

Elders Authority

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:1 “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”

Introduction:

Maybe you have noticed lately the dis-unity across our nation. Never have we been so divided, politically, morally, and even spiritually.

I would like to make a bold proclamation as to why we find ourselves in this mess. For the most part we have had men that did not know how to be leaders...I'm talking about politician, men of society and even church leaders. In many cases this lack of leadership has left folks stranded out in the deserts of life.

As a result of this we see an attitude of general rejection of authority. We see it played out every day in our children across this nation, in adults with no regard to the law and it has even crept into the church.

Transitional Statement:

Authority doesn't mean one person is greater or more important than the other. 1 Cor 11:3 says that God is the head of Christ....does that mean He is better or more important? It simply means they serve different purposes.

Lesson:

I. Let's take a look at some viewpoints concerning the authority of elders

A. Some people view the eldership in at least 5 ways:

1. Elders have all authority and shouldn't be questioned about anything
2. Their authority is limited to rightly dividing the word only
3. Their authority is only connected to example setting
4. Their authority is only during worship assembly times
5. Their authority is valid only as far as it meets and agrees with the majority of the church will and desire.

Note: While the before mentioned certainly have some true components, they are wrong !

B. So why do we have so many different understandings surrounding elder authority?

1. And which one if any of them are right?

II. With very little effort, you can find out that this topic brings much discussion in our brotherhood to say the least.....more often than not the discussion leads to strong division.

A. Now with regard to authority in the church we are cautious with good reason

1. Simply put we are afraid of the abuse of power.
 - a. After all, every great falling away from God, has found its center in a corrupt leadership
 2. **When authority, in the church, becomes a tool for power and control it can and will destroy the church.....as seen over and over again throughout history.**
 - a. Please notice what I did **not** say....
 - 1) I did not say: The elders don't have power or the ability to control given situations.
 - 2) What I am saying is that their power and ability to control should not be the focal point of their work
 - b. Leaders in the Lord's church **must** have humble servitude as their center for operation
 - 1) i.e. Love should be their focus....not force.

B. With these things in mind some have sought to limit the elders authority to the simple division and application of God's word.

1. Which seems right on the surface until it excludes the elders authority in matters of judgment.

C. We have certainly raised some legitimate concern....but you can't interpret scripture from concern.

1. No matter what the political correctness of the day may demand
2. No matter what fears lie in our hearts
3. We must let God's own word give us direction in this matter.

a. It's His church and He directs it according to His will....not ours.

III. So to talk about authority in the church....where should we begin?

A. With restating a point from last weeks lesson.....Jesus is the head of the church

1. Colossians 1:18
18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

2. Ephesians 1:22-23
22 And He (God) put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

- a. Headship is not a shared position

- 1) Jesus is the head alone....period!

B. And Jesus has been given all authority

1. Matthew 28:18

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, " All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

2. But Jesus as a kingdom manager delegates some of His authority.

- a. **However, delegated authority always exists under the umbrella of His own authority...it is never a stand alone thing.**

IV. Elder authority is clearly seen by the mere definition of the word overseer.

A. Overseer is the Greek word Episkopos

1. And according to Thayer Greek Dictionary, an overseer is a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done are done.... and done right.

- a. He is a curator, guardian, or superintendent over the church

- 1) How can you do these things without any authority?

-You can't !

B. Now, let me illustrate this thing out for you.

1. Elders wear at least three hats according to scripture.....Experience / Shepherd / Overseer

- a. The hat of experience

- 1) Elders always have the Experience hat on because it is the very thing they have become throughout life....it's glued to their heads

- b. The hat of shepherding

- 1) With the experience hat on, the elder also puts on his shepherding hat and with this hat he sits down beside you and asks what is happening in your world, how is your walk with God, are you struggling with anything, and so on.

2) With the shepherding hat he might sit down beside you and say...I see you balancing your check book during the worship assembly...is everything ok in your life? This is where a godly shepherd would listen carefully and try to help the person realize that balancing their check book during an hour of worship is dishonoring to God and could be distractive to others.

a) A godly shepherd here might share the story of Nadab and Abihu and emphasize how God demands to be honored. Lev 10:1-3

3) But, some of our own brotherhood want to stop here with what elders are called and commissioned to do.

c. But through scripture God also gives the elder the hat of overseer

1) With this hat he is called to watch over and keep godly order as a curator, guardian, or superintendent over the Lord's church

a) If we understand that an elder will be held accountable for the souls of the church members (Hebrew 13:17) we must also see that he can't be held accountable for what he has no control over.

2) Let's look at some examples of oversight.

a) First of all oversight includes watching over the flock

- Asking questions and knowing the sheep
- Protecting sheep
- Looking for pitfalls
- And even exploring potentials / and possibilities

b) Oversight includes making sure that soundness in God's word is being taught.

-If not they are charged to stop the teaching.

c) Oversight also includes overseeing growth of the church as a whole.

-If this preacher is not helping the church grow the elders have the God given right and responsibility to bring in another preacher.

d) Oversight also includes matters of judgment

- Should we use song books or power point
- What time should we have service
- Helping solve disputes

Note: So long as they do not contradict God's word.

e) Oversight includes keeping good order

-Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:40 "...all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner."

-The elders oversee that order

f) Oversight also includes stopping rebellion

-If the member balancing their check book, in open rebellion does the same thing the following week, the elder then gives them a directive by oversight to stop harming the sanctity of worship and then follow up with more private discussion.

C. Let me give you an interesting twist to these three hats that elders wear.

1. Read with me Acts 20:28

28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

2. The Holy Spirit makes overseers

a. And shepherding is to come from oversight.

b. Perhaps some problems come when elders get the idea that they have to remove the shepherding hat to put on the oversight hat or vise-versa.

-The reality is that they always as a matter of necessity keep all three hats on at the same time.

-Sometimes it's hard to know when to shepherd and when to manage.

V. Then in relation to elders there is this highly controversial word "rule"

A. Let's read a couple of passages

1 Timothy 5:17

1 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

- B. The word “*rule*” and “*charge over you*” are both the same word. In the Greek the word is *proistami*, which means to be over, to superintend, to preside over, to be a protector or guardian (Thayer)

1. To remove authority here would certainly violate both scripture and context.

VI. Another very powerful point is the analogy that an elder is a father figure.

- A. Let's read 1 Timothy 3:4-5

4 He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),

- B. So what kind of authority does a parent have?

1. God is making the correlation here that the elders are to manage the church as a father manages his family

- a. With dignity, he keeps his family under control
b. When God uses the word control...does a knot form in your throat.

-I would like to suggest that the knot comes from fear...not faith.

VII. Then we have our command to obey the elders

- A. Lets read Acts 16:4

4 Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.

- B. Hebrews 13:17 says:

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.

1. This word obey is the same word used in James 3:3 that says:

3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

- a. So the elders help us with direction
b. If we have enough horse sense to take direction

VIII. Also, God expects our submission to the elders

- A. Let's read Titus 3:1

1 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,

- B. Church the power of authority is found in the churches willing submission
- C. Churches can be crippled by a non-submissive membership

1. Or with submissive hearts can grow the kingdom to new heights.

IX. Finally let's look at how elders are to apply their God given authority

A. First of all elders are to be Servants

1. Matthew 20:25-28

25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26 "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

2. 1 Peter 5:3

3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

- a. Examples modeling the truth for them and showing them pattern living according to godliness

B. Elders are to use God's will as their foundation

1. 1 Peter 5:2

2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

2. And refrain from putting forth their own inventions

C. Elders are to be trainers of godliness

1. Ephesians 4:11-12

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

2. Helpers in discipline

- a. Here I'm talking about discipline that builds up the body.

-If you work out at the gym you stretch your muscles to help them grow.

-God is concerned with stretching each of us for spiritual growth

b. Hebrews 12:6 talks about how God disciplines those He loves.

-Sometimes discipline comes through godly elders

D. Elders are to be keepers of the truth.

1. Rightly dividing God's word 2 Timothy 2:15
2. Not exceeding what is written 1 Cor 4:6

E. Elders are also a Team thing....

1. The New Testament demands a plurality of elders
 - a. With no head elder
 - b. No Senior elder ..etc.

Conclusion:

Great responsibility

- By Elders James 3:1...incurring a stricter judgment
- By Church