



## Loving and Respecting Authority Bible Study

[**Please provide:** a copy of this study for each participant, Bibles, hymnals]

*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).*

**Opening Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, guide our conversation today that we might be drawn closer to You and to one another in our shared faith. Help us as we work together in Your kingdom. We thank and praise You for the many ways You shower Your gifts upon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### Introduction

When I read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 in my Bible, I see this heading “Final Instructions and Benediction” above the paragraph. As the mother of two college age kids, my thoughts go directly to the things I say, or have said, to my children when I leave them or they leave me. Over the years my closing parental comments have changed a bit. They’ve gone from “Listen to the babysitter and go to bed when she tells you to” to “Drive carefully, watch your speed, and get your homework done”, but always I close with an “I love you.” While the specifics have changed a bit, most of my parental parting comments over the years would fall under the category of “Have a good day, but behave.”

Do I give these instructions because I think my kids are naughty? No, generally speaking, they are kids that stay out of trouble. However, I know that they, too, are born with the same sinful nature that lives within us all. As a mother, I feel like part of my job is to teach them the proper way to behave and I would hope that they would behave well whether I was there to scold them or not. Isn't that what we all hope for as parents? Perhaps we even hope that our kids behave better when we're not around.

*Discuss with another group member.* What do you typically tell your kids right before you drop them off or before you leave?

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What do you remember your parents saying to you right before they left when you were a kid?

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What did you tell your child when you dropped him or her off at college? \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you notice any patterns or similarities? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do I want my kids to behave? Well, that's a silly question! It's because it makes me look better, of course. (Ha! Ha!) No, that's my sinful, prideful nature talking. I want my children to behave and follow the rules because I know that their lives will be better if they do. God didn't give us the Ten Commandments because He wanted to make our lives harder or more restricted. He gave us the Commandments because He loves us. He gave us those rules for living because He knew that our lives and our world would be better if we followed them. His rules give us a blueprint for a God-pleasing and a God-honoring life.

### **The Gift Of Order**

God is a God of order. He ordered our world in so many wonderful ways, and all for our benefit. One of the ways that He has provided order for us is through setting up structures of authority.

Read Exodus 20:12. In Luther's Small Catechism, Martin Luther explains the Fourth Commandment in this way: "*What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them." (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, CPH ©2017, page 14)

The Fourth Commandment teaches us concerning the first authorities we are most familiar with, our mother and father. We learn to respect and honor these parental authorities in our lives and from there grows our understanding of other authority, including pastors and other church workers.

Good order is also a gift that God has given to His people. And as such, when He sets up authorities in our lives, we think of them as gifts. As with the rules that He has given us to live by, (the Ten Commandments), God doesn't give us authorities to oppress us, but rather so that we have a good structure within which to function.

God gave His people many good and faithful leaders throughout the Old and New Testament. Name at least four that you remember. \_\_\_\_\_

Note that even though all these people had serious flaws, God used them to lead His people. What are some specific facts that you remember about these leaders and their leadership styles? \_\_\_\_\_

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Now let's shift gears just a bit.

### **Gifts In Ordinary Wrappings**

Have you ever received a gift from someone you love that didn't seem like a very nice gift? One year for my birthday, my husband gave me an electric knife and that was it, no flowers, no romantic anything, just a hastily wrapped box with an electric knife. My first reaction was, "Gee, thanks...I guess." In my mind I had a vision of him as he scooted through the store at the last minute, looking for a present, until he stumbled upon something that I might like. I made the assumption that he hadn't thought about me or this gift. I couldn't have been more wrong. Well, I was right about the last minute part, but he had, in fact, put some thought into this gift. When I looked so underwhelmed upon opening my gift he said, "I thought you could really use this, especially for your good home-made bread, and when you make a roast or a chicken. It just seemed like you really needed something like this." He was totally right. I did really need that

knife. I use that knife all the time now. As it turned out he knew better than I did what I needed. What are some of your favorite unexpected gifts that you've received? \_\_\_\_\_

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Perhaps you've received a gift in a dented box or wrapped in a plain paper bag. It didn't look too good and you didn't have high hopes about the contents, but once you opened it, the gift was truly wonderful. Or maybe you've had just the opposite happen: someone hands you a fancy-looking box and you have big expectations for something expensive or much desired to be inside, only to open it and find something you didn't really want. Sometimes the old adage, "You can't judge a book by its cover," is very true.

All this to say, sometimes God gives His gifts in ordinary looking wrappings. We're very accustomed to this idea when we talk about God's gifts of the means of grace— God's gifts given in ordinary means like ordinary water (combined with God's extraordinary Word), and bread and wine. God also uses ordinary people to carry out His work among us.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7. How does God describe the leaders He gives us? \_\_\_\_\_

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What does this description mean? \_\_\_\_\_

Read Hebrews 13:17. How are we to show respect to those God has put in place to lead us, particularly in the church? \_\_\_\_\_

What special responsibility does God give to pastors? \_\_\_\_\_

What brings a pastor his greatest joy? \_\_\_\_\_

Reread 2 Thessalonians 5:12–13. Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians as an encouragement to the believers who were being persecuted. Paul wanted to remind them to stay close to Jesus. How might these parting words help the believers to stay close to Jesus?

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In light of our earlier conversation about parental parting words, the gift of good order and God's gifts coming in ordinary packages, how might these words be read for our lives today? \_\_\_\_\_

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God places pastors, teachers, DCEs, deaconesses and other church workers in our congregations and schools to do His work. He gives us these leaders to share the precious message of the Gospel with us and others. He gives us these leaders to help keep good order in the organizations of our church. Sometimes, these leaders might remind us of that electric knife I once received. Because of their ordinary humanity, we may look at them and think, "Gee thanks, God...I guess. This really wasn't who I was hoping for." But God knows what and who we need better than we do. These leaders are gifts from our Lord and Savior. When Paul wrote these words to the believers in Thessalonica, he knew that they needed that same gentle reminder that we sometimes leave with our children: "Pay attention to these people that God gave you. They are there because God loves you." Paul's reminder is also for us, as we all have

times when we fail to hold in proper regard the leaders that God has placed in our midst. Through the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to work together in His kingdom to share the Gospel. Pastors and church workers are human reminders of His love for us with whom He gifts us.

For personal reflection, sharing optional: Are you currently giving the respect God expects to your pastor and other leaders He has placed in your congregation? \_\_\_\_\_

What are some specific ways that you can show love and respect to your pastor and other church workers in your congregation? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Closing Prayer:** Gracious heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of all the professional church workers in our midst. Help us to work together with them to share the Gospel with believers and unbelievers in our communities and beyond. More than anything, thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to die for our sins and rise again so that we may all spend eternity together with You in heaven. In Your Name we pray. Amen.

**Sing:** "We Are Called to Stand Together," LSB 828

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