

## HONOR YOUR ELDERS

Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12, 13; 1 Tim. 5:17-22

### Introduction

This is Pastor Appreciation Day. It gives us great pleasure to honor those who have been charged with the oversight of this congregation. These shepherds or pastors responded to the call of God, as they perceived it, and accepted the invitation by this congregation to serve in the loftiest office in the Lord's church on earth – elder.

Consider several reasons we are pleased to honor them and ways in which we may fulfill this Biblical mandate of submission and support.

### WHY? WHAT MOTIVATES SUCH HONORING?

#### ➤ **Because it honors God**

We are motivated to do whatever honors God.

His Word instructs us to respect, honor and obey the elders, not because they are perfect, nor only when we agree with their direction.

Children are to honor their parents, not because their judgment is never flawed, nor because their discipline is pleasant, but because it is right (Eph. 6:1).

It's right because God said so! Honoring parents and honoring elders is part of honoring God, Who ordained their respective roles in the home and the church. To set aside this responsibility is to set aside and disregard the authority of Almighty God.

Paul's instruction to "respect" those who "have charge over you in the Lord" means more than that we are to merely appreciate or acknowledge their vital function and hard work. He continues to say that we are to "hold them in the highest regard" or "esteem them very highly in love." In other words, we are to respond to them in much the same way we respond to God, Himself. That is, an abiding submission that is rooted in love.

We honor God, not just because of His raw authority over us as the Sovereign Ruler. Our submission to Him is motivated by love, not fear or reprisal. The same is true in a healthy relationship with parents. And it carries over to our relationship with the elders God has given.

#### ➤ **Because we selected them**

Support whom you select. We have placed these men in a position of great responsibility as overseers, superintendents of our souls. By placing them in that awesome role, we not only **confirmed our confidence** in their judgment and vision, but we **committed our compliance** by means of **submission** and **support**.

This we are to do until and unless the practice of sin in an elder's life is substantiated by at least two witnesses. Elders are human and will make mistakes. But leadership blunders and shortcomings are not justifiable reasons to withdraw support from an elder. Yet most of the complaints against elders in my experience revolve around personality and procedural differences – matters of personal preference as opposed to matters of serious sin.

Notice, however, that our responsibility in this regard precedes the appointment of men to the office of elder. We are admonished against haste in setting apart men to this awesome responsibility. Paul indicates that careful examination of a man should precede his appointment to the role of elder. To fail to do so is to "share responsibility for the sins of others" (1 Tim. 5:22).

A woman was complaining about how stupid her husband was and how much more intelligent she was. After enduring several minutes of her railing, the counselor said, "Well, if you're so smart, why did you marry the dumb bunny?!"

If we are smart, we will take great care in selecting leaders so that we won't be complaining later on.

#### ➤ **Because their work is not easy**

The nature of their ministry of protecting the flock from the wolves of false teachers from without and purveyors of dissension from within makes them prime targets for Satan's attacks. Theirs is a lonely job many times. Honoring confidences to protect troubled and straying sheep often results in being second-guessed by those who should prayerfully trust and support them.

Some obviously have the misconception that the elders are to the church what representatives are in government; that their job is to represent their selfish desires in “running the church.” This is based upon a gross misconception that the church is a democracy. News flash!: The church is a theocracy. The church belongs to Christ, not man. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. Elders are to be representatives of Jesus Christ to the church. They receive their commission from the Chief Shepherd, not the sheep. They are accountable to Him.

In fulfilling this awesome responsibility, they are called upon to make judgments and take actions that are not always popular among the flock. Those who are mature and knowledgeable of the Word of God are able to appreciate and honor such servants of God. One difficult aspect of the elders’ work, however, is trying to bring along the immature and less knowledgeable to an understanding of God’s will. In a very real sense, elders often find themselves trying to honor God’s commission to them, while at the same time disciplining open opponents and diplomatically and patiently coddling the uninformed. That is hard work!

➤ **Because evangelism depends upon it**

R. W. Grimsley, an elder for over fifty years in the College church of Christ in Montague, TX, writes in this regard: “The church of the Lord cannot be built up, nor souls be converted to Christ, through bickering and adverse criticism.” The Church and Its Elders, Quality Printing Co., Abilene, TX, p. 97 1964.

Not only is the world put off by a church that attacks its own members, and especially its leaders, but the focus of energy and attention is diverted from the commission to evangelize the lost to pacifying the saved.

➤ **Because it makes for peace in the body**

A congregation that honors its shepherds enjoys harmony and unity. But discord and dissention plagues a congregation that does not respect, honor and obey its elders.

“Maintaining genuine harmony and cooperation is especially crucial in relationships between spiritual leaders and those in their care.” — JON A. WEATHERLY, College Press New Testament Commentary: with the NIV

I read with empathy what Elder Grimsley wrote regarding the proper attitude the church ought to have toward the elders. You don’t have to be good at reading between the lines to know that his job of tending the flock was not always done with joy. He writes,

**“Shame and reproach have been brought upon the church many times by self-willed, rebellious members, who through jealousies, envies, or other unholy causes use their influence against the direction of the elders, thereby blocking the progress of the church, and bringing shame and disgrace upon themselves and the whole church. Something is radically wrong with the thinking of such persons. Such evil creatures surely bring the deepest grief upon all those who love the Lord. If we could just remember the holy relationship that each member of the Body of Christ bears one to the other, surely we would strive to maintain peace and unity at the cost of all personalities. . . The devil has no better servant nor Christ a greater enemy, than the man who sows discord among brethren.”** The Church and Its Elders, Quality Printing Co., Abilene, TX, p. 98 1964.

➤ **Because it is for your eternal good**

Heb. 13:17 In giving account for their stewardship as shepherds, we want the elders to give a good report concerning ourselves. Not only will they give an account of their stewardship, but they will do it either with joy or with sorrow, depending upon how you responded.

**ILLUS.** Like the babysitter who gives a report to parents at the end of the evening. Parents want to know two things: Did the babysitter do the job well? And did the children cooperate with the babysitter?

It will be in our best interest to respond favorably to the direction of our elders in view of the time when they will give an account to the Lord.

Also, grieving our pastors weakens their spiritual power.

Consider, too, the culpability of one who causes grief to an elder in the fulfillment of his ministry of oversight and

shepherding. God may hold such sheep responsible for creating grief in the life of one of His shepherds.

[1.] They have the rule over the people; their office, though not magisterial, yet is truly authoritative. They have no authority to lord it over the people, but to lead them in the ways of God, by informing and instructing them, explaining the word of God to them, and applying it to their several cases. They are not to make laws of their own, but to interpret the laws of God; nor is their interpretation to be immediately received without examination, but the people must search the scriptures, and so far as the instructions of their minister are according to that rule they ought to receive them, not as the word of men, but, as they are indeed, the word of God, that works effectually in those that believe.

[2.] They watch for the souls of the people, not to ensnare them, but to save them; to gain them, not to themselves, but to Christ; to build them up in knowledge, faith, and holiness. They are to watch against every thing that may be hurtful to the souls of men, and to give them warning of dangerous errors, of the devices of Satan, of approaching judgments; they are to watch for all opportunities of helping the souls of men forward in the way to heaven.

[3.] They must give an account how they have discharged their duty, and what has become of the souls committed to their trust, whether any have been lost through their neglect, and whether any of them have been brought in and built up under their ministry.

[4.] They would be glad to give a good account of themselves and their hearers. If they can then give in an account of their own fidelity and success, it will be a joyful day to them; those souls that have been converted and confirmed under their ministry will be their joy, and their crown, in the day of the Lord Jesus.

[5.] If they give up their account with grief, it will be the people's loss as well as theirs. It is the interest of hearers that the account

their ministers give of them may be with joy, and not with grief. If faithful ministers be not successful, the grief will be theirs, but the loss will be the people's. Faithful ministers have delivered their own souls, but a fruitless and faithless people's blood and ruin will be upon their own heads.

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Also, members also have the responsibility to make the job of leadership easier, not more difficult. No one can lead without followers. Finally, it is to their own advantage for members to work with leadership. They are seeking our spiritual well-being. The word translated "keep watch" (ajgrupneww, *agrypneo*) literally means to "keep oneself awake." God will hold them accountable if they fall asleep on the job and many a leader has lost sleep serving the best interests of his charge. It is God's plan for our spiritual growth to provide leaders who can help us. If we frustrate their efforts, we are the ones who lose.—College Press New Testament Commentary: with the NIV

Many an elder has been kept awake at night by his genuine concern for those in his charge and under his care.

## HOW?

Don't be a burden or the cause of groaning.

"If a man has stock in a corporation, he will not find fault with everything the directors in the corporation do and remain a stockholder. If he intends to remain in the business, he will make such suggestions as he thinks are worthwhile to those in the lead, but he will not knock the business." -- R. W. Grimsley, *The Church and Its*

Elders, Quality Printing Co., Abilene, TX, p. 97 1964.

➤ **Submit to them**

Heb. 13:17

➤ **Cooperate with them**

“No work of any group of individuals can succeed without the full cooperation of all those concerned.”

-- R.W. Grimsley, The Church and Its Elders, Quality Printing Company, Inc., Abilene, TX, p. 95

These men need your help. They are not charged in Scripture to do the work for the church, just as the preacher is not the paid lackey for the church. To the contrary, the Apostle Paul says that these men are to equip Christians for works of service to the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).

Follow where they lead. When they offer learning opportunities through classes and seminars, demonstrate your trust and support of their leadership by participating. These include Bible classes on Sundays and Wednesdays. The failure of some to become educated in the Bible through these opportunities has resulted in their lack of understanding when the elders have functioned according to the Biblical mandate.

For example, our elders have been very diligent in maintaining the spiritual integrity of this flock by not allowing the persistent practice of immorality to tarnish the reputation of the church. Nor have they ignored threats to the harmony and peace of this body, but have taken seriously their divinely ordained responsibility to apply loving discipline, as outlined in Scripture. This is appreciated and supported by those who know what the Bible teaches. Those, however, who do not avail themselves of the opportunity to be taught and trained in the Scriptures find it difficult to honor and support the elders, not because the elders are out of line, but rather because the people are not adequately educated in the Bible.

➤ **Obey them**

➤ **Protect them**

Their reputation

By not receiving, believing, or repeating criticism against them; innuendo, gossip, rumor

Don't give credence to reports, especially from those who have a critical spirit. Never take at face value their information, but honor your elders by treating them as you would want to be treated, that is, by checking out the story with them and not passing it along.

Their time, emotional well-being

By not creating unnecessary work for them

By praying for them

Imagine what it would be like for men charged with watching the souls of people who are constantly second-guessing them, sniping at them at every turn about petty concerns regarding procedures and policy. How frustrating it would be to constantly be diverted from the primary responsibility of spiritual oversight to tend to things of worldly significance.

These servants are in a constant state of watchfulness, in some cases losing sleep because of their concern for our souls. It is our responsibility to so conduct ourselves as to make this diligence a thing of pleasure and joy. These are sentinels of our souls.

Heb 13:17

not only obey where no sacrifice of self is required, and where you are persuaded they are right [so peithesthee: "obey"], but [hupeikete (NT:5226)] "submit" with dutiful yielding when your natural judgment and will are averse.

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Heb 13:17

Grief in your pastors is unprofitable for you, for it weakens their spiritual power.

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Heb 13:17

'The groans [stenazontes (NT:4727): 'grief'] of other creatures are heard; how much more of pastors!' (Bengel): God may avenge on you their 'groaning.' If they must render God an account of their negligence, so must you for your ingratitude (Grotius).

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not lording but leading  
grief and groan