

## Seeing Our Church Leaders Beyond Our Standards

By [Ben Gonzaga](#)

In Christian communities, it is common to set personal standards of right and wrong, which can often lead to the easy identification of flaws in others, particularly those in positions of leadership. When we view others—especially our church leaders—through the lens of our own standards of perfection, we risk being blinded by our own biases. However, Scripture calls believers to adopt a posture of grace and understanding rather than judgment when engaging with others, including those in leadership.

### The Biblical Mandate for Grace Over Judgment

The Apostle Paul addresses the tendency to judge others in **Romans 14:10**, where he writes: *“Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”* This passage reminds believers that judgment belongs to God alone, not to us. It highlights a critical truth for the church: none of us, including church leaders, are beyond God’s judgment, and it is not our place to condemn or criticize others harshly. While correction and rebuke are necessary at times, the overall posture we are called to embody is one of grace.

John Calvin, a key figure in Reformed theology, echoed this sentiment in his commentary on **Romans 14:10**, where he stated: *“The church is not a society of perfect men, but a society of sinners, who, by the mercy of God, are brought to the knowledge of salvation.”* Calvin’s observation helps us understand that church leaders are not exempt from sin and imperfection. Rather, they are part of a larger community that, by God’s grace, is growing together in holiness. This should shape how we view our leaders—not as perfect models but as individuals who are also being sanctified by God.

### Honoring Leaders: A Call to Respect and Support

The Bible makes it clear that we are called to respect and honor those in positions of leadership, especially within the church. In **1 Thessalonians 5:12-13**, Paul writes: *“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”* This call to honor leaders is not contingent on their perfection but on the sacred calling they have received from God. Church leaders

are appointed to shepherd the congregation and to serve the body of Christ in ways that are vital to the church's spiritual health and mission.

The language Paul uses in this passage—*“esteem them very highly in love”*—indicates that our respect and honor toward church leaders must be rooted in love, not in a mere acknowledgment of their role. It is easy to honor a leader when they are doing well or when their actions align with our expectations, but true honor comes when we extend love and respect despite the leader's imperfections. The Scripture calls us to recognize that their labor in the Lord is what warrants respect, not their flawless execution of that labor.

In **Hebrews 13:17**, the author urges believers: *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”* Here, we see that the responsibility of church leaders is immense. They are accountable to God for the care of the souls entrusted to them. Their work is not simply administrative; it involves the very spiritual well-being of the church body. When we honor and support our leaders, we are participating in the well-being of the entire church, allowing leaders to shepherd with joy rather than burden.

### **Extending Grace to Our Leaders**

While church leaders are entrusted with a great responsibility, they are still human beings who are subject to the same flaws and temptations as anyone else. In **2 Corinthians 4:7**, the Apostle Paul writes, *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”* Paul's reference to *“jars of clay”* emphasizes the fragile and imperfect nature of humanity. Leaders are vessels—imperfect and fragile—who carry the precious gospel and the responsibility of leading others. Their imperfections do not negate their calling but instead point to the grace of God that works through them.

John Calvin expanded on this idea in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, writing, *“The ministers of the church are only stewards of the mysteries of God, and their calling is not of their own making but from God.”* Calvin's words remind us that church leaders are not self-appointed; they are called by God. Their authority does not rest in their own merit but in the sovereign calling they have received. As such, they deserve honor not because of their personal perfection but because of the sacred responsibility entrusted to them.

Recognizing that leaders are “jars of clay” allows us to approach them with a sense of humility and grace. We are called to support our leaders in their growth and sanctification, just as we support one another in our own journeys. The Christian community should be one that fosters growth, not only for the laity but also for the leaders. This includes encouraging them, praying for them, and

offering constructive criticism when necessary—all done in a spirit of grace and love.

## **Cultivating a Culture of Mutual Growth**

Supporting our leaders is not about excusing their faults or ignoring their mistakes. Instead, it is about creating a culture where growth is mutual. Just as church leaders are responsible for nurturing the spiritual lives of those they lead, they too need support and encouragement in their own spiritual journeys. The apostle Paul encourages the body of Christ to speak the truth in love in **Ephesians 4:15**, where he writes: *“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”* This truth in love applies not only to the congregation but to the leaders as well. When we engage with our leaders in a spirit of love and grace, we help them grow in Christ, just as they help us grow.

This mutual growth is essential for the health of the church. Leaders are not above correction, and the congregation has a role to play in helping them become the leaders God has called them to be. At the same time, leaders are entrusted with the spiritual health of the congregation, and their role is vital in helping the church grow in faith and holiness.

## **Conclusion: A Christ-Centered View of Leadership**

In the end, honoring and supporting our leaders is a reflection of the grace that we ourselves have received through Christ. As John Calvin aptly put it, *“The true church is where the Word of God is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered.”* The leaders of the church are called to faithfully preach the Word and administer the sacraments, fulfilling the sacred task of nurturing the spiritual life of the body of Christ. Our role as church members is to support them in this task, honoring their calling and extending grace when they fall short.

When we view our leaders through a lens of grace, we acknowledge that they, like all believers, are in need of God’s sanctifying work. We honor them not by holding them to impossible standards but by recognizing their role in God’s plan for the church. As we do so, we contribute to a church culture that is centered on the gospel, where leaders and members alike grow together in faith, integrity, and the mission God has entrusted to us.

## **References**

1. The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV). Romans 14:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, Hebrews 13:17, 2 Corinthians 4:7, Ephesians 4:15.

2. John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.
3. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion.
4. Martin Bucer, The Christian Ministry and its Importance for the Church.

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