

What the Sheep Should Do

by John Bjorlie

The sermon emphasizes the responsibilities of believers towards their elders, including knowing, loving, obeying, and honoring them.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, 1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:7

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Elder Respect"

Description

John Bjorlie emphasizes the importance of knowing, loving, obeying, and honoring elders in the church. He highlights the need for believers to actively seek out their elders, show genuine love and appreciation for their work, obey their guidance, and honor them with material and spiritual support.

Transcript

The expectations we have for our elders seem to far outstrip our awareness of our responsibilities to our overseers.

To know them

"We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you" (1 Thess. 5:12). How many wish that their elders would take more interest in them. But the fault does not always lie with them. It is more than difficult for elders to do their work, especially when it means admonishing a believer who holds them at arm's length.

Christ was a seeking shepherd. But His word to many was, "Come follow Me." Instead of chasing them down, He challenged them to chase after Him. Little wonder that we often read of people running to meet Him. This was His "follow-up program." In effect, He was saying, If you are serious, then you follow Me up. Is this not true today? If we want to benefit from godly elders, we must seek them out: observe their habits of life, visit them in their homes, discover the books they read, and the friends they keep. Know them.

To love them

"Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thess. 5:13). Preachers have told us that love is not a feeling. Strictly speaking, that may be true. But if I told my wife, "Honey, I love you, but I have no feelings for you," what would she say? Certainly our feelings are a gauge of our love. If, at the mention of a man's name, a coldness comes over me, I should ask why. We are admonished to be "kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love." The elders often find themselves at the low end of the totem pole, doing

the unlovely job for the unlovely soul. Certainly we should love them for it. If our thermometer registers a low temperature, there may still be hope. Paul often supplicated God for a fresh infusion of His love. We do well to join with Paul's inspired prayers, that our love "would abound yet more and more." For it is a command. Love them.

To obey them

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account" (Heb. 13:7). In almost every passage about the believers' responsibilities to their elders, obedience is plainly stated or implied. Words like "rule," "take the oversight," "obey," and "submit" are hard to ignore. These are the words that irritate our flesh most. How much easier to consult acquaintances, relatives, or even strangers about my problems, than to heed the counsel of someone in authority. My acquaintances may not answer for me at the Judgment Seat, but my elders will. If they are good men, why should we so fear these words, "obey," "submit," and "rule"? The godly elder does not lord it over the believers, beating the Christians like Bunyan's "Giant Despair." Obey them.

To honor them

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn" (1 Timothy 5:17-18). This verse uses the word "honor" as we have it in Mark 7:10-11 and Romans 13:7. One way honor is there shown is by material support. Every elder is not worthy of double honor, and many do not require it. But there are others who do. Local elders are sometimes the fulfilment of Christ's words, "The prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin." Paul enforces the responsibility Christians have to minister to those who feed them spiritually (1 Corinthians 9:6-15). The teacher or preacher had the right, which Paul sometimes used, to refuse financial support, but the Christians had no right to withhold it. A. B. Simpson once said that when a congregation fails to materially support the one who is treading out the corn, "It is good for the preacher, but bad for the congregation." The sad irony is, congregations treat their elders like lackeys and one day wake up to find themselves elderless. In the emergency, they run out and find a hireling who gladly takes the leadership and the money too! Is it possible that we take for granted those who minister to us most? If we do not support those who deserve it, will we end up meeting the payroll of those who don't? Spare yourself. Honor them.

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