.

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not under compulsion, but willingly as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

[17 : 47] And when the chief shepherd shall appear, Peter writes, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Yes, Timothy was focused on caring for the people, but that was just an extension of his primary concern for the primary role of a pastor, to preach and teach faithfully the truths of the Bible.

The proper care of the church begins with the proper focus on faithfully preaching the Bible, whether it's a popular thing to do or whether it's an unpopular thing to do.

As Paul wrote to Timothy, in season and out of season. In fact, a pastor's love for his people is directly related to the extent to which he's willing to preach to them the truth, even when the truth is difficult.

And again, it's an encouragement to us as a church that as the Lord blesses and grows our church and we have need for a plurality of leaders in our congregation, that we would look for people not only that have a heart of care, but that their heart of care would be an extension of their primary desire to preach and teach the truths of God.

Because that's the gift of pastors to the church, that God would use them to teach us what God has told us in his word. And so first we see in this mutual love and concern between church and leaders, we see the first element of that was a caring pastor.

[19 : 19] Secondly, we see Epaphroditus. And Epaphroditus in this case is the selfless servant. He's the selfless servant. Look with me at verse 25.

Yet I suppose that necessary to send to you Epaphroditus. Now, when he's talking of sending Timothy, he said that he's hoping to send Timothy soon, eventually. And then there's a caveat to Timothy coming, which is waiting to see what's gonna happen to Paul's imprisonment. Paul wanted to go as well. And if Paul was gonna be stuck in prison a little bit longer, he was gonna go ahead and send Timothy.

But if he was able to get out soon enough, he was gonna come along with Timothy and there was gonna be the pastoral representation of the both of them. When we get to Epaphroditus here, it's not that he's thinking to send Epaphroditus eventually.

It's a guarantee. He's sending Epaphroditus. And we know that Epaphroditus went, although we don't know about Timothy, we know that Epaphroditus went because they received the letter.

[20 : 20] The very letter that Paul is writing was delivered by Epaphroditus. Look back again at verse 25. I suppose it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and companion in labor and fellow soldier, but your messenger and he that ministered to my wants, for he longed after you and was full of heaviness because that you had heard that he had been sick.

For indeed he was sick nigh unto death, but God had mercy on him and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. While Timothy is the example in this passage about which we know the most, Epaphroditus is the one about which we know the least.

In fact, this is the only place in scripture that we find his name. Verse 25 gives us an understanding of what Epaphroditus' role was in being the messenger of the Philippian church.

We find out in chapter four that the church had collected an offering for Paul, quite a large sum of money and it was actually out of the deep pockets of their poverty, their empty pockets.

They saved what they could save in order that they could send help and aid to Paul in Rome. And so obviously, Epaphroditus was a trustworthy individual. He was entrusted to carry this sum of money all the way to Rome and actually the money make it all the way to Rome.

[21 : 44] Not only that, but their intention was that once he got there, he would remain there for as long as Paul needed him, serving the needs. Paul says, he is your messenger and he is the minister to my wants.

He was there to help Paul in whatever way Paul needed help. Clearly, this was a good man with a good testimony, a trustworthy individual.

We don't know exactly what his role was within the church at Philippi. We're not specifically told that he held an office in the church. But given that he was trusted with this task and described with this kind of character, I think it's hard to imagine that he wasn't among the leadership of the church there.

In fact, many people have suggested that because of his duties, always referencing back to a type of service, many have suggested that it's likely that he was a deacon in the church in Philippi, which simply means to serve, they're servants of the church.

That was obviously his character. We don't know for sure, but whether or not he was a leader in the church is without question. It may not have been with an office or a position, but he was a leader because of his character.

[22 : 58] He was a selfless individual. Verses 26 and 27, we find out that on his journey to Rome, he fell deathly ill. Whatever this illness was, it had brought him to the brink of death, which most people in that day weren't gonna come back from.

So Paul says, God in his mercy has provided healing to Epaphroditus and he was nursed back to health in order to go back to Philippi. But what does this tell us about his character? That even though things were difficult, he was committed to serving the church even at his own expense. How can a church and its leaders exist with love and concern and with health the way that God has determined that the church should exist? Not only does it take a caring pastor, but it takes some selfless servants who are willing to serve the church even when it comes at their own personal expense.

In Timothy's example, we see the proper focus of church leadership. In the example of Epaphroditus, we see the proper qualities in church leadership.

For any church to be healthy, it must ensure that those in those roles of leadership are actually qualified to be there. Here's the descriptions that he gives. The first one is my brother.

[24 : 17] Look at that in verse 25. I hope to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother. This is simple. It just simply means that Epaphroditus was a genuine believer, a pretty important quality for a leader in a church.

It would blow your mind how many churches are unhealthy, not because they have poor views of the gospel, but because they put people in leadership who have no business being in leadership. They're in a form of leadership and they're not even believers in the gospel themselves. They've been chosen because of their intellectual prowess, or they've been chosen because they've been successful in their business and they have a particular charisma about them as they lead people.

People are drawn maybe to their personality and that's why they're chosen. Paul says the first thing about Epaphroditus is he's my brother. Perhaps you've heard people refer to other people as the real deal when they're talking about them.

It's their way of insinuating that you can trust this person. They're not gonna pull one over on you. This is basically Paul's way of telling the church in Philippi, Epaphroditus is the real deal.

[25 : 25] I've seen him serve. I've heard his testimony. I've listened to him preach. I've watched him live his life. He's the real deal when it comes to the gospel and when it comes to the faith. And that's the first quality that's listed here.

The second one is companion in labor. Companion in labor. 12 times in the New Testament, Paul uses this term to describe someone that had faithfully served the Lord with him.

The indication is not only that Epaphroditus was a hard worker, but that he enjoyed partnership in the gospel. Partnership.

MacArthur's helpful when he says that this has the idea of an affectionate partnership, not that of a merely impersonal official relationship. And then we understand, of course, that in these qualities, there's no room for laziness in the work of God.

It doesn't benefit the church to have leaders who will not be willing to fulfill their duty as leaders and sacrifice as necessary. And so Paul says, Epaphroditus is my companion in labor.

[26 : 32] Thirdly, we see that he was a fellow soldier. He's a fellow soldier. Now, in verse 27 of chapter one, Paul has used the analogy of a soldier to picture the way that Christians are to stand firm on the gospel.

And here we see Epaphroditus as the example of that soldier that stands firm on the gospel. The insinuation of this term and of this phrase is that he endured.

He endured this persecution. In fact, his standing firm was against opposition that would come against the gospel message, that would come against the doctrines of the Bible. And Epaphroditus was a man. He was a good soldier in the Lord.

He stood firm on the truth of God. He persevered in the truth, even despite the hardship. Paul says the same thing to Timothy in one of his letters. He says, share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

And of course, that's a vital quality of church leadership. Fourthly, we see that he was a messenger and minister. At the heart of this description is the quality of being servant-hearted.

[27 : 40] Whether you're examining Epaphroditus or Timothy, either one, they were fundamentally servants. Epaphroditus didn't have to make this journey to Rome.

It wasn't an easy journey. 800 miles is a long way to go when you don't have an airplane or a car. It's a long journey. It's a dangerous journey. He's got a large sum of money on him. He didn't have to do this.

He put himself at risk. His health was at risk. Why did he do that? Because fundamentally, he was a servant. He wanted to serve the church. He wanted to serve Paul.

Timothy, we know through the scriptures, was a gifted pastor. It wasn't just that he was in a position of pastoral leadership, but he was gifted at it. We're told that he was instrumental in the early church, even despite some of his weaknesses.

He didn't have to just go back and forth at Paul's beckoning call. He could have easily been like the other pastors in Rome and probably would have gathered his own following fairly simply.

[28 : 38] But fundamentally, Timothy was a servant. What are we looking for in church leadership? Someone who will serve. Someone who will serve. Not someone who will lord over the flock, though authority is a part of it, but someone who fundamentally will follow Jesus's example of humble service.

And then the last quality that we see is that he longed after you all. What's interesting about this one is it communicates the same care that Timothy had. Once Epaphroditus got to Rome, it seems like he got a little bit homesick.

The homesickness that Epaphroditus is sensing is not just because he was a homebody and he was ready to get back home. We're told in these verses, in fact, look with me at verse 27. He longed after you all and was full of heaviness. But why? Because that ye had heard that he had been sick. What's interesting about Epaphroditus' concern is that his concern had to do with their concern.

You ever met somebody like that? They cared a lot less about their own condition and they just were concerned. They didn't want you to worry about their condition. This word heaviness, it's only used one other time in the scriptures.

[29 : 50] And it was in reference to Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. What amazing concern and love that he had. What does this tell you?

This is one of the reasons. If there's an indication that he was actually an elder in the church, I think this is it. Shepherds smell like sheep. And when you have a good leader among you, it's somebody that wants to be with you.

We should be careful about leaders that want nothing to do with the flock, that care more about being served than they care about serving, that care more about the position than they care about the people.

And so as we see these qualities, we're reminded of what we should look for as we pray for the Lord to raise up leaders in our own church. So we see Timothy as the caring pastor, Epaphroditus as the selfless servant.

Thirdly and finally and quickly, we see the Philippian church was the loving congregation. There's two sides to this mutual love, two sides to this mutual concern.

[31 : 02] Both existed in this relationship in Philippi. Look at verse 28. I sent him therefore the more eagerly that when you see him again, you may rejoice and that I may be less sorrowful.

The indication there is that they would rejoice whenever Epaphroditus got there. They would be excited to see him. Verse 29. Receive him therefore, Paul instructs, in the Lord with all gladness and hold such in reputation because for the work of Christ, he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life to supply your lack of service towards me.

A healthy relationship can only exist when all parties are committed to loving and serving one another. This begins with godly leadership in the church, but it must also include a genuinely loving congregation.

We're conditioned in our culture to be suspicious of leadership and authority. The world where we demand rights in all things, we often find it difficult to have room for proper love for and submission to authority.

But love, care, and submission must be mutually demonstrated between church leaders and the congregation. Otherwise, the church is doomed to fail. It certainly won't glorify the Lord.

[32 : 27] There's no doubt that the Philippian church was a loving one, and we've seen it in many ways in our study of this book, not only in the way that they gave to Paul, but even Paul himself thanked them for their partnership.

He loved them. There's a warm tone, not just because of his love, but because of the love that they reciprocated back. This was a loving church. But in verses 28 through 30, we're told or instructed by Paul that the way that a church loves its leaders is in the way that they receive their leaders.

The idea here is that churches welcome them with open arms. Rather than being suspicious, rather than constantly questioning their motives, rather than refusing to submit to their authority, they embrace them.

They welcome them. There's two ways that Paul tells this church to receive them and will be done. The first way was to receive them with joy. Receive them with joy. Look at verse 29.

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness. Up until his arrival, they may not have had any idea what was actually going on with Epaphroditus as far as his health.

[33 : 45] We know that they had heard about his illness because he was concerned about their concern. But they probably had no idea that he had survived at this point. A part of their gladness and rejoicing would just be at the simple fact that they probably had been praying for him relentlessly.

And to see him alive and well would have been encouraging. This is a testament to their love. But Paul still felt that it would be necessary to instruct them to receive him with gladness.

But why? He was already loved of the church. They cared about his physical well-being. I think the best thing for us to assume here is that they would have otherwise questioned the motives of his ministry.

One of the reasons for sending Epaphroditus to Rome was not only to deliver this money, but it was to stay there. It was to serve Paul in whatever way Paul needed to be served.

They were to be, he was to be their representative to Paul for as long as Paul needed him. And then he was to report back to Philippi in order to say what was going on with Paul, what was going on with the gospel there.

[34 : 54] When he gets there, he's been really sick. And not only has he been sick, he served Paul well, but he longed to be back home. And so Paul graciously says, go back home.

Paul needed him, but he said, go back home. The first thing they would have probably expected when they saw him, despite being joyful over his healing, was why are you back so soon?

We thought you'd be there a lot longer. Perhaps Paul anticipated that there would be suspicion on the part of the congregation that because it didn't work out the way that they wanted it to work out, maybe there was something that was actually wrong with Epaphroditus.

Maybe he quit on the ministry. Maybe he did something he wasn't supposed to do. Maybe he didn't serve in the way that he wasn't supposed to serve. And so Paul goes to great lengths here to say, not only he's my brother, but he's been my companion and he served me well.

And you should receive him with gladness, not just because of his illness, but because he has served me well and he has served the gospel well. How are we to view the leaders in our life, the spiritual leaders that God has given us, not just me, but any leader that would be raised up in our church on God's part?

[36 : 01] We receive them with joy, not with suspicion, but with joy and with love and with concern. They receive them with gladness. And then finally, he says, receive them with honor.

Receive them with honor. Look again at verse 29. And hold such in reputation, he says. Really means hold them in honor. This is not the kind of honor that's demonstrated by parading leaders in front of the church and erupting in applause.

It's not what this is. He's not talking about creating this environment like you see at the State of the Union address, where the president walks into the House of Congress and as he walks in, everyone erupts in applause and he can go as quickly or as slowly as he wants to go.

And if he goes super slow and he really wants to soak in the applause, they'll remain standing and they'll applaud for as long as they need to stand and applaud until the president is ready to give his address. That's not what Paul's saying.

In fact, he doesn't say honor them because he's got a great personality. He may not have had a great personality. He may have been dull. He doesn't say honor them because you connect with them.

[37 : 11] He doesn't say honor them because of this parade and the charade that you need. He says hold them in high regard because of what they do in the Lord. Look at verse 30.

Because for the work of Christ, he was nigh unto death. Paul gives another instruction to the Thessalonian church. In 1 Thessalonians 5, he says, I beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you to esteem them highly for their work's sake.

And Paul says the way that you honor them, the way that you esteem them is not by rising up and applauding every time they walk into the building, but he says esteem them highly in love.

How do you honor spiritual leadership? Not through applause. You honor them in love, in the same love and concern and care that you want them to show towards the flock.

You show that same love and care and concern for your leaders and respect them, not because of who they are, but because of what they do for the Lord.

[38 : 18] It's not based on their personality and gifting, but it's on the basis of their work for Christ. And so Paul says the example of this healthy church relationship is seen in a loving congregation that receives their leaders just as you do.

Relationship between a church and its leaders is so very important. And we must be mindful of appointing leaders that meet the biblical qualifications for pastoral leadership.

Pastors and deacons must focus on the gospel and they need to have a genuine love and concern for the church. But the church must also lovingly receive them and honor them in love because it is

God that's put them there.

This mutual love is not easy because love is messy, right? Love in any regard is messy and it's vulnerable. And when you add to it that everybody in the relationship is imperfect and sinful, it complicates it that much more.

There's gonna be times in the life of our church where I'm gonna be a disappointment to you. I hope that in those times of disappointment, unless it is a situation that the scripture says I need to be removed, I hope that those times of disappointment will be met with love and concern on your part. [39 : 50] The other part of this covenant between church and leader is that when you disappoint me, my promise is that it'll be met with love and care and concern as well.

Because at the end of the day, we're all still sheep and God may have put me in a particular position to lead in a church and he may do that with some of you as well.

But fundamentally, we're sinful beings. And we only represent the chief shepherd. And we wanna do that well. And we wanna do it with honor and with love and with grace.

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[40 : 56] We meet every Sunday morning at 10 a.m. in the gym at Cornelius Elementary School. We'd love to meet you.