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Be Obedient to Those Taking the Lead
 The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom—1989

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“Be obedient to those who are taking the lead among you and be submissive, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will render an account.”—HEBREWS 13:17.

1. How do we benefit from the work of Christian overseers?

Jehovah has provided overseers for his organization in this “time of the end.” (Daniel 1 24) They take the lead in caring for sheeplike ones, and their supervision is refreshing. (Isaiah 32:1, 2) Moreover, loving oversight by elders who treat God’s flock with tenderness serves as a protection from Satan and this wicked system of things.—Acts 20:28-30; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 5:19.

2. How did some view the apostle Paul, but what attitude toward the elders is fitting?

² But how do you view the elders? In your heart, do you say: “I’ll never go to another elder in this congregation if I have a problem, for I have no confidence in any of them? If that is how you feel, could you be overemphasizing their imperfections? In ancient Corinth, some said of the apostle Paul: “His letters are weighty and forceful, but his presence in person is weak and his speech contemptible.” Yet, God assigned Paul to a ministry and used him as “an apostle to the nations.” (2 Corinthians 10:10; Romans 11:13; 1 Timothy 1:12) It is hoped, then, that you feel more like the sister who said: “We have the best body of elders in the world. They were right here to help when needed.” 21

Why Obey Them?

3. If the Lord is to be with the spirit we show, how should we view Christian undershepherds?

³ Since Christian undershepherds have been provided by the Great Shepherd, Jehovah God, how do you think he wants us to view them? Surely, God expects us to follow the Bible-based direction received through loving overseers under the supervision of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Then “the Lord will be with the spirit we show; we will enjoy peace, and we will be upbuilt spiritually.”—2 Timothy 4:22; compare Acts 9:31; 15:23-32.

4. How can we personally apply Hebrews 13:7?

⁴ Paul urged: “Remember those who are taking the lead among you, who have spoken the word of God to you, and as you contemplate how their conduct turns out imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7) Among the early Christians, the apostles primarily took the lead. Today, we can observe those making up the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses, other anointed overseers, and men of the “great crowd” who take the lead among us. (Revelation 7:9) Although we are not urged to imitate their voice quality, posture, or other human traits, we should be able to make our conduct turn out well by imitating their faith.

5. On the earth today, to whom has the chief responsibility of caring for the Christian congregation been entrusted, and what do they deserve?

⁵ On the earth today, the chief responsibility for caring for our spiritual needs has been entrusted to “the faithful and discreet slave.” Its representative Governing Body takes the lead and coordinates the worldwide Kingdom-preaching work. (Matthew 24:14, 45-47) Especially might these spirit-anointed elders be viewed as spiritual governors, for Hebrews 13:7 can be rendered: “Be you mindful of the ones governing . . . you.” (Kingdom Interlinear) With more than 60,000 congregations and over 3,500,000 Kingdom proclaimers, the 12 elders forming the Governing Body have plenty to do in the Lord’s work.’ (1 Corinthians 15:58) In view of their God-given assignment, they deserve our full cooperation, even as the first-century governing body had the cooperation of the early Christians.—Acts 15:1, 2.

6. What are some things done by elders for the benefit of Jehovah’s people?

⁶ Overseers have been spirit-appointed to care for the spiritual needs of the congregation. (Acts 20:28) They see to it that the Kingdom message is preached in the territory of the local congregation. These Scripturally qualified men also provide spiritual direction in a loving manner. They exhort, console, and bear witness to their spiritual brothers and sisters, to the end that these might go on walking worthily of God. (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8, 11, 12) Even when someone takes a false step before he is aware of it, these men seek to readjust him “in a spirit of mildness.”—Galatians 6:1.

7. What counsel did Paul give at Hebrews 13:17?

⁷ Our hearts are motivated to cooperate with such loving overseers. This is fitting, as Paul wrote: “Be obedient to those who are taking the lead among you and be submissive, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will render an account; that they may do this with joy and not with sighing, for this would be damaging to you.” (Hebrews 13:17) How are we to understand this counsel? 22

8. (a) In view of Hebrews 13:17, why should we be obedient to those taking the lead? (b) Our obedience and submissiveness can have what good effects?

⁸ Paul urges us to obey those governing us spiritually. We are to “be submissive,” to yield to these undershepherds. Why? Because ‘they are keeping watch over our souls,’ or lives dedicated to God. And how are they “keeping watch”? Here the present active indicative of the Greek verb *agrupneo* literally means that the elders “are abstaining from sleep.” This reminds us of the solitary shepherd who forgoes sleep to protect his flock from nighttime dangers. Elders sometimes spend sleepless nights in prayerful concern for God’s flock or in rendering spiritual aid to fellow believers. How much we should appreciate their faithful service! Surely, we do not want to be like the “ungodly men” of Jude’s day who “disregarded lordship and spoke abusively of glorious ones,” anointed Christian elders with God-given glory, or honor, conferred upon them.—Jude 3, 4, 8.

⁹ Jehovah would be displeased if we failed to be obedient and submissive to Christian overseers. This would also prove burdensome to them and would harm us spiritually. If we were uncooperative, the elders might care for their duties with sighing, perhaps in a spirit of discouragement that could result in a loss of joy in our Christian activities. But our obedience and submissiveness promote godly conduct and strengthen our faith. “The Lord is with the spirit we show,” and joy flourishes in such a climate of cooperation, peace, and unity.—2 Timothy 4:22; Psalm 133:1.

10. According to 1 Timothy 5:17, why do those presiding in a fine way deserve honor?

¹⁰ Our being obedient and submissive to congregation elders does not mean that we are men pleasers. That would be unscriptural, for first-century Christian slaves were told to obey their masters, “not with acts of eye-service, as men pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, with fear of Jehovah.” (Colossians 3:22; Ephesians 6:5, 6) Overseers ‘who preside in a fine way and work hard in speaking and teaching’ deserve honor principally because their teaching is based on God’s Word. As Paul wrote: “Let the older men who preside in a fine way be reckoned worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard in speaking and teaching. For the scripture says: ‘You must not muzzle a bull when it threshes out the grain’; also: ‘The workman is worthy of his wages.’”—1 Timothy 5:17, 18.

11. How may “double honor” come to an elder, but what must he avoid?

¹¹ Paul’s words just quoted indicate that material help can rightly be given to those looking after the spiritual interests of others. However, this does not mean that elders should receive a salary, and “double honor” surely is not something exacted by an elder. It may come from the congregation’s members spontaneously, but he must never use his assignment to gain power or material possessions. He should not seek his own glory or associate mainly with the more prosperous ones for material advantage and to the neglect of others. (Proverbs 25:27; 29:23; Jude 16) Rather, an overseer must shepherd God’s flock ‘willingly, not for love of dishonest gain, but eagerly.’—1 Peter 5:2.

12. By keeping what in mind will we be helped to obey those taking the lead among us?

¹² We will be helped to obey and honor those taking the lead if we remember that God himself has provided the elders. (Ephesians 4:7-13) Since these men are spirit appointed and God’s organization occupies a vital place in the lives of Jehovah’s Witnesses, surely we want to demonstrate our gratitude and respect for theocratic arrangements. Moreover, we can assist new ones to develop this attitude if we set a fine example of obedience and submission to those taking the lead among us.

Why Appreciate Their Service?

13. (a) What contrasting views of leadership exist in the world and in God’s organization? (b) We have what sound reasons for confidence in the men taking the lead among us? (c) Instead of magnifying the imperfections of hardworking elders, what should we do?

¹³ In the world, there is a tendency to reject leadership. As one lecturer said: “The rising education level has improved the talent pool such that followers have become so critical that they are almost impossible to lead.” But a spirit of independent thinking does not prevail in God’s organization, and we have sound reasons for confidence in the men taking the lead among us. For instance, only those meeting Scriptural requirements are appointed as elders. (1 Timothy 3:1-7) They are trained to be kind, loving, and helpful, yet firm in upholding Jehovah’s righteous standards. The elders adhere to Scriptural truth, ‘holding firmly to the faithful word, that they may be able to exhort by healthful teaching.’ (Titus 1:5-9) Of course, we should not magnify their human imperfections, for all of us are imperfect. (1 Kings 8:46; Romans 5:12) Instead of feeling frustrated by their limitations and treating their counsel lightly, let us appreciate and accept the Bible-based direction of the elders as coming from God.

14. In view of 1 Timothy 1:12, how should an elder look upon the ministry assigned to him?

¹⁴ Paul, an appreciative man, said: “I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who imparted power to me, because he considered me faithful by assigning me to a ministry.” (1 Timothy 1:12) That ministry, or service, included the preaching work and the serving of fellow believers. Although an overseer has an assignment by holy spirit to serve as a shepherd, this should not make him feel superior to others, for he himself is part of God’s flock of sheeplike ones. (1 Peter 5:4) Instead, he should be grateful that the Head of the congregation, Jesus Christ, counted him worthy to minister to members of the flock and that God qualified him by granting him a measure of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. (2 Corinthians 3:5) Since an elder has reason to be grateful for his God-given privileges, other members of the congregation should appreciate this ministry, or service.

15. What is the essence of Paul’s counsel at 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13?

¹⁵ Jehovah’s Witnesses are grateful for the organization that God has built up in these last days, and that appreciation moves us to respect the elders. We should be happy to cooperate fully with the arrangements they make for our benefit. Paul said: “Now we request you, brothers, to have regard for those who are working hard among you and presiding over you in the Lord and admonishing you; and to give them more than extraordinary consideration in love because of their work.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13) Applying this counsel brings joy and Jehovah’s blessing.

Be Quick to Apply Counsel

16, 17. What counsel might elders give regarding marriage, and what would result from following it?

¹⁶ Paul urged Titus to ‘keep exhorting and reprov[ing] with full authority.’ (Titus 2:15) Similarly, God’s representatives today direct us to Bible principles and laws. There are sound reasons to accept the repeated admonition to apply the counsel and direction of Jehovah’s organization and the appointed elders.

¹⁷ To illustrate: The elders may urge a Christian to follow the Bible’s counsel to marry “only in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 7:39; Deuteronomy 7:3, 4) They may point out that marrying an unbaptized person can lead to serious problems, even as King Solomon erred gravely by taking foreign wives, who inclined his heart toward false gods and away from Jehovah. (1 Kings 11:1-6) The elders may also explain that Ezra had Jewish men put away their pagan wives, and Nehemiah said that those marrying unbelievers were ‘committing great badness in acting unfaithfully against God.’ (Nehemiah 13:23-27; Ezra 10:10-14; see *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1982, page 31; November 15, 1986, pages 26-30.) Blessings and the satisfaction of pleasing Jehovah result from applying such Scriptural counsel given by loving elders.

18. Considering what Paul wrote at 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, how should we react if a family member is disfellowshipped?

¹⁸ It is also proper to respect the judicial decisions of the elders. Paul told Christians in Corinth to “quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man.” They were to ‘remove the wicked man from among themselves.’ (1 Corinthians 5:9-13) But how would you act if one of your relatives was disfellowshipped? While there might be a need for limited contact to care for family matters, all spiritual association with the disfellowshipped relative would have to be cut off. (See *The Watchtower*, April 15, 1988, pages 26-31.) Surely, loyalty to God and his organization should move us to respect the judicial decisions of the overseers.

19. What should we do if the elders show us that we are going the wrong way spiritually?

¹⁹ It is not easy to remain on the narrow road to life. To do so, we must follow the direction given in God's Word and by those entrusted with shepherding responsibilities in his organization. (Matthew 7:13, 14) If we were traveling from one city to another by automobile and made a wrong turn, action would be needed to correct our course. Otherwise, we would never reach our destination. Similarly, if the elders show us that we are going the wrong way spiritually, perhaps by courting an unbeliever, we should quickly apply their Scriptural counsel. This would be one way to show that we really do "trust in Jehovah."—Proverbs 3:5, 6.

Respect Even in Small Things

20. Asking ourselves what questions can help us to show respect for the direction of the elders even in small matters?

²⁰ We need to show respect for the direction of the elders even in small matters. So we might ask ourselves: 'Am I cooperative if the elders ask us to visit the sick or train new ones in the field ministry? Do I readily accept assignments for meetings and prepare them well? Am I receptive when elders give direction on seat saving at conventions, our manner of dress, and so forth? Do I cooperate when they ask us to assist in cleaning the Kingdom Hall, report our field service promptly, or arrive at meetings on time?'

21. Our showing respect for the elders may call to mind what words of Jesus?

²¹ Congregation overseers appreciate our cooperation, and it results in much good. In fact, our being respectful and cooperative even in small matters may well call to mind Jesus' words: "The person faithful in what is least is faithful also in much." (Luke 16:10) Surely, we want to be considered faithful.

Keep Responding to Loving Oversight

22. What are some benefits resulting from the loving oversight of the faithful slave and congregation elders?

²² The benefits resulting from the loving oversight of the faithful slave and congregation elders prove that Jehovah's rich blessing is upon his earthly organization. Moreover, skillful direction by the elders blends their abilities and promotes unity among us. It also results in a concerted and successful effort to advance Kingdom interests. Indeed, one positive result of our appreciative response to the oversight of those taking the lead is that God blesses our preaching and disciple-making work. (Matthew 28:19, 20) Our cooperation with the elders is also preparing us for eternal life in the new system of things.

23. In the light of 1 John 5:3, what should we be moved to do?

²³ Since we love Jehovah, obeying him is not an unpleasant duty. The apostle John wrote: "This is what the love of God means, that we observe his commandments; and yet his commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3) Loyal Christians gladly obey Jehovah's commandments and are moved to cooperate with those to whom he has entrusted congregation oversight. How thankful we are to be in God's organization and to have such "gifts in men"! (Ephesians 4:8) With full confidence that God is directing his people, then, let us always be obedient to those privileged to take the lead among Jehovah's Witnesses.

What Are Your Comments?

- Why be obedient to those taking the lead among us?
- What attitude should we have regarding the service rendered by hardworking elders?
- Why be quick to apply counsel given by the elders?
- What benefits result from our appreciative response to loving oversight?

[Blurb on page 24]

Do you cooperate with the elders by accepting assignments for meetings, by helping to clean the Kingdom Hall, by reporting your field service activity promptly, and in other ways?

[Picture on page 23]

Paul was delighted to preach the good news and to serve fellow believers. As an elder, are you grateful for your God-given privileges of service?