

[Know Them Which Labor Among You](#) [1]

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KJV ~ “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.” (I Thessalonians 5:12-13)

Amplified ~ “Now also we beseech you, brethren, get to know those who labor among you [recognize them for what they are, acknowledge and appreciate and respect them all]—your leaders who are over you in the Lord and those who warn and kindly reprove and exhort you. And hold them in very high and most affectionate esteem in [intelligent and sympathetic] appreciation of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.” (I Thessalonians 5:12-13)

To any Bible scholar who has thoroughly immersed himself in the study of God’s Word, the subject of God-ordained authority is a familiar one. From the creation of the world, God has been the one who has orchestrated all earthly authority—authority in the home, in the nation, and (since the time of Christ) in the church. This has been put into place, by God, in order to give direction and to maintain law and order. It is also by this method that He provides structure and organization through which all the functions of life can move forward successfully.

As we examine the Scriptures, it is evident that God allows people who are in authority to decide how to exercise that authority according to their own choosing. Since man is born with a carnal nature, these choices often tend to be against the holy will of God. However, since it is all God-ordained, He still requires that all authority must be respected and obeyed without excuse, regardless whether that authority is godly or carnal.

The only exception to this mandate is when earthly leaders begin to require that the people under their authority make decisions or act in ways which are contrary to the higher written law of God. In these cases, disobedience to their laws is necessary in order to continue living as true followers of God and His Word. However, there must still always be honor and respect through it all.

In this article, we will be looking at how God expects Christians and their church leaders to relate to one another, during this New Testament time period. This subject could be addressed from a number of different angles. What should church leaders do to gain the respect of their people? What should the people do when Godly church leaders appear to be going wrong? Or, what forms of church leadership and practical administrations follow Biblical directives?

While each of these questions would lead to excellent discussions, we will seek to keep the focus of this article on just one main point. We will be looking at the scriptural instructions that God has given to each of us regarding the issue of relating to those who have been placed over us in spiritual authority as church leaders.

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The New Testament uses a number of different terms for early church authority, beginning with the apostles and followed by deacons, ministers, elders, and bishops. Various scriptures note specific prerequisites for seeking out from among God's people those who will properly take up these offices. It is interesting that in these requirements for church leadership, we see that their past relationships are important as well as their ability to develop and maintain healthy ongoing relationships, with integrity.

These directives place much responsibility upon them for the spiritual care of the souls within their realm of duty. Obviously, there must be active, healthy relationships, in order for this to happen. No relationship is built by just one person; it always takes the effort of both parties involved.

The first and possibly most important point to look at, is the need to accept the fact, that all authority is God-ordained. Romans 13:1-2, refers to the seriousness of this matter. All authority is ordained of God and must be obeyed, whether in the church or in the kingdoms of this world.

The consequence of disobedience is eternal damnation. It is not nearly as important how the specific administrations of authority are structured and functioning, as it is to accept the command to obey all God-ordained authority.

The disobedience to, or disrespect of, authority, is one of the devil's main tools in taking souls captive. This was his original plan with Adam and Eve in the garden, and it has continued on down through time. Rebellion is essentially pride, since it focuses on self and the desires of the flesh.

Repentance, confession, and accepting Jesus Christ as our personal Savior brings Holy Spirit power into our experience and places us into the family of God. This by extension also brings us under the authority of the church of Jesus Christ. With God's Holy Spirit giving us direction and empowering us to overcome the flesh and all its vices, we are thereby being transformed in all our relationships.

In the conservative Anabaptist setting, local church fellowships vary greatly in administration and practical agreements regarding the application of Biblical principles. Still, the fact remains that membership in any of these organizations is voluntary and should be based on the testimony of a transformed life.

Agreements within these organizations are, consequently, under the direction of the leadership that God has ordained to guide that particular local church body. This then declares that any Christian who chooses to pledge his allegiance to that particular body of believers is therefore required by God to obey those practical and particular agreements.

To build relationships with those who "labor among us," we will seek to keep our voluntary commitments to the church open and full of integrity. There are always times for discussions or questions, but it must also, at all times, be understood that the authority which is placed in the church by God is to be respected and obeyed.

There are those instances when a believer realizes that he is no longer able, with a clear conscience, to be in harmony with the specific ways his local church applies the teachings of Scripture. At this juncture in his life, he should seek out a church with which he can once more

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voluntarily cast his lot. He must never violate his present commitment until he has changed his allegiance to a different group of believers; otherwise he will find himself in direct challenge to his God-ordained authority.

It is a weakness of humanity to view any authority either with too much reverence or with disdain. As believers, we seek to find God's will in this delicate balancing act. Those who "labor among us" have not campaigned nor fought for their position, as many in earthly kingdoms do. Rather, they have been given a duty of service (by God) that has changed their life forever.

As they seek to fulfill the duties God has given them through the church, their desire should be to "know them [those]" under their authority. This is necessary to help them determine the spiritual condition of those believers, so they can "watch for their souls."

In relating to our spiritual authorities, it is just as improper for us to revere them as it is to disrespect them. To understand, bless, and encourage them, we need to realize that they are still living in the flesh, with similar struggles as those faced by the rest of us. With all this in mind, we see then that their responsibility also brings added accountability.

Open communication with them about our lives is imperative in helping them to continue their work. Asking them about their spiritual journey is also important. This will give us direct knowledge about how to more properly pray for them from day to day.

Those who "labor among us" need friends. It has sometimes happened in church culture that the ordained men were thought of as ones with whom we can no longer be friends, but rather have more of a "business-style" relationship. This is far from the direction that scripture gives to believers working together for the glory of God.

Our theme verse suggests an affectionate relationship—one that is both "intelligent and sympathetic." This indicates a close friendship. If servants of God carry out their responsibility in the Biblical manner of "watching for souls", then a loving friendship with them necessarily becomes that much more important.

Regular phone calls, notes of encouragement, getting together with them as families, having them over for a meal, or giving them transportation to a speaking assignment are only a few practical suggestions about how to build these friendships and make their work load lighter. It is good for us to know their schedules, so they can be reminded of our prayer support through the heaviness of their responsibilities.

Interestingly, the verses at the beginning of this article end with some pertinent advice, "be at peace among yourselves"! What a beautiful way to improve our connection with God and His ordained authority.

There are different issues that will always put stress on the godly relationships we should be having with our leaders: disagreements without love, strivings among fellow believers, and struggles in interpersonal relationships. Any of these types of struggles always has the potential to bring division to the body.

A Godly church leader will spend much time and energy to know the truth about matters and seek to bring any necessary restoration. This will create many temptations for bitterness and

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cynicism in a leader's experience. He may struggle to love his brethren as he ought, yet he knows that the standard of God has never changed and he must be faithful in his calling.

On our part, as those who are under their authority, we need to give diligence in our personal commitment to holy living and loving the brethren. This then, will be a tremendous asset in bringing about closeness of relationship with those who "labor among us."

"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 13:17)

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