

A Charge to the Church

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[0:00] Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles this afternoon to Acts 28. And set Him over us as one of our pastors.

It's good to be reminded of our relationship to Him. And our responsibility to Him. And how we can best be a faithful congregation. A faithful flock under His shepherding care.

If you're a member here, perhaps you remember, I hope you remember making the commitment to give willing submission to Christ-appointed overseers in the church. Whose duty is to shepherd the church according to the will of God as contained in the Scriptures.

It's from our Constitution. Jason is now one of those overseers. We want to consider our responsibility toward him this afternoon. In preparing for this message, I immediately thought of and turned to and read a little work by an old pastor named John Angel James.

entitled, The Duties of Church Members to Their Pastors. And he gives nine. And we could give nine this afternoon. I'm going to tell you what some of them are.

[1:33] But it would take a long time to work through all nine of them. So I'm going to tell you what they are and then we're going to focus in on one of them this afternoon. Listen to them and see and think of them in relationship to our brother Jason.

The duties of church members include submission to the elders, the pastors' just and scriptural authority. Includes treating pastors with distinguishing honor, esteem, and love.

Includes attendance upon their ministry. Show up. Come. And as you heard our brother charge this morning to preach the Word, that means that you need to come ready to receive that Word.

And when He calls us to repent, we need to take a good look at our lives and see where we need to repent. And when He calls us to praise, we praise. When He calls us and challenges us from the Word of God, we don't ignore it as though it doesn't matter.

He's preaching the Word of God to us. And so we receive it. That's the Word of God. Not the Word of Jason. So attendance on their ministry. Earnest prayer.

[2:41] You could easily spend a sermon here. Your pastors need your prayers. Every day we need your prayers. We need your prayers for faithfulness. We need your prayers for holiness.

We need your prayers for consistency. We need your prayers for wisdom. We need your prayers as we prepare the Word to bring it to the people. We need your prayers right as we're standing and delivering it.

We need your prayers always. Pray for Jason. Jason stood and answered yes to some very serious questions this morning. And the only way that he can fulfill those ordination vows is if you pray for him.

If he does it in the strength of God and only know that strength as he seeks it from God and as you seek it for him. Praying for him. Earnest prayer.

Praying for him. Praying for him. Praying for others to attend upon the ministry of their pastors.

Bring others with you to hear him preach. Zealous cooperation in all strategies of usefulness proposed by the pastor.

[3:41] Whether for the benefit of their own congregation, the church at large, or the world.

Planning an evangelistic Sunday. And cooperate in that effort. And bring people that need to hear the Gospel or a vacation Bible school.

Throw your weight in. And help. Whether it's for the benefit of our own church here, or the church at large, or the world. A delicate and tender regard for the reputation of the pastor is the responsibility of church members.

Not speaking ill of him. Not slandering. Holding his reputation carefully and guarding it. Generous financial support. Those are some of John Angel James' responsibilities of members towards their

pastors.

But I want us to focus in this afternoon on treating our brother with distinguishing honor and esteem. But to emphasize doing so in love.

Now the command to do that comes from 1 Thessalonians 5. I'm not going to ask you to turn there. We're not going to focus on the command so much itself as a demonstration of it in the life of the Apostle Paul.

[4:49] But the command reads like this in 1 Thessalonians 5. Now we ask you brothers to respect those who work hard among you. Who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.

Hold them in the highest regard and love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. You might remember that Jason himself in preaching through this letter touched on this not so long ago. The command is simply to respect. To hold in highest regard and love your pastor. And to live at peace with one another. It's one thing to say that you respect someone.

And to hold them in high regard. And to say that you love them. It's another thing entirely to do it and to show it. You might say, oh I respect my new pastor. I honor him. I hold him in high regard. I love him. To say that in your heart. But it's another thing to demonstrate that respect and regard and love for him. If you have that respect and regard and love for your pastors, they will know.

[5:50] They'll see it in the way that you listen to their sermons. They'll see it in the way that you carry on your relationships with one another. Living at peace as Paul says. They'll see it in your encouraging words and thoughtful demonstrations of kindness.

So let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. It's here in Acts 28. Notice verses 11 through 16. Well just a little background. Paul has, on his trip to Rome, he's going to stand trial there.

He was shipwrecked and they washed up on the island of Malta. And they spent three months there waiting for the weather to calm for the right season to finish their journey to Rome.

Here we pick up that journey to Rome. We'll just read verses 11 through 16 of Acts 28. After three months, we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island.

It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. From there we set sail and arrived at Regium.

[6:56] The next day the south wind came up and on the following day we reached Puteoli. There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them and so we came to Rome. The brothers there heard that we were coming and they traveled as far as the Forum of Apius and the three taverns to meet us.

At the sight of these men, Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with a soldier to guard him. Now we may tend to read over some of these details as just some background history, minor points on Paul's journey to Rome where he would be imprisoned and their house arrest and eventually stand trial there.

But there's something very instructive for us here. Remember that Paul had been in prison for some time now. He was imprisoned more or less by the Romans partly to protect him from the Jews who wanted to kill him.

And they wanted to kill him because he was preaching the gospel. Paul was suffering for doing what God had called him to do. And he had languished in Roman prisons in the land of Palestine for three or four years.

He was trial after trial. A trial before the Jewish authorities. And then there was an assassination attempt on his life. And then other trials you remember with Festus and with Felix and before Agrippa.

[8:14] And each time he doesn't get out, each time perhaps he goes with a hope of being released. And he's not. Every day in a prison cell.

Every day without company. Without fellowship for the gospel. Every day temptation to be discouraged. And even depressed. The Apostle Paul wasn't beyond the weight of facing imprisonment and feeling the weight of that.

And feeling the discouragement that it would bring. Especially over an extended period of time. Having your hope built up to one trial. And then having it dashed as you're sent back to prison. He faced discouragement.

And one other note before we come to these verses. Paul's previous letter. He had written to the Romans. Had already proved him faithful in ministry to them. Before this trip to Rome.

Paul had written a letter. We have it in our Bible. As the letter to the Romans. They received it as a letter from the Apostle Paul. They had received blessing from his ministry. Prior to his ever having seen them.

[9:19] He had never been to Rome. He hadn't seen them face to face. He didn't know them personally. But he knew of them. And he writes to them. Encouraging them. Challenging them. Instructing them. He had had a ministry among the Romans.

And now he is on a journey to Rome. And I want us to focus. Especially on verses 14 and 15. As he travels. At Putioli.

Says there we found some brothers. Who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The brothers there had heard that we were coming. And they traveled as far as the forum of Apius.

And the three taverns to meet us. And notice these words. At the sight of these men. And Paul thanked God. And was encouraged. The brothers in Putioli.

Showed hospitality to Paul for a week. They took him in. Maybe his Roman escort Julius. Had some business in that town. We don't know what detained them there for a week. But somebody there. A believer. Opened their home to Paul.

[10:12] And showed him kindness. They showed him regard. They showed him respect. They showed him love. By taking him in for a week. And then the brothers from Rome. They traveled from Putioli up towards Rome.

And the brothers in Rome. Hearing about the situation. They heard that Paul. The guards that were transporting him. And Paul's traveling companions were coming. Maybe the brothers in Putioli. Had sent word up to Rome. Paul's on his way. But they heard that he was coming. And having that knowledge. They didn't just get excited that Paul was coming. Hey Paul's coming. They didn't sit on that knowledge.

And do nothing with it. They said Paul's coming. Paul who's been in prison for three or four years. Paul who was shipwrecked. And has been in Malta. He's been in Roman custody. How can we be a blessing to Paul?

And so they take that information. And they go. They go to see this man who had ministered to them through his writing. Surely he could use some encouragement. And they come and they meet him.

[11:10] Some 30 or 40 miles outside of Rome. Probably a two days walk. We're not told of their conversation. What they did when they saw Paul. But we can imagine them telling Paul of the usefulness of his letter to them.

Their eagerness to have him present in Rome. Giving him food for his journey. Perhaps fresh water to drink. Providing for any physical needs they could see that he had. Whatever they said and did isn't recorded.

But Paul's response to it is. The brothers from Rome held Paul in high regard. They respected him. And they loved it. And they showed it. And Paul's response tells us all that we need to know about it.

He saw them. He saw them. He realized who they were and why they had come. He received their words of encouragement and thanks. And their demonstrations of kindness. And then he gave thanks to God for them.

You see it's in verse 15. At the sight of these men, Paul thanked God. Having been imprisoned for so long. Uncertain of his fate. What an encouragement to arrive at the end of his journey.

[12:13] Where he's only going to face another trial. He knows what's coming in Rome. What an encouragement. Not to come to some cold Roman soldiers. Transferring his charge from this battalion of soldiers to another.

But rather to be received by brothers and sisters in Christ. It's cause for thanksgiving. And so he thanks God. And he takes courage.

He's encouraged. He takes heart. Encouraging words do this for a person. Job 4 in verse 4 says, Your words have supported those who stumbled.

You have strengthened. That's our word. You have given courage to faltering knees. That's what these Christians did for Paul. They regarded, respected him.

They showed him love. And it brought him encouragement. He took heart when he saw them.

When he heard them. When he received their encouragement. Their actions gave him strength.

[13:13] And so what can we learn from what the brothers at Rome did for the Apostle Paul? How can we take this and apply it to our pastor Jason? What the brothers from Rome did was unexpected.

It wasn't even a necessary duty. But they went above and beyond to be a blessing to their apostle. And I would encourage you to surprise our brother with acts of love.

Showing him honor as one who labors hard for you in the Lord. And it's not as though he needs a grace period here. Where you say, well, let's see if he's going to... Well, it's a grace period for you, I guess.

Let's see if he's going to labor hard in the Lord. He's already demonstrated it. We've thrown everything and then some at him. And he's accepted it gladly. He's already working hard among us in the Lord.

And so let us surprise him with acts of kindness and love and respect. What they did was unexpected. It was also thoughtful. It was thoughtful of Paul's situation.

[14:12] They didn't sit around waiting for service opportunities to fall out of the sky. Saying, well, if something occurs to me, then I'll do it. They had to think about how they might have been an encouragement to Paul.

The letter to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 10.24, And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. We think about spurring one another on toward love and good deeds.

But the command starts before that. It says to consider how to do it. Think about it. It takes work to think about how to encourage someone. How to show kindness to them. How to show love to them. It's not just going to come to you.

And so, put some thought and energy and effort into thinking of how you can show love to our new pastor. It was thoughtful of what would be good for the kingdom. Thinking of God and His glory. And we should be thinking how we can invest our time and energy in ways that will reap dividends for eternity. How we can deny ourselves and live for something that's bigger than ourselves instead of only thinking about what will make me happy.

[15:10] And what will make me comfortable. And what will bring me joy. And what will bring me satisfaction. That's a very easy way to live because we're selfish by nature. And our sinful selfishness, even though we've been saved by grace, will still rear its ugly head.

It's very easy to look around and only to see your problems in your life. But these people at Rome didn't think about their needs and what they wanted. They thought about Paul.

And they thought about the kingdom of God. And how helping Paul would be a help to the kingdom of God. Since Paul was such a faithful servant in God's kingdom. They were thoughtful of what might be good for the kingdom.

And so I would challenge us as well to be on the lookout for ways to show esteem and love for Jason. With practical, tangible demonstrations. And let me give you a little bit of a little flavor of John Angel James.

And under this point he says, let him, your pastor, let him see the most studious and constant care. Notice it's studious care. You've got to think about it.

[16:15] You've got to work at it. Let him see the most studious and constant care to promote his happiness and usefulness. When he is in sickness, visit him. In trouble, sympathize with him.

When absent from home, take a kind interest in his family. When he returns, greet him with a smile. Do not permit him to retire from his scene of public labors without the reward of some tokens of approbation.

Even if it only be one friendly handshake. Let him see that his prayers and sermons and concern render him dear to the hearts of his flock.

He should be able to tell by the way that you speak to him. The way that you act for him. The things that you do for him. That you are thankful for his ministry. Be as thoughtful and creative as the brothers from Rome were in showing this kind of love.

Ministers need this. I can't tell you how blessed I have been to receive the very sort of thing I'm talking about. I'll give you one example. When Andrew was three weeks old.

[17:24] He went in the hospital for nine days. And we had had one perfectly healthy son. So this was all new to us. And I remember coming to church on the Sunday after he had been in the hospital.

I don't remember how many days into it we were. It must have looked shell-shocked. I remember feeling that way. And a brother came up to me. And this is really simple. It's not rocket science. And this doesn't even take a whole lot of thought. He came up to me. He looked at me. He said, he just gave me a bear hug. He said, you look like you need a hug. And I did.

I needed a hug that day. And I remember that from five years ago. Andrew delights in telling me that he's five now. Not four. So I know it was five years ago. I remember that hug.

It was down in that building. Because this one didn't exist then. And that expression of love. Meant the world to me. I've received emails.

[18:24] And I could bring you to my computer. And show you emails that have picked me up when I was in the dumps. I've had people take me and my wife out to dinner. When they knew we were discouraged.

Pastors need it. Jason needs it. We need that loving encouragement. Being a minister doesn't mean all of a sudden that one is superhuman. And rises above all emotion and feeling and pressure.

As those things had no effect on them. John Angel James says, some people treat their minister as if he could feel nothing but blows. And so that's what they give. They give him blows.

I assure you, we're capable of feeling blows. But we're also capable of feeling love and encouraging words and actions of kindness.

Jesus himself spoke the words, take heart. The word that we have here. Paul took heart. He took courage. Jesus said to different people, take heart.

[19:22] He said it to weak people like the paralytic who was brought to him on a mat. The woman who touched the hem of his garment and then feared perhaps for her very life when Jesus turned around and said, who touched me, said to that woman, take heart.

Be of good cheer. Be encouraged. He said it to weak people. But you know who he also said it to? He said it to his disciples. They needed encouragement.

He spoke it to them when he came walking to them on the water and they were afraid. He spoke to them in John 16.33. I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart.

That's our word. Take heart. I have overcome the world. Jason is going to need to take heart.

There's going to be times when he's discouraged. And it will be your actions and words that bring him joy.

And you know who else Jesus said those words to? He said them to Paul. Paul, he's in prison before he makes the trip to Rome. And just before one of his trials, we read in Acts 23 and verse 11, the following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, take courage.

[20:41] As you have testified about me in Rome, so you must also testify, or in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome. Jesus knew that Paul himself needed to take heart.

And so he encourages him with those words. Jesus didn't think that his disciples and the Apostle Paul were beyond needing some encouragement. Please don't think that Jason or your other pastors are beyond needing the same thing.

And one of the ways our Lord Jesus administers that encouragement that he speaks to his ministers is through you. The Lord of the church, Jesus, uses the flock to encourage the hearts of the shepherd.

And that's what we see happening in Acts 28. He sends some brothers down from Rome to meet the apostle they'd never met before, but he'd read his letter. And you know what that did for Paul? It heartened him. It gave him courage. It put strength in his legs. And that's what you can do for your pastor, Jason.

[21:50] Your actions toward him can cause him to give thanks to God, as Paul does, and to take courage. Or they can cause the opposite. Your actions and words towards him can cause him to lose heart.

And sleep. And so when Jason sees you, will he instinctively thank God? I thank God for that, brother.

I thank God for that sister that's challenged me, that's encouraged me, that's shown love to me. Will he instinctively be encouraged just by the sight of you, knowing what you have done for him?

That's the sort of loving regard that you should show for him. So that his response will be like that of Paul. To give thanks and to take heart. And know that this is not just for Jason's good.

It's for your own good. It's for your blessing. Do you think that we will be better served by a minister who is heartened and encouraged, finding joy in his work, or one who is always treading fearfully because he doesn't know where the next attack is coming from?

[22:56] Or because he's not certain that anyone appreciates his ministry? Hebrews 13 verse 17 says, Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.

They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. It's a heavy burden to bear. You heard our brother charged with us this morning. He'll give an account one day for the way he ministers.

They keep watch as one who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy. Not a burden for that would be of no advantage to you. Now, this is talking about submission to their leadership, which is different than the thing that we're focusing on today, but the principle is the same.

If you make Jason's work a joy and a delight by being the kind of people that show him that loving regard and honor, then it will be better for you than if his work is a burden.

If he's going about always troubled, always carrying a burden on his back, his ministry will be that much less effective. And if he's able to do it with joy. Now, that isn't entirely upon your shoulders.

[24:03] I understand that. There will be times when your pastors need to be challenged and rebuked even at times. I understand that. But understand that you play a large part in whether your pastors are able to do their work with glad hearts or with heavy hearts.

And it's better for you when we're able to do it with a glad heart, when we're able to do it with joy, giving thanks to the Lord, having taken heart and taken courage. I believe, dear brothers and sisters, that you are this kind of congregation.

And I thank you. I've been on the receiving end of it. Let me only encourage you today to excel still more and to extend that same respect and honor and love that you've shown to Pastor Bob and to Pastor John for years and to me for the years that I've been here and show it to our brother Jason as well.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your love, for your faithfulness to us, as a church. We thank you that you speak words of encouragement to us, that you challenge us, that you uphold us.

And we pray that you would be that blessing to our brother Jason. We pray that you would make us to be a people that show that loving respect and honor to our brother. And we pray it all so that it might be for your glory and the good of your kingdom.

[25:29] We want our brother to have a fruitful ministry here so that these sheep that are here today, so that others who are not here, that will be brought in, will be growing in grace.

So that sinners will be saved. So that your kingdom will be extended here and to the ends of the earth. And so we pray that you would make us a faithful flock, a faithful congregation. We pray that you would bless our brother's ministry and use them for good in our midst and to the ends of the earth.

And so we thank you one last time today for your good gift. You have blessed us. We pray that we would be good stewards of the gift that you have given. That we would be thoughtful. That we would be faithful to our brother as a congregation.

Help us. We're not sufficient for this work. And so we pray that you would strengthen us. Give us the grace and the help that we need. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.