

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

5 What Kind Of Authority?

Scripture Reading

Hebrews 13:17

Last time we thought about the circumstances under which fellowship may be broken. Inevitably when matters of discipline are considered judgements must be made and when Christians have differing opinions someone has to decide on what the way forward should be. How are such decisions to be made? By what criteria and on what authority Tonight we are going to consider the issue of authority in the church.

Two principles are particularly important and neither of them should be new to us.

Jesus Rules

The first principle, we established at the beginning of these studies. It is that the very nature of the church is that it is a group of people who are ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ. That being the case, everything must be judged according to His word.

Others Come First

The second principle is that in everything other people come first. There are many passages we could demonstrate that from but Ephesians 5:21 will suffice.

“...submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

Elders Rule

Elders are appointed to rule in the church and they have certain special responsibilities.

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”

1 Peter 5:2

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Acts 20:29 – 31

Question: What does the term “Shepherd” tell us about the responsibilities of an elder?

Respect Your Elders

Elders are to be respected

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer is worthy of his wages." Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.”

1 Timothy 5:12ff

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 – 13

Elders With Attitude

Elders are to fulfil their role with a certain attitude or demeanour.

"But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.

Luke 22:26 – 27

Not A Job For Everyone

It is not everyone who can handle such a position so care must be taken in the appointment of elders.

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you — if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers."

Titus 1:5 – 10

"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

1 Timothy 3:1 – 7

Question: How to the qualities required in an elder fit him for the job?

What Kind Of Authority?

Elders rule the church but they do so as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and their authority derives from His word. They are also servants of the church, serving the interests of the church, primarily, guarding each member and the flock as a whole from danger. They do not dictate but their authority ought always to be exercised with patience, gentleness and concern.

Question: What role should the elders of a church play when members differ in their understanding of Scripture?