

Slide 1

What Is Our Responsibility Toward Our Shepherds? **(Hebrews 13:7, 17)**

Introduction

1. Today, we come to the last of our lessons on elders.
2. Over the last three weeks we have focused on . . .
 - a. Who these men are and why we need them.
 - b. Their responsibilities among us.
 - c. The qualities which God looks for in them.
3. Today, I would like for us to spend our time together looking at our responsibility toward these men we call our elders or shepherds — not just the ones who will be appointed, but those who presently lead us.
11. This is very important because if this church is to grow and have a bright future, not only must it have godly leaders, it must also have faithful Christians who are willing to fulfill their responsibility toward these men.

Slide 2

When It Comes To Our Elders, It Is God's Will That We . . .

A. OBEY THEM AND SUBMIT TO THEM (HEBREWS 13:17)

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” (*Hebrews 13:17, NASB95*)

1. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer of this letter tells us here that there are two responses which you and I are to give to our elders — we are to “obey” them and “submit to them.”

2. What does this mean?
 - a. To “obey” (*peitho*) our elders means that we “listen to” and “follow” them — we subordinate ourselves to them even when we may have a difference of opinion.
 - b. To “submit” (*hypeikō*) to them means we “yield” or “defer to” their authority.
3. Why is this so important?
4. One reason is because “. . . they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.”
 - a. “Keep watch” is a metaphorical way of saying that these are ‘watching, guarding, or caring for people.’
 - b. They are involved in our spiritual care.
 - c. All of us as Christians start out as newborn babes in Christ, and some of us may find ourselves constantly weak in faith.
 - d. Because of this, watching over our spiritual development is indispensable and continuous work.
 - e. You and I can make their task easy or difficult, one filled with joy or grief, by the way we respond to them.
 - f. In his third letter, the apostle John said to the believers to whom he wrote, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth” (3 John 4, NASB95).
 - g. We must make sure that we make their task a joyful one, because to do otherwise is “unprofitable” for us.
5. A second reason is that you and I are involved in an ongoing spiritual battle against what Paul called “the rulers . . . the powers . . . the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).
 - a. To “obey” and “submit” our leaders is to find ourselves ‘spiritually protected and nourished’ and to receive help in our battle against these spiritually destructive entities.

- b. Submission to authority is necessary for the proper ordering of society. The church of our Lord is no exception.
- c. The effectiveness of any eldership is seen in the response of the people they lead.
- d. People who are stubborn and unsubmitive are unteachable and incapable of changing for their own good.
- e. An entire generation of the Israelites who followed Moses through the wilderness were refused entrance into the promised land because of their continual disobedience (Numbers 14:22-23).

“Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.” (Numbers 14:22–23, NASB95)

- 6. In other words, God will judge us for the way in which we respond to them.

Slide 3

B. IMITATE THEIR FAITH (HEBREWS 13:7)

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7, NASB95)

- 1. Some of the elders who have led us and taught us God’s word are no longer with us.
- 2. They have gone on to their reward.
- 3. But we must not forget them — we must remember them, and especially the way in which they lived out their faith before us.
- 4. Think about the end result of their conduct.
 - a. Was their life one which affected others for Christ in a positive way.
 - b. Are you a better person for having been around them.
- 5. If so, imitate their faith by reproducing that same conduct in your own life.

6. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul wrote, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”
7. In Philippians 4:9, He told the Christians in Philippi, “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9, NASB95).
7. One of the greatest compliments which you or I could pay to an elder of our Lord’s church is to imitate his faith.

Slide 4**C. APPRECIATE THEM (1 THESSALONIANS 5:12)**

“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction . . .” (1 Thessalonians 5:12, NASB95).

1. Appreciate — (“know,” KJV; “recognize,” NKJV; “respect,” ESV, NIV84)
 - a. “to acknowledge”
 - b. “to give proper recognition”
2. Why should we appreciate these men?
 - a. They “diligently labor among” us
 - 1) The word “labor” is a word typically used to describe physical labor.
 - 2) It speaks of strenuous work that leaves a person weary and fatigued.
 - 3) Paul wants us to know that caring for people’s spiritual welfare is hard, stressful work.
 - 4) “It is emotionally draining, time-consuming, and often monotonous and discouraging. It requires a great deal of personal dedication and sacrifice.”¹

¹ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995) p. 166.

- 5) They “labor among” us — they carry out their responsibilities on our behalf.
- b. “have charge over you in the Lord”
 - 1) “have charge” — to ‘guide, direct, lead’
 - 2) Their authority is “in the Lord” — Everything they do must be done in accordance with that Lord’s authority and in the Lord’s ways.
- c. “give [us] instruction”
 - 1) These men work hard at instructing us.
 - 2) Though the NASB translates this word as “instructuaction,” it is better rendered “admonish” (KJV, NKJV, ESV, NIV84).
 - 3) Christian admonition, though, is not angry scolding.
 - 4) It is loving correction and warning based upon God’s Word.
 - 5) Its purpose is to protect us and build us up in our faith (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:14).

“I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.” (1 Corinthians 4:14, NASB95)

4. We should also show appreciation for them by encouraging them in their work (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

“Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11, NASB95)

Slide 5

D. ESTEEM THEM VERY HIGHLY (1 THESSALONIANS 5:13)

“... and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (1 Thessalonians 5:13, NASB95).

1. Our natural tendency is to . . .
 - a. Take our leaders for granted

- b. Forget what they have done for us
 - c. Complain rather than be thankful
 - d. Accentuate the bad
 - e. Disregard the good
- 2. In the Old Testament we find that God gave Israel some of the greatest leaders in human history — men like Moses and David.
- 3. However, when times were difficult, the people were ready to stone them both (i.e., Moses, Exodus 17:4; Numbers 14:10; David, 1 Samuel 30:6).
- 4. It is because we have a tendency to complain and be ungrateful that God's Word exhorts us to honor our spiritual leaders.
- 5. No group of elders is perfect.
 - a. All elders have weaknesses and each of us have our own perspective on how they should lead.
 - b. Some will think these men are
 - 1) doing too much, or doing too little.
 - 2) moving too slowly, or moving too quickly.
 - 3) changing too much or not changing enough
- 6. "Esteem" — hold them in high regard, and we do that in love.
- 7. These men are working to save our souls and guide us safely to heaven.
- 8. Because of this, they are deserving of our love and esteem.

Slide 6

E. PRAY FOR THEM (1 THESSALONIANS 5:25)

"Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:25, NASB95).

- 1. I believe that if any of our present elders could stand before you and make a request of you on their own behalf, it would be these same words, "Brethren, pray for us."
- 2. James wrote that "the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16).

3. Your prayers on behalf of our elders and our potential elders can accomplish great things.
4. So, pray for these men and ask God to guide and bless them in their work, because the Lord's work is too important not to pray over it.

Conclusion

1. This morning, you and I presently have four men who have devoted their lives to helping us get to heaven.
2. Before long they will be joined by other men who will do the same.
3. Let us do all that we can to make their task a joyful one:
 - a. Willingly submit to their authority in our lives.
 - b. Imitate their faith.
 - c. Get to know them and show our appreciation for their work.
 - d. Encourage them.
 - e. Love them and hold a very high opinion of them because of their work.
 - f. Pray for them on a regular basis.

Slide 7

4. We are “a temple of God . . . the Spirit of God dwells in [us]” (1 Corinthians 3:16).
5. We are “the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).
6. What we are doing here is very important because it involves our souls — let's commit ourselves to its success.