

The Authority of Elders

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Do you remember the story of Korah in the Old Testament? Numbers 16:1-35 tells the story of the rebellion of Korah and its tragic effects upon him and his followers.
1. Korah, in conjunction with Dathan, Abiram, and On (Reubenites), rebelled against his cousins, Moses and Aaron, in the wilderness.
 2. They were apparently dissatisfied with their exclusion from the priesthood and the Levites being limited to inferior service in the tabernacle.
 3. Their rebellion against Moses and Aaron was in fact rebellion against God, for it was God’s plan and delegated authority that was being questioned and challenged.
 4. The haughty and ambitious Korah contended with Moses and Aaron.
 - a. After exposing the rebels, Moses and Aaron pleaded with the Lord to spare the crowd, then commanded all who were near to the adjacent Korahite and Reubenite locations on the south of the tabernacle to move away from the impending judgment of the rebellious men.
 - b. The ground opened up and swallowed the Reubenite rebels and their families, then closed up again.
 - c. Korah himself was apparently among those consumed in the cremating fire sent down from Heaven shortly thereafter consuming the 250 who had offered incense.
- B. Some great truths can be learned from this story.
1. God delegates authority.
 2. One who has received a delegation of authority is not acting upon his own impulse when he exercises that authority.
 3. God will not tolerate any rebellion to his delegated authority. Those who rebel against delegated authority also rebel against the one who delegated the authority.
 4. God has demonstrated that He will not tolerate any such rebellion.
- C. Elders in the Lord’s church do not have an authority that originates from themselves, but rather they have a delegated authority from God.
1. It is vital that we understand our responsibility to the elders of God’s people.
 2. Their authority is delegated from God, and rebellion against their properly carrying out that authority is indeed a direct rebellion against God.
- D. Perhaps there have been many who have been appointed to serve as elders who have abused the authority God delegated authority. That is a terrible shame.

1. Nonetheless, even though some may abuse that authority, let us not rebel against God’s plan and God’s delegated authority.
 2. We do need to understand clearly what that delegated authority to elders is so as to prevent our lack of understanding leading us to rebel against it.
- E. Definition of authority. Authority means “. . . Power to influence or command thought, opinion or behavior.” Webster

ELDERS HAVE A DELEGATED AUTHORITY FROM GOD

- A. Their authority is not original within themselves.
1. They are not lawmakers or dictators.
 2. They do have the authority to make whatever decisions are necessary in order to accomplish the following things.
 - a. Oversee the congregation. Acts 20:28
 - b. Shepherd the flock. Acts 20:28 1 Peter 5:1-4
 - c. Watch for souls. Hebrews 13:17
 - d. Spiritually rule over the local congregation. Hebrews 13:17
1 Thessalonians 5:12-14
 - e. Direct, guide, and persuade the church. 1 Timothy 3:4 1 Peter 5:1-5
- B. The following eight Greek words in the original language of the New Testament establish the authority of elders.
1. **EPISKOPOS – Overseer**
 - a. Acts 20:28 – “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.”
 - b. Definition: According to *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, P. 243, an overseer is “A man charged with the duty of seeing that things done by others are done rightly.”
 - c. Therefore, elders have the authority to see that the things done by Christians in the discharge of their duty to God is done rightly.
 2. **POIMAINO – Feed**
 - a. Two Significant references.
 1. Acts 20:28 – “. . . To feed the church of God which he hath purchased with His own blood.”
 2. 1 Peter 5:2 – “Feed the church of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.”
 - b. Definition: “To feed, to tend a flock, keep sheep . . . to rule, govern, to furnish pasturage or food.” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, p. 527
 - c. Therefore, elders have the authority to feed, rule, govern, and provide pasturage for the congregation.

3. GREGOREO – Watch

- a. **Acts 20:31** – “Therefore watch . . .”
- b. Definition: “To watch . . . give strict attention to, be cautious, active . . .” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, p. 122
- c. Therefore, elders have the authority to do whatever is necessary in watching to prevent the destruction of the flock of God.

4. PRO-ISTEMI – Set over

- a. **1 Thessalonians 5:12** – “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.”
- b. Definition: “To set or place before; to set over . . . to be over, to superintend, preside over . . . to rule . . . to care for, give attention to . . .” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, p. 539
- c. There, elders have the authority to do that which is necessary in superintending, guarding, ruling, protecting, aiding, and attending to the welfare of the church.

5. HEGEOMAI – Rule, govern

- a. **Hebrews 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.”
- b. Definition: “To lead . . . to go before; to rule, command, to have authority over . . .” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, p. 276
- c. Therefore, elders have authority over the church, and those who rebel against them in the rightful exercise of that authority rebel against God.

6. PEITHO – Persuade

- a. **Hebrews 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.”
- b. Definition: “To persuade . . . cause to believe in a thing . . . to listen to, obey, yield to . . .” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, p. 497
- c. Therefore, the elders have the authority to persuade the church and thereby cause them to obey their rule.
 1. The same word (PEITHO) is used in **James 3:3** – “Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey (PEITHO) us; and we turn about their whole body.”

2. This shows the extent of such persuasion. It is not limited to merely making suggestions.
7. **OIKONOMOS – Steward**
- a. **Titus 1:7** – “For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God . . .”
 - b. Definition: “The manner of a household or of household affairs; especially a steward manager, superintendent . . .” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, p. 440
 - c. Therefore, the elders have the duty and authority as stewards of God to manage and superintend the affairs of the house of God, the local congregation under their oversight.
8. **HUP-EIKO – Submit, yield**
- a. **Hebrews 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.”
 - b. Definition: “. . . To resist no longer, but to give way, yield . . . to yield to the authority of the elders.” *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, p. 638
 - c. Therefore, Christians are to yield to, to obey, to give way, to resist no longer the authority of the elders. This is because they have special qualifications, a special assignment, and a special interest, the welfare of our souls. It is a happy arrangement when spiritual men of dedication and knowledge lead the way, and godly disciples follow after and obey them as they follow and obey Christ.

CONCLUSION:

- A. In recent years there has been an effort to set aside the teachings of the Bible regarding the authority of elders.
 1. Some have denied the elders the right to have their own meetings and to make decisions without the democratic consent of the congregation.
 2. Some teach that elders have no authority to act except in the manner of an example. While the Bible strongly affirms that elders must act as examples, we must also conclude that they have the authority and the duty to decide and act upon those matters which relate to the well-being of the church . . . And they do not need a democratic mandate to do so.
 3. We who are under their authority are bound to obey them so long as they do not go contrary to the will of God.
- B. Each congregation is autonomous and is self-governing.
 1. Therefore, the elders’ authority is local.
 2. It begins and ends with the affairs of the local congregation.

3. Elders have authority in the locality where the Holy Spirit made them overseers, and no where else.
- C. With this study in mind, let us resolve that individually and collectively we will never stand in rebellion to the delegated authority of God.
- D. When one submits to the AUTHORITY of CHRIST, he is submitting to the AUTHORITY of GOD!
- D. **God’s Plan for Man’s Redemption**