



The Fear of God – Part 2 And Our Leaders

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Well, I can admit that I've only flown first-class one time, one time. I got bumped up on a flight, a rather long flight, and I just got to tell you, flying first-class was a big mistake. It turned out to be a bad thing because I liked it. I mean, I liked it a lot, a lot. Like this is the way to go right here. I didn't realize how it would just inflame this temptation to covet every time that I got on a plane thereafter walking by first-class. And you're in the kind of the cattle line there and you get backed up and you look at these people ensconced in these seats and they're so much wider and they go back so much further.

I remember one time having a person, they're reading their iPad, reading the news, saw a headline about equality, which made me laugh. Equality. Which of course, I understand the idea of equality. We are all for equality, right? We understand that God has made people in his image and we all have equal value and worth before God and each life is sacred before God. I to get all of that. But if you ever want to see inequality at work, just go to the airport. Right? I mean, starts with the two lines to go through the TSA, the haves and the have-nots. Right? And then there are the boarding groups, which I've never, I don't know how you get in the first boarding group. I don't know if that's even possible. And when did it go from like three boarding groups to now it's like twelve boarding groups? And I'm always like eleven, right, the eleventh group.

Then you get on the plane, of course you got to walk past the first-class, which is always hard. And my assistant, when I have to fly, she tries to get me closer to the front of the plane so I can maybe possibly catch my connecting flight. So I've been moving up a little bit in life from like row twenty-two to row twelve and row ten. I even got in the single digits, row nine. The problem with being in row nine is that you're close enough to hear the smug whisk of the veil closing between you and first-class when you reach cruising altitude. I want to say I can still see through it. It's one of those, you know, kind of sheer, I can see the movements of all the good stuff that's being passed out up there. And, you know, they lean back and they wait on them. I just struggle with it all.

But at least their windows are no bigger than ours. Think about it. Right? They still have the tiny little window and you realize that everyone's stuck with the same window except for a couple of people up at the very front. Occasionally when the flight attendant kind of blocks off the cockpit and the guy comes out like he owns the place and asks for coffee and chats and flirts with the flight attendant and goes to the bathroom and all that, I get the look through that corridor and I see the view they got up there. That's pretty nice, man. I mean, that's the view that I want. And you realize those guys up there who are so privileged to have that great view and they got their lambskin on their seats and all that and all the stuff they got, they get to bring their luggage and set it down next to them, even between them you realize there's a pecking order. Right? And they're going to remind each other because they wear those coats with all the stripes. You got two stripes, you got three stripes, you got four stripes. The little epaulets on their shoulder remind, you know, kind of where they rank. All this ranking stuff.



If you want to be seeing inequality at work in terms of benefits and privilege and respect, just go to the airport. Then you think, well, then just go to your office too. Right? Go to any company and you got different size offices. You got different titles that seem to come with more honor. If you don't believe that, just try and get a hold of the pay stubs of everybody. I mean, no one's paid equally. You recognize we live in a world where there's all this graduation, all this distinction among people, and that's just the world we live in. Some of you hearing that on a Sunday morning, you think, "Well, praise God, you know, there's no one gets to fly in any first class, no one has to fly in coach in heaven. At least we all get to be on equal footing there." And if you didn't catch the sarcasm with which I said that perhaps you don't recognize that is not what the Bible teaches. Do you recognize that?

Most people don't think about it and I often call it celestial communism. They think that when they get to heaven, everyone's going to get the same thing. But you do realize the Bible keeps trying to emphasize that when you get to the eternal kingdom, which is without sin, there's no sin, there's no coveting, there's no envy, there's no strife, there's no backbiting. This is a good and perfect place. And yet it is graduated in terms of how much people have, what the privileges are, what the respect and the honor is. I mean, think of just the authority alone. Jesus keeps telling stories about when you get there, he's going to look at you and when he says, "Well done, good and faithful servant," based on how you did down here, you're going to either take charge, at least in the millennial kingdom, of five cities or three cities or ten cities. Well, think about that. That's a graduation. And when the mom of two disciples came to Christ and said, "Hey, I want my two kids to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left when you come into the kingdom. I know it's now kind of a roving band of like preachers and doing all the stuff you're doing. But when you get to the kingdom, man, and you're ensconced and enthroned in this great boardroom in the New Jerusalem, I want my sons in the pecking order, number one and number two, that's what I want."

And Jesus didn't respond with, "Well, no, everyone's the same there. Everyone's got the same paycheck, same house, same privileges, same responsibilities." No, he says no, "Mom, I just need you to think about what you're asking for your sons. Do you know what you're asking for? Are they able to drink the cup that I'm going to drink?" Do you want to talk about being at the head of the table? There's a price to pay for that. I mean, the dividends that come with that kind of privilege, I mean, those are paid for by the price that you have to pay in this life of service to Christ. He didn't say we're all going to be the same. He says, as a matter of fact, the Father has determined who's going to be there and it's going to come with a big price tag.

Sometimes when you think about the fact, "Well, in the secular world, I can't even go to a plane and not remember that there's all this distinction of authority and privilege and benefit. And then you're just trying to disappoint me this morning thinking about the eternal state that it's all going to be graduated there. Well, at least here in church, we don't have to deal with that."



And then you say, well, wait a minute, you open up your Bibles like to passages we're studying today in Acts Chapter 5, verses 12 through 16, and you go, "Well, wait a minute, there seems to be some graduation in the church." Matter of fact, there seems to be distinction in the church, a kind of distinction that is recognized as something that is kind of something you might expect in the business world, something you might expect in secular organizations, something you might expect in governmental positions. I mean, and you'd like to think, "Well, I hope it's not that way in the church," and then you say, "Well, I hope it's not that way in the eternal state." Well, it is that way in the eternal state and even in the Church, even after we had the first eleven verses of Acts Chapter 5, when we have God purifying the Church, taking two hypocrites out of the equation with a severe act of discipline, he then turns in this passage verses 12 through 16 and says, here's how the Church is functioning and it's functioning well.

I understand it's a description of how the Church is functioning, but I'll show you throughout the rest of the Scripture, the Scripture affirms that the way it was functioning there in terms of how they viewed the distinctions among the people in the Church is a proper way to think about the fact that there will be distinctions in the Church. Matter of fact, he writes, God does, an entire set of books in the New Testament called the Pastoral Epistles that try to show how the distinctions are to be made among people in the Church. It comes with a varied amount of respect and honor and privileges that are part of something in the Church that may be distinct as to how that is done from the world. It's distinct, the world has a different view of how that works and yet the realities of those distinctions are true and they'll be true in the kingdom.

The kingdom and the world, you can bet this, that the pecking order in the world is not going to be the same as the pecking order in the kingdom. I can even say they're going to be some adjustments between the Church and the kingdom. I know that for sure. But I got to say, well, wait a minute, is the Church going to function the way it should if we like to pretend that we have a flat-lined organization in the Church and that there is no distinction and we should all just get along. Though we try to even on church websites today trying to flatten things out and we're all just kind of brothers in Christ, there's no difference between us, if we're really going to function biblically and understand the differences that there should be among us, well, then maybe that would do something as it relates to the health of our church if we thought rightly about the church.

So you can already understand with this introduction how uncomfortable this message may be for me to preach. But I need you to take a look at your Bibles and understand something about church leaders as it relates to what we are dealing with throughout this entire passage and that is something we call the fear of God. The fear of God, as we rightly established last week, for a variety of reasons as it relates to our discipline and how we view God as a God who will judge his people, we now look at the leaders that he's put in place and we say, now, wait a minute, there is something about the fear of God translating into even how I think about leaders. Matter of fact, the whole point in the book of Proverbs about fearing the Lord and gaining wisdom, it eventually gets down to articulating how I view leaders, in particular in the book of Proverbs, as it relates to governmental leaders.



Well, our topic this morning in Acts Chapter 5 is church leaders. I want you to look at this, knowing that there are distinctions between the acts of the apostles and church leadership in our church. The difference between first century leadership in the book of Acts and 21st-century leadership here in a church like ours, I understand, there are some different categories, but the paradigm, I will try to establish this morning by the authority of Scripture, is similar.

So take a look with me, if you haven't turned there already, to Acts Chapter 5 to think rightly about the church, that it might be a church that functions well and that is healthy is to understand something about church leadership. So let's go there and learn that the inclusio, as we call it, the first part of this in Chapter 5 verse 12 to the end in verses 15 and 16, this inclusio, this category of verses, even though there are some different topics in the middle, all relate to what the leadership of the Church is doing and how the people view the leadership of the Church. So let's see if we can learn to please the Lord, even by the way we view our own church by reading and studying this passage.

So look at the text with me. I'll read it for you with some comment, because some of the pronouns certainly need some explanation. We see some "thems" and "theys" and we need to know who the "thems" and "theys" are. I understand if you are a good student of the Bible, you might look up some commentary, some critical commentary, some exegetical commentaries, and you might say, wow, there's a different way that you can read these pronouns. I understand that. But in my study, I'm going to show you that I think contextually, the way I'm about to read this with a little bit of commentary will help you realize that this is a very reasonable way to read the text. Even if you were to debate some of the things about how I read this text in terms of defining the pronouns, I think you would say clearly there's no dispute about the passages that give us the prescription from God as to how the ongoing church ought to view its leaders. So let's look at this with all that blah, blah, blah before I read it and see if we can understand a little bit about what's going on in this text.

Acts Chapter 5 verse 12. "Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people." What people are we talking about? Now I know at the end of the passage we're going to talk about the people out there, the multitudes. But right here, I think we're talking about the people in the Church. OK? So we've got signs and wonders being done among the people of the Church "by the hands of the apostles." Thankfully, I have a very clear noun there that tells me who we're talking about, the apostles. So the apostles are doing these miraculous signs. Signs and wonders, it means they're breaking natural law. "And they..." Now I need an antecedent for that pronoun. They, who are they? Let me contend they are the apostles, "and they," apostles, "were all together in Solomon's Portico."

Now, that may be something you debate because you've seen the Church meet in Solomon's Portico. Well, Solomon's Portico is the overhang, the stoa they call it, or the colonnade where you could sit under the shade of an overhang and a preacher could preach to the crowds. And yes, you can have the crowds there on the Temple Mount in that big open expanse, you could have them all gather there as the leaders are under the colonnade. Well, in this particular point, we're not talking about that we have a church service going on. What we



have is, I think, the assembly of this group. And you'll see why the next phrase, the next verse, helps me understand that that's what we're talking about.

So you've got the leaders, you got the church officers, if you will at this point. You've got the apostles of the church meeting together in Solomon's Portico. And it says, "None of the rest, the rest of the Christians, none of the rest of the church "dared to join them," that is the apostles. Right? "But the people," that means the Church, "held them," the apostles, "in high esteem." Let me read it again. "None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem." So what I'm arguing, contending is that the people in the Church, seeing the apostles do signs and wonders, they were like, "Wow, I don't know that I want to hang out with them. I'm not really sure I want to kick my shoes off, put my feet up on the coffee table and have a conversation with Peter, James and John. I'm just not sure I'm comfortable with that."

And why would that be? Well, partly because of what this whole passage is about, signs and wonders and that's a big deal. "Well, I would want to hang out with a person like that." Well remember the last people that hung out with Peter got killed. Remember that? In the Church, verses 1 through 11, Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead, Those were the last two appointments on the pastor's calendar. I don't know. Do you want to be the next appointment in the pastor's calendar? This is going to be a really bad day to think I'm risking my life to hang out with Peter, James and John. So I think it makes sense that they had this fear of kind of hanging out with the apostles.

And I don't think this is conversion. As a matter of fact, if you are a student of the languages, you might want to click even on that word there that describes the joining them, dared to join. We're not talking about a strong Greek word here of associating like you describe elsewhere in Scripture of non-Christians joining the people of God or being joined to the Lord or being joined to the Church. This is a word about association, like hanging out. It wasn't a comfortable thing to hang out with them. So you've got here the Church seeing the apostles doing these signs and wonders among the people of the Church, I would contend. And they, if they weren't apostles, as they hung out in Solomon's Portico, they said, "I don't know if I want to hang out with them." Why? Because they held them in high esteem.

Verse 14. "And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of men and women." You can see why trying to understand the pronouns in verse 13 as, well, the rest, that means non-Christians, none of the rest dared to join them, the Church. I don't think that's the right reading because the next verse says, "now just more and more people kept joining the Church." Do you follow why that's the case? I know I talk fast on Sunday mornings, but you follow what's happening there. It wouldn't make sense to me to say we're talking about the non-Christians didn't want to join the Church because they held the Church in high esteem. No. Matter of fact, you got "more and more people, believers, being added to the Lord, multitude of men and women." So we're talking about the Church esteeming the apostles.



So, verse 14, "more and more added multitudes, men and women." Verse 15, "So that they," and I would contend that's the multitude, "even carried out the sick into the streets." We're not talking about Solomon's Portico. We're not talking about the Temple Mount. We're talking about on the streets where the apostles are going to go from wherever they were staying to go into the Solomon's Portico, "they were laying out on cots and mats," the sick people, carried them out, hoping that, here's their intent, "that Peter, as he came by, maybe even maybe his shadow might fall on some of them." I just want to be near these guys because we heard back there in Chapter 3, he's going up to the Temple Mount to pray and as he does, he heals a paraplegic. We've known this guy who used to beg there at the temple gates all the time and he was raised up walking around. And, man, if Peter can do that, I want to get my sick cousin over here and get my sick friend in my village over here. So they're bringing in all these sick people.

"The people also gathered," verse 16, "from all the towns around Jerusalem." So this includes all those who are believers and they're bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits," and it says this, "and they were all healed." So there's the inclusio. There we have the healing ministry of the apostles, verse 16, and look back up at verse 12, "signs and wonders regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles." This is a passage about leadership. And in the middle of this passage about leadership, you see the people saying, "I'm not even comfortable having them over for dinner because I esteem them so highly."

But you know what? When the church esteemed their leaders that way, man, it was a healthy church and the church grew. Of course, leaders want to love their people. Of course, Paul just has this heart where he keeps talking about how he just wants to be with you. I'm like a mother to her children or a father to his children. It's like I don't want there to be this distance. But in the natural course of the authoritative leadership of the apostles, you have them saying, "Wow, I have a different feel about this than just hanging out with one of the guys."

We'll get to that in particular. But let me just make a simple statement just for those that like flat-lined organizations and they like to pretend that the church can function as a flat-line organization. I just want to have you write this down, because here's one passage about leadership. God does not correct this leadership model. He affirms that it's working the way it ought to in the book of Acts and later as we'll see in the normative practice of Church leadership, he always affirms that as appropriate. I would just say this, number one on your outlines, you need to "Understand the Importance of Church Leaders." We're always going to have them and if you just think about it logically, just like at your work, every organization needs leaders. You've got to have leaders. You've got to have people who are going to make decisions, that can deal with the fiduciary trust, they're going to deal with the administrative trust. They're going to have to lead the organization. You've got to have leaders.

And in the church, there are two tiers of leaders. You've got the pastors and the ministry leaders. That's what we call them around here. The words in Scripture, "Poimen," "Episkopos" and "Presbuteros," they all deal with that top-level translated often pastors, overseers and elders. Those three words used for that top layer of administrative leadership. They're all teaching, they're teachers. They lead by teaching. Then you have this ministry leader group.



They're called the "Diakonos" transliterated the "deacons." Those are people who have a high reputation. They qualify for that role. They're men and women of character in the church and they lead ministries in the church as examples, as player/coaches.

So that's the leadership structure in the ongoing work of the Church the rest of the New Testament unpacks. In this passage, it's tucked away in a book called the Acts, not of the pastors, but the Acts of the Apostles. And the apostles are different. A couple of passages I want you to jot down. How about this one, Second Corinthians 12:12. Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 12. That verse reminds us of the thing that characterizes this particular function of leadership called the apostolic band, the apostles. It says that the marks of the true apostle, which Paul says were done faithfully among you with perseverance, they were done the way they ought to be done, are "signs and wonders." And that's what's going on in this passage. They're healing people, miraculously healing people.

We talked about the paraplegic being healed in Chapter 3. My daughter is a paraplegic, right? She's paralyzed from the knees down. To have immediate, instantaneous healing where atrophied legs become strong, muscular legs, and you stand up and run away. That's an instantaneous, miraculous breaking of natural law. That is a sign of true apostles. The true apostle has that ability. Here's another passage to jot down, Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 20. Ephesians 2:20. It says the church, speaking of the church in Ephesus and all the other churches, they're "built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets." They're built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. So apostles and prophets, and you can think back to the Old Testament, the prophets had the same ability. Moses, the first prophet, he comes on the scene, and by that I mean the writing prophet, he writes the first five books of the Old Testament, he does miraculous signs. He's got that staff. He goes before Pharaoh. He does stuff that the Egyptian magicians could not replicate. He does miracles. He breaks natural law.

So during Moses' time and Joshua's period, they have this rash of miraculous signs that are absolutely amazing. Every time he says it, it happens. Matter of fact, the second to last word in the very last verse of this passage, verse 16, what's the second to last word in verse 16? What's the word there? Interactive eleven o'clock crowd. You got your Bibles open, right? What's the word? All. How many were healed? All. What did they bat? A thousand. See when they did a miracle, when Elijah or Elisha in the next wave of miracles set up this classical period of the prophets, and Elijah and Elisha started the School of the Prophets and that School of the Prophets had these miraculous gifts and they did miraculous things. We had that in Joshua's and Moses' day. We had it in Elijah's and Elisha's day. So we had the law and the prophets. Then we have a New Testament that's needed and the apostles here in the New Testament become the writers of this book called the New Testament, these 27 books, and that becomes the written constitution, if you will, of the rest of the Church. And so far, we've gone 2,000 years into it and we all go back to that set of writings and we say here is the authority of the Church. That authority was proven, it was attested to, by those miraculous signs. The Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and the sign of apostleship was miraculous gifts.



Not like the kinds of things that go on in the convention center. I remember going up to the Anaheim Convention Center and sitting, and I went to the Miracle Working Service. I wanted to see it firsthand. So I sat there in like the 6th row, I snuck in. I've told the story before, maybe. It's embarrassing, but I got in through the back service gate with the cooks and I sat there, you know, as an observer. And guess what? The miracle workers, as I went in through the back, I saw the busses having all the infirmed and wheelchaired people and on crutches, they all came into the service and the miracle worker did not bat a thousand, let's just put it that way, because at the end of the night, when I went back out to find my car, here were all these people being put right back in the bus, not walking, not jumping, not skipping, not running, they were all in the same infirmed place they were before.

The few people who were picked out that made it on the TV program that night, oh, they were people that you couldn't affirm that there was something supernatural that broke natural law taking place. They were things that were not visible, things you couldn't see. It wasn't like my daughter where instantaneously legs now became healthy and we went from not walking to walking. If it was something like that, it was something with someone on a crutch, and then he walked across the stage without his crutches. We don't see what we see here, and that is the signs and wonders of breaking natural law that take place here in this particular passage. We saw it with the coming of the law, we saw it with the coming of the prophets and we see it with the coming of the New Testament.

Here's another passage to jot down. Hebrews Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4. Hebrews Chapter 2:1 through 4. It talks about the attestation of the New Testament message, the verification of the New Testament message. It says the verification of it so that you know that it's God's truth is "signs and wonders." Right? Those of us who heard had it attested by those who heard Christ by signs and wonders. So when you have a New Testament church that does not have a written New Testament, we need to know whether what you're telling us about New Testament revelation is true or not. And the only way to know that is whether or not you have some kind of verification that you're speaking for God. The way to verify you're speaking for God, just like with the prophets of old, was for you to be able to suspend natural law.

It can happen through a predictive prophecy. It can happen through making the blind see or the lame walk or the dead live. That was a sign of the apostles, the sign of the apostles and the sign of the prophets, attestation that their truth was true. Now, here it is 2,000 years later, in every successive generation, we say, "How do you know if I'm teaching the New Testament message in a New Testament church setting?" Well, are you teaching what the Bible says? Are you teaching the New Testament truths that came as a verified, authenticated, attested message, a corpus of revelation from God? Well, if a pastor stands up and says this is what we ought to do. This is where we ought to go. Here are the things we shouldn't do. Here are the kinds of things that we're enforcing or the things we're prohibiting. Well, he better be able to open the Bible and show you the authority of that leadership by going to the book.

So here's the contrast I'm trying to make. The early church needed leadership, leadership that did not have a written New Testament. Therefore, we had the apostles leading the church and



they held them in high esteem. Well, we certainly aren't going to hold New Testament pastors in high esteem, right? Because they don't get to do miracles and they don't seem as impressive as those guys. So we don't have to do that. And I'm saying no, no, no. Turn with me, if you would, to First Thessalonians Chapter 5, the same paradigm, even though you have pastors and teachers, according to Ephesians Chapter 4 saying the difference is you've got apostles and prophets. Now you have evangelists and pastors and teachers who do this work without the authentication of miraculous signs. You have them being able to defer to a written book called the New Testament.

First Thessalonians 5 is what I mentioned, I think. Is that what I said? I want you to look at this text, because what we're trying to do is to understand not only the importance of those leaders, which I hope you recognize is important in any organization and we just need to understand you've got them here in this church. Now, we have to move to how we should respond to them. First Thessalonians Chapter 5 verse 12. "We ask you, brothers," Paul speaking to a church in Thessalonica, Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, "to respect those who labor among you and who are over you in the Lord." Let's just stop right there and recognize this. There's a structure, a hierarchy, a leadership structure.

So we affirm the importance of leadership structures. And in that leadership structure, there are people who "are over you in the Lord." You ask, "Are they more important than I am?" I'm just saying this: just like in any organization, your boss who makes more than you, he's got a bigger office than you. Right? You know, before God, made in the image of God, the significance and worth of human beings is exactly the same. But in terms of the role you recognize there are people in administrative oversight of other people. So in the church, it's the same way. So we can affirm that there. And it says what we ought to do is respect them. Right? Their leadership in the church at least, is through admonition, they're teachers.

Verse 13, unpacked the same phrase we see over there in Acts Chapter 12 verse 13. He says here in this passage, look at verse 13 here, "And to esteem them very highly in love because of their work." "Well, I would esteem them very highly if they could do some miracles." No, no, no. You're supposed to esteem them highly because of their admonition. What are they admonishing you to do? To keep the apostolic truth. And in our case, it's written, it's codified. We've got 27 books of it and we're preaching that message in the local churches throughout the United States and around the world and we're saying, here's what the Bible says. We're leading based on that constitution called the New Testament. The Bible says you need to respect them, highly respect them, hold them in this high esteem in your own mind, just like the early church held the apostles in high esteem, hold them in high esteem "because of their work."

Now, this paradigm is throughout the Bible, and that is that you need to learn to take people in your mind and have a certain view toward them and choose to have that view toward them, not because of the virtue of them being more important than you or because you think they're smarter than you, or you think that they're better than you, but because of the virtue of their position in being placed in a leadership position and that goes all the way to governmental authorities, as hard as that is for me to articulate at this particular point in human history. It is



to say we respect them for the sake of the role that they play. In Romans 13, we had some bad Roman officials and Paul says, "there is no authority except from God." and the leaders that we have, this authority that we have "is given by God."

That's why Peter could look at Nero, the emperor, and say "honor the king." He calls him this word of authority, regal authority, honor Nero, honor him as king. I'm supposed to give him honor by virtue not of him being a good guy, because Nero was not a good guy, he was a detestable man and a persecutor of the Church. But I recognize that the position of authority I am to esteem him. That may be hard in your governmental or civic arenas of life, but I hope maybe perhaps it's a little easier in your church environment. First of all to establish the importance of leaders and then number two on your outline to choose to highly esteemed those leaders.

So number two, "Highly Esteem Church Leaders," that is your calling. And I say choose because you have to decide to do that by virtue of the role that they play. I know that's hard because they are admonishing you. They are taking this book that hopefully they're working hard to study and maybe to have some insight, passage by passage, lesson by lesson, sermon by sermon and saying here's what you should do. Here's what we as a church should do. Here's how we should invest. Here's how we should proceed. Here's what we shouldn't do. Here's how we should change things. Those leaders are providing that leadership based on that book. They admonish you and sometimes you won't agree with them. I get that. But because of the importance of their position, the Bible says you are to highly esteem them, I love this, "in love." Not just because, "Well, I guess I got to do it." It doesn't say that about the king, it doesn't say honor the king in love, but it does say honor your church leaders in love, those who are over you in the Lord. I know that's tough.

Jot this reference down. We won't have time for this one either, but the whole chapter, Numbers Chapter 12. Numbers Chapter 12. The more you get to know your leaders, unfortunately, with that familiarity, it breeds some contempt. And when you get to know them, you say, "Well, they're just like us." Well, I understand that. The Bible goes to great lengths to show that all the leaders of the Bible are just like us. Peter, just like us. David, just like us. Moses, just like us. They all have feet of clay. But they're qualified, they should be objectively qualified, they should be called and gifted and trained to do the work of leadership. When they're ensconced in that position, when they're given that authority, when they're appointed, even as it says in Hebrews, like the priest of the Old Testament, weak as they are, chosen among the brothers, they can empathize hopefully because of that weakness, they know what it is to sin, those leaders you should recognize that just because you get really familiar with them doesn't mean that your view of your esteem for them should be lowered.

And that's what happened in Numbers 12 when Moses got some complaints from Miriam and Aaron. Do you know your biblical family trees? Aaron and Miriam were the brother and sister of Moses. Moses makes a personal decision they don't agree with. A personal decision that's going to affect Christmas and Thanksgiving. Let me just tell you that. And that was to marry a Cushite woman it says in verse 1, a Cushite woman, an Ethiopian. Right? You've got this Jewish descendant of Abraham marrying an Ethiopian woman. She looked different, she's



from a different background, different culture. Who knows what she might want to have for Thanksgiving? This woman is from a whole different place. "I can't believe you'd marry her."

So Aaron and Miriam, brother and sister, they know him well, they start to complain. They speak against him. And then they start saying, "You know, we esteem him so highly. Why? Is he the only leader we got in this room? Has the Lord only spoken through him?" They start lacking the kind of respect they had for him in Chapter 11, and they no longer esteem him highly. They think, "We're just like him. We're brothers and sisters. We are relatives of the boss. I don't think we should hold him in such high esteem." So they speak against him.

Here's what the Bible says, "And the Lord heard it." Now that just should give you pause. Some things you say the Lord hears with an exclamation point. There are a lot of things you say, you think, "Well, the Lord hears it of course. He's omniscient, he's omnipresent, he hears everything. "Ah... but I heard that. I really heard that." The Bible says the Lord heard it. And he came down just like a dad calling three kids out and he says he comes down in the tent of meeting in a cloud and he says, "I want to see Miriam, I want to see Aaron, and I want to see Moses." It's like being called to the principal's office. And so here is God speaking to these three siblings. One of them has been positioned and posited in this leadership role and God says, "I got a lot of prophets out there doing a lot of things. You're talking about aren't there more prophets? Yes, there are other prophets. But this is the guy I have chosen to lead the people of Israel," this is the Mike Fabarez paraphrased now, "through the wilderness. And you're not going to view him as just another guy. You're just not."

So the cloud lifts and if you know the story, Miriam is now struck with leprosy and Moses in the middle of that passage, we're reminded, is a humble man, a humble leader. You're going to pray for that. You want humble leaders. But in his humility, God would not let him not be esteemed by the people who knew him best. And when Moses says, "Oh, God, please don't let Miriam be as one as dead, an outsider, an outcast with leprosy, don't let her be a leper." And God says, "Moses, listen, even if it were a parent who had a disrespectful teenage daughter, there would be consequences. So for a time, she's going to be stricken with this and your intercession for her is not going to work, at least not, you know, for right now. We're going to have her for a period of time, she'll have to go outside the camp and we're not even going to move the whole nation to the next place. We're going to camp out until she's better. So all of us are going to have to wait for her as she works through this leprosy."

The point is this, that I'm not trying to compare your small group leader, your sub-congregational pastor to some prophet like Moses. I'm not even saying they're like the miracle-working apostles, but I am saying the paradigm fits and the call to highly esteemed them is the same as it was in the Old Testament. And if you want to see some reiteration of that for non-apostolic leaders, maybe you should in your mind, or at least jot down Hebrews Chapter 13, where the veiled threat in the text is that you better "Let your leaders do their job with joy and not with grief, for that would be of no advantage to you." And there's a little veiled threat, is there not in that, saying not only is it not good if you make the pilot mad at you, it would be good for me to be nice and respectful to the pilot. But it'd be really good if you



recognized that God is watching how this arrangement worked out. God established the arrangement and you ought to show the proper esteem and respect for those leaders.

You know when the captain gets on the speaker to say whatever he's going to say, it's funny, he doesn't say, "Hey, it's Bill, your bud." He says, "It is your captain speaking." And he doesn't wear jeans and a T-shirt, have you notice that too? They are going to be all uppity with their outfits in their white shirts, black tie and stripes all over the place, a little hat they wear. You know why they do that, right? "Well, it's tradition." We've got the captain, we have a guy who's going to fly the plane, he's a leader. I'm hoping that you recognize the importance of that leader. I hope you want him to be, as we would say in biblical terms, to be gifted and trained and called and qualified. That would be a really good thing, because at least in that case, our physical life depends on that. I'd like to be respectful. I would like to recognize that. I don't have any disparaging thoughts when he says he's the captain. I realize you're the captain and you know how to fly the plane. I might even have studied a little bit about aeronautics. I might have even got my pilot's license. But right now, you're the pilot. I recognize that.

Let me just get personal here, not about me, but to think about the fact that even in our day, this kind of philosophical flat-line thinking that we like to inject into the modern church. If you got a pastor named Bill and Bob and Jim and you're hanging out with him, it's not, "Yo, Bill. Yo, Bob. Yo, Jim." That's not how you address the leaders of your church any more than you bristle at the pilot being called the captain. They are Pastor Jim and Pastor Bob and Pastor Bill. "Oh, no, no, no, no. I don't want to do that because the Bible says about leaders, I've read the Bible, Mike," maybe you should read the Bible, "because in the Bible, Mike, it says that these Pharisees, they love the respectful greetings in the marketplace. And I don't want my pastor to do that. No, no, no. Because, you know, it's my job to keep the pastor humble. That's my job." Do you understand it is not your job to keep your pastors and your church leaders humble? It's not your job. It's your job to esteem them very highly in love. I understand it is their responsibility not to crave and love and thrive on respectful greetings in the marketplace. But let me go so far as to say it is your job to give them respectful greetings in the marketplace.

You know, it's not your job to keep them humble and make them remember, like it says in Hebrew, that they're just one of us, right? They're weak and they're sinful. That's not your job to remind them of that. It's your job to remember that they are over you in the Lord. And that's just a basic fundamental reminder. I mean, even when we start Compass Bible Institute to try and train people to go out and it may feel a little stuffy to have a guy I've known for a long time and call him doctor this and doctor that. Well, the whole point of the respect we give people who traffic in the truth of God and the word of God and equipping people for the ministry of God that may seem old school in a day where everyone does wear jeans and T-shirts and no one likes to call anyone anything based on some credential that you don't have. But the Bible's very clear about how highly we ought to esteem the leaders because of the important work that they do, for the work that they do.

Choose to highly esteem your leaders. It's very important that you see how their lives are essential for the work of the church. Will they be gone? They'll be gone. Every leader you got



is going to be gone. All are going to be gone. Right? God can replace them like that. As my old mentor used to say, your role in the church is like a finger in a bucket of water. As soon as your finger gets pulled out, you're going to be replaced. And I understand that. Everyone is. No one is thinking about themselves, certainly in the role that we see in church leadership, which is not only to recognize the fact that we have a trust, but that we're also in that trust commissioned to serve. We realize that. The Gentiles love to lord their authority over them. "Well, that's my job, to make sure they don't." No, no. It's their job to make sure they're not domineering, to quote passages like First Peter Chapter 5, not to be domineering. That's their job to do that. Your job is to recognize that they are people who, like you, are sinners and in need of God's grace, but have a very important role to play, just like the pilot in your plane.

"To hold them in high esteem," as verse 13 says back in our passage, Acts Chapter 5, would be a good thing. And it's not that you shouldn't go to dinner with your pastors. I get that. "None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem." It's just that there ought to be something there that feels different than going out with your bros.

Verse 14. And this is what people like to focus on but this is a byproduct of the context. And the context is about leaders and leaders that are rightly understood by the people that they lead. It says, "And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." That's the whole point of the Church. Making disciples, right? That's how this book started in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth, and now it's hitting high gear, turbocharged, the Church is moving forward. And it's moving forward I would say in part because the apostles are doing the work that they're called to do. And we're going to see that totally unpacked in Chapter 6. That's a great thing. Leaders are being leaders. Congregants are highly esteeming their leaders and the Church is moving forward with health. When it does things like this happen, it hits the target of what it's there for.

I would say, as we think about church leaders, you should be praying, number three, for the "Effectiveness of Your Church Leaders," because when the churches do their job effectively, guess who's benefited? You are, your church is and the community is and the lost are saved and people are built up in Christ. We make disciples in the particples that we like to articulate. We reach them, teach them and train them and that is a benefit to all of you. If you pray for your pilot when you are flying in a plane, you are praying for something that directly benefits you. You understand that. It's like praying for your surgeon or praying for your doctor. Before someone cuts you open, I hope you're praying that they've had a good morning and a good breakfast. And, you know, I hope all went well with them and they didn't get in an argument with their wife last night. That's a good thing to pray for your surgeon because you are directly benefited when things are going well there. You want to pray for an effective set of church leaders.

Turn with me, if you would, to one more passage. Second Thessalonians Chapter 3. The church is thriving. That happens, I think, when the congregation in part not only sees the leaders, the pastors as they ought to, but they really pray for them because that's the outworking and application outworking of so much in the New Testament. Pray for your leaders. Paul is always asking for people to pray. In Hebrews 13, the writer of Hebrews, "pray



for us," pray, pray, pray, pray, pray. Matter of fact, a lot of the problems you might have with your pastors would be solved if you just regularly, sincerely prayed for them. Not out of obligation, but as it says, out of love. That you love them and you pray for them. That would solve a lot of things.

But in this text, let's look specifically, maybe we can even break this down into some subpoints. If I'm going to pray for the effectiveness of church leaders, look at the first thing here in verse 1. Second Thessalonians Chapter 3 verse 1 says, "Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored." Man, that's what I want. Nothing encourages leaders more than to see the effectiveness and fruitfulness of their ministry speeding on ahead. And I love this, "as happened among you." Right? That's how Thessalonians, First and Second Thessalonians, keeps on reiterating how good it was that the message of the gospel had come in power. It had changed their lives. The story about how they turned from idols to God, it's everywhere. The word is sounding forth. It's ringing out in all Macedonia. It's amazing how God has planted this church in Thessalonica and how it's thriving. And he says, just pray that will happen more.

Pray for us. Right? Because we are the ministers of that leadership brokering that, Paul says, "that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you." So there's one thing you can pray for. Pray for a growing ministry. Right? Really, you should. "I don't like praying for numbers." You're not praying for numbers, you're praying for people. Every person counts as Spurgeon liked to say, "The only people that like to criticize statistics are those who have none to report." The problem is we celebrate statistics when churches are growing and churches are planting and those attendance numbers go up and more people are being baptized and more people are engaged in discipleship because each one of those people represents what our job is, and that is to make disciples, to reach them, to teach them, to train them.

So I'm excited about numbers. I'm excited about statistics. I want to plant more churches. I want to see more people joining those congregations. And I want to see them multiplying services and then multiplying congregations. That's what we're all about until Christ comes back. That is the job. So pray for a growing ministry through their work.

Secondly, verse 2, "and that," in other words pray that, "we may be delivered from wicked and evil men." Number 2, Letter "B" if you're going to break this down, "Pray For Their Protection." We should be praying for your church leaders' protection, your pastors, your ministry leaders, your Bible study teachers. You ought to be praying that God would protect them. When the leaders were being trained and they were about to get into the roles that they're in, when Peter was going to become the pastor here in Jerusalem, Jesus looked at him in Luke 22 and said, "Satan has demanded to sift you." It's a plural, looking beyond Peter to all of them, "sift you all like wheat." As I've often said, I don't know what that means, but it doesn't sound good, right? I don't want Satan sifting me. And here's Jesus going, that's the problem. And do you remember Jesus' response? It's the response that we ought to be having. "But I've prayed for you."



We ought to be praying for our leaders because they're under constant spiritual attack. Spiritual attack sounds pretty like whoo, whoo, whoo, but here's what the Bible says in Second Timothy Chapter 2. Spiritual attack comes through people. It says that Satan in a church, he ensnares people, he traps them and uses them to do his will in the church. So here's the thing. Within the church, your leaders are being attacked. They're being slandered. They're being lied about. All of that is happening in the leadership of the church and about and against the leaders of the church by people, human beings with real teeth and real tongues and they're saying things to people with real ears. All of that's going on. Disgruntle, division, opposition, slander, false reports, all of that's happening. And it's happening, the Bible says, because of the spiritual assault. The more you seek to advance the word of God or as it says here, to see it speed ahead and be honored, the more you're going to have that.

Matter of fact, as Paul said in Second Corinthians, he said there's an open door for ministry, he says and there are many adversaries. Well, that's the word that is used for Satan. And here he doesn't have demons in view. I mean, ultimately he might, but he's got people in view. There are lots of opposition, a lot of adversaries, a lot of people that oppose. So would you pray for your church leaders' protection? They need that. I think just praying in that way for them sympathetically out of love for them, I think would change a lot about how the church functions.

Just to add a few more, I can't help when I think about praying for leaders, I can't neglect Colossians 4:3 and Ephesians 6:19, which talk about "the open door for the Word," speaking of ministers. It says that, "I can declare the mystery of Christ." He says, "That I can make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." And over in Ephesians 6:19, that I can do it with "boldness." You should be praying for their preaching skills. You should be praying for their teaching skills.

Hebrews 13:18, I talked about the writer of Hebrews asking for prayer. He says, "Pray for us," and he talks about two things, "about a clear conscience and a desire to act honorably." Pray for your pastors to act honorably. Pray for your leaders and the teachers in our church and the people who lead and make decisions to have "a clear conscience and to act honorably." Of course, that all gets back to qualified leaders as well as gifted and trained and called.

Anyway, there are four quick things. Right? Pray for a growing ministry. Pray for protected ministry. Pray for a powerful preaching ministry. I say that because so many people read this passage like John Windber up there in Pasadena at one point started a very injurious movement against evangelicalism. He thought he was doing the church a favor by reading passages like Acts 5 and saying, "I want to do that stuff. When will the church get to do that stuff? I want to do that stuff." And we started this whole third wave movement of everyone trying to seek some kind of temporal miracle. And by that I mean temporal miracle, I mean all these miracles that people think are the great apex of God's power. They think, "Wow, someone was healed of some sickness."

I'm not undermining that. I've had my share of physical problems. I've had loved ones that I know who have suffered greatly. I get that. Healing would be awesome. Right? I prefer relief



over pain. I prefer health over disease. I get that. But you realize that the power of miraculous life change that lasts for eternity is not having someone's arthritis go away, not having their cramps go away, not having their paralysis go away, not having their vision get restored. I mean, that only lasts for a time. Matter of fact, everyone in the passage where it says they all were healed. All those people's bodies eventually were laid in a grave somewhere around Jerusalem. All of them.

But you know what? When people powerfully were changed by the miracle we read about in the Daily Bible Reading this morning of a heart of stone turning into a heart of flesh and being made right with God, guess what? That lasts for eternity. They hear from God one day, "Hey, enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, you blessed of the Father." As opposed to "depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." That is really, really different. One is a huge miracle. It's called regeneration. And the other one is a temporal sign which points to the power of the message of the gospel that changes people for eternity.

When I talk about praying for your leaders to have a powerful preaching ministry, a powerful teaching ministry, a powerful evangelistic ministry, I want you to think about what that does. Matter of fact, there's a word and unfortunately it's not translated very powerfully in the English Standard Version, but when it speaks of Apollos, and we'll meet him in the book of Acts, it says two things about him. He was competent in the Scriptures and I forget how it puts the second word. But the word is "dunamis" in the original language and it means he was powerful in the Scriptures. He spoke it powerfully. So much so that Paul was still talking about how people were just flocking to his teaching when he wrote the book of First Corinthians. He had a powerful, impactful preaching. And like Paul said, the ultimate expression of the Spirit's power is when people are changed by that leadership, that admonishing, that correcting, that rebuking, that call to repentance.

If you study Acts and you feel left out, you've forgotten what the real goal of this is and that is people's names being written in the Lamb's Book of Life. That powerful, miraculous work that's available to you and I right now, which is to go to your neighbors, your coworkers, your relatives and to say repent, put your trust in Christ, and we will spend eternity in a place of blessing and not in a place of paying for our own sins. It's amazing. That changes everything. That's a cataclysmic cosmic change.