

Giving Thanks for Godly Elders

"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." (Hebrews 13:17).

The following is based on an illustration I read years ago. Imagine for a moment that you're a business owner. In order for your business to be successful you have to rely not only on your own efforts but also on the efforts of each of your employees. However, while you are diligently working to build your business, few of your employees volunteer for any assignments, many occasionally neglect to carry out the responsibilities they've been given and some often don't even show up for work. To top it all off, some of the employees spend the majority of their time trying to change your business so that they can have it the way they want it instead of the way you know it should be. In spite of this, you are still expected to make this business a glimmering success.

Imagine further that every December you sit down and, putting pencil to paper, determine with great care how much money it's going to take to run your business during the next year. Your plans for growth and philanthropy are many. However, come the first week of January, you have no idea whether or not your income will come close to equaling your budgeted expenses. What's more, this uncertainty threatens to rear its ugly head 51 more weeks during the year. In spite of this, you are still expected to take this business to the top.

How long would it be until you decided that this business wasn't for you? How long would it take you to abandon ship and move on? Such discouragement could cause even the strongest heart to droop.

Considering this article's title and the opening verse of Scripture, I hope that you've grasped the analogy. While elders in the Lord's church are not "spiritual business owners," they nonetheless have the responsibility to oversee the congregation they serve (I Peter 5:1-3). As they carry out this task, they must frequently deal with members of the flock who refuse to work, absent themselves from worship services and Bible classes and/or even go to the extent of attempting to harm the work of the church with their ungodly living, loose talk or false doctrines. They contribute numerous hours of their precious time to visiting the sick, encouraging the wanderers, confronting the fallen and studying God's Word in order to build up the congregation and protect it from the attacks of ravening wolves (Acts 20:28,29). In addition, the elders oversee the distribution of the funds collected each first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:1-2). The commitments made to the care of the property as well as to the teaching and preaching of the Gospel are numerous and yet the only scriptural source the elders have to meet these commitments is the aforementioned weekly, free-will contribution. The elders' work is a monumental task that can be performed only by men who meet strict qualifications as set down by the Lord (I Timothy 3; Titus 1).

While God's Word instructs elders on how to do their work, it also gives instructions regarding the members' responsibility to the elders. In addition to the verse at the beginning of this article, I Thessalonians 5:12-13 reads, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves." While I'm sure the elders are glad to receive our words of appreciation, I'm also sure that they are even happier when they see the members of the congregation they oversee being faithful to God. The best way for us to honor the elders is to honor God in our daily lives.

May each of us thank God for the faithful elders who oversee congregations of the Lord's church. May we show these brethren our appreciation in word and deed.

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