

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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The "Rule" of Elders

The Bible teaches that elders are to bear "rule" in the local church (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17). However, there is a great deal of misunderstanding as to the nature of this rule. Therefore it would be wise for us to carefully consider this subject. As with many other Bible topics, there are extreme views on the rule of elders. Some believe that elders stand in the place of God, and thus "to disobey the elders is to disobey God." But at the other extreme are those who would strip elders of any rule, and make them subject to the will of the congregation. Both of these extremes are wrong!

Elders do not stand in the place of God. "There is one Lawgiver" (James 4:12). God has not abdicated his throne. No man, or group of men, has the right to enact or repeal laws for God. Further, Peter warns elders against "being lords over" the flock (1 Peter 5:3). This phrase suggests "to be master of, to subjugate, to overpower." Elders do not make laws, nor can they "overpower" anyone to accept their judgments or personal whims. Some elders would do well to seriously consider this, for it has been a root of many evils! Rather, elders "rule" by virtue of their example. Hear Peter again: "nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). Their example generates respect, influence, trust, and thus the submission of the flock (cf. v. 5a).

While it is true that elders are not "lords," they also are not subject to the will of the church. God's plan calls for shepherds, qualified men of experience, to lead the sheep of the flock (1 Peter 5:1-5; 1 Timothy 3:4-6). Sheep follow shepherds; they do not lead shepherds! If elders must constantly ask the flock if certain judgments are agreeable with them, then they are not leaders, but followers. The Bible says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive" (Hebrews 13:17). Even in 1 Peter 5:3, where Peter warns elders against "being lords over" the flock, there is a legitimate rule implied. If elders bear no rule at all, then this warning against the abuse of authority is absurd.

As previously stated, elders "rule" by virtue of the influence generated from their example (cf. 1 Peter 5:3). Thus, when selecting elders, we are taught of God to look for exemplary

men (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Therefore, when a church selects and appoints men to be "over this business" of shepherding (cf. Acts 6:3), there is an "implied contract" to follow these shepherds. In effect, the church is saying, "We trust you with our care; please lead us." While their judgments are not inspired of God, the flock has chosen to put them in the lead, and thus should trust and submit to them. This is God's established form of oversight (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1-5; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17).

Thayer says that those who "rule over you" (Hebrews 13:17) do so by "leading as respects influence, controlling in counsel." Furthermore, W.E. Vine says that the word "obey" in this passage suggests that one is "persuaded" by the counsel of these experienced men. If elders "rule" by influence and persuasive counsel, it demands that they maintain good and open communication with the flock, rather than being secretive about every aspect of their work. It may even be necessary to have public meetings with the entire church from time to time, especially for major undertakings or problems (cf. Acts 6:1-6; Acts 15). Along with their own mature judgment, good elders will take the desires of the congregation into consideration; and then render decisions for the good of the flock, and in harmony with the Lord's will. This type of "rule" makes them fit leaders in God's kingdom, and motivates the flock to follow. It also helps them to avoid arbitrary rule (cf. 1 Peter 5:3), which is a great temptation especially in "matters of judgment." But there are also matters that need to be handled privately by elders (cf. James 5:14-15; Acts 21:18-24)! This is not "being lords over" the flock, it is wisdom at work; and it can help keep problems to a minimum (cf. Proverbs 17:9; 25:8-10).

It is true that some elders have abused their "rule," become "lords over" the church, and caused untold harm. But we simply must not allow abuses to cloud the issue of congregational "governments" (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28, KJV). The Bible is clear about this matter. It simply is not true that every decision that elders make without consulting the flock is tantamount to "being lords over" the flock. "Permission or lording" is a false dilemma! Of course, if elders fail to live or "rule" in harmony with God's will, they should be corrected, even removed, if necessary (1 Timothy 5:19-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:6). The elders must be "over" the flock; but the flock must have and maintain scriptural elders!

Greater dedication to the Lord would solve many of the ills that exist with regard to this issue. The truth lies between the extremes of arbitrary, inconsiderate rule of the elders (1 Peter 5:3), and majority rule of the congregation (Hebrews 13:17). Let us thank God for those who understand this, and work to correct those who do not.

- Lanny Smith, via *Guardian of Truth*, 09/01/1994

I Study My Bible Like I Plow My Field

A farmer explained: "I study my Bible like I plow my field. Oftentimes when I'm plowing or breaking new ground, my plow will get hung under a root, and if I'm going at a pretty good clip it will really jar me. But I don't get mad and beat my mule and burn my plow. No, I just back up a little, ease over the root and get on with my plowing. Next time around I'll probably hit that root again and it still shakes me up, but I don't quit farming. I just back up, ease over the root and keep on working. Pretty soon I have hit that root so many times that it's loose and the first thing you know I plow right through it and don't even notice it. I've got it shook loose."

"That's the way I study the Bible. When I come upon a hard passage, it might shake me up a little bit, but I don't throw away my Bible and quit the Lord on that account. I just ease over it and keep on studying. The next time I read that passage I jar it a little bit more. I keep on doing this until finally, because of information that I have gathered from other parts of the Bible I am able to jar the passage loose. I understand it."

- Unknown

If A Man Dies, Will He Live Again?

Job raised this question in Job 14:14. He was a man of great integrity who was faithful to Jehovah God. The Scriptures describe him: "blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil." He patiently endured his trials and persevered, even under the most difficult of circumstances. But he was not in possession of the complete revelation of God to man, as we are today in the Bible.

Many in the world of mankind have embraced a hope of life after death, possibly in an effort to drive away despair in contemplation of mortality. The Egyptians refined the art of embalming and buried many treasures with their kings to supply them in their lives beyond the grave. Many civilizations have adopted similar practices indicating, to some extent, hope and desire to rise above the destruction of the grave, in spite of skeptics, materialists, agnostics, and "expert" scientists. Science is not the source of knowledge of the realm of eternity and, at best, scientists can only offer theories and guesses.

The apostle John left an account of the death of Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, friends of the Lord Jesus. Following his death, Martha said to Jesus, "Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the

last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." (John 11:22-27). If a man dies, will he live again? Jesus Christ has the answer!

Further, John left us these words of Christ: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." ["eternal punishment" – Matthew 25:46] (John 5:28-29). He who had power to rescue Lazarus from the grave, surely has the power to give immortality.

Because of Jesus Christ (His resurrection forecasting that for others, cf. Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, 54-55), all of those who die in faithfulness to Him WILL LIVE AGAIN!

The apostle Peter wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:3-5). The Christian has a living hope; others in this world "have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Paul stated in writing to Titus, "in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago," (Titus 1:2).

If a man dies, will he live again? Indeed he will. Eternal joy awaits those who belong to Him, those who believe and obey His will. Friend, are you living with this hope?

- Gary Smalley

* "Everyone is wise until he speaks!"

* "Pride is to character what the attic is to the house — the highest part and generally the most empty!"

* "A mule can't kick while he's pulling and can't pull while he's kicking!"

* "It is better to be despised for doing right than praised for doing wrong!"

* "If as a Christian, you are too busy to pray, you are too busy!"

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)