

# THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS IN THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

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## **Introduction**

Brethren, we have spent two weeks dealing with the topic of Elders in the Church. We can accept the fact Elders are members of the local Congregation who fulfil a specific role within the Church, which is that of (leadership). We have determined some of the responsibilities and attributes of Elders based on the three words used for them scripturally (Shepherd, Elder, and Bishop/Overseer). Today we are going to look at the topic of the Authority of the Elders within the local Congregation.

## **WHAT SOME THINK AND PRACTICE ABOUT CHURCH ELDERSHIP**

Brethren, if the actions and practices of some Congregations are to be followed, elders of a local Congregation have absolutely no authority whatsoever.

- a) Instead, the Elders are reduced to figureheads, only having a title attached to their name.
- b) Nothing they say or think matters to the Congregation.
- c) Because of this, in some Congregations, the God ordained office of an Elder is reduced to nothing.

Again, if the actions and practices of other Congregations are to be believed, Elders of a local Congregation are absolute authority in everything the Members do.

- a) Some Elderships go as far as to say who a single Sister should marry or not to marry.
- b) Some Elderships go as far as to tell the members where they are allowed to work, what restaurants they are allowed to eat or not to eat etc.
- c) Because of this, in some Congregations, the God ordained office of an Elder is elevated to a place of equality with God Himself.
- d) Brethren, this is blasphemy.

## **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS IN THE LOCAL CONGREGATION?**

### **DO ELDERS HAVE ANY AUTHORITY WHATSOEVER?**

The Bible says that the Elders do have authority in the local congregation as declared in **1 Tim. 5:17**.

*“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine” NKJV*

## WHAT IS THE MEANING OF RULE-WELL?

1. The word used here means – preside, maintain, oversee, and rule.
2. It is the same word used in **1 Tim. 3:4**, regarding the role of a father. An Elder must be one who rules his own household, having his children in subjection to him.
3. Could a man rule his house by only his example and nothing else? Obviously this is not the meaning of rule.
4. The Elders have the responsibility (thus the authority) in the local Congregation to preside over matters within the Congregation.
5. They have the responsibility (thus the authority) in the local congregation to Oversee the Congregation.
6. Just as with children, the Elders are to initiate correction when it is needed.

Brethren, it is on this basis, the Congregation is to obey those who “rule” in the local Congregation (**Heb.13:17.**)

*Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

- (a) Since God directs that the Congregation is to “obey” those (plural) who have the “rule” over them, these “rulers” must have some God given authority.
- (b) It is clear that God is speaking of Elders in this passage –
  1. Remember those (plural) who have rule over you
  2. These men have spoken unto them the word of God.
- (c) Brethren, why would God command the Congregation to obey someone who had no authority?

We can see that the Elders do have authority in the local Congregation, but the question now is: what authority, and how much authority has been given to the Elders by God?

## WHAT AUTHORITY DO THE ELDERS HAVE?

Are the Elders the absolute authority in every section of the members lives? The Bible says “NO”. The Elders responsibilities all revolve around - Heb.**13:17** – they watch for your souls.

For example, if someone began to date a non – Christian who showed no Interest in God’s word (the Bible), it would be right for the Elders to approach that member and express their concerns.

- ❖ They could point out the danger of going into such marriage union
- ❖ They could point out what happens to people who marry someone who is not trying to please God. **1Kings 11:1 - 2.**
- ❖ But could they tell the member to stop dating that person or he/she will be kicked out of the Church?

- ❖ Of course not.
- ❖ After all, Paul addressed Christians who are married to non Christians in **1 Cor. 7:12 – 16**.
- ❖ The Elders have full responsibility to inform the members if their job selection is in opposition to God.
- ❖ If a member here, got a job at the casino house, shouldn't the Elders approach such member of the danger of such Job?
- ❖ That job is something that could affect the member's Spiritual life, therefore the Elders have the authority to advice such member.

**ANY THING IN YOUR LIFE THAT COULD AFFECT YOUR SOUL – E.G. (CHOICE OF SPOUSE, CHOICE OF JOB, CHOICE OF ENTERTAINMENT), falls under the authority of the Elders. *Heb.13:17***

### **DO ELDERS HAVE ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY IN MATTERS OF DOCTRINE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH?**

The answer is NO. Brethren, if the Apostles at the inception of the New Testament Church do not have absolute authority in the Church (which they did not) Elders cannot either. Please note – the term “absolute” means - **possessing unlimited power: or** having total power and authority.

Apostle Paul did not say “follow me” but he said “follow me as I follow Christ” (**1 Cor. 11:1**)

- If Apostle Paul did not follow Jesus Christ's teachings, the Corinthian Church should not follow him.
- It is on this basis the Elders are to follow what God's word has to say on the subject.
- No Christian, not even an Elder, has the authority to change what has been laid out in God's word.
- To all Christians (including Elders), Apostle Paul declared, in **Colossians 3:17**, “whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord”
- This simply means that, everything we do must be done by the authority of Jesus Christ.

### **THE ELDERS AUTHORITY IS NOT ABSOLUTE**

- (a) The Elders cannot change the doctrines – God's word or practices.
- (b) The absolute authority in the Church is Jesus Christ and His revealed word – **1 Tim. 3:16-17**.

### **WHAT AUTHORITY DO THE ELDERS HAVE THEN?**

- (a) The Elders have the authority to teach God's word – **1 Tim. 5:17**
- (b) The Elders have the authority to oversee the work of the local Congregation -**Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:1 – 4**.
- (c) They have the authority to determine which member fulfil specific role within the congregation.

- (d) They have the authority to determine what teaching material will be used in various classes in the Church.
- (e) They have the authority to determine which works the local Congregation will be involved in.
- (f) The Elders have the authority to watch for the souls of the Congregation – **Heb. 13:17**.
- (g) If you are doing something which could endanger your soul, the Elders have the authority to approach you about it and try to help you out.

### **THE LIMIT OF THE ELDER'S AUTHORITY**

Brethren, Elders authority in the Bible is limited to within one local Congregation.

1. **Acts 20:17& 28** *"17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church." 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. **1 Peter 5:1 – 3**. *"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 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; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. NASB*
3. *Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder"*.
4. Peter was an Elder but he was not higher in rank than any other Elder.
5. All Elders in the Eldership of a local Congregation are of equal authority.

### **CAN AN ELDER SIN?**

#### **AN IF HE DOES - WHAT DO WE DO?**

Elders are humans, they can be tempted to sin, an if they are found in such situation, what happens? In **1Tim. 5:19 – 22**. Apostle Paul instruct Timothy the Evangelist, and he declared. *19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. 20 Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. 21 I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. 22 Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure. NKJV*

### **CONCLUSION**

Brethren, after going through the lesson on the authority of Elders in the local Congregation, It is important to let the Bible speak on all scriptural matters.

1. Men say Elders have no authority whatsoever-the Bible disagrees
2. Men say Elders have absolute authority in all matters – the Bible disagrees.
3. The Bible lay out the authority of Elders quite plainly.
  - a) We must follow God's Word
  - b) Elders must oversee the work of the local Congregation.

- c) The local Congregation must be kept pure.
- d) Discipline those who sin
- e) We must not add or remove from God's word.