

# The Harvester



## Preparing Souls

## To Serve The Lord



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## Church Members' Responsibility Toward The Eldership

By Brian R. Kenyon

In order for the church to function properly, each part must be “fitly joined together and compacted [or knitted] by that which every joint supplieth” (Eph. 4:16, KJV). Involved in this properly functioning body of Christ are responsibilities toward one another in the local church. In First Thessalonians 5:12-22, Paul teaches three levels of responsibility church members have: (1) toward the eldership (1 Thes. 5:12-13); (2) toward each other (1 Thes. 5:14-15); and (3) toward themselves (1 Thes. 5:16-22). In this article, we will examine the first of these responsibilities; namely, church members' responsibility toward the eldership.

### Appreciate The Eldership

Paul wrote, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you” (1 Thes. 5:12). Paul could have “commanded” these brethren as an apostle with authority, but instead he “beseeches [urges, NKJ]” them as family in Christ. “Brethren” is a term of endearment often used by Paul (cf. Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 1:1). All Christians are of equal value in the family of God (cf. Mt. 23:8).

This first responsibility Paul gives for the church members toward their elders is to appreciate them. “To know [recognize, NKJ]” is from a word that means to know, understand, perceive; as used here, it means “to acknowledge the true value of,

appreciate” (Zerwick 620). This perhaps indicates that the Thessalonian “brethren” did not realize as they should the rightful place of those to whom Paul referred. The Thessalonian church consisted mainly of Gentile Christians who perhaps were not as inclined to appreciate the role of these leaders (unlike Jews familiar with the synagogue organization).

The group Paul said we are to appreciate is described in a three-fold manner. They “labour among you,” they “are over you in the Lord,” and they “admonish you.” That these refer to one group that do all three of these functions, rather than three groups that each do one of the functions described, is evident by the fact that there is only one Greek article that governs the three participles translated “labour...are over...admonish,” and they are connected by the coordinating conjunction translated “and.” Let us consider Paul's inspired description of the function of this group of individuals in the local church.

First, those to whom Paul referred “labour among you.” The word “labour” (from *kopiao*, κοπιᾶω cf. the noun in 1 Thes. 1:3; 2:9; 3:5) means to work

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hard, labor (Rom. 16:6; 1 Cor. 4:12; 15:10; Eph. 4:28; 1 Tim. 4:10; 2 Tim. 2:6). Although the verb often refers to physical work, it can also refer to the hard work done for the Lord in teaching and living the Gospel (cf. Rom. 16:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; Rev. 2:3). Second, those to whom Paul referred are “over you in the Lord.” The word behind “[Who] are over” (from *proistemi*, προΐστημι, literally, “set before”) means be a leader, have authority over, manage; care for, give help. The word is used with reference to elders and deacons concerning the headship in their families (1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12; 5:17 cf. Rom. 12:8). Note that the realm of their authority is “in the Lord,” and is, therefore, to be exercised for the spiritual good of the family of God (cf. 2 Cor. 10:8), not as an opportunity to force their own will upon others (cf. Lk. 22:25-27; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). Third, those to whom Paul refers “admonish you.” The word “admonish” (from *noutheteo*, νουθετέω) basically means to impart understanding (a mind for something); it denotes the word of admonition which is designed to correct while not provoking or embittering (1 Thes. 5:14; Acts 20:31; Rom. 15:14; 1 Cor. 4:14 “warn;” Col. 1:28 “warning;” 3:16; 2 Thes. 3:15) (Behm 1021). The word carries the idea of “older-brotherly” counseling on the part of the leader to a younger brother who is at fault in a matter (especially brought out in 1 Cor. 4:14) (Edwards 36).

Although various ideas exist as to whom this group refers, the elders of the church best fit this context and the total teaching of the Bible. The

main argument against the view that this refers to elders is the claim that the church could not have had these “officials” this early in the church’s history (AD 51-52). Paul and Barnabas, however, earlier than the establishment of the church in Thessalonica “ordained elders in every

church” in the regions of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:22-23 cf. Acts 20:26). Furthermore, church organization was well established in the Philippian congregation (about AD 60-62) (Phil. 1:1). This claim also assumes that church organization “evolved” over a period of time. However, the Bible teaches that elders (and deacons, etc.) were part of God’s plan from the beginning (cf. Eph. 4:11-12).

Another argument against the view that First Thessalonians 5:12 refers to elders is that the congregation in Thessalonica was too young to have mature men who would qualify (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). However, it is possible that some of the converts were spiritually mature Jews, and were thus more readily qualified once they learned the Gospel more fully and taught it to their families. This was also during the miraculous age, and some men may have been spiritually gifted (cf. Eph. 4:11-12). Having considered these objections, the truth stands clear: there is no group of people other than elders who are “over” others “in the Lord” (cf. Acts 20: 28; 1 Tim. 5:17)!

## Respect The Eldership

Paul continued with instruction to the Thessalonians, “And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thes. 5:13). They are to respect the elders of the church for their work (1 Thes. 5:13a). The word translated “esteem” basically means to lead, but in the thirteen known epistles of Paul, it is used in the sense of to consider, regard, have regard for (2 Cor. 9:5, “thought;” Phil. 2:3, “esteem;” 2:6, “thought;” 2:25, “suppose;” 3:7-8, “counted;” Heb. 11:11, “judged;” 11:26, “esteeming”). “Very [exceeding, ASV] highly” is from a word that means with all earnestness, more than ever; very highly indeed (Newman 187). The entire construction of the phrase teaches that the Thessalonians are to esteem their elders most highly, or to have an immense regard for them (Zerwick 620). “In love” shows they are not to be respected as mere “figures of authority” whose names appear on church stationery, but with affection as family in Christ. Likewise, “for their works sake” shows that respect must not be based on mere personalities, but because of the work elders do on behalf of the Lord’s church. Elsewhere, we are told,

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

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not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17)

## Conclusion

The relevance of the last part of First Thessalonians 5:13—"be at peace among yourselves"—must not be overlooked. When the elders are respected and appreciated in love for their work, the church will be at peace (1 Thes. 5:13b). Disharmony in a local church with an eldership most often results from one of two factors. Either elders are not Scripturally

fulfilling their God-given roles and thus are not receiving appreciation or respect from the members, or elders are doing their God-given work, but they are not receiving the appreciation nor respect from the members because the members do not appreciate nor respect God's will concerning leadership in the local church. Local church members must appreciate and respect the local eldership! As one observed, "It is a matter of fact that to this day we are often slow to realize that effective leadership in the church of Christ demands effective following" (Morris 167).

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# AS WE BEGIN OUR 44<sup>TH</sup> SCHOOL YEAR . . .

We give thanks, first and foremost, to God who has allowed us to train preachers and prepare souls to better serve the Lord since 1969! A number of years ago, a donation was given to our library that included several issues of brotherhood journals. In many of those journals from the 1970's, announcements were made of preaching schools that had started throughout this country. Yet, many, if not most of those preacher training schools no longer exist for various reasons, ranging from not enough students, not enough support, and brethren just not getting along with one another. However, by God's grace the Florida School of Preaching continues to faithfully train preachers.

Secondly, as we begin our 44th school year, we give thanks to you, our supporters. Without your help we could not even have a school to train preachers and prepare souls to better serve the Lord. We especially thank the South Florida Avenue congregation for hosting the school and supporting us in so many ways, above and beyond their recently increased financial assistance. We also thank those of you who support our students. Especially when we consider the economic challenges of our time, it is difficult enough for a young man with a family to take two years out of his life for intensive preacher training, but when we add to that the difficulty in raising support, it sometimes seems impossible for a young man to attend the Florida School of Preaching. However, with your generous and sacrificial help, we continue to enroll young men who want to preach the Gospel of Christ. Please include us in your 2013 budgets, whether you wish to support the school, our students, or both! We cannot exist as we have since 1969 without your help!

As we accomplish great things through the Lord this semester, we ask that you continue to pray for the Florida School of Preaching that we may continue faithfully training preachers until the Lord returns. Also, please help us find men who are willing to dedicate their lives to preaching the Gospel of peace. In many ways, you are our best recruiting tools! Again, for the start of the first semester of our 44th school year . . . **WE THANK GOD AND YOU!**

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