

UNDERSTANDING OUR ROLES 2**March 8, 2015**

In the interest of being a unified force in the world, the church must be able to accomplish the goals that are placed before her. However, that is not possible unless we know what each member's role and responsibility is. Last week's bulletin focused upon the role of the preacher and exactly what needs to be done if he is going to be successful in that role. This week's bulletin will spotlight the role of the eldership, and the necessary relationship between elders and members that is needed in order for a congregation to be successful.

First, being an elder is not an easy task, instead it is an obligation that places men in a position of responsibility for another's soul (Heb. 13:17). Think about that for just a moment. The men that comprise an eldership are not only responsible for their individual souls, but for the souls of every man and woman that are members of the congregation over which they watch (Acts 20:28)! That fact alone should draw the respect of all Christians for faithful elders that serve the church.

Second, faithful elders should always be given the benefit of the doubt. The church has recognized them as mature men of wisdom and good judgment (1 Tim. 3:1-7). Elders are often the guardians of information that only they know, and because of that they should be protected when others jump to conclusions. One way for that to happen is to never adopt an "us" vs "them" mindset. The eldership is not the opposition, but men of God that have been given an enormous responsibility to shoulder. Those types of attitudes have destroyed many congregations of the Lord's people (1 Cor. 12:25).

Third, faithfulness must be a characteristic for the elders and members alike. It is the obligation of the eldership to shepherd the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4), but it is also the responsibility of the congregation to allow themselves to be shepherded (1 Thess. 5:12-13). The very designation of overseer (Acts 20:28) means the eldership has the right to be involved in the personal lives of each member over which they watch. That isn't a duty that any elder looks forward to undertaking, but one that God commands. Understanding that, the membership must be willing to allow the eldership to help guide them during times of confusion and question.

Fourth, a godly eldership must be willing to seek the good of the congregation as a whole, and be willing to communicate effectively. The eldership should never behave as "lords" over the church (1 Pet. 5:1-3), and under no circumstances should a single elder take it upon himself to "run the church," or make decisions outside of the eldership as a whole (3 Jn. 1:9-10). There is, of course, wisdom in God's requirement that the eldership be made up of a plurality of faithful men. For a godly eldership to be successful, it must be willing to keep the congregation abreast of information that needs to be shared, even if certain details cannot be revealed.

Fifth, faithful members desire to have an eldership that not only leads, but one that also works (Mt. 23:1-3). The elders are not administrators over the church, they are Christians that have been placed in leadership roles so the church will move in the godly direction that God intended. James Rogers, minister for the Smyrna church of Christ in Cookeville, TN, once stated during a Gospel meeting, "If elders are going to be shepherds, they must smell like the sheep." Of course,

brother Rogers meant that elders were to be an active part of the congregation, not only in the church's work efforts, but also in the lives of its members.

Sixth, congregations desire that the eldership utilize the talents of all the members of the congregation. The body is comprised of many different members with many different talents (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 12:14-24), and they need to be employed within their proper scopes. If a congregation is going to grow, under proper oversight, then growth must take place in the individual members of the collective body! A member may not have a present talent that perhaps, can be fostered and developed into a future talent.

The role of the eldership is one that carries with it great responsibility, and one that is due great respect. Elderships that are concerned with the future will always be grooming younger men to one day be elders and placing the needs of the congregation and its faithfulness to God in its proper place of priority. Next week, the deacons and their roles in the work and success of the church will be considered.