

1 Thessalonians 5:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

Analysis

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you—erōtōmen de hymas, adelphoi, eidenai tous kopiōntas en hymin kai proistamenous hymōn en Kyriō kai nouthetountas hymas (έρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, εἰδέναι τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν Κυρίῳ καὶ νουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς). Paul transitions to church order (vv. 12-22). Leaders are described three ways:

1. kopiōntas (κοπιῶντας, 'laboring to exhaustion')—ministry is hard work, not honored position
2. proistamenous en Kyriō (προϊσταμένους ἐν Κυρίῳ, 'leading/ruling in the Lord')—exercising oversight under Christ's authority
3. nouthetountas (νουθετοῦντας, 'admonishing/warning')—confronting sin and error.

To know them (eidenai, εἰδέναι, 'to know/recognize/appreciate')—not mere awareness but respectful recognition of their ministry.

Churches need leaders; leaders need recognition. The three-fold description emphasizes servant-leadership: toiling laborers, not domineering lords (1 Pet 5:3); rulers 'in the Lord,' not autonomous authorities; admonishers who warn, not flatterers who placate. Biblical eldership combines affectionate care (like nursing mothers, 2:7) with firm admonition (like fathers, 2:11).

Historical Context

The Thessalonian church was young (months old) without established leadership structures. Paul apparently appointed leaders during his brief ministry (cf. Acts 14:23) who continued pastoring after his departure. Some members may have resisted these leaders' authority, especially admonition. Paul establishes pastoral authority: leaders who labor, rule, and admonish deserve recognition. This balanced authoritarianism (clergy lording over laity) and egalitarianism (rejecting all leadership). Biblical church polity requires both servant-leaders and submissive members (Heb 13:17), authority exercised humbly and received willingly.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How do you recognize and appreciate those who labor, lead, and admonish in your church?
2. What evidence demonstrates that your church leaders exercise servant-authority ('in the Lord') rather than domineering control?
3. How do you respond to spiritual admonition—with defensiveness or with teachability?

Interlinear Text

Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀδελφοί εἰδέναι τοὺς κοπιῶντας
we beseech And you brethren to know them which labour
G2065 G1161 G5209 G80 G1492 G3588 G2872

ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ
among you and are over you among the Lord and
G1722 G5213 G2532 G4291 G5216 G1722 G2962 G2532

νουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς
admonish you
G3560 G5209

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 13:17 (Parallel theme): Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Hebrews 13:7 (Parallel theme): Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

1 Corinthians 16:18 (Parallel theme): For they have refreshed my spirit and your's: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such.

1 Corinthians 16:16 (Parallel theme): That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.

1 Corinthians 15:10 (Parallel theme): But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (Parallel theme): Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

Luke 10:7 (Parallel theme): And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.

Titus 1:3 (Parallel theme): But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour;

Acts 20:35 (References Lord): I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Acts 20:28 (Parallel theme): Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

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