

INTRODUCTION: In Part 1 of this message, we considered in some detail the important passage we have just read. Elders and pastors have real authority in Christ's congregation because they have been appointed by Christ, the Head of the church, to their sober and weighty role of preaching, modeling, and applying God's Word to God's people.

For this reason, the elders of any biblically functioning congregation must be qualified according to God's Word. Jesus Christ, the Head of His blood-bought churches, has spoken! He has told us through Paul how to identify the men He has equipped for the task. Because Christ is the Sovereign Lord, His churches must never appoint them by human standards, especially by feelings, but by the Apostolic qualifications alone. When we take 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 2 Timothy 2:24-26, Titus 1:6-9, Acts 20:18-35 together, a detailed image of an elder appears: he must be a mature Christian man, who is blameless. He must be faithful to his wife and a man with faithful children. He must manifest an ability to preach and teach the inspired, infallible Word of God effectively with skill and in the obvious power of the Spirit of God. How he governs his home must come under careful observation. He must not be overbearing, quick-tempered, but he must be gentle to all and patient. He must not be given to drunkenness, not violent, not greedy for material gain, but he must be an example of self-control. He must be hospitable, he must love what is good, upright, holy, and disciplined. Finally, as a faithful steward of God's house, he must cleave to the pure Word and Gospel, pointing God's people to Christ Jesus, the Head of His church.

Perhaps some of you are thinking, "I am not going to be an elder. What interest do I have in all this?" Why is all this important? (1) Because they watch over your souls. (2) Because as Christ's eternally loved people, you play an important role in recognizing and appointing your elders. (3) Because as Christ's blood-bought people you may have to remove an elder when he is no longer qualified. What was true of kings in the OT is certainly true of elders in the NT: "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn" (Pro 29:2). (4) Because as members of Christ's body, you need to be certain that qualified men are preaching the only message that saves sinners and leads to a holy life. (5) As Christ's set-apart people, you must cultivate these Christlike qualities in your own life and household. The elders are modeling what mature Christianity looks like so that your own life may conform to the biblical pattern. John Calvin puts it this way, Paul "exhorted all the Christians to behave themselves in such sort, that soberness, justice, holiness, modesty, and all those things which he speaketh of here, may be general virtues common to them all." (6) Because Christ, the Prophet, Priest, and King of His people, accomplishes His prophetic office in His churches through His elders by His Word and Spirit to God's glory, world without end!

1. APPLICATIONS:

(1) With humble hearts, let us be sure that understand the vital matter of authority. (1) the Sovereign Lord—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is and possesses all authority. He is the origin, the source of all authority in the universe. (2) God the Father has given all authority in heaven and earth to Christ the Son, the Head of the church. (3) Christ manifests His authority by His Spirit and His Word. These are the final authority in all the churches of Jesus Christ. (4) Qualified elders and teachers exercise delegated authority in the churches as Christ's representatives. Elders have no authority in themselves: they are appointed administrators of God's authoritative Word. We must keep this in bal-

ance: the elders must administer the Word of God in the power of the Spirit to the people of God.

(2) With humble hearts, let us obey and submit to our pastors as they faithfully preach, model, and correct according to God's Word. Obedience and submission are not weaknesses: biblically speaking, they are Spirit-wrought strengths that manifest faith in Christ and His Word. This, of course, is why Christ-appointed elders labor in their studies and in prayer. They must "Study to shew [themselves] approved unto God, [workmen] that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2Ti 2:15). For this reason, "elders that rule well [should] be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1Ti 5:17). The word labor means "to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually, work hard, toil, strive, struggle."¹ They must cry out to their heavenly Father, they must exalt the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, and they must depend entirely upon the Holy Spirit in their preaching. Why? "to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Act 20:28); again, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof" (1Pe 5:2). For this reason, good preaching does not simply say, "The Bible says this." Rather, good preaching says, "This is what the Bible says, this is what it means, and this is how we apply it to ourselves and live in it." This is crucial because when God's people hear God's Word they are hearing God—the Lord God Almighty, the Sovereign Creator, the Gracious Redeemer. We hear this in Paul: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2Co 5:20). In His Word, He reveals Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the one true and living God. In this way alone can we distinguish the true God from all the false gods! In this way alone, God reveals His glorious salvation in Jesus Christ. Sinners must repent of their sins and believe on the God-man Jesus Christ. That holy person—fully God, fully man—is the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father but through Him! In this way alone, God reveals His will for His worship; He reveals His will for our lives—what we should embrace and what we should reject. Every congregation then must then know the qualifications of an elder and then recognize and appoint faithful men. By obeying and submitting to such men, we will bring glory to God and do good to our souls.

(3) With humble, obedient hearts, let us pray earnestly for our pastors. Our pastors watch for our immortal souls: Can there be a more important task on earth? They will give account to Christ for what they think about, say about, and do to God's Bride! Is there a more solemn accountability in the Kingdom of God? We should ardently, faithfully, and unfailingly pray (1) that they will remain faithful to the Lord and to His Word; (2) that they will be filled with the Holy Spirit; (3) that they will give themselves continually to the Word and prayer; (4) that they will govern God's people according to the Word and not their own whims; (5) that God will protect them from secret sin; (6) that God will protect them and their families from the snares, devices, and attacks of the devil; (7) that they feed the flock of God and watch diligently over the souls of God's people; (8) that they may finish their course with joy (Act 20:24). Remember, even the apostle Paul asked the Thessalonians, "Brethren, pray for us" (1Th 5:25). Again, "Finally,

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brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you” (2Th 3:1). And again, “Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly (Heb 13:18). Do you pray for your elders? I pray that it is so.

(4) With humble, obedient, and prayerful hearts, let us give ourselves to helping our pastors undertake their oversight with joy, not grief. When we think of the weak, feeble, vessels of dust that Christ appoints to be elders, let us give ourselves to a careful and exuberant pursuit of making their oversight a joy to them. May we give ourselves to making sure that our elders can say with John, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3Jo 1:4). Matthew Henry says, “The best evidence of our having the truth is our walking in the truth. Good men will greatly rejoice in the soul-prosperity of others; and they are glad to hear of the grace and goodness of others.”² Can there be a better goal regarding our elders, who have taught us our Savior’s will and how to walk with Christ to the glories of heaven, than to help finish their course with joy? They must give account to Christ for their work, but we will give account for praying for them. As Paul soberly told the Roman Christians, “every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12).

CONCLUSION: My beloved brethren, the apostle has told us plain, simple language, “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.” When Christ calls us out of this world and we give account to Him for our lives as believers, may we be able in that day to say, “Lord, as feeble and weak as I was in the world, Thy grace did give me the power to obey Thee in obeying and submitting to those whom Thou didst appoint to guide my soul unto this very day with Thee.” Amen.

² Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2458.