

## "Be Subject to Your Elders"

(1 Peter 5:1-5)

Introduction: The Lord has woven into the very fabric of His creation an authority structure. Everyone who lives is under some kind of authority. The only exception to this, of course, is God. Everyone and everything is under His authority. The angels are under Christ as their Head. The rulers of the earth are under His authority. The church of Christ is ruled by Him, as well as all the peoples of the earth. But under that one great authority, the Lord has appointed subordinate authorities. Last week, we saw that He ordained civil government, and all the citizens of those governments are called by God to submit to them. Christians are to submit to that authority, and to its laws, both because it bears the sword of punishment which the Lord has placed into their hands to execute justice, and because they recognize that it is ordained by their Lord who commands them to submit to it as a matter of conscience. The only possible exception to this submission by the Christian is where that government commands them to do something contrary to the will of God. In those cases it is clear that you must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

The Lord has also ordained an authority structure within His church. Remember that the church is the visible expression of His kingdom. It is the intrusion of the final kingdom of God into this present time. All of the members of the church are subjects of His realm. All of them are to submit to the rule of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Lord Jesus Christ. All of us I believe would readily admit that this is true and that we should submit to Him. But I think that we often forget that Christ does not rule directly, but indirectly. He is not seated on a throne somewhere on earth where we can go to Him and learn of His Laws and commands. He is in heaven, where He will remain until the time when He comes again to judge the living and the dead. He is not bodily on the earth. But during this time, while His kingdom continues to advance throughout the world, He rules by His Word and Spirit through the officers He has appointed. And this is what we will want to consider this evening, who these officers of Christ's kingdom are, and His command to His people to submit to them. And what I want you to see is that,

*The elders are commissioned by Christ to rule over you with the authority of Christ, and you are called by Him to submit to them because they rule in His name and with His authority.*

- I. *Peter Tells Us Tonight That Elders Are Appointed by Christ to Shepherd His Flock and to Exercise Oversight.*
  - A. *Remember First of All That an Elder Is a Man Set Apart by Christ for a Special Purpose.*
    1. *And because that purpose is special, the Lord requires that he have special qualifications.*
      - a. *Not just anyone can serve in this capacity. Those who serve as elders must have special spiritual qualifications.*
      - b. *Elders must be men who are blameless, mature, disciplined, knowledgeable in the Word, and skillful in applying it to God's people and in refuting heretics, of which there are many in the church today (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).*
      - c. *They must be men who are spiritually mature, hence their name elder, which implies maturity.*
    2. *This office also requires a special calling from the Lord.*
      - a. *It requires that a man have an inward desire to pursue this office.*

- b. And it requires a call from the people of God to do so, a people who have been ministered to by this man, and who desire that his gift continue to be ministered to them for their spiritual edification and growth in obedience in Christ.
- c. This does not describe every man who is a Christian. Very few actually have the qualifications listed by Scripture. The requirements are high, because the responsibility which must rest on their shoulders is great.

B. That Responsibility, as It Is Described in Scripture, Is Multifaceted.

- 1. An elder is to shepherd God's flock.
  - a. This is a figure of speech commonly used to describe what the elder is to do. He is to watch over the flock of God as a shepherd does the sheep of his fold.
  - b. This means that the elder is to lead, to guide, and to rule over the flock (BAG 690).
  - c. Obviously, if he is to do this, he must be a man who knows which way to go and is walking on that road himself. He must be one who is able to live before the people as an example.
  - d. Christ said, that "A DISCIPLE IS NOT ABOVE HIS TEACHER, NOR A SLAVE ABOVE HIS MASTER. IT IS ENOUGH FOR THE DISCIPLE THAT HE BECOME AS HIS TEACHER, AND THE SLAVE AS HIS MASTER" (Matt. 10:24-25). If the elder is to lead the people into a closer walk with God, his walk must be closer and more mature than their's.
  - e. He must be someone who knows the will of his Master, be willing to do it, and be skilled in performing it, before he will be able to lead others into it.
  - f. He must not be as the Pharisees who "TIE UP HEAVY LOADS, AND LAY THEM ON MEN'S SHOULDERS; BUT" be "THEMSELVES . . . "UNWILLING TO MOVE THEM WITH SO MUCH AS A FINGER" (Matt. 23:4).
  - g. Peter says, "NOR YET AS LORDING IT OVER THOSE ALLOTTED TO YOUR CHARGE, BUT PROVING TO BE EXAMPLES TO THE FLOCK" (1 Peter 5:3).
- 2. He is also called by Christ to be an overseer of God's flock.
  - a. Peter says that he is to exercise oversight.
  - b. This means that he is to watch over them, and to care for them.
  - c. Unless this servant knows the will of his Master for the flock, he will not know how to give them the correct kind of care which will lead them into a knowledge and practice of the truth, and away from the humanistic errors which are so prevalent in the church today.
  - d. The will of Christ is so diverse from the world's ways, and from the ways of a vast majority of the church today, that it is positively shocking to most who profess the Christian faith to learn what it really is.
  - e. But it is into Christ's paths that the elder are to lead the people, and not into the paths of their choosing.
- 3. And lastly, he is called to rule on behalf of Christ in His kingdom.
  - a. This is included in the idea of shepherding.

- b. Paul wrote to Timothy, "LET THE ELDERS WHO RULE WELL BE CONSIDERED WORTHY OF DOUBLE HONOR, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO WORK HARD AT PREACHING AND TEACHING" (1 Tim. 5:17).
  - c. To rule means to direct, or to be at the head of (BAG 713).
  - d. He is the one who stands in the name of Christ to give authoritative direction to His people.
  - e. Christ is the King, but He rules through delegated authority. And although that authority is delegated to men, it is none the less the authority of Christ.
4. The office of elder is the highest office of authority in the church.
- a. The deacons are servants of the whole body who are called to minister to the physical needs of the congregation. To that end they are endowed with the authority by Christ to do so under the authority of the Session.
  - b. The trustees are servants of the whole body as well, having an authority delegated to them by the Session to take care of the material needs of the building.
  - c. But it is to the elders that the Lord has committed the rule in His Church.
    - (i) They do not have a blank check from the Lord to do whatever they want. They must rule "ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD."
    - (ii) They are not to domineer over the people of God, but they are "TO BE EXAMPLES TO THE FLOCK" of what every Christian ought to be. They are to be examples of Christ-likeness.
    - (iii) But inasmuch as they come to you with the Word of God, they are a real authority in Christ's church. They are not the servants of the people, they are the servants of Christ, and they rule over His people in His name. And for that reason they are to be submitted to for Christ's sake.
    - (iv) It is for this reason that we turn to the second facet of this principle.

II. Because This Office Is Ordained by Christ for the Government and Well-Being of His Church, All of His People Are to Submit to It.

- A. Peter Says, "YOU YOUNGER MEN, LIKEWISE, BE SUBJECT TO YOUR ELDERS."
- 1. This subjection is the same response which you are to give to all of God's ordained authority.
    - a. You are to submit to God as He reveals His will in the Law. Paul warns, "THAT THE MIND SET ON THE FLESH IS HOSTILE TOWARDS GOD; FOR IT DOES NOT SUBJECT ITSELF TO THE LAW OF GOD, FOR IT IS NOT EVEN ABLE TO DO SO; AND THOSE WHO ARE IN THE FLESH CANNOT PLEASE GOD" (Rom. 8:7-8). They cannot please God because they are unwilling and UNABLE to subject themselves to His Law.
    - b. You are to subject yourself to Christ. Paul writes, "THE CHURCH IS SUBJECT TO CHRIST" (Eph. 5:24).
    - c. You are to submit yourselves to the governing authorities. Paul writes to Titus, "REMIND THEM TO BE SUBJECT TO RULERS, TO AUTHORITIES, TO BE OBEDIENT, TO READY FOR EVERY GOOD DEED, TO MALIGN NO ONE, TO BE UNCONTENTIOUS, GENTLE, SHOWING EVERY CONSIDERATION FOR ALL MEN" (Tit. 3:1-2).
    - d. You are to submit yourselves to those who are your masters. Again, Paul writes to Titus, "URGE BONDSLAVES TO BE SUBJECT TO THEIR OWN MASTERS IN EVERYTHING, TO BE WELL-PLEASING, NOT

ARGUMENTATIVE, NOT PILFERING, BUT SHOWING ALL GOOD FAITH THAT THEY MAY ADORN THE DOCTRINE OF GOD OUR SAVIOR IN EVERY RESPECT" (Tit. 2:9-10). You may not have an earthly master in this sense, but many of you have employers whom you are to submit to.

- e. You wives are to submit yourselves to your husbands, "BUT AS THE CHURCH IS SUBJECT TO CHRIST, SO ALSO THE WIVES OUGHT TO BE TO THEIR HUSBANDS IN EVERYTHING" (Eph. 5:24).
  - f. And you who are children are to submit yourselves to your parents. When Jesus was growing up, He submitted Himself to His parents. Luke writes, "AND HE WENT DOWN WITH THEM, AND CAME TO NAZARETH; AND HE CONTINUED IN SUBJECTION TO THEM" (Lk. 2:51).
  - g. In the same way, you who are Christians are to submit yourselves to your elders.
2. Peter is not referring here to simply the younger respecting the older, although that is what we are to do. He is also referring to those who are Christ's submitting themselves to the rulers of the church.
- a. It is the same thing that we see in the fifth commandment, where we read that we should honor our fathers and our mothers. It is not referring only to our natural fathers and mothers, but also to all who are in authority over us, while we are looked upon as the children that they are to nurture with their authority.
  - b. Matthew Henry writes, "Having settled and explained the duty of the pastors or spiritual guides of the church, the apostle comes now to instruct the flock, how to behave themselves to their ministers . . . He calls them the younger, as being generally younger than their grave pastors, and to put them in mind of their inferiority, the term younger being used by our Savior to signify an inferior, Luke xxii.26 [Jesus says here, "THE KINGS OF THE GENTILES LORD IT OVER THEM; AND THOSE WHO HAVE AUTHORITY OVER THEM ARE CALLED 'BENEFACTORS.' BUT NOT SO WITH YOU, BUT LET HIM WHO IS THE GREATEST AMONG YOU BECOME AS THE YOUNGEST, AND THE LEADER AS THE SERVANT]. He exhorts those that are younger and inferior to submit themselves to the elder, to give due respect and reverence to their persons, and to yield to their admonitions, reproof, and authority, enjoining and commanding what the word of God requires, Heb. 13:17" (6:1034).
  - c. You are therefore to submit to the rule of Christ as He directs you through your elders.
    - (i) You are, as Henry says, to give them the respect that is due to them for their office. You are not to despise them for their authority, nor are you to disregard their authority, or show them disrespect, for to do so is to do these things to Christ whose authority they represent.
    - (ii) You are to yield to their authority as they come to you with admonitions to godliness and holy living, with reproof for your sins, and with encouragements to do what it is that your Lord commands.
    - (iii) Remember, it is an authority which your Lord Himself has ordained. It is that which He has set up for your good. If you submit to it, then you are submitting to the Lord's authority. But if you resist it, you are

resisting Him. When the people wanted to have a king in the place of Samuel--because he was old and because his sons were not walking in his ways--the Lord said to Samuel, "LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE IN REGARD TO ALL THAT THEY SAY TO YOU, FOR THEY HAVE NOT REJECTED YOU, BUT THEY HAVE REJECTED ME FROM BEING KING OVER THEM" (1 Sam. 8:4-7).

B. Peter Tells You What You Can Expect If You Do or Do Not Subject Yourselves.

1. If you do not subject yourselves to God's authority, then you can expect that God will become an adversary to you, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD."
  - a. It is only pride and arrogance that keeps anyone from being in subjection to lawful authority.
  - b. But God is opposed to the proud. Solomon writes, "EVERYONE WHO IS PROUD IN HEART IS AN ABOMINATION TO THE LORD; ASSUREDLY, HE WILL NOT BE UNPUNISHED" (Proverbs 16:5).
  - c. And Isaiah writes, "FOR THE LORD OF HOSTS WILL HAVE A DAY OF RECKONING AGAINST EVERYONE WHO IS PROUD AND LOFTY, AND AGAINST EVERYONE WHO IS LIFTED UP, THAT HE MAY BE ABASED" (2:12).
  
2. But if you do submit yourselves to God's authority, God will give you further grace, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."
  - a. It is the humble in heart and spirit that the Lord seeks to be His followers.
  - b. Again, Isaiah writes, "FOR THUS SAYS THE HIGH AND EXALTED ONE WHO LIVES FOREVER, WHOSE NAME IS HOLY, 'I DWELL ON A HIGH AND HOLY PLACE, AND ALSO WITH THE CONTRITE AND LOWLY OF SPIRIT IN ORDER TO REVIVE THE SPIRIT OF THE LOWLY AND TO REVIVE THE HEART OF THE CONTRITE" (57:15).
  - c. And so Peter says, "HUMBLE YOURSELVES, THEREFORE, UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD, THAT HE MAY EXALT YOU AT THE PROPER TIME" (5:6).
  - d. Will you be proud and resist the authority which Christ has ordained in His kingdom? Then God will resist you.
  - e. But if, on the other hand, you humble yourself and submit to His ordained authority, He will exalt you.
  - f. May the Lord grant that you may have a humble heart, to walk before Him in obedience all your days, and to submit to His authority for your good and His glory. Amen.