

Our Responsibilities To Elders

Introduction. All too often the church assumes no responsibility for its progress, casting all blame for failures upon the elders in neglecting their duties. But when all elders perform their duties properly, and each member performs his duty toward the elders, the church will not fail.

The duties of the church toward the elders are no less important than the duties of the elders to the church. Each congregation should be taught how to conduct itself toward the eldership. The relationship between the elders and the members of a congregation must be understood and agreed upon by both parties. Unless the members agree to submit to the elders, the elders will not be able to perform all their functions. It is always our prayer that we be ready and willing to know our duty toward the elders.

We have studied the duties of the eldership, now we turn attention to the local church to explore her duties to the elders. These duties are the responsibility of every member of the church. If we are to have a peaceful and effective working church, then each one must know and do his duty as God has bound it.

I. ***Know The Elders (1 Thessalonians 5:12)***

- A. It is the duty of each member of the church to be well-acquainted with those men who have the rule over them. Each member should feel free at any time to go to the elders with any personal problem and for personal advice and instruction. No member of the church should be cold and distant toward the elders, treating them as strangers and ignoring their wants.
- B. But "to know" the elders implies much more than just to be acquainted with them. It means to acknowledge their status and respect them (cf. Romans 14:6; Titus 1:16). Various translations say "recognize," "give recognition," and "appreciate." There is no greater mark of success in any local church than for the elders to know each member and each member to know the elders and respect their work and instructions in the Lord.

II. ***Esteem The Elders Highly In Love (1 Thessalonians 5:13)***

- A. There is no higher honor bestowed upon any man than that of an elder. Those who have been entrusted with the care of the souls of the church deserve honor and respect. This is also due the elders because of the qualifications of the men.
- B. Four thoughts are worthy of consideration.
 - 1. To "esteem them" means that the church should consider the elders as leaders and rulers. Unless the church regards the elders in this way, they can hardly render a worthy and good work.

2. The church should esteem them "very highly." The estimation of the elders in the eyes of the members should be in the highest degree. It is not enough just to casually think of them as the leaders, but they must be held in the very highest regard.
 3. This should be done "in love." Nothing really counts in the Christian faith unless it is done in love (1 Corinthians 13:1-8). When elders love the church and their work, and when the church esteems the elders very highly in love, there is bound to be great success in the work.
 4. This is done "for their work's sake." The degree of honor and respect due the elders is because of their noble work. Although the elders are subject to weakness and mistakes, they are due respect because of the dignity of the office they hold.
- C. Men delight in serving those whom they love. Christians cannot do too much for those who are watching their souls. When we think of the awful responsibility that the elders have taken upon themselves for us, esteeming them highly in love is a small way to show our appreciation. Most of will never know the hours these men will spend in prayer and service to this church.

III. ***Be At Peace Among Yourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:13)***

- A. The effectiveness of the congregation depends to a large degree upon the peace and harmony among its members. On top of that, the elders' work can only be successful when there is peace among the brethren. So it is the responsibility of every member of the church to contribute as much as possible to a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. Members needs to refrain from always trying to stir something up.
- B. But while we talk about peace in the church, it is not to be understood from this that the Bible permits Christians to be at peace at any cost. Paul wanted us to be at peace with all men (Romans 12:19), but this statement implies that in some cases, and with some men, it is not possible to be at peace (cf. Matthew 10:34). Furthermore, we cannot seek peace to the point of compromising with any evil or false doctrine.

IV. ***Obey And Be Submissive To The Elders (Hebrews 13:17)***

- A. To "obey" and "submit" to them are closely related. The elders is charged with the duty of ruling the congregation, but they cannot do this unless the members will obey them. This means that they must yield to them and comply with their wishes. Elders have a difficult job and the members should cooperate with them. Of course, they are to be obeyed only if they are qualified and are ruling well.

- B. "To submit" means to give in to and let their decisions prevail over ours. This means more than just to obey. It means to have the attitude of mind to subject one's judgment and will to another. It is a desire to obey. Unless one is submissive to authority, their obedience is of little value. Prisoners obey the guards, but they are not really submissive.
- C. The elders are not to rule arrogantly and in an overbearing way, and sometimes they would do well to carefully consider the judgments of others in the congregation before making decisions. This statement does not imply that a general vote of the congregation should be taken and the majority rule should decide the course.
- D. Some want to obey the elders only as long as they agree with their decisions. When a decision is made with which they disagree, they cry, "Lording it over the flock." The eldership is not "lording it over the flock" when the elders make a decision with which some of the members disagree. The point at which the elders begin to make laws contrary to the New Testament and demand the members to obey them, is the point at which they begin lording it over the flock.
- E. Great care should be taken to select righteous men to whom all the members of the church can scripturally submit. This is one place where a great danger lies in appointing unqualified men to the eldership. However, whatever decisions the righteous elders make, every member of the church should submit to them and help to the fullest of their ability to carry out the decision.

V. ***Remember And Imitate The Elders (Hebrews 13:7)***

- A. To "remember" the elders means to be mindful of their instructions in righteousness, their personal counsel, and their example of godly conduct. Not only must we call all this to mind, but we must imitate them in life.
- B. We expect a lot of these men, such as attending every service of the church, and being faithful in all the duties of a Christian. If everyone imitated them as they should, the attendance would be nearly 100% and every good work would be accomplished.
- C. If we refuse to imitate the righteous faith of qualified elders, we sin against God. We are not to imitate anyone who does not himself imitate Christ in everything (1 Corinthians 11:1). How can elders be successful as good examples to the flock when the flock will not follow their pattern?

VI. *Count The Elders Worthy Of Double Honor (1 Timothy 5:17-18)*

- A. The elders who rule well in word and doctrine are to be given another kind of honor in addition to the normal honor given to all elders. The word "honor" means "to fix the value or price upon."
- B. This honor has to do with financial support because the same reference is used in 1 Corinthians 9:9 with respect to the support of preachers. Furthermore, it is inferred in 1 Peter 5:2 that elders may be paid for their services if they give all of their time because they are told not to seek the office for the money, showing that some were supported.
- C. The work of elders is local in scope and must be considered in each individual case. In New Testament times some elders were supported by the congregation for their labors, especially when they preached the gospel. In many cases the work of preaching is too much for one man to do by himself, and one or more of the elders may devote their full time to the work of the church.

VII. *Receive Not An Accusation Against An Elder (1 Timothy 5:19)*

- A. Evil men are always ready to charge an elder with some misdeed or sin. Any such criticism should be regarded as idle gossip unless sustained by two or three witnesses. No personal grudge should be considered as a basis for an accusation against an elder unless that elder is at fault and it has been established by two or three witnesses.
- B. When there are accusations brought against an elder with sufficient proof by two or three witnesses and he is found guilty, he should be rebuked before all in a respectful way (1 Timothy 5:1). They make mistakes the same as other Christians, but if they are the kind of elders they should be, they need only to be told of their errors to correct them.
- C. The church must protect herself against unqualified leadership. Any elder who sins and refuses to repent should be relieved of his position as elder because he has become disqualified by his conduct. Paul said to withdraw from all who do not obey the will of God, whether he be an elder or otherwise (1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6).

VIII. *Call The Elders When In Need (James 5:14)*

- A. James wanted the sick to call for the elders. This places the responsibility square upon the members of the church until they have informed the elders of their needs, and then if the elders do nothing about it, God will hold them accountable. No sick person ever blames the doctor for not ministering to his illness unless he has been notified.

- B. Many church members today seem to enjoy keeping such matters from the elders and then charging them with neglect of duty when they do not visit some sick people. This is hypocritical.
- C. Most of the weakness in the ministration to the sick is due to the neglect of the members rather than the elders. If you will let the elders know of your needs, you will find that you have better and more efficient elders than you thought.

Conclusion. The cooperation of both the elders and the church is essential to a peaceful work. I pray that you will check your Bibles and carefully remember all that has been said today.

We cannot treat this matter lightly. We do not argue about baptism as a condition of salvation; we know that we must obey it if we are to be saved. Now why should we show less respect for the duties we owe to the elders than to any other command of God? Until we return to the Lord's way we can never be successful in anything we undertake in the kingdom.