

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, February 4, 2024

**Elder / Bishop (Overseer) / Pastor / Teacher**  
**Part 3: Duties of the Church Toward Elders**

Today, we will complete our examination of the office of elders in the New Testament Church. As a reminder, we are approaching this analysis under the following headings:

- What are the qualifications of an elder? (Part 1) – October 29, 2023
- What are the duties of an elder? (Part 2) – January 7, 2024
- What are the duties of the members toward elders? (Part 3) – Today

***Gill:** “As pastors of churches have a work to do, which is both honourable and useful; so there are duties incumbent on those who are under their care, with respect to them, for their work’s sake. Though they are “nothing”, with respect to God, to whom they owe all they have, and with respect to the churches, they are theirs, for their use and service; yet they are not to be reckoned as nothing by them, and to be treated with contempt; “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ”; made such and put into the ministry by him, being furnished from him with gifts and graces for it, and as such, to be highly accounted of; and though they are not lords and masters in the family of God, yet they are stewards in it, the highest officers in the house of God; and therefore are to be accounted of as “stewards of the mysteries of God”, having the secret and hidden things of God entrusted with them; the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, the sublime as well as plainer doctrines of the gospel, which they are to minister.”*

**Know them / esteem them very highly in love**

- **1Corinthians 4:1** “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.”
- **1Thessalonians 5:12,13** “12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves.”
  - We are to know our pastors, so that we enable them to perform the work of oversight: watching over the flock, feeding them, and providing each beloved sheep with scriptural counsels and admonitions unique to their frame and circumstance. If we don’t know them, then they cannot effectively do that work. How can a sheep know and hear the voice of a shepherd that they stand aloof from?
  - Know them:
    - We are to know them personally, and particularly. We should strive to understand their frames, so that we can maximize their strengths and efforts on our behalf, support them in their afflictions, and be prepared to

bear with their weaknesses, and cover their foibles. If you find yourself easily distressed at one of your pastors, then you ought to work to know them better. If you find yourself bracing for impact when one of them engages you, or you find yourself putting on a front, like you are lining up for an inspection, then you ought to work to know them better.

- To “know” a person in the scriptures often extends beyond a bare knowledge to include a particular love for them. Consider how God knows His people: “... *The Lord knoweth them that are his ...*” (**2Timothy 2:19**) We ought to know our pastors with particular love for them, and a determination therefore to perceive their actions through a lens of charity.
- Make yourself known to them:
  - *Gill: “To make themselves and their cases known unto them; for sometimes to “know” signifies to make known; as in 1Corinthians 2:2. Members of churches should freely converse with their pastors, and make known the state and condition of their souls; and especially when they have any matter of difficulty and cases of conscience to be resolved, or are in any soul trouble and distress; they should open their minds to them, and declare their case, that they may speak a word in season to them; for though their cases may sometimes be hit upon and reached in the general ministry of the word, yet this is owing to an extraordinary direction of providence, and cannot in common be expected by all; at least it cannot be assured of, unless persons unbosom themselves to their ministers, and tell them their case.”*
  - Making ourselves known to our pastors is not a passive matter; it requires practical, sincere effort to be scrutable. Practicing this behavior, and building these relationships in quiet days makes us better prepared when the Lord brings us days of trouble or affliction. It also requires that when we make ourselves and our state of mind known to them, that we are ready to receive words from them that run contrary to our flesh without taking offense, or treating them like enemies to be attacked or avoided.
- Esteem them very highly in love, for their work’s sake:
  - *Gill: “It is the duty of church members not only to know their pastors; but “to esteem them very highly in love for their work sake”, or “superabundantly”, as the word signifies; over and above common esteem and affection, in honour preferring them to others; they are to think highly of them, and entertain a high opinion of them, of their grace, gifts, and abilities for their work; for if they think meanly, and entertain a contemptible opinion of them, their ministry is not likely to be of much use unto them: and they should speak very highly and very honourably of them; for if members of churches do not speak well of their own pastors, it can*

*hardly be thought they should have much respect and esteem from others; and they should speak respectfully to them, with a becoming decency, considering the character they bear, and the high office they are in, in the church: and this esteem must be cordial and affectionate, it must be "in love"; not through fear, nor in dissimulation and hypocrisy, but in sincerity and truth; and that, "for their work sake", which is laborious, attended with weariness of body; and sometimes, through it, are "nigh unto" death, as Epaphroditus was (Philippians 2:30), and which also exposes to the reproach and contempt of the world. To which may be added, that it is, notwithstanding, a good work and honourable, and very beneficial to the souls of men; and therefore those employed in it, should be esteemed for the sake of it; for the work that they have done, in which they have been useful to men for conversion, or for comfort and edification; and forasmuch as they have continued in it, and may be more useful in their day and generation, both for the good of souls and the glory of God."*

○ Don't work against them:

- When our lust or pride is enflamed, we are prone to see an elder who is appropriately, faithfully engaging in the work of oversight as lording over us, gossiping, controlling, over reaching, trying to run our life or our house, etc. We receive their inquires and admonitions as impugning our character, intent, or motivation. It is shocking and shameful how quickly we can go from gushing words of kindness to violent opposition, when we want to protect ourselves from any inspection or criticism. It is thankless in the extreme to watch these men bear patiently with the weaknesses of our frame, but then maliciously search out and highlight their weaknesses, accusing them like some kind of petulant child, because our pride is up and our conscience is pricked.
  - **Galatians 4:12-16** *"12 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all. 13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. 14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. 15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. 16 Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"*
- If you sincerely submit to an elder's admonitions, and yet have some lingering offense or distress from your interactions with him, then the scriptures provide you an avenue to seek peace: entreat him as a father. Get to the Lord to quiet your spirit; put away malice, recognize that his

motivation is to work for your best good, and then go and peaceably entreat him. He will receive you.

- **1Timothy 5:1,2** *“1 Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; 2 The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.”*

### **Obey them / follow their example**

- **Philippians 3:17** *“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.”*
- **1Peter 5:1-4** *“1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: 2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”*
- **Hebrews 13:7-9; 14-18** *“7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. 8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. 9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. ... 14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. 15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. 16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. 17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. 18 Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.”*
- **Luke 10:16** *“He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.”*
  - Hear = “give ear to a teacher, consider, learn, understand, attend to what has been taught”
  - Despise = “to do away with, to set aside, disregard; to thwart the efficacy, nullify, make void, frustrate; to reject, to refuse”
- **Gill:** *“Obedience of members of churches to their guides and governors, lies in regarding their admonitions, reproofs, and rebukes, whether in case of error or immorality, and whether in private or in public; and as their business is to admonish when needful, their admonitions should be well taken; as they are to speak, exhort, and rebuke with all authority, their authority should not be despised, but be submitted to: likewise their counsels and advice should be observed, and taken, and acted up to; especially if it*

*appears to be founded on the word of God, and is consonant to it. Another branch of the duty of church members to their pastors, is to “submit” themselves to them; that is, to the laws of Christ’s house, as directed to and put into execution by them; and to their admonitions, reproofs, and censures. The reason given for such obedience and submission to them, is “because they watch for their souls”; not for the preservation of their bodies, and outward affairs; though if such who watch over these, to preserve them from hurt and damage in the night season, are to be regarded and valued, and obedience to be yielded to their alarms and directions, then much more those who watch for the good and welfare of immortal souls, which are of more worth than a world; their ministrations, in whatsoever way, are for comfort or edification, and are the instrumental means of saving souls: and what engages them to such watchfulness to preserve from error and heresy, from vice and immorality, is, that “they must give account”; to their own consciences, that they have discharged their work aright; to the church of God, to whom they are accountable if negligent; and especially to Christ, the Judge of all, to whom they must give an account of their ministry, and of the use of their talents, and of the souls put under their care, how they have discharged their duty towards them; and how such souls have behaved towards them under the ministry of the word and ordinances: and this they are desirous of doing “with joy, and not with grief”; either at the throne of grace, where they either rejoice or complain; or at the great day, when they will be witnesses either for or against those that have been committed to them; which latter would be “unprofitable” to them, and to the disadvantage of such who occasion grief and sorrow.”*

### **Hold them accountable in the case of flagrant sin**

- **1Timothy 5:19-22** *“19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. 20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. 21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. 22 Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.”*
  - Verse 19 tells us that we ought not be making careless accusations against elders, but rather that any matter must be discretely and firmly established before two or three witnesses. Every member of the church is to be treated in this exact same way (Matthew 18), so why double down on the concept specific to elders?
    - Calvin: *“I reply, this is a necessary remedy against the malice of men; for none are more liable to slanders and calumnies than godly teachers. Not only does it arise from the difficulty of their office, that sometimes they either sink under it, or stagger, or halt, or blunder, in consequence of which wicked men seize many occasions for finding fault with them; but there is this additional vexation, that, although they perform their duty correctly, so*

*as not to commit any error whatever, they never escape a thousand censures. And this is the craftiness of Satan, to draw away the hearts of men from ministers, that instruction may gradually fall into contempt. Thus not only is wrong done to innocent persons, in having their reputation unjustly wounded, (which is exceedingly base in regard to those who hold so honorable a rank,) but the authority of the sacred doctrine of God is diminished.”*

- Base men can inject poison into the body with their crafty insinuations and accusations, the effects of which can last for years, nay, generations, particularly when a pastor is their target. Each of us is responsible to stop that kind of behavior when we hear it, and bring it into the light if it is not repented of.
  - **Proverbs 25:23** *“The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.”*
- When it is appropriately established that an elder is walking in flagrant sin, the church is bound to deal with the matter fully, without partiality to the office the person holds. Because the church is supposed to follow the example of their elders, it is critical to correct the erring example when an elder falls into sin, so that the church is not left in confusion. If the church respects persons at those crucial moments, then the body learns to follow in the same sin as the offending elder; furthermore, the body learns to respect persons, which is its own deadly trap.

### **Provide for their needs**

- **1Timothy 5:17,18** *“17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. 18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.”*
  - The heart of this instruction is to provide for the financial needs of the elders. On the face of it, it seems to be distinguishing between elders that do the work of ruling (oversight), and those that teach doctrine. There are many expositors that favor that interpretation, but I don’t think it lines up with the many scriptures that we have reviewed in this series of sermons. Instead, I read this as simply saying that you should provide for their needs, and especially when it is the exclusive labor of their days. It would be wholly appropriate for an elder to dedicate all of their efforts to the work of the body, with no other vocation to support themselves; in that event, their financial needs should be fully supported by the church. If there is sufficient help among elders, I believe it is also appropriate for them to share the work, while also keeping a vocation that supports their families. This is the approach that the Apostle Paul took, so that he would be an example.

- **2Thessalonians 3:7-9** “7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; 8 Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: 9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.”
  - The reasoning we are given is taken from the Mosaic law: “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.” (**Deuteronomy 25:4**) You don’t work the ox to death while denying him the very substance that he is laboring to produce for you. This is similar to the way that the Jews were supposed to provide for the Levites, as they executed their peculiar duties to God on behalf of the people. It was a terrible sin when the Jews greedily refused to appropriately provide for the Levites, which in turn resulted in more and worse sin, as the Levites then broke from their duties to provide for themselves.
  - Why double honor? The word means “price”, or “value”. Does that mean that they should be paid double? I don’t think so. I think that Paul is simply pushing against the tendency of selfish flesh. Don’t deal with these faithful men in a stingy fashion. The work that they do is of the utmost value, because it is sowing seed in this world that produces a harvest in the life to come. Treat them like you understand that. If they need financial support, then they should be supported at the same standard of living that the rest of the church lives.
- Beyond financial support, the members of the church ought to be watching for practical ways to help their elders wherever possible. The elders have to enable that, by allowing the help. Just because we want to be a good example doesn’t mean that we should keep a death grip on every piece of work that comes our way. To the contrary, we ought to coach young strong souls to begin to take the burden upon themselves. In order to provide this help to an elder, you have to know him. You have to be watching; you have to be investing in that relationship. You cannot expect the person who is under the burden to chase you down.
  - **Galatians 6:1-10** “1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. 2 Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. 3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. 4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. 5 For every man shall bear his own burden. 6 Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. 7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. 9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. 10 As we have

*therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”*

### **Pray for them**

- **Ephesians 6:18-20** *“18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; 19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*
- **2Thessalonians 3:1-5** *“1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: 2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you. 5 And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.”*
- Gill: *“Another branch of duty in church members to their pastors, is suggested in Heb 13:18 "Pray for us", for us ministers; this is often inculcated in the sacred writings, as being of great moment and importance; see Eph 6:19, Col 4:3, 2Th 3:1. Members of churches should be solicitous at the throne of grace for their ministers. With respect to their private studies and preparation for their work; that they may be led to suitable subjects, and be furnished with suitable matter; that their understanding may be opened to understand the word; that they may be led into the depths and mysteries of the gospel; that their gifts may be increased; and that they may be diligent, industrious, and laborious in their work. With respect to their public ministrations; that they may come forth richly fraught with gospel truths; that they may have freedom and utterance in the delivery of them; that they may speak them boldly, faithfully, and fully, as they ought to be spoken; and that their labours may be blessed to saints and sinners: and unless members of churches are observant of this their duty, they cannot expect the word will be blessed to them. With respect to the world, and their conduct in it; that they may be kept from the evil of the world, that the ministry be not blamed; and from the temptations of Satan, who has a peculiar spite against them; and that they may be delivered from evil and unreasonable men, who, as much as can be, endeavour to discourage them, and hinder them in their work; and they should pray for them, that they may neither be intimidated by the frowns of the world, nor allured by the flatteries of it; and they should pray for their temporal good, for their bodily health, and for the sparing of their lives for farther usefulness, and for every thing needful for them.”*

### **Gather when they call the assembly together**



- **Hebrews 10:25** *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”*
  - While the “assembling” referenced in this verse speaks to the daily, continual assembling of ourselves in our spirit and the course of our lives, it certainly includes those times when the assembly is literally called together, whether for worship and teaching, seeking the Lord, or speaking about matters of importance to the body.
    - When the elders call the body together, we should make every effort to ensure that we are able to attend. This includes setting up the affairs of our lives to best accommodate that objective. There are certainly times when we cannot be physically present, but those times ought to be the rare exception, and for needful reasons. We need to be careful that we are not treating the assembly as a common logistic of our lives, that just needs to be fit into our busy schedule, or else discarded at our pleasure because of recreation. My friends, if we take this privilege for granted, we will do it at our peril.
    - When we come, we need to prepare ourselves, so that we are coming readily, with a willing heart, prepared to fully engage with the business at hand. Don’t come reluctantly, watching the clock, or questioning the needfulness of the meeting. What more important thing do we have in our lives, than tending to the Bride of Christ?
    - We have to treat all of the pastors equally when they are teaching us doctrine. Do not respect persons. Do not look down on any of them because your brain doesn’t connect as well with their particular approach / teaching style / personality. It’s fine to know that you have an easier time learning from one person vs another, but we need to strive to conform to the teacher as best as possible. No matter what, we cannot denigrate them to others. Further, if you have ought with a pastor, then you will misinterpret their words and motivations. It is a barrier to communion, and a barrier to understanding. So – if you have that kind of issue, then go and peaceably entreat that person until you are knit together in our common faith, purpose, and love.

### **1Thessalonians 5**

*“1 ¶ But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail*

upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. 5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. 6 ¶ Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. 7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. 8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. 9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. 11 ¶ Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. 12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. 14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. 15 See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. 16 ¶ Rejoice evermore. 17 Pray without ceasing. 18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. 19 Quench not the Spirit. 20 Despise not prophesyings. 21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. 22 Abstain from all appearance of evil. 23 ¶ And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. 25 Brethren, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. 27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”