

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 17 Sep 2023

Sermon Title : Loving Our Leaders

Speaker : Rev Reuben Ng

Text : 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

INTRODUCTION

As we proceed with our “Loving Our...” sermon series, we are reminded that we are called to love everyone, even those in categories that are not covered in this sermon series, or not explicitly mentioned in the Bible for us to love. As Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40 tells us, we ought to love all, regardless of whether they are good or bad, deserving or not-deserving, lovable or unlovable in our opinion.

Having covered “Loving Our Parents” and “Loving Our Children” in the past two sermons, we shall move to “Loving Our Leaders”. Although 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 was written in the 1st century where authority was more pronounced and exercised compared to in our modern society today, this lesson from Paul has become even more relevant and needful.

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labour among you,...” (v.12)

Paul asks/urges/begs/beseeches us with a sense of urgency perhaps because what he is asking us to do is something that is not natural to us. It will take awareness and intentionality for us to do what Paul is asking:

- To acknowledge/recognize/respect which means – “to have seen” and therefore “acknowledge” and “appreciate” our leaders in a way that we “have regard for”, “pay attention to” or “cherish” their work.

Paul urges us to recognize our leaders who “labour” or work tirelessly with great effort and exertion for our spiritual well-being. They serve as leaders because they are obeying God’s call and expressing their love for those whom they are called to be servant-leaders of.

In response, we are called to recognize our leaders; not just those whom we like, whom we think are deserving, or whose opinions and views we agree with. When we give our leaders a hard time or deny their leadership, we are not just rejecting them but rejecting or denying that God is in the process of placing that leader over us.

Our leaders’ work often goes unnoticed so our recognition and support can make a significant difference in their ministry. Let us not take them for granted or criticize them

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unfairly, but instead, let us recognize their efforts, thank them sincerely and support them faithfully.

“...and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,” (v.12)

Even though we understand that leadership in the context of the church is “in the Lord” meaning our leaders are appointed by God, we may still find it unnatural to love someone who “admonishes” us. To admonish means to warn, instruct, or correct. When someone disagrees with us and admonishes us, even though it is well-meaning, we would still find ourselves feeling uncomfortable or unsettled, and we may even have the urge to retaliate.

- Paul urges us to recognize and appreciate these leaders appointed by the Lord who on some occasions would warn, instruct, or correct us.

“...and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.” (v.13)

Paul’s words in this verse (in Greek) are expressed strongly, meaning we really have to do this:

- To regard them with the highest honour, respect and consider them worthy and esteem them highly in love for their work. This should be unconditional; not dependent on whether they are deserving, whether their views are aligned with ours, whether there is personality clash or whether their priority in ministry is the same as ours.
- Paul then ends off with “Be at peace among yourselves.” suggesting that if we were able to do all the things that he had instructed in verse 12 and the beginning of verse 13, then the church will be at peace. There will be unity within the church and harmony amongst one other. It could also mean that when we do as Paul instructed, we are proactively guarding and maintaining unity, harmony and love within our church.

In Paul’s letters to the Ephesians, Jesus is described as the head of the church and the church is His body. The way we treat, support, love and esteem our leaders can affect the peace of our church and we ought to always remind and ask ourselves how we should treat Christ’s body, His church. May we never be the cause for Christ’s body to be broken.

Hebrews 13:17a: “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.”

Obey means to cooperate or support, not to be treated as slaves. We are called to run alongside and journey with our leaders and to be submissive, it does not mean we are weak. It means:

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- To be intentionally humble, in recognition of the authority or the position, and therefore, subjecting ourselves to it.

In modern society, we enjoy autonomy and freedom and are uneasy with the concept of being submissive, but submission removes chaos.

- We are called to submit ourselves to leaders who watch out for our souls and look after us.

Church leaders are appointed by God and those who understand that they are placed there by God know they are accountable and answerable to Him. They will work hard to do their very best to obey God and fulfill their responsibility. In doing so they are loving the people whom God had placed them to be servant-leaders to.

Hebrews 13:17b: “Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”

This verse suggests that another way to show love to our leaders is that, as we work and serve alongside them, we help them to serve “with joy and not with grief”.

- It would be a joy to work in peace, unity and order when a team serves together with motivation and initiative to make the ministry run smoothly and successfully. As an extension, the leader would likewise serve with joy. Conversely, when we keep challenging our leaders’ decisions and authority, we will cause him/her to serve with grief.
- Paul warns us that if we cause our leader to serve with grief, it would be unprofitable to us.

Some practical ways of loving our leaders:

- We can help our leaders to serve with joy in our ministries, Life Groups and church by supporting them.
- Not to turn a blind eye when our leaders have faults or failures – otherwise, we are not loving or respecting them. We are to approach our leaders by providing constructive feedback in love, to build them up and not tear them down. Whether it is received well or not depends on the leader, but in order to have this open communication we need to cultivate a safe, honest and open trust among us.

CONCLUSION

We can start practising what we learnt today in our ministries, Life Groups and church. When we recognize, encourage and build up our leaders, we will see our leaders serving with joy and this will be profitable to us. Let us intentionally show our love and appreciation to our leaders as we serve and journey alongside them, so as to build up the body of Christ.

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A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. Appoint someone to read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 slowly.

Reflect on your ministry, Life Group or our church. What do you think are some pain points your leader(s) may be experiencing?

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C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. (i) Share your personal testimony on how you have encouraged your leader by bringing him/her joy in serving, or
- (ii) Share, how as a leader, you have been encouraged and loved by your committee/group, and so are able to serve with joy.

OR

Give thanks to God for our leaders who have boldly stepped up to obey His call to serve our church, labouring tirelessly.

6. As a group, seek the Holy Spirit's leading in your daily lives, as you intentionally encourage and support your leaders and one another in your ministry, Life Group or church. Pray that together, our church will be God's family where there is peace, love and harmony with godly order and unity as our leaders serve in joy.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. King of Kings – Hillsong <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of5lcFWiEpg>
2. Tabernacle – Awaken Generation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hvJiLXNqUQ>
3. Lord I Need You – Matt Maher <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuvfMDhTyMA>

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