

“Obey Your Leaders . . . As Those Who Will Give an Account”

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Take note of what is being said in the following Scripture passages:

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

¹¹“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

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, ¹³and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another” (1 Thess. 5:12, 13).

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

“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” (Heb. 13:17).

¹“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ²shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Those who minister as elders will give an account to the Lord for those entrusted to them. This is the direct teaching of 1 Corinthians 3 and Hebrews 13:17. Because elders will give an account to the Lord for those entrusted to them, the sheep are exhorted to obey the shepherd-leaders and to make the ministry entrusted and joy and not grievous. This is a heavy weight and grave responsibility. There are several significant features to the references cited.

First, elders are appointed by God as overseers (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

The weight behind the office is through the appointment by the Holy Spirit. Those who are servant-leaders have an invested authority that is not intrinsic to the individual, but to the position of elder.

It is important to note this because many treat the office as something to be won by popularity or vocational success, but the office is to be occupied by those whom the Holy Spirit appoints. This assumes such an appointment is discernable by those within the office and by the congregant.

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Second, elders have a distinct role in the local church (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 3).

The ministry entrusted to elders is narrow, centered on the Word, prayer, and oversight. A Word-centered ministry finds its expression in the Bible. What place the Scripture has in any local church should be non-negotiable. This demands an appetite for the Word and the ability to teach the Word. A prayer-exercising ministry is one of supplication in behalf of the congregation. This demands that the elders are aware of the sheep and their needs. A ministry of oversight is one of guardianship. As overseers, the shepherds are to guard or protect the health of the sheep. This deals exclusively with soul-care. The shepherds must know the state of the sheep. This requires engagement.

Third, the work of the shepherds will be evaluated as to its temporal or eternal nature (1 Cor. 3).

If the sheep perish, then the shepherd will not receive a reward. First Corinthians teaches that an eternal work is built on the message of Christ-crucified. Any other message will produce a congregation of flammable materials. It would be a grievous error to labor for a lifetime only to have produced a congregation of unbelief.

Fourth, the ministry of shepherding is to be marked by joy (Heb. 13:17).

When the church is healthy, then ministering to the sheep is a joy. When it is unhealthy, then shepherding is grievous.

Fifth, elders must be blameless in their attitudes and in their conduct (1 Pet. 5:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-16).

The office of elder must not be used for personal advancement or gain. The office of elder, that of the shepherd-leader, is marked by a selfless spirit, one in which the well-being of the sheep takes precedence over the comforts of the shepherd.

Sixth, elders are to be obeyed and submitted to by the sheep (Heb. 13:17).

In a culture that rebels against anything and anyone who exercises any authority, this becomes problematic. Sheep are not provided with options or alternatives. This is a strong reason for local church ministry and responsibilities. Some sheep almost refuse to align themselves to any local church, thereby circumventing any accountability to any local fellowship and its leadership. This is wrong, and it is sin. It is this attitude that has produced an anemic church, where ideas of commitment and loyalty and responsibility are unheard of.

Making it Personal (What is the NEXT STEP? Let us get real practical)

1. As an elder, if you do not measure up, then step off.
2. As a congregant, join the church, do right, and make shepherding easy. Obey and submit to your elders as in the Lord.