

MATCHING PARTS #2

A. **Last Sunday** we read four passages that referred to our responsibilities toward qualified elders.

1. We are to honor & esteem them, to follow their faith, to obey & submit to their rule, & to follow their example & pattern of life—& obviously, such authority can easily be abused.

One elder stated that what the members want is not important. {In some instances he may be correct, however the opinions of the members should be considered in many cases}. **Another** elder stated that in order to be in submission to the elders, a person must not only do the elders' bidding without question, but must also go to the elder and tell him he is doing a good job.

[Today, we want to continue to discuss the responses we should have to the work of qualified elders.

First of all, we can properly respond to elders by...]

I. ACCEPTING A WISE MAN'S JUDGMENT & COUNSEL

A. **Elders**, of course, do not make laws that Christians must abide by, but they will have many occasions to offer their advice & counsel.

1. In some cases it will be personal, & then in other cases it will be directed toward the congregation.
2. And, unless we have good reason to think otherwise, we should view their advice as coming from wise & knowledgeable men who have our best spiritual interest at heart.
3. However, when elders get idea that they have legislative powers they have gone beyond the Holy Spirit's teaching regarding their work.
4. And in addition, when members get idea that elders make all the rules, or that they can't be wrong, & that we have a duty to follow their lead wherever it may go, then we, the members, will cultivate an improper relationship to the elders.

5. But do elders have the God-given right, even duty, to make judgments & to offer advice that we are obligated to accept?
 - a. Peter started (15:7-11). Paul & Barnabas went next (15:13). James, an elder, gave his judgment (15:13-21, 19 – the longest of the speeches).
- B. Consider Acts 15, & the questions that arose over circumcision & the Law of Moses (15:1-2).
1. Why go to Jerusalem in the first place? After all, God was already at work among the Gentiles.
 - a. He was working through apostles like Peter & Paul, & through prophets like Barnabas.
 2. God had already made His will known that He does not require the Gentiles, who were coming to the Lord, to be circumcised & to keep the Law.
 3. So why go to Jerusalem? To confer face to face not just with the other apostles but also with the elders of the church (15:2, 4), AND furthermore, to allow the apostles & elders to discuss the matter between themselves (15:6).
 - a. Peter started (15:7-11). Paul & Barnabas went next (15:13). James, an elder, gave his judgment (15:13-21, 19 – the longest of the speeches).
 4. What was the result of the apostles & elders conferring with one another on this issue?
 - a. It “pleased...the whole church” (15:22), in Jerusalem.
 - b. In other words, every sound Christian in Jerusalem consented to & agreed with the judgment of the apostles & elders.
 - c. And soon, churches everywhere would be given the same opportunity to consent with the apostles & elders (15:22-31; 16:4).
 - d. Now, do I believe that the elder’s judgment would have had the same force if the apostles had not been involved? NO! However, the elders were major players in the final decision, & the church consented to it.

C. **So the point** we are driving at is this:

1. If we have the idea that elders lead & rule by example ONLY, & that they have no right to make any judgments for the church, or to give any advice & counsel to us – *then we are simply not going to match up well with elders.*
2. And if we don't match up with qualified elders, whose authority are we trampling on?
 - a. We would be trampling on the authority of God the Holy Spirit, Who has given elders their duty to oversee us (**Acts 20:28**).

D. **The authority** of elders has long been recognized by God's people & with His consent.

1. Before David became King of Judah & later Israel, he already had a standing army that could have destroyed much of his nation.

2. But even David himself was not crowned King without the consent & blessing of the elders of his people (**2 Sam 3:17-18; 5:1-5**).
3. When David's son Absalom assumed the throne, David left Jerusalem. Why? Because the elders sided with Absalom (**2 Sam 17:4**).
4. And when David's army defeated Absalom's army, David didn't return to Jerusalem until the elders invited him back (**2 Sam 19:11**).

[Likewise, the authority of elders in the church is more than just example setting – *they aren't mere figure heads.*

They have an important role as leaders, & that makes those of us who are not elders subject to their judgment & counsel, which is in keeping with God's word.

How else are we to respond to elders?]

II. ACCEPTING A SHEPHERD'S CARE & PROTECTION

A. **Can you have** a shepherd without a flock that is willing to follow? Can a shepherd do any shepherding without sheep tagging along?

1. Everything a shepherd does as a shepherd involves his authority to lead a flock of sheep.
2. And that authority is not for his selfish pleasure or his prideful ego.
 - a. Can you even imagine a prideful shepherd? Spending the night out in the elements, & sleeping on the hard ground, but never really getting any restful slumber for fear of wolves coming in to maim or kill the sheep – will drive away all temptations to be prideful.

B. **What do spiritual** shepherds do with spiritual sheep (Acts 20:17, 28-31)?

[Every admonition Paul made to the Ephesian elders was in view of protecting the sheep from wolves.]

1. They “take heed” to the flock: to turn the mind to, attend to, be attentive: to a person or thing (Thayer).
2. They are “overseers” of the flock: a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent (Thayer).
3. They “shepherd” the flock: to feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep (Thayer).
4. They “watch” for the flock: to give strict attention to, be cautious, active (Thayer).
 - a. A spiritual shepherd is concerned with the spiritual health & nourishment of his sheep, as well as their protection from spiritual danger & their recovery from spiritual injury.
5. They must also “support the weak”, as Paul had demonstrated when he lived in Ephesus.

Acts 20:35 – I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that **you must support the weak**. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

- a. Now can shepherd “support the weak” without the consent of the weak?
 - b. No, those members who are weak spiritually must be willing to accept the help & leadership that a shepherd can offer – *there are far too many cases where weak sheep refuse to be supported or led by shepherds.*
- C. **On the other hand**, what do spiritual sheep do with Shepherds (**John 10:3-5**)?
- a. Sheep hear the voice, they know the voice & they follow the voice (singular, as of unity with one another & with Christ) of their Shepherds.

[A third way we are to respond to elders.]

III. ACCEPTING A PASTOR’S TRAINING

Eph 4:11-12 – And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, & some **pastors** & teachers, 12 **for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry**, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

- A. **Elders** who are going to lead in equipping [training] the saints for the work of ministry will have to be matched up with saints who want to be trained to minister.
 1. No matter how competent the elders are in regard to equipping the saints, they must have the willing cooperation of saints.

[A fourth way we are to respond to elders.]

IV. INVITING AN ELDER’S COMPANY

Jas 5:14 – Is anyone among you sick? **Let him call for the elders of the church**, & let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

- A. **Elders**, who are going to pray for the sick must first be invited or called on to do so.
1. Elders may know a lot about the members, but elders cannot be expected to know everything.
 2. Sometimes we have a notion that elders will be knocking at the door when we have a problem.
 3. But James tells us that when we are in need, we should take the first step.

2. Are we willing to accept the elders' judgments & counsel, their care & protection, their training process, & are we willing to invite them to pray for us?
3. If we are willing to support them in the work they have been called by God to do, then we will match up with them perfectly.
4. And if they will lead us as Jesus would lead us, then we will truly be what the church is supposed to be: "the fullness of Christ" (**Eph 1:23; 4:13; 15-16**).

CLOSING

- A. **What is the main question** we have been addressing in our last two morning lessons?
1. "How well do we match up with God's order of leadership in the church"?

GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR SALVATION:

Hear the gospel of Jesus Christ; read it in your Bible: Acts 2; 3; 13; 17; Rom 10:17

Believe Jesus to be Lord and Christ, the Son of God and Savior: Acts 2:36; John 3:16; 8:24; 20:30-31; Acts 4:12; Titus 1:4

Repent of your sins: Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 1 John 3:4

Confess your faith in Jesus Christ: Matt 10:32-33; Acts 8:37; Rom 10:9-10

Be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins: Acts 2:38; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet 3:21

Be obedient to the Lord, He will be your Judge: Titus 2:11-12; Heb 5:9; 2 John 9; Rev 2:10; John 12:48