

The Work Of “Genuine” Elders

It is a sad reality that we have so few “genuine elders” in the Lord’s work, but we need to recognize and commend those men who are serving in this capacity, and who are truly doing the work which the Lord has entrusted to them. It takes “genuine quality men” to accept and do this most demanding work. Dealing with the personality quirks and challenges, which brethren can so often present, is not the most enjoyable part of this work, but that is why we have genuine elders. And it is admirable when we have men with the calm and straightforward skills to relate to a multiplicity of different personalities and problem circumstances in the lives of those whom they must shepherd. We must heartily commend and respect this diligent desire to truly “tend the flock” and to also make themselves “ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Is it possible that we want elders so that “they will be responsible for everything,” and therefore it would relieve us of responsibility regarding our personal duties or the duties which we have regarding the local church? If that is the case, we are seriously mistaken about the work of elders. These shepherds are responsible to see that our spiritual condition is what it ought to be, and that our duties and work are being addressed and accomplished. You see, their work has to do with our spiritual welfare: “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:28-31). Their responsibility is not to “take over” everything about the local church. Their job is to watch and care for souls. Their job is to teach, reprove, and generally watch to be certain that we are “spiritually” what we ought to be! Their job is to exhort in sound doctrine and to convict the gainsayers. Their job is to protect us from “grievous wolves” who would lead us into error. Are we willing to listen, learn, and prepare ourselves to avoid these dangers?

The question therefore remains, are you and I ready and willing to be taught, even when that teaching may involve reproof or exhortations which are especially needed in our lives? Are we willing to listen? Are we willing to accept their spiritual exhortations? Their duty is to watch, but is it possible that we really do not want to be watched? Their duty is to protect us, but could it be that we want to be left alone, even if we are drifting farther into evil practices? Genuine elders reach out to our needs, even when we indicate that we do not need their help. They will reprove, rebuke, and exhort when it is needed, even when we resist their efforts. They love us and care about our souls, and we had better wake up and listen to their wisdom and encouragement: “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 not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

They are genuinely concerned that we are not deceived with false teaching. Genuine elders are well aware of the dangers which threaten the flock. They are busy informing us about the “grievous wolves” whom we should recognize as a danger to our spiritual well being. John, in warning about the consequences of entangling oneself with false teachers, wrote, “Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works” (2 John 9-11). Genuine elders are not involved in the unity-in-diversity teaching which would have us believe that we can fellowship moral and doctrinal error. Genuine elders will be involved in warning the flock about the tremendous dangers of such doctrines. Genuine elders will warn us about sinful or questionable practice in our lives, and also in the lives of our children. Do we take their words seriously and bring these practices in harmony with the teaching of God’s word? They will also warn us about the dangers of unfaithfulness in attending worship services, or the dangers of not growing spiritually as we should. We had better wake up and listen to these admonitions!

I believe that I have made it very clear that I am greatly concerned about the disappearance of genuine elders, and let it also be very clear that I am greatly concerned about the failure on the part of those of us who lack respect and acceptance of what genuine elders are doing to watch for our souls. What a travesty it is when we resist and reject the loving efforts of dedicated men who are trying their very best to “watch for our souls”! It is time that misinformed and misdirected elders get their act together, and get busy doing the job which the scriptures instruct them to do. It is time for those of us who are selfish and spiritually lacking to recognize, respect, and follow the genuine shepherds who truly care about where we are going to spend eternity!

Far too many of our men today are totally unwilling to prepare themselves for this work which is greatly needed in so many congregations. Do we not want to work, do we not want to prepare, and do we not want to take on the responsibility of watching for souls? Whatever the cause or excuse for not having qualified men, the brethren must continue along without having those who are appointed to take care of the church of God. What am I doing to contribute to finding a solution? Genuine elders and those who genuinely respect and listen to them are greatly needed!

Adapted from Dennis L. Reed