

Blueprint for a Peaceful Church

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Church leaders are feeling pressure today: Covid-19 affects all of us, and Satan will use it to divide Christians. Elders ‘shepherd the flock of God,’ but as one pastor put it, sheep bite! How can we keep peace in an angry world? This advice is especially needed in these times.

Who elders are, and What they do (12)

Qualifications of elders – ‘Above reproach’ (1 Tim. 3; Tit. 1)

Function of elders – ‘Shepherd the church’ (Acts 20; 1 Peter 5)

The care and feeding of elders (13a; Heb. 13.17)

“Esteem them very highly”

“Obey and submit to them”

The Result: A peaceful church (13b)

“Live in peace with one another.”

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-13

1. The Christians in Thessalonica were new converts, but already showed spiritual strength, withstanding persecution (1.6; 2.14). The issues they struggled with show they are just beginning to ‘make their way’ in the Christian life. This is likely the key to Paul’s words in 5.12-13. Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica prematurely (cf. Acts 17.1-10), so those he appointed as elders, while seeking to lead the flock, would have been quite ‘young in the faith’ themselves! What kinds of issues might have led Paul to write the exhortation in these verses?
2. Translating from the Greek New Testament to English is often challenging. In v12, the Greek word οἶδα (*oida*) is translated *appreciate* (NAS), *respect* (NEB, NIV), or *recognize* (NKJV), but its basic meaning is *to know*. We can combine the various translations this way: ‘*Recognize* the difficult task which God has entrusted to elders, and *appreciate* and *respect* them for what they do.’ Do you *know* your elders in this way?
3. The New Testament speaks of both elders and deacons in the local church, but the functions in v12 indicate Paul is talking about elders. To get a glimpse of the function of elders, read Acts 20.17, 28-31; 1 Tim. 3.1-7; 5.17; and 1 Pet. 5.1-3. What are the major tasks of elders?
4. Verse 13 instructs Christians to ‘esteem elders very highly in love because of their work.’ Elders aren’t ‘super-Christians’; they struggle like all believers, so what does it mean to ‘esteem them highly’? Read Hebrews 13.17. When it says elders *will give an account*, what do you think it is referring to?
5. Paul concludes v13 with an exhortation: *Live in peace with one another*. Why does this fit well here? What results when we the body of Christ fails to recognize authority? This has been a real problem since New Testament times. Think of New Testament churches with anarchy and strife. It still happens today, so pray for your church, and your spiritual leaders.