Discipleship Questions

Why is it important to recognize that the congregation has responsibilities toward their elders?

What should a congregation do with the teachings and examples of the elders?

What responsibility does a congregation have to obey and submit to elders?

What kind of honor do elders deserve?

How must you receive correction from elders?

What must you do when you have a physical or spiritual need that requires the attention of the elders?

What must you do as part of the body of Christ, specifically in relationship to the elders?

What responsibilities do you have toward elders since they are brothers in Christ?



God's design for the local church involves every church having elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). These elders are to oversee and shepherd the local church (Acts 20:17, 28-31; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The men who are appointed to this work also must possess the qualifications God has assigned as necessary (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Yet, the successful functioning of a church with elders does not depend on the elders alone. Instead, we must also consider the responsibilities that every member of the church has toward the elders.

Hebrews 13:7, 17

The Hebrew Christians had people among them who were considered leaders who had authority over them, taught them God's word, set examples of faith, and kept watch over their souls. These responsibilities are consistent with the work of elders in a congregation (overseers, shepherds). While these leaders have great responsibility, notice that the congregation also has responsibility toward them. First, we must remember our leaders (which may include leaders who have died in the Lord). We must actively remember their teachings and examples in ways that help us live for Christ. Second, we must carefully observe their lives and faith. We must take time to notice how these mature Christian men live, how their faith informs and guides their decisions, and how their faith has shaped their lives. Third, we must imitate the faith of their leaders. We should see in elders examples worth imitating in their faith, relationships, decisions, habits, etc., and do what we can to follow these godly examples. Fourth, we must trust and obey our leaders. We should see the elders as trustworthy in their understanding and application of Scripture and obey what they say (though never blindly trusting any man, Acts 17:10-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22; 1 John 4:1-3). Fifth, we

must submit to the elders. We must yield to the direction of the elders, unless the elders are leading in a way that is contrary to the will of God (Acts 5:29). This will then help the work done by the shepherds to be joyful rather than grievous!

1 Timothy 5:1-2, 17-20

Younger people must not rebuke any older men in the church (including its overseers) with harsh or sharp rebuke. If sin is committed, it must be dealt with as one would exhort a father (e.g., with respect and humility). Then, those who work hard and do their work of shepherding well are worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching (a key work of elders, 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). Elders are to be viewed as worthy of honor by the congregation for the important and challenging work that they do and be treated with respect and appreciation. Then, those who work hard at preaching and teaching can also be shown the additional honor of receiving financial support, as a worker worthy of his wages (1 Corinthians 9:1-14). Part of this honor should also extend to not accepting (receiving) an accusation of wrongdoing made against an elder as being true. Thus, gossip and complaints about the elders must be avoided. An accusation should only be viewed with credibility if there are two or three witnesses to verify it. Then, elders who persist in sin must be publicly rebuked.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Since this passage speaks of those who labor and lead (rule over) others, the instructions apply to elders. First, you must know (or, give recognition to) the elders. The congregation should not just know who their shepherds are, but spend time with their shepherds so as to know them in a deeper way (thereby learning the examples they should imitate). This should also extend to a sense of respect that is carried alongside this knowledge. Second, you must receive admonition (warning, instructive correction) from them. You must respect the elders enough to be open and welcoming to their correction, even when it is challenging. Third, you must regard them very highly in love. You must highly regard and respect them for the way they are invested in your spiritual wellbeing and want them to be involved and familiar with your life in meaningful ways. Fourth, you must be at peace with other members of the church. Rather than making their work more difficult by being a troublemaker among other members of the church, you should be committed to living in a peaceable way that helps make their work easier (Romans 12:18; Ephesians 4:1-3).

James 5:13-20

Whenever there is a need in the congregation, the one with the need has the responsibility to call for the elders so they can help. When physical or spiritual care is needed, prayers can be offered to God in connection with such. But recognize that elders (though they should know the sheep in the congregation) are not mind readers and do not possess perfect knowledge about every need in the congregation. Therefore, when a need requires the attention of the elders, it is your responsibility to make them aware of it! Furthermore, confessing your sins to them, praying for them, and receiving correction when you stray is also applicable to the elders.

Ephesians 4:11-16

The elders (along with the evangelists and teachers) work to help every disciple in the congregation become mature in Christ, united in the faith, knowledgeable of God's Son and His teaching, equipped for the work of ministry, and able to contribute their part. Therefore, you must spend time learning from and talking with them so they can help you in these ways (Hebrews 10:24-25). Then, you must also be committed to doing your part in the body of Christ! Rather than seeing the elders (and evangelists and teachers) as the only ones with work to do, you must do your best to do whatever you can in the Lord's work!

Hebrews 3:12-13

Although you have specific responsibilities toward elders in a congregation, you also must recognize that they are still your brothers in Christ. Therefore, all the responsibilities you have toward other Christian brothers and sisters must also be fulfilled toward them. This passage specifically speaks of encouraging one another daily. Therefore, you still have the responsibility of encouraging the elders of the church rather than just receiving encouragement from them. You also must pray for them, love them, show hospitality toward them, serve them, carry their burdens, etc. (James 5:16; 1 Peter 4:8-10; Galatians 6:2).

Conclusion

Elders have an important role in the local church. However, their diligence in accomplishing their God-given work is just one part of what it takes for the congregation to be successful. The rest of the congregation must also do their part in living for the Lord. Involved in that is the fulfillment of specific duties toward the elders. When everyone does the part God has assigned to them, God's beautiful design for elders in every church can be realized, and the entire congregation is blessed!

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