

LET THEM SERVE WITH JOY!

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INTRODUCTION:

A. A year ago today we were drawing to a close a very important event in the life of a church... The selection and appointment of elders and deacons!

1. This was certainly a great learning experience for all of us!
 - a. From my perspective I have never been in this position... and yet I understood that the bulk of the responsibility as the preacher here fell on my shoulders!
 - b. Most of the members here have never been through this process before!
 - c. Beyond the process itself, we learned more about one another than we had before!
2. The process was not easy and was not without its heartaches; however, hopefully we can all step back and look at the good impact getting through this had on this church

B. When we normally think about lessons on elders we normally think about lessons focusing on their qualifications and their work... but that is only one side of the coin!

1. This morning I want us to “turn the table” and take a few minutes to consider our responsibilities to the elders... The Bible has a good bit to say about this as well!
2. I would summarize our duty in statement found in **Hebrews 13:17**: “They are keeping watch over your souls... let them do this with joy and not with groaning” (ESV)

I. OUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO OUR SHEPHERDS IS BASED ON THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES TO US:

A. The work of a shepherd is a very important and serious work that they do not take lightly!

1. The work of an elder is the work of a shepherd! (**Acts 20:28-29**)
2. The work of our shepherds is the work of watching over souls! (**Hebrews 13:17**)
 - a. The work of an elder is a work with eternal consequences! The things they do as our shepherds have an impact on where people will spend their eternity!
 - b. So when they make decisions they are making decisions with our eternity in mind!
3. These men did not assume this position without much thinking and self preparation because they knew they'd be held accountable for their work! (**Heb 13:17**)
 - a. For some men, this is enough to keep them from desiring the work of an elder!
 - b. Throughout the history of the Jews when God's people strayed, the place where God, through prophets, went first to correct the problem was the elders!
 - c. These men will have to stand before God and give an account for their teaching, their example, and the way in which they lead us! So they take it seriously!

B. This is the responsibility of our shepherds; however, unless the sheep they are leading cooperate with their leadership they cannot truly shepherd the flock!

II. OUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE SHEPHERDS:

A. At the heart of our responsibilities is the possession of a proper attitude toward them:

1. We are to recognize our shepherds (**I Thess 5:12**)
 - a. Recognize is from two words meaning, “To purposefully open wide your eyes” & “To behold, perceive, take heed, or see” → Basically, pay attention to them
 - b. It means to have regard and respect for them, recognizing their office, and treat them accordingly with reverence and in supporting their needs
 - c. Notice it is men who labor among us, are over us, and admonish us! Whether they are praising us, feeding us, or correcting us we are to have respect for them!
2. We are to esteem them very highly in love (**I Thess 5:13**)
 - a. We aren't just to look at them as leaders who make cold decisions but in the eyes of all of the members we are to esteem them with a high regard out of love!
 - b. Notice the reason → It is because of their work! They are devoting themselves to you! Their goal and passion is to help you do what's right and go to Heaven!
 - c. These men devote much time and energy to their work! I doubt any of us fully

- appreciate the time they spend studying, teaching, and helping others... the emotional toll it takes as their hearts are torn apart by those insisting on doing wrong... the amount they pray... the wrestling they do with difficult decisions!
3. Those who rule well should be counted worthy of double honor (**I Tim 5:17-18**)
 - a. This passage is teaching that elders can be supported financially... just like we typically do with a preacher – Shows appreciation for his time and focus
 - b. He is one who does a honorable job as an elder and also is laboring in preaching and teaching → He's spending a lot of time preaching and teaching others
 - c. Most of the time when I have seen this done it is when an elder is spending so much time doing his work that he cannot hold down a full time job at the same time... But this passage allows for financial honor even if its not to that extent
 - d. So, when you see an elder doing this be sure you show a high level of honor
 4. We should look at our elders like we would look at our own fathers! (**I Tim 5:1**)
 - a. This probably has reference to any men who are “elder” but would certainly apply to our shepherds because of their age and office!
 - b. This means we aren't to talk back to them, be disrespectful in our approach to them, or speak bad about them... Give them the honor you'd give your father!
 - c. “Rebuke” doesn't mean don't correct if wrong, but “To strike upon, to strike at, to rebuke sharply. The word contains a note of severity; to censure severely”
 - d. Not with the hand but the tongue giving hard words which are as heavy blows (*Gill*)
 5. What if you don't find the man to be worthy of your honor and respect? (**Acts 23:3-5**)
 - a. An elder must first meet the qualifications & he is thus worthy of respect & honor!
 - b. If you don't find an elder to be respectable then is there something he has done wrong? You have an obligation to go to him as a brother about this matter!
 - c. If it's just personal differences... then grow up and get over it! If for no other reason, hold the man in high regard because of his spiritual position!

B. Our honor and respect is also shown in our striving to do what is right:

1. We make their job a joy when we are at peace with one another (**I Thess 5:13**)
 - a. One of the most difficult things for elders to deal with is division in a local church... sides get drawn amongst members, strife abounds, & it's tough to recover!
 - b. This means that there will be times where we have to swallow our pride, set aside our self-interests, & put our brothers and sisters in Christ ahead of ourselves!
 - c. Think about it! If the elders are having deal constantly with immature bickering between members they can't focus on feeding and nurturing the sheep!
2. We also have the obligation of obeying those who rule over us (**Hebrews 13:17**)
 - a. Sadly sometimes getting Christians to cooperate with ideas, projects, and morality harder than getting me to sit through *Gone With The Wind* and stay awake!
 - b. What if they are asking you to take part in something you don't think will work or that you think could be done a better way? Explain your concerns, then obey!
 - c. What if the elders ask you to take steps to strengthen your marriage, over come some morality struggle you have, or grow spiritually? Refusing is sin!
3. We are also told to be submissive to our elders! (**Hebrews 13:17**)
 - a. While I separate this from obeying them it is intricately tied to obedience! Our attitude of submission to the elders is the heart and soul of our obeying them!
 - b. **Illustration:** Like a child asked to clean his room & he grumbles the whole time... Has he obeyed? Technically, but he truly hasn't submitted to his parents!
4. When it comes to our personal lives... simply strive to do what is right!
 - a. The shepherds are concerned about the souls that are wandering away from God and worry about them a lot! They take them as their personal responsibility!
 - b. When you fail to do what is right you turn their job from being a joy and make it a source of pain and sorrow! Their hearts ache when they see you falling away!
 - c. Make it your determination to do what's right so that you make their job as your shepherds be a joyous thing! If they lose sleep at night its not because of you!

C. Finally, I would say that we have a responsibility of opening up to the shepherds:

1. When it comes to our responsibilities this is probably one we think about the least, but a failure to be open and talk with the elders definitely complicates their work!
 - a. Some Christians don't want to open up their lives - they don't want to let other people into their lives - Possibly they feel threatened or vulnerable by it!
 - b. Some may know if the elders really get to know them that they'll rebuke them!
 - c. With others it's just that they are real private or they don't want to bother others
2. The Bible commands us to "call for the elders" when we are sick! **(James 5:14)**
 - a. Where's the responsibility placed? On the sick! Some get upset if they aren't checked on! Somehow the elders and preacher are just supposed to know!
 - b. It's your responsibility to call them! Don't wait for them, call them and let them know you are sick! They know a lot, but they aren't omniscient like God!
3. If we're to do this on the physical level, how much more on the spiritual! **(James 5:15-16)**
 - a. Sometimes people will get discouraged or overcome with sin and just quit! Then when questioned about it they will say, "The elders never checked on me!"
 - b. Sometimes they just can't know! We are great at wearing masks and acting like everything is fine... Some do this then all of a sudden they seem to disappear!
 - c. Maybe you are down, your faith needs strengthening, your marriage is having trouble, you need help raising your children, you're losing your battles against sin, you are having spiritual doubts, etc → Go to the elders and talk to them!

E. Our responsibilities to our shepherds does not mean we continue to follow them regardless of what they are doing!

1. This point seems obvious; but, there are many people who don't seem to understand it!
 - a. I have heard several people who believe what their shepherds are doing is wrong say, "Well, we have to do what they say and follow them... they're our elders!"
 - b. When the division in churches across America occurred in the 50's and 60's there were some who disagreed with what was done, but stayed due to this attitude!
 - c. I am not saying we have this problem here, but preventative teaching is good!
2. If our shepherds ever start contradicting God's word in their leadership our allegiance must be to the Lord before them! **(Acts 5:28-29)**
3. Shepherds who fail to lead in the truth by word or example are not to be followed down that pathway but are to be rebuked! **(I Tim 5:19-22)**
 - a. Two possible meanings here: Make sure there's two or three witnesses to validate a charge or make sure its handled in front of two or three witnesses
 - b. I believe the latter is right... otherwise, if an elder sins against you then you have no course of action to save him! No way to follow Jesus' instructions in Mt 18!
 - c. An elder is not above rebuke! He must be open to people coming to him if they believe he or his decisions are wrong! We must have the right attitude!
 - d. In this we are to be cautioned... Timothy is told not to take action against an elder hastily! Give careful thought & make sure you aren't caught in a lynch mob!

CONCLUSION: Let's all determine now that we will do all we can to make the work of our elders be a joyous work and not a grief to them! Resolve that if they are job becomes a burden it won't be because of me!