

Spiritual Leadership

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[0:00] Well, this morning is really kind of a pick-up from last week as we talked about the significance!

And depending upon your orientation, depending upon where you're coming from, your background, and maybe even your work experience, there is a sense in which we look to leaders to kind of be the end-all for us in setting the course and helping to create a healthy environment. That unless we have good leaders with certain qualities, we can't ever hope to have a healthy organization or a successful company or, in our case, a healthy church.

And certainly there is a significant factor of having healthy leaders, but today I want to draw out from our text today the significance of a healthy body that is instrumental in selecting and choosing out healthy leaders.

And also coming alongside those leaders and allowing the ministry to be effective because of the work of God in your lives in carrying out the ministry in our midst.

[1:47] It's clear that healthy leaders are important, but without a healthy church, that leadership is going to be disruptive and ineffective.

Maybe the telltale example of that is to go back a bit in history and to look at Jonathan Edwards.

And those of you who would know Jonathan Edwards would be familiar with a man who was key in helping to lead America into two significant revivals.

The first and second great awakening that we enjoyed as a country. And for 25 years, Jonathan Edwards faithfully preached and proclaimed the word of God in his church, which happened to be his grandpa's church.

But over the course of 25 years, you would think that a church that is hearing the deep, living truths of the scripture would be healthy, but in fact, they were not.

And after 25 years of ministry, Jonathan Edwards was fired from his position, expelled from his church, and only 10% of his members voted for him to stay.

[3:07] What was the issue? The issue was a commitment that Jonathan Edwards had to the sanctity of communion and preserving that holy ordinance for those who were truly saved.

For those who had actually come to faith in Christ, those are the individuals he wanted to be able to participate. And to the exclusion of those who did not know Christ, he wanted to preserve them from the ramifications of that, taking that in an unholy, ungodly way.

That's what the deal breaker was. That's what sent him over the edge. And for all of the ministry and sound leadership that he provided for that church, it was still insufficient to overcome the unhealthy nature of the body.

So as we come to our text this morning, I want to point this out that we've kind of fast-forwarded a bit in our study. Last week we were in chapter 2, now all of a sudden we're in chapter 5.

And for some of you, you're wondering, what in the world happened here? Did we just forget and leave behind all the other chapters? The answer is no, but that we wanted to use 1 Thessalonians as a means to address this important topic.

[4:31] Especially given the fact that here in October, you're going to be instrumental in nominating leaders who will serve you as deacons here in this church. What do you look for?

And what are the qualifications for those leaders? And what would you expect them to do? These are all important in our conversation and things that will come up in our passage today from 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, beginning in verse 12.

Let me read this for us and we'll begin in our study. If you're a guest with us today, you can find it on page 988 in the Pew Bible in front of you.

It says, Be patient with them all.

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always.

[5:48] Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil.

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.

He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. And I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Now just in reading through that passage this morning, there should be a couple of things that really stand out to you in just a cursory reading of that passage.

First, it is loaded with commands. One after the other, there are this stream of imperatives that Paul addresses to this church.

[7:04] Things that he expects them to do, things that are directed to them specifically as members of the body of Christ and as those who are fellowshiping together in community.

He addresses them on at least two occasions. We see here in verse 12, he says, we ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor over you.

And then in verse 14, we urge you, brothers. These commands go not to the leaders themselves, but we're going to find the significance of our personal contribution to the health of the body.

If you want to have a healthy church, you must be a healthy member. It's all really is as simple as that. Certainly, it's important to have healthy leaders.

But it begins with having a healthy church. It begins with being a healthy member. And Paul begins to understand and is helping the church to understand the significance of their contribution to make this church a church that not only glorifies God, but is effectively accomplishing the objectives in the world around them.

[8:24] We're going to step through this and we're going to see what does it take then to be a healthy member. What does it take to be a person who is contributing well to the body of Christ and helping to assist and helping to come alongside this process and be used of God to create a healthy environment, a church that is glorifying Him and is working out its purpose in the world.

We find the first purpose, the first recognition of the quality of this church in verses 12 and 13. It begins, Paul begins with this, affirming your leaders.

That's the first goal. Recognizing the significance of affirming your leaders. Now really, right here at the outset, I want to make it clear that although I'm a pastor here, this is really more about the deacon process and the leadership that we have as a church.

I don't want this to seem self-serving in any way. And in a sense, there is a responsibility for me as well to be robing myself and adorning myself with the same characteristics.

That as God has permitted us to have diverse leadership here at this church, it's important for all the leaders to be treating one another this way and it's important for the members of the church to be doing this for their leaders.

[10:02] This is something we're all commanded to do. This is something that we all must adorn our lives with and that is beginning with affirming your leaders.

It begins right here at the start. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you. It really begins by recognizing their labor.

By recognizing their labor. And so I want to just pull out some observations for you to help you understand what does that look like and how does that happen?

How do we begin to recognize their labor? Well, first, I think we recognize that it's our personal responsibility. That the Apostle Paul is speaking to the members of this church and he's telling them to take action.

Don't be inactive in this process. Don't be indifferent about this process. Be actively engaged in the ministry so that you can personally recognize those who are in your church and those who are taking responsibility.

[11:14] Those who are leading in this way. Paul uses an endearing term to request and to implore and to encourage them to a certain activity.

He doesn't use his apostolic authority in this particular verse, but he is coming as a friend would for a peer. And he's coming alongside of them and just making a request and helping them to recognize their personal responsibility in identifying leaders.

The church was already doing so well in so many areas and they just needed some encouragement to step up their game and to continue to be a church that was healthy.

It began with recognizing their personal responsibility. Second, it was important for them to recognize the efforts of those around them. To recognize the efforts of those around them.

And although this is not up on the screen, this is extra, no extra charge. He says, respect those who labor.

[12:24] They're diligently laboring. It's the word in the Greek that would point to labor to the point of exhaustion. Labor to the point of sweat and even pain and a sense of suffering that is taking place in their life.

There is this expending of energy and a personal investment in the ministry. Paul had already set this kind of example. We saw that last week in chapter 2 when we're reading his example of spiritual ministry in this church.

He says in chapter 2, verse 11, for you know how like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God.

Well, how did that all start? Well, it started as in verse 9, you remember our labor and our toil. We work night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

The apostle Paul had set the example. He had helped to condition them to recognize what true labor looked like. It was exhausting, but it was for the sake of the body.

[13:44] He did whatever he needed to do to set the precedent for godly leadership. He did this in Colossae. He did this in Ephesus. Wherever the apostle Paul went, he was committed to labor at his own expense for the sake of those that he was serving.

He tells them to respect those who labor among them. This is really an unusual word. Respect is a translation of the common New Testament word to know by experience.

The connotation here is that these believers would be able to identify, would be able to recognize, they would come to an awareness of those who were working among them because they were in community with these individuals.

They got to see it firsthand. It wasn't just something that they heard about, but it was something they witnessed. There was no indication that Paul had actually appointed leaders in this city.

As we've been working through this little letter, we've become familiar with the fact that Paul's time in Thessalonica was really pretty small. Maybe a matter of weeks or a few months.

[15:04] And so, there wasn't any time for him to identify leaders among them. There wasn't time for him to establish, well, these are going to be the pastors and these are going to be the deacons of your church.

There just wasn't time for that to develop. And so, what Paul is trying to help them understand is here are the cues, here are the indicators that you can look for to identify the people who are growing in leadership among you.

See, Paul, as we saw in chapter 1, was committed to the understanding that the Holy Spirit was actively at work in this church. And because the Spirit was at work in this church, he had regenerated this group of believers, he had indwelt this group of believers, he had gifted this group of believers, and he had allowed them to experience a measure of spiritual fruit.

So, as Paul was committed to the work of the Spirit in the lives of these people, he knew that what was going to happen over time is there would be people that the Holy Spirit would gift for leadership and for teaching, and they would just begin to rise to the top.

They would begin to recognize the call of God in their life, and they would begin to put that call to work in the church. They would begin to commit themselves to ministry and to service among the people within the body.

[16:38] And I believe that's what's happening here. Similar to what we find in Acts chapter 6, and so I just encourage you to keep your finger in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and turn with me briefly to Acts chapter 6.

Now, what's taking place in Acts chapter 6 is the church is beginning to explode.

There are growing numbers of individuals who are coming to faith in Jesus Christ. And Peter and the rest of the apostles have come to the point where they recognize that everything is important, but not everything is possible for them to do.

And so that the only way they can meet the needs of this growing group of believers is to allocate the ministry to faithful individuals who will be able to carry it out.

And so we find in verse 2 of chapter 6, and the 12 summoned the full number of disciples and said, it's not right that we should give up preaching the word of God into served tables.

[17:54] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer into the ministry of the word.

And so that's what they do. They recognize seven faithful men who have a good reputation and are full of the Holy Spirit.

How do you suppose they're able to identify those men? And how do you suppose they're able as a massive group of believers to all agree?

Now that's probably the biggest miracle of all. It's possible only because these men were already committed to ministry. These men were already actively serving and laboring in the church.

And so as these individuals, these Hellenistic converts were recognizing the ministry of these faithful men, they said, well that is easy.

[19:03] That's really easy. These are the men we need to pick. These are the men who clearly demonstrate not only a commitment to the Holy Spirit, not only a good reputation among the group, but a faithful, serving attitude.

A ministry to us. A ministry that is devoted. A ministry that is faithful. So the takeaway for us as we look at this passage this morning is to recognize that leaders lead.

to recognize that those who have the gifts of service, those who have the gifts of teaching, those who have been called to serve in this way will serve because that's what God has called them to do. They're going to take initiative. They're going to look for opportunities. And maybe it's not in the most favored places of ministry, but they're going to find ways to fill the gap so they can exercise their spiritual gift and benefit the body of Christ.

Now that all happens of course within the context of the leadership structure that's already in place. It happens as they faithfully submit themselves to the leaders who are already there.

[20:31] Like these seven men in Jerusalem who were actively serving this church without having been given any instruction all underneath the leadership and authority of the apostles but now that there's some assistance in leadership that's required they are happy to carry out the objectives.

I would just like for a moment if it's not awkward can I just encourage the deacon team to stand with your wives please? Can you do that for me?

I want to call out the faithful leaders of this congregation. Now there are some who are here there are probably many others who are serving.

This team has demonstrated a commitment to ministry this way. They have demonstrated relentless labor to the point of exhaustion.

congregation in areas that are public in areas that are private there is a desire for them to serve this congregation but more importantly to serve the Lord because of the giftedness that God has given

to them the call of God on their life and they have demonstrated even without having to have the title of deacon that they have a heart to serve.

[21:56] Thank you for standing. As we're talking as a deacon team it continues to astound me of all the areas that this faithful servant team ministers to this body.

There's teaching and visitation counseling Maranatha movers security teams greeters and ushers there are small groups and hosting families in their homes there's discipleship that's taking place one-on-one there are marathon meetings on Saturdays there are serving families in various ways children's ministry Awana and youth group there are mowing lawns and setting up tables overseeing the budget and serving to the point of exhaustion these men and their wives should be commended and identified and esteemed and respected because of their labors for Christ on behalf of this church what a blessing it's also important for us to understand that that they are we need to recognize the authority with which they serve notice the phrase here who labor among you and are over you in the

Lord over you in the Lord their ministry is to the Lord their ministry is for the Lord and their ministry is commissioned by the Lord they are serving under the authority of him and thus they demand as God demands respect and esteem as representatives of him they command and demand our respect so they won't speak on their own authority but they will admonish you with the authority of Christ and that's what we find here next they're over you in the Lord and admonish you that's an important word it's it's the word which is the word we get new counseling from it is the idea of instructing or teaching it's identifying behaviors and leading them to the scriptures and seeking to call them to righteous living and then we find in verse 13 our responsibility to esteem them highly in love because of their work not because of their title not because of their gifting but interestingly because of their work because again of recognizing the labors that they have and the way that they're serving the

Lord in your midst that is our responsibility to leaders but then the apostle Paul moves on he moves to the next thing but I'm getting ahead of myself aren't I we need to I said recognize their labor but we also need to choose them based upon their character sorry choose them based upon their character if we had time this morning we would look at this passage and we could begin to fill out the qualifications that God lays forth for deacons but there are several different observations I would like to make first I would like to identify the fact that these relate to their duties excuse me these do not relate to their duties or their spiritual gifts and if you would turn just for a moment to 1st Timothy chapter 3 the only way we're going to be really able to appreciate this is to see it 1st Timothy chapter 3 beginning in verse 8 it says deacons likewise must be dignified not double tongued not addicted to much wine not greedy for dishonest gain they must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience and let them also be tested first and then let them serve as deacon if they prove themselves blameless their wives likewise must be dignified not slanderers not sober minded But sober-minded.

[26:45] Faithful in all things. That could be a problem, huh? It's okay for the husband not to be drunk, but the wife, she can get a little tipsy. Wow.

I guess I'll be looking for a job this week. Shoo! Verse 12.

Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Do you see the concentration, the focus on character and not on performance? Not on their duties or even their giftedness, but the quality of life?

The significance of an individual who has been tested and proven and has demonstrated a commitment to Christ first? That's what qualifies them to serve.

[27:56] There's also the perspective of understanding that Paul's expectations use a present tense.

We understand that we're flawed as individuals. There are moments of life where God has taken us through learning processes. And that by God's grace, he can not only redeem, but he can also restore.

So Timothy is supposed to look at the current quality and pattern of life. All of these adjectives and all of these verbs are given in the present tense and describe the quality of life from this point on.

The significance of an individual who has demonstrated a commitment to faithfulness and a commitment to the Lord. Although broken, although sinful in the past, has been able to move by God's grace into purity, into faithfulness, and into obedience.

I want you to notice, third of all, that this encompasses all of life. We see a character in the private sector. There in verses 8 and 9.

[29:17] They're dignified. They're not double-tongued. They're not addicted to much wine. They're not greedy for dishonest gain. They hold fast the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

There is this private commitment to God. God that is visible not only privately but publicly. There's also a commitment to family.

They're the husband of one wife. They're a one-woman man. There's a sense of loyalty about them and devotion at home. And he manages his children and household well.

There is this indication that God has affirmed his leadership through the way he's been able to lead his family. And also affects his impact or presence in the community.

Verse 10 says, Let them be tested first and then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. There is a sense of their character that has shown up, even in the community, as those who love the Lord.

[30:22] We choose them based upon their character. Now moving to the second responsibility of the church and the brothers to one another.

There is a command to assist your leaders. Not only to affirm them, but also now to assist them. And we find four rapid-fire commands here in verse 14.

Back in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 now. We urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

Now, what's truly remarkable about these commands is that almost all of them show up in 1 Thessalonians and they're all related to what you would expect of your leaders.

This word, to admonish, is used in verse 12. It's used of the leaders themselves in the ministry that they have for the church.

[31:36] They're involved in this newthetical ministry of counseling and encouraging and instructing the people. But it doesn't end with the leaders.

It is a part of a healthy body as well as we're learning to stir one another up to love and good deeds. There is a connection to the body of Christ.

There is a commitment to the people that God has put in community with us and also a commitment to serve them in lots of different ways.

Some of these aren't terribly fun to do. Like how many of us really enjoy to admonish? How many of us really like to confront sin that we see in a brother or sister?

That's not something that we want to do. It's something we prefer for our leaders to do. And yet, if we're going to be a healthy church, it's something that Paul tells the church of Thessalonica they must be committed to do.

[32:40] Because truth be told, there are things that are totally unaware that your leaders are totally unaware of. And for us to be a healthy community, we all need to be doing this for one another.

Admonishing the idle. Now, some of you may have the translation, admonishing the unruly. And that's probably a better translation of this word.

Those who were idle or unruly, it was a military term. It referred to a soldier who was out of rank and behaved in a disorderly and insubordinate manner.

It came to refer to anyone who did not perform his duty or follow through on his responsibility. So, in a sense, they were inactive or idle. It wasn't that they were lazy.

It was just that they were plain defiant. And there is no place for that in the church. And for us as believers, we need to do the ministry of love, of admonishing in love those who we see are out of step.

[33:51] The second is a little bit more endearing to us to encourage the faint-hearted. There were those in the church of Thessalonica who were experiencing any number of difficulties.

Those who were faced with tremendous persecution and pressure. As we find in chapter 4 and chapter 5, those who were grieving over the loss of a loved one who they thought had missed the opportunity to be with Christ.

Paul was trying to help them understand and bring fullness to their doctrine and theology, but in the same time encourage the church to come alongside and embrace and comfort those who were feeling discouraged.

Paul uses this of himself in his dad-like ministry that we saw last week. It's this ministry of drawing individuals to yourself, of walking together in fellowship, of walking towards a goal in community. And that's what we need to do with those who are feeling discouraged. To help the weak. It's the word to hold them firmly, to cling to them, to support them, and to hold them up.

[35:14] And then to be patient with all. If those previous words didn't cover it, then this will. And certainly it's a good word for all of us to learn to be patient with the people that God has put us in community with.

To have this sense of enduring, this enduring quality of love, this spiritual quality, fruit of the Spirit, as God is helping us to grow in love, and joy, and peace, and patience, and kindness towards one another.

Finally, in verses 16 to 24, Paul addresses the issue of the heart. He addresses the issue of the heart.

Any healthy church has a healthy relationship with their God. Now this morning, I was drinking from my favorite coffee cup, and it is very functionally, it's very sound functionally.

The lid screws on, it doesn't leak, which is great. It keeps the coffee, the liquid inside hot. The button works, so that when you press it, the coffee comes out.

[36:35] But for some reason, what I was tasting, was bitter and sour. Now I put, I put fresh coffee in there.

I put fresh cream in there, but for whatever reason, I just kept tasting sour coffee. And so this morning, I looked in the side of, inside of my lid, and I think you know where this is going, it was full of curdled milk.

And so it had been there for a while. There's no wonder why I thought I was drinking sour cream, instead of... This is really where it comes to a head for us, this last component.

Because we can have the right leaders, and we can have right ministry, but if we don't have the right heart, we're not going to be a healthy church. So Paul wants to commend a healthy ministry to these people.

He wants to get rid of the residue, the spoiled milk, that's the buildup that can be there, and he wants to help them recognize the significance of a ministry that is holy and sanctified and effective for what God has called them to do.

[38:06] He begins here with the attitudes of thanksgiving. Because, to be honest with you, it all kind of comes to a pinnacle here in this orientation.

To recognize the significance of rejoicing always and praying without ceasing and giving thanks in all circumstances. Why? Because this is the will of God for you.

I'm astounded at how Paul puts it in Romans 1. When he is describing the condition of the unregenerate heart, and he says, although they knew God, they did not serve Him as God, nor were they thankful.

Thankful. Does that seem serious to you? And then when Paul is describing the fruit of the Spirit, he says, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace.

So when Paul puts it that way, the unregenerate heart is not thankful, and the Spirit-filled heart is thankful and full of joy, it begins to help us recognize the significance of this kind of attitude.

[39:43] And maybe, the best, the best litmus test to know if there's true holiness taking place in our life. What is our posture in relationship to Thanksgiving?

What is our orientation or attitude when hard things come? Do we have an attitude of rejoicing evermore and praying without ceasing?

He moves in verses 19 to 21 to their tenderness to the truth. He describes it in several ways. He says, don't quench the Spirit. Don't despise prophecy.

Test everything. Hold fast what is good. Abstain what is evil. Know the truth. Love the truth. Test the truth.

And apply the truth. There must be a tenderness to the truth in your life, which will flow then into a separation from sin.

[40:47] A desire to put sin away from you and to live the holy life that represents your holy God. And we begin to wipe away the residue of our life and to seek to let God do a work in our heart.

Then we'll begin to have other things in order in our life. And the promise that Paul ends with in verses 23 and 24.

Because this is a work, the sanctifying work is beyond you. The cleansing work is not possible without the power of God. And so he says here, Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.

Not just partially, but completely. And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He who calls you is faithful. He will do it. Don't you love that? God cares about your sanctification.

[42:02] God cares about your holiness. Because God cares about his glory. And how he's being represented in the world. And he cares about your effectiveness and fruitfulness in ministry.

And he cares about the leaders that you are going to be appointing. And he cares about the ministry that you're going to be having amongst yourselves. He cares about his gospel showing up among us.

And having extensions into the community around us. So that we can bring other worshipers along with us to celebrate the wonder of our God.

Let's pray. Thank you.