



The Bible is clear that elders have **authority**. (1 Thess. 5:12-13)

- In the earliest stages of the church, there were some who were set apart as **leaders** who were to be respected because of their important work in the church. (1 Tim. 5:17)

*Hebrews 13:17*

Paul does not say that the leaders are to **compel** the congregation to submit. He urges the congregation to submit voluntarily and **gladly** to leadership.

As teachers, shepherds, and leaders elders are charged with the task of authoritatively proclaiming and following God's Word. They are not merely offering their own **opinions**.

- The congregation has the **duty** to obey, not because they are the words of the elder, but the words of God inasmuch as the elder accurately and faithfully conveys and follows the Word of God.

The elder's authority comes from **Christ** and the congregation's role is that of recognition and affirmation of God's gifting and calling. In that is required a certain amount of **trust**.

The issues, decisions, and movements about which it is most important for the church to listen to the elders is when areas are **serious**, but **unclear** – crucial, but not obvious in terms of solution.

This is the crucial area where a church either enjoys the **leadership** God gives it and prospers by it, or rejects it and pays the price. A church member's basic attitude needs to be either to **trust** the leaders or replace them, but not to give acknowledgment and then not follow them.

Elders' authority is not **absolute**.

Not only is an elder's authority limited by his faithful submission to and exercise of the Word of God, it is also limited by the authority of the **congregation**.

The NT gives a much higher status and role to the **congregation** at large than has often been accepted and practiced in the experience of the church.

The last and final court of appeal in a matter of the life of the local church is and should be the meaningful **membership** of the local church:

- Matthew 18:15-17, Acts 6:1-5 – in matters of **dispute** between Christians
- Galatians 1:8-9, 2 Timothy 4:3 – in matters of basic **doctrinal** truth
- 1 Corinthians 5:5, 7, 11, 13 – in matters of church **discipline**
- 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 – in matters of church **membership**

God has clearly designed His church so that while authority is exercised and imbued in the **elder** leadership He calls out, that authority is limited by the final authority He invests in the **corporate** body of believers in the local church.

It is important to distinguish between elder **leadership** within a congregational context from an elder **rule** position that does not recognize the biblical role of the membership.

Churches that teach that they have no such responsibility and instead assign all authority of discerning truth solely to the elders have abdicated a biblical **responsibility**.

The NT does not prescribe **detailed** rules and regulations for the elder-congregation relationship or decision making process. What is clear though, is that Christ-like love, humility, and prayer are to guide **all** the decisions and uses of authority in God's church.

Acts 6:4, Acts 1:14, Philippians 2:2-8

What is clear in God's design of authority is that elders will give an account to God for how they **lead**, but the membership will give an account to God for the condition and success of the **church** in displaying the glory of God and thereby reaching the lost with the truth of our Savior.