

What is the Christian's Responsibility to their Elders?

By Joshua Stucki

Hebrews 13:7:

“⁷ Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

Hebrews 13:17:

“¹⁷ Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”

1 Peter 5:5:

“⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble.”^[a]

Many other verses speak of the elders but for the context of our study these will suffice.

People today are more independent than ever. This is not inherently bad; people need to be able to think for themselves, supply for themselves, and be able to plan ahead for themselves. Nonetheless, there are some negatives to being too independent:

Scripture tells us that every Christian is a part of the Body of Christ, of whom Christ is the Head (Colossians 1:18). Each of us is a part of that body; we are independently and succinctly a part, but dependent on every other part as well. Parting from the body would not result in more

independence; in fact, it would result in the death of that part. No dismembered hand or foot ever lived on its own for long!

Christ has placed elders as overseers of every local congregation (Acts 20:28). When the first-century church had an issue, they first went to the Apostles (Acts 6:1-2), but after elders were raised up, they joined the Apostles in decision making (Acts 15:2). After the church spread and not every new church had an Apostle (of which naturally none exist today), evangelists who planted churches appointed new elders (Titus 1:5), and they became the sole overseers of each local church.

So at this point in the Christian age, Christ is the Head of His Kingdom, the Church, and He has left His Word for us to live by (2 Timothy 3:16). Christ has provided elders as qualified by Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1-7) to lead their individual congregation in right teaching (Hebrews 13:7) and administrate the church as they submit to Christ (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12+13).

Our only avenue against an elder is to follow Scripture's admonition in 1 Timothy 5:19-21. This is only in the context if an elder sins, not just because we disagree on a decision they have made. Decisions they have made that can be shown to be Scriptural (issues that are "gray" are up to them to decide – that is one reason why elders exist) have no place being questioned, complained or gossiped about. The decision is final.

Finally, 1 Peter 5:5 reminds us who are younger to submit to our elders. We can learn from them, even their mistakes. We will be honored ("blessed") by God if we do, according to Peter. Peter was an elder (and an Apostle, of course) of the local congregation he served (1 Peter 5:1). Undeniably he dealt with difficulty as all elders do today. Let us as Christians submit to our elders, and not make their jobs difficult, as that would be of no profit to us (Hebrews 13:17).