

Responsibilities of the Members to the Elders

Introduction:

1. Recently we had two lessons pertaining to the elders of the local church.
 - a. The Qualifications of elders.
 - b. The Work of elders.
2. In this lesson we are looking at the “other side of the coin;” specifically, we are considering the duties or responsibilities of the members of the local church to those serving as elders.
3. Observe: Most people are rightly critical of elders when it becomes apparent that the elders either do not know, and/or do not honor their responsibilities to the flock over which they have the oversight. But, sadly, many of those, who are critical of elders not living up to their obligations toward the members, neglect to recognize and/or to honor their obligations toward the elders. In a real sense, the responsibilities of elders to the members in general and the responsibilities of the members in general to the elders is “a two way street,” and much damage is done when either group do not honor their obligations toward the other.

Discussion:

I. God made provision for family relationships.

A. Physically.

1. God set up the domestic family.
 - a. He made a help meet for the first man, Gen. 2:18, 21-24.
 - b. God joins together the husband and wife, Matt. 19:6.
 - (1) Marriage, as God designed it, is honorable, Heb. 13:4.
2. Marriage is the legitimate relationship for procreating the human species.
 - a. Gen. 4:1; I Tim. 5:14.
3. Parents and children have responsibilities toward each other.
 - a. Parental responsibilities, Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4.
 - b. Responsibilities of children, Eph. 6:1.
4. Tragedy occurs when husbands and wives, when parents and children neglect to honor their God-given responsibilities to each other.

B. Spiritually.

1. Jesus built the church, Matt. 16:18.
2. The church is “*the house of God*,” or the family of God, I Tim. 3:15.
 - a. “*Church*” (*ekklesia*) denotes “the called out,” those called by the gospel, 2 Thess. 2:14.
3. But God, in His infinite wisdom, made provisions for local churches, I Cor. 1:1-2; Romans 16:16.
4. A local church, fully organized, consists of saints in Christ Jesus, with the bishops and deacons, Phil. 1:1.
 - a. God did not want His children to be “members at large.” Acts 9:26; Phil. 4:9.
5. This makes for an overseer-overseen relationship, Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17.
6. Only eternity itself can reveal just how tragic it is when the overseers and the overseen either do not recognize and/or do not honor their obligations toward each other.

II. Responsibilities of the Overseen to the Overseers.

A. “*Know*” the Elders, I Thess. 5:12.

1. “*Know*” (*eidenai*), Hebraistically, to have regard for, cherish, pay attention to,” Thayer.
2. Recognize their authority to oversee, respect and regard their leadership. Cf. Heb. 13:24.
3. Know them by the lives they live, the truth they teach.
4. Sadly, there are times when elders, in an effort to better know and encourage the member for whom they are very concerned, are rejected. Elders must know the flock, John 10:14; the flock must “*know*” the elders, I Thess. 5:12, and this means that both groups must be willing and ready to interact with the other.

B. “*Esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake*,” I Thess. 5:13.

1. There is no work more important than that of watching for souls, Heb. 13:17
2. Elders are stewards of God, Titus 1:7; they have been entrusted with the care of souls.
3. Hence, concerning the elders of the church, Paul exhorted the saints at Thessalonica to “*esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.*”
 - a. Nothing really counts in religion unless it is done in love, I Cor. 13:2-3.
4. “*For their work’s sake.*”

- a. Most members have no way of knowing the hours that must be spent, or the agony elders feel over the indifference of some of the souls that have been entrusted into their care.
- C. *"Be at Peace Among Yourselves,"* I Thess. 5:13.
 - 1. The effectiveness and efficiency of their work depends, in part, upon the peace and unity among brethren.
 - a. God wants us to be at peace among ourselves. I Cor. 14:33; Mt. 5:9; Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:15.
 - 2. However, we should not seek "peace at any price!"
 - a. Jesus, the *"Prince of Peace,"* Isa. 9:6, came to bring a sword! Matt. 10:34; Rom. 12:18.
- D. *"Obey them that have the rule over you,"* Heb. 13:17.
 - 1. There is a sense in which elders must "rule." I Tim. 3:4-5; I Tim. 5:17.
 - 2. But elders cannot "rule" if members refuse to submit in things that are right within themselves.
 - a. Illus. Rom. 13:1-2; Eph. 5:23-24; Eph. 6:1.
 - 3. However, elders must not become "lords," I Pet. 5:3!
- E. *"Submit,"* Heb. 13:17.
 - 1. *"Submit"* means more than just "obey."
 - a. It includes the attitude of mind to submit to another's judgment; it to have the desire to obey.
 - b. Some people in prison outwardly obey their authorities, but do not inwardly submit.
 - c. This suggests the wisdom of appointing men who are biblically qualified.
 - 2. Submission is reflected in one's attendance, in their being ready unto "every good work," Tit. 3:1, when you notify them when you must be away, etc.
- F. Count those *"that rule well worthy of double honor,"* I Tim. 5:17.
 - 1. *"Honor"* is from *timas* (Greek).
 - a. Denotes honor "which one has by reason of the rank and state of the office which he holds."
 - 2. *"Especially those who labor in the word and doctrine."*
 - a. Financial support is here implied. Note verse 18.
- G. *"Receive not an accusation,"* I Tim. 5:19.
 - 1. *"Elder,"* as used here, is used in an official sense.
 - a. He is discouraging the making of hasty charges.
 - b. Note the necessity of there being two or more witnesses. Cf. Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16.
 - 2. But *"them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear,"* I Tim. 5:20.
- H. Remember and Imitate, Heb. 13:7.
 - 1. Remember in prayer.
 - 2. Imitate, or follow their example in what is right. Cf. Phil. 4:9.
- I. *"Call for the elders,"* James 5:14.
 - 1. *"Sick"* in v. 14 is from a word which is used interchangeably to refer to both physical and spiritual illness.
 - a. V. 15 is from a different word, and elsewhere is used to refer to those spiritually sick.
 - 2. *"Anoint with oil."* Olive oil was used in the first century as a medicine. Cf. Luke 10:34.
 - a. Effort should be exerted to provide whatever is needed for recovery.
 - 3. But note: He said **"call for."**
 - a. Don't wait until you get well and then blame the elders for not visiting you. People who are ill generally call for their doctor; they don't just assume that he knows they are ill.
- J. Pray for the elders, James 5:16.
 - 1. There is power in prayer!
 - 2. Pray that the elders:
 - a. Will have the physical strength to do their job.
 - b. Will have the wisdom to do their job.
 - c. Will have the courage it takes to do their job.

Conclusion:

- 1. It is noteworthy that the same Bible which stresses the obligations of the elders to the members also stresses the obligations of the members to the elders.
- 2. Fact: **If** elders will sincerely and scripturally honor their obligations to the members, and **if** the members will sincerely and scripturally honor their obligations to the elders, the church **will** grow!

--Bobby Witherington, Sept. 6, 2015