



Loving and Respecting Authority

Bible Study Leader's Guide

[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? Give participants a chance to share with a partner and with the entire group.

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

Give participants a chance to share with a partner and with the entire group.

What did you tell your child when you dropped him or her off at college? Encourage participants who have had such an experience to share.

Do you notice any patterns or similarities? Lead group members to identify any such patterns or similarities within their own responses and within the group's responses as a whole.

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 authorities, 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. Answers may include Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Deborah, Daniel, Peter, and Paul.

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? As participants respond, lead them to recognize that these Biblical leaders had flaws and were sinful. Also point out how God led them to turn to Him in prayer for forgiveness and well as for the strength and wisdom to lead His people.

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? Encourage participants to share their experiences.

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? They are described as treasures in jars of clay.

What does this description mean? They are ordinary, fragile people who are great gifts to us from God.

Read Hebrews 13:17. How are we to show respect to those God has put in place to lead us, particularly in the church? God directs us to obey our leaders and submit to them, not out of subjugation or oppression, but because He has appointed them to the task as His representatives.

What special responsibility does God give to pastors? Pastors are to keep watch over [our] souls, which is a huge job. Both in corporate worship and in individual settings, pastors lead their congregations to recognize their sins and to repent of them. Pastors then have the joy to pronounce to people God’s forgiveness and grace in Christ Jesus. Pastors have the privilege to lead people in worship and praise of the Triune God. Pastors have the God-given responsibility to preach and teach the true Word of God, both Law and Gospel, to their congregations and communities. Pastors baptize individuals in the one true faith and welcome them as members of God’s family. Pastors eagerly invite their communicant members to partake in Holy Communion where believers receive forgiveness of sins and strength to follow and serve God. God also directs us to let them do this with joy and not with groaning. As partners in the Gospel, we work with our pastors to help them tell the world of Jesus’ saving love as well as pray for their needs and encourage them.

What brings a pastor his greatest joy? A pastor’s greatest joy is when his flock trusts in the Triune God, believes God’s Word, and lives their lives according to God’s will.

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? God has placed pastors, Christian teachers, and other church workers among us to teach us God’s Word. We show our respect for them when we listen to them and learn from them.

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? God has

given us pastors and other church workers to share the Gospel with His people and to guide us in the way God wants us to go. These leaders are gifts whom God has given us. Sometimes they may not seem so grand or charismatic. They are ordinary people as we are, but that doesn't mean they aren't a wonderful gift that God has given us to encourage us and to share with us the truths of God's Word.

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? This question leads the participant to look inwardly at her own heart. When we publically criticize our pastor or other church leaders or do it privately with another church member, we are not giving these leaders the respect and love God commands us to give them. Be aware that someone may ask what should be done when we have an issue with a pastor or other church worker especially concerning the teaching of God's Word in its truth and purity. This is an issue that should be handled with the procedure described in Matthew 18:15–20. God directs us to first go to the person and speak with him privately. If the situation is not resolved, others, such as church elders, a circuit visitor, or other church authorities can gradually be made aware of the situation so that a God-pleasing resolution might occur.

What are some specific ways that you can show love and respect to your pastor and other church workers in your congregation? Ways mentioned might include praying for pastors and church workers, speaking highly of them especially among people who are not a part of your congregation, complimenting them on things they do well, supporting them in their efforts with your willing and joyful participation, paying them well, and giving them times of rest and relaxation with their families.

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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