

Motives and Advice for Ruling Elders

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I exhort you to labour rightly to discharge your duty and I offer the following motives.

1. Consider it is a sacred office in the house of God to which God has called you; therefore let us together take that exhortation: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). The office is honourable in itself, however the world may esteem it. David, though a king, would have thought it no disparagement to himself to say, “A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps 84:10). But the office has work annexed to it; and being sacred, it is not to be played with. Labour to approve yourselves to your Lord and Master.

2. By it you have a fair occasion to be serviceable to God and to advance Christ’s kingdom in the congregation and suppress that of the devil. And what should we not do to do good to souls? “Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (Jas 5:20). I think that now, for a considerable time, I and my brethren in the eldership might have said, “The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall” (Neh 4:10); and it has gone near to sinking some of our spirits. But now that God has inclined the hearts of so many to come over and help us – if we take courage in our Master’s work, to ply it faithfully, diligently, zealously and prudently, and the Lord bless us with unity among ourselves and real zeal for His honour, to put our shoulders jointly to the work – we may hope, by the blessing of God, to see a more promising face on this congregation, sin more discouraged and piety more increased.

3. You and I must give an account to our great Master how we have carried ourselves in this work (Heb 13:17). If we are faithful, we shall not be without our reward from the chief Shepherd, who will give us a crown of life. If we are unfaithful, woe will be unto us for betraying our trust. I give you a few advices:

1. Remember always that it is God with whom you have to do. This will make you pay little regard to men’s feud or favour, if you do your work agreeably to

God's will. 2. Study to act in dependence on the Lord, for He sends no one to warfare at his own charges. Look to His promised assistance when you set about your work. 3. Labour to believe that the way of uprightness and faithfulness is the sure way. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov 16:7). "He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth" him (Prov 28:23). Let men's corruptions say what they will, their consciences will speak in favour of faithful dealing.

4. Watch over your own persons, to be blameless and exemplary in your personal walk (1 Tim 3:1-3). If you are not tender in your walk, you will do more hurt than you can do good. Being honoured to be rulers in the house of a holy God, you must be holy as the Master is holy: tender in your words, circumspect in your actions, and therefore watchful over your hearts.

5. Watch over your families. Everyone who has a family is obliged to do this, and you in a special manner (1 Tim 3:4,5). The sinful practices of those in your family will reflect a peculiar dishonour on you and, through you, on your Lord and Master. Therefore your family should be a church where God is to be duly worshipped morning and evening, and good discipline kept up by admonition, reproof and watchfulness.

6. You must watch over one another, each over his fellow elders, knowing that anything scandalous in one of the society reflects dishonour on the whole, and by them on the Lord Himself. And if you are not careful on that side, there will be little good of your watching over the flock. Therefore strict discipline among yourselves is absolutely necessary.