

POWER

“the gospel is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16)

Editorial Introduction

The June issue of POWER began examining the subject, *Discerning good and Evil*. Laying forth the ability to determine good and evil, the real sin of the Pharisees (hypocrisy), the all-encompassing scope of the Scriptural application in life, and the decrepit moral status of America. Also, demonstrating every Christian's clear responsibility to obey the laws and commandments contained within Scripture.

The goal of this second issue is to firmly establish the God-given place, position, and authority of the Eldership in the Church and lives of Christians today. We are grateful to brother B.J. Clarke, Director of the Memphis School of Preaching, for the submission of a large portion of this issue's content and allowing it to be arranged in this way.

This issue will depart from our traditional layout in some ways to accommodate a simple and logical presentation of this material.

Pertinent Passages, Words and Definitions

by B.J. Clarke (Ed. and Arr. by: Aaron J. Cozort)

Passage: Acts 20:28

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Term: Overseers

Definition: Paul called for the “elders” (from *presbuteros*) of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17), and he called them “overseers,” or “bishops,” as the ASV renders it (Acts 20:28). Hence, an elder is the same thing as an overseer or bishop.

The Greek word translated “overseers” (or “bishops”) is the word *episcopos* a word which Thayer defines to mean “the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent.”

English: A superintendent is “one who has executive oversight and charge” (Webster 1160). The very nature of superintending over something implies the **authority** to do so.

Passage: 1 Timothy 3:4-5

One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

This Issue

DISCERNING GOOD AND EVIL (2)

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

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EDITORS

MARK TESKE
AARON J. COZORT

ELDERS

LARRY EVERSON
CON LAMBERT
VERN SCHRIMSHER

CONTACT US

PHONE: 662-393-2690
FAX: 662-342-7152
EMAIL: POWER@SOUTHAVENCOC.ORG
WEB: WWW.SOUTHAVENCOC.ORG/POWER

Term: Ruleth

Definition: The Greek word translated “ruleth” is the word *proistami*, which means “to be over, to superintend, to preside over, to be a protector or guardian” (Thayer).

Like children are subject to their human father (Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:4), likewise the members of the church are expected to be in subjection to the rule of the elders as they “take care of the church of God” (1 Tim. 3:5).

Passage: 1 The. 5:12-13

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which 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. And be at peace among yourselves.

Term: Over you

Definition: The expression “over you in the Lord” is from the Greek word *proistami*, the same word used in First Timothy 3:4-5. It is also the word that Paul used in First Timothy 5:17, wherein he wrote, “Let the elders that **rule** well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labor in word and doctrine” (emphasis added, BJC)

The combined teaching of these texts proves conclusively that elders have authority, for **the very phrase “over you” connotes the idea of subordination.**

Passage: 1 Pet. 5:1-4

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Term: Feed

Definition: The word “feed” comes from the Greek word *poimaino*. The word is most commonly translated “to feed” or “to tend.” However, Thayer, in his very first definition of the word, notes that it is “used of rulers.” It denotes one who governs, manages and directs. In fact, the same word is translated “**rule**” in several passages in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). The **noun** form of the word is translated “**shepherd**” everywhere in the New Testament except for

Ephesians 4:11, where it is translated “**pastors.**” Thus, we see that elders are expected to pastor (or shepherd) the flock by feeding, tending, and guiding the flock in the paths of righteousness.

Term: Lording it over

Definition: The concept of “lording it over” (ASV) the flock comes from a Greek word (*katakurieuo*) which means **to rule from an arrogant and domineering spirit.**

Passage: Hebrews 13:7, 17

Term: Obey

Definition: The word “obey” comes from a Greek word (*peitho*) which Thayer defines as “to listen to, obey, yield to, comply with.” It is the very same word used in James 3:3, wherein we read of how “...we put bits in the horses' mouths, **that they may obey us;** and we turn about their whole body.”

Passage: 1 Timothy 4:14

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

Term: “the presbytery”

Definition: Thayer defines [this word] to mean “a **body of elders.**” Thus, authority resides in the body of elders in a particular congregation, who received their authority from the Chief Shepherd.

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The Authority of Elders

by B.J. Clarke

(Ed. and Arr. by: Aaron Cozort)

Commission

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith...And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed (Acts 14:21-23)

From this passage, we see that God not only cared enough to send his Son to die and purchase the church (Acts 20:28), but he also cared enough to provide a pattern for the organization of the church. Of course, no organization can be successful without good leadership, and God did not leave his church without a pattern for good leadership.

Qualification

God's ideal will is that each and every congregation have its own elders. In fact, the only time a church should not have elders is when no men within the congregation meet the qualifications necessary to become elders, which qualifications are listed in First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. God is not pleased when a church ignores these qualifications merely so it can get on with the business of appointing elders. It has often been repeated, and accurately so, that it is better for the church to be Scripturally unorganized than to be unscripturally organized. That being said, it is better still for a church that is Scripturally unorganized to do everything within its power to become Scripturally organized, and that as soon as possible. Therefore, the church should strive diligently to prepare men to become elders in the future. God never intended for a church to be satisfied without elders.

The Nature of an Eldership's Authority

The question before us is as follows: once elders are appointed within a congregation, what is the nature of their authority? Do elders possess authority? If so, from whence, or by whom did they receive it? Moreover, if elders do possess authority, what, if any, are the limits of such authority? It is to these questions, and many other related ones, that we now turn our attention. Where can we turn to discover the answers to the foregoing questions? We turn to "the law and the testimony" (Isa. 8:20). We turn to the Inspired volume, wherein we find all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).

Acts 20:28 – Authority by definition (cf. page 1).

When Paul bid farewell to the elders at Ephesus, he charged them,

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

It is interesting that Paul did not call for the preacher/preachers from the church at Ephesus. This is because God did not give preachers the authority to oversee the work of the church. It is elders who are to superintend or oversee the work of the church, not the preachers, deacons, or any other members.

The very nature of superintending over something implies the authority to do so. How can one oversee something over which he has no authority? Imagine a newly elected superintendent of schools being told, "Congratulations on your election to become the superintendent of schools. However, you must remember that you have no authority to make any policy changes or decisions affecting the schools over which you have been elected to superintend. But, I hope you enjoy the job anyway, and, oh, by the way, if anything goes wrong within the school district, you will be blamed, even though you had no power to prevent it!" No superintendent could do his job if he were told that he had no authority over the job he was given! The same is true in the Lord's church. If elders have no authority to oversee, take charge, or superintend the work of the church, then who has this authority? **The Biblical fact of the matter is that elders have been given the charge to "oversee" the flock that is among them.**

1 Timothy 3:4-5 - Authority by Qualification (cf. page 1)

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?);

Rule implies there are those in subjection to that rule. It is obvious that, in dealing with his children, a father possesses authority to rule over them. Would anyone argue that a father has authority over his children only in example? While his example before his children is exceedingly important, it does not encompass the full extent of his authority over them. In ruling over them, he must do so in a way that does not provoke his children to wrath (Eph. 6:4), but this does not negate his authority over them altogether. Infact, the children are to be in subjection to the "rule" of the father in the home (1 Tim. 3:4). They are expected to obey and subordinate their will to the will of their father. Likewise, the members of the church are expected to be in subjection to the rule of the elders as they "take care of the church of God" (1 Tim. 3:5).

1 The. 5:12-13 – Christian's responsibility to the Elders where they are. (cf. page 2)



Near the close of his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul made a special plea to his brethren:

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which 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. And be at peace among yourselves (1 Thes. 5:12-13).

Although Paul does not explicitly identify those of whom he speaks in this passage, it is not difficult to deduce that he was writing about elders. If elders are “over” the congregation, then the congregation must be “under” the authority and oversight of the elders. As such, the church should “know” the elders, and “esteem them very highly.”

1 Peter 5:1-4 - The Role of a Shepherd (cf. page 2)

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 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.

The Responsibility and authority of a shepherd is:

1. Feed
2. Tend
3. Guide
4. Protect
5. Correct

Peter's exhortation to the elders to “feed the flock” has a definite bearing on our study.

Of course, part of the shepherd's guiding responsibility involves using “his rod and staff.” In his comments on Psalm 23:4, Albert Barnes makes the following interesting comment regarding the shepherd's use of his rod and staff:

The image is that of a shepherd in attendance on his flock, with a staff on which he leans with one hand; in the other hand the “crook” or rod which was the symbol of his office. Either of these also might be used to guard the flock, or to drive off the enemies of the flock. The “crook” is said to have been used to seize the legs of the sheep or goats when they were disposed to run away, and thus to keep them with the flock. “The shepherd invariably carries a rod or staff with him when he goes forth to feed his flock...With this staff he rules and guides the flock to their green pastures,

and defends them from their enemies. With it also he corrects them when disobedient, and brings them back when wandering.”

This quotation does an excellent job of demonstrating that a good shepherd must demonstrate both the qualities of tenderness and toughness as he works with the flock.

Peter echoes this same sentiment in his epistle when he exhorts elders to “take the oversight” of the flock “willingly.” They should become shepherds because of a genuine desire to help the flock, not because of a desire to be “lords over God's heritage.”

Peter reminds his fellow-elders that they are to earnestly strive to be examples to the flock over which they have been appointed as shepherds (1 Pet. 5:3). Brethren who believe that elders have authority only in example, point to this passage as decisive proof of their position. However, what does this passage actually say? To be sure, it says that elders ought to be examples to the flock, but it says a lot more than that! As already noted, Peter commanded these elders to “rule” over the flock by giving them proper nourishment, guidance, and correction. It is not either one rules over the flock, or he serves as an example to the flock. The elder must do both! It is possible to be an example without abdicating one's authority to lead. The apostle Paul was an example to his brethren (Phil. 3:17), yet this did not cancel out his apostolic authority (1 Cor. 14:37). Should a father be a good example to his children? Of course, he should, but does this mean that his authority over his children is limited to his example only? Does a father have a right to set rules for his children, for their well-being, or can he only hope to influence them by his example?

It is self-evident that a good father is one who sets a good example before his children, and because he does so, he commands their respect when he “rules” over them. Obviously, a father should not abuse his position of authority over his children. We note again that Paul admonished fathers not to provoke their children to wrath by ruling over them in an unloving and overbearing fashion (Eph. 6:4). Unfortunately, some fathers ignore Paul's teaching and rule over their children as terrible tyrants, never mixing the right amount of love with their severity. However, does the fact that some fathers abuse their authority mean that we ought to teach that all fathers should be stripped of their authority, except in the area of their example?

In the same way, it is sad, but true, that some elders ignore Peter's teaching, and they rule over the church as exacting masters who delight in seeing their servants bow before them, but does this mean that all elders should be told that the only authority they have over the congregation is to set forth the right kind of example? Because one elder/eldership acts poorly does not mean that all other elders/elderships should



be prohibited from acting at all. The passage in First Peter 5:1-4 forbids the abuse of authority, not the proper use thereof. The abuse of a system is not proof that the system itself is false. We should never allow one extreme to beget another. The cure for the problem is not to say that elders have no authority at all. Rather, the cure is to teach all that God says about the subject; namely, that elders receive their authority from the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and, therefore, they should live as good examples before the flock, so that they might lovingly and humbly exercise their God-given authority over the flock to lead and guide them to heaven above!

Hebrews 13:7, 17 - A Christian Reaction (cf. page 2)

Perhaps there is no plainer declaration of the authority of elders than in the last chapter of the book of Hebrews. Therein, Inspiration records:

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

Obeys 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.

In unmistakably clear language, the Bible teaches that some brethren have “the rule over” other brethren. Undoubtedly, this is a reference to the elders of the church who possess the oversight of the church. Our responsibility is “to obey them that have the rule over” us. The word “obey” is the very same word used in James 3:3, wherein we read of how “...we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.” Sadly, some brethren do not have the horse sense to yield to the direction in which godly elders are leading the church.

Sensible Applications:

But what if I do not agree with the elders?

Of course, we ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29), but if a decision of the elders does not conflict with God’s word, then our responsibility is to “submit.” The Greek word translated “submit” (*hupeiko*) found only here (Heb. 13:17) in the New Testament, means “to resist no longer, but to give way, to yield (of combatants)...metaphorically, to yield to authority and admonition, to submit” (Thayer). It is not an easy thing for us to subordinate our will to the will of another. However, if we would follow Jesus, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow after him (Mt. 16:24).

Someone may be quick to say, “I will submit my will to the will of God, but I will not submit to any man.” The problem with such a statement is that it ignores the fact that God has conferred certain authority upon certain individuals. There is

original authority, which belongs to God, and there is *delegated authority*, the authority which God bestows upon another.

The point is that I must obey even in the realm of judgment. It is not enough for me to obey the elders about the things that are obvious. **I must submit to the elders even when the decision is based upon human judgment with which I might not agree**, unless, of course, that human judgment contradicts God’s law. Also, I need to recognize that, in matters of judgment, the wisdom of others may be superior to mine.

God knew that someone or ones needed to be accountable for making decisions which affect the welfare of the church. However, rather than leaving the decisions affecting the church to each individual, a situation that would surely lead to chaos, God, in His infinite wisdom, has arranged for a plurality of certain qualified men to “take the oversight” of the church and its affairs.

How far does the eldership’s oversight extend?

Just as there are some laws of the land that are based clearly upon matters of moral right and wrong, in the church, there are matters of faith about which God has so clearly legislated that no eldership on earth has the right to alter. **For example, no elders on earth have the right to rule that instrumental music is acceptable to God, that women can serve in leadership positions in the church, or that sprinkling is an acceptable “mode” of baptism.** As shepherds under the Chief Shepherd, their decisions, on matters of faith, must harmonize with his decisions, because he is the head of the church and his word will judge men in the last day (1 Pet. 5:4; Col. 1:18; John 12:48).

In a manuscript written on the authority of elders, Bobby Duncan addressed the concept of whether elders have authority to make decisions in matters of judgment. Commenting on Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3), brother Duncan wisely wrote:

This verse does not mean we will all think alike in matters of judgment; it rather shows that there must be unity and harmony of action in a local congregation, even in the realm of judgment or opinion. It should be easy for us to see why such is the case. If it were not so, it would be impossible to have an orderly period of worship or an effective program of work.

The hour at which the church begins its worship on the Lord’s day is a matter of judgment or personal preference. For example, some might prefer to meet at nine o’clock, some at nine-thirty, and others at ten o’clock. Each believes his preferred time would be best. But each one is not at liberty to begin the service at whatever hour his own personal preference or his own judgment dictates. That would create mass confusion...



There are hundreds of decisions in the realm of judgment which must be made, and which affect the entire congregation. **If a church is to have unity and harmony, there must be unity and harmony even in matters of judgment.** Since human judgment and personal preferences do often differ, then it becomes essential that all the members of a local congregation yield to the judgment of certain ones in order to have unity in matters of judgment. We raise this question then: To whose judgment are the members of a local congregation to yield that unity and harmony might prevail? Does the Bible answer that question?

Has God ordained that certain ones oversee the congregation, and that all the members submit to those overseers? He has, and that right clearly and emphatically. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (23). [Emp. AJC]

As the above quotation clearly shows, elders are constantly confronted with the need to make decisions in the realm of judgment or expediency. For example, the idea that the church must uphold and proclaim the truth is a matter of faith (1 Tim. 3:15). No eldership has the right to rule that this is an unimportant command from the Lord. But, how should the church carry out its mission to spread the truth? Should the church preach by radio, television, the printed page, or by all three methods? Who should decide this? Who decides which mission works to support? Should the church have one gospel meeting a year, or two? Furthermore, which evangelist will conduct the gospel meeting? How much should he be paid for holding the meeting? Regarding the local work, should the church have one or two preachers working full-time? Who should be hired to work as the local preacher? What will his salary be?

Obviously, someone has to decide how to answer the above questions, and myriads of other questions we did not even ask.

For example, the idea that the church must uphold and proclaim the truth is a matter of faith (1 Tim. 3:15). No eldership has the right to rule that this is an unimportant command from the Lord.

Who should decide? From a study of the New Testament, we know that no one man has the right to make these decisions. It is a matter of faith that one man cannot be placed in charge of the church, universally or locally. The New Testament

pattern shows that God demands a plurality of men to be appointed as elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:2), with no one elder having any more authority than another elder. Moreover, it should be remembered that **the authority belonging to elders is granted to them as a collective group, not as one man; authority belongs to the eldership, not to one elder, separate and apart from the group as a whole.** Some have made a fuss over the fact that the word "eldership" does not occur in the New Testament. However, in First Timothy 4:14, Paul mentions "the presbytery," a word which Thayer defines to mean "a body of elders." Thus, authority resides in the body of elders in a particular congregation, who received their authority from the Chief Shepherd.

Should the Elders follow the wishes of the congregation?

Some are willing to admit that the New Testament authorizes the existence of the eldership in a congregation, but they view the eldership as a type of "Congress" or "Senate," where the elders have the responsibility to govern in accordance with the wishes of their "constituents." In essence, this position argues that the elders have authority to make a decision only if that decision harmonizes with the wishes of the congregation as a whole. **The practical conclusion of such a position is that the elders are not over the congregation, but under the congregation.** However, Paul did not tell the brethren at Thessalonica that the elders were under them; rather, he affirmed that the elders were over the church (1 Thes. 5:12-13). Furthermore, if the decisions of an eldership are required to submit to the wishes of the congregation, then why have elders make decisions at all? Why not just take a congregational vote whenever a decision needs to be made? If the wishes of the congregation are going to ultimately decide the matter anyway, why not just cut out the middle men, the elders, and save some time? At least that way the wishes of the majority would be guaranteed.

In fact, some have suggested that all matters should be decided by a congregational vote. However, in an article, which appeared in the June 28, 1979 issue of the Gospel Advocate, brother Alan Highers made the following solid argument against this practice:

In majority rule every member would have the same voice, from the young teenage Christian to the aged saint with forty years or more of dedicated service in the kingdom. In emotional situations there would be a carnal and political spirit engendered in which opposing factions would go door to door seeking support to "get out the vote." It should be obvious why God, in His wisdom, did not impose such a system of majority rule upon the kingdom of righteousness and peace. How much better that **God devised a means whereby men of wisdom and experience would lead the church into paths of usefulness and service. God's way is right and as we follow His plan, we will manifest**



the wisdom of God in all things (404). [Emp. AJC]

We are not suggesting that elders should ignore the feelings of the congregation altogether. On the contrary, a wise eldership is the one that seeks the input of the congregation. If an eldership sends a message to the congregation that its decisions are above questioning, and that their judgment is infallible, they have made a serious mistake. On the other hand, the congregation must recognize that the eldership is composed of fallible human beings, who, as such, may make some mistakes in matters of judgment.

What is my responsibility toward the elders, even when they may have made a mistake in judgment?

Once again, brother Bobby Duncan offers an insightful answer:

Should the members of the congregation submit to the elders, even when the elders have made a mistake in judgment? The answer is yes. Why? There are two reasons. **First**, if it is in the realm of judgment, how can members be certain they have made a mistake? All they know is that the judgment of the elders differs with their judgment in this particular matter. To say they made a mistake is to exalt one's own judgment above the judgment of the entire eldership. Unless enough time has elapsed that a certain decision has proven to be a mistake, we need to be careful about declaring a decision of the eldership to be the wrong decision. It has always been a source of amusement to me that a certain matter could arise, and the elders discuss that matter, pray over the matter, perhaps study it for several weeks, and then make a decision based on the very best information they have, but the very minute their decision is announced some good brother who was not in on the discussion, and who has not given one minute's thought to the matter can immediately proclaim the elders have made a mistake...A **second** reason why we must submit to the eldership, even if the elders make mistakes, is that the Bible teaches that we are to submit to the elders. **God knew that elders would not be perfect. He knew they would be human beings and, as such, would make mistakes.** Still he said, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not

with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:17) (29-30). [emp. AJC]

We conclude by noting the following statement from the pen of brother Alan Highers, which appeared in the July 12, 1979 issue of the *Gospel Advocate*:

I am impressed with the counsel which an older saint gave to his children when trouble arose within a congregation. He admonished, "**When differences arise over matters of judgment, just stay with the elders.**" Let us learn, brethren, to "stay with the elders" (426).

Let us pray fervently that each congregation may be blessed with godly elders, and that each member will follow their good example and humbly submit to their rule, as they submit to the authority of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

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POWER LECTURESHIP 2015

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THE ELDERSHIP'S AUTHORITY APPLIED TO DISCERNING GOOD AND EVIL

by Aaron J. Cozort

There are many possible applications of the eldership's authority in discerning good and evil. One example is very prevalent in the life of the twenty-first century Christian.

Has a well-intentioned Christian ever suggested to you, "the Bible doesn't teach that I need to attend worship twice on Sunday, and doesn't say anything about bible study on Wednesday night, so no one can tell me I have to attend any time except once on Sunday?"

How much basis in fact does this statement have, and how does it apply to our topic for this article?

The New Testament Example

When the example of the first century church is examined, these truths are discovered:

1. The first century church met regularly from the beginning of its existence (Acts 2:42, 46-47)

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people... (Emp. AJC)
2. The first century church met on the first day of the week (Sunday), and while gathered, partook of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7).

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them...
3. There are rules and ordinances binding our actions when we come together as the assembly ("church") (1 Cor. 11:8-ff; 16:2)

For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it... Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation...

Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.
4. The assembly of the church is necessary to provide the encouragement Christians need to remain faithful (Heb. 10:24-27).

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins...

5. Turning away, or forsaking entirely, the assembly was condemned in the first century (cf. Heb. 10:25).

Is An Optional Matter Optional?

The conclusion drawn by many from the above passages is that the first century church normally assembled only once on the first day of the week (*a correct conclusion*), and that assembling on Sunday is a binding example on Christians today (*a correct conclusion*), therefore an additional assembly on Sunday or on Wednesday night is a matter of judgment (*a correct conclusion*), and therefore no one can "require" a Christian to attend those assemblies, they are optional, and **cannot** be a matter of good or evil/sin or salvation (*a false conclusion*).

What authority could possibly be produced to indicate otherwise? The simple answer, as demonstrated so clearly in the article by brother Clarke, is the authority of the eldership.

If an eldership, who has authority in matters of judgment, and specifically has authority (and accountability) in matters of keeping the flock of God faithful, establishes additional times for the church to assemble together and makes this a binding matter on the members to attend these assemblies, then the responsibility of every Christian under their oversight is to assemble with the body on every one of those occasions where they are able.

The response might be, "Attending only one worship assembly on Sunday is not condemned by the New Testament." This is true. But the New Testament does stipulate that to defy the authorities that God has established is to defy the authority of God Himself. And to defy the authority of God is a matter of good and evil.

If a Christian defies the God-given authority of the Elders in matters of attendance, they sin. Will you submit your will to the will of the shepherds in your congregation? Remember, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for the watch for your souls, as those who must give account..." (Hebrews 13:17a)

This is how the authority of the Elders applies to *Discerning Good and Evil*.



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ELDERS NEED ENCOURAGEMENT TOO

by Franklin Camp

There is a growing disregard for elders. This is symptomatic of our day where human wisdom is substituted for divine revelation. I want to say something on the other side.

I appreciate elders because this is God's plan (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The one who fails to respect elders fails to respect God's word and God's way. I cannot be faithful to the Bible and disregard elders.

I appreciate elders because of the responsibility they accept. No men on earth have a greater responsibility than elders. The President of the United States with all of our problems does not bear the responsibility of elders. Elders are responsible for carrying the gospel to every creature (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16). But that is not the end of the elders' responsibility. They must watch after souls. They will have to give an account of the souls that are under their oversight. I appreciate the man that is willing to accept the responsibility of an elder.

I appreciate elders because of the time they give to the Lord's work. While others are free to use their time in various ways, elders must use much of their time in fulfilling their duties. There are meetings where time must be given to planning the work, dealing with problems, and many other things. This requires a great deal of time. I appreciate the man who is willing to take the time necessary to do the work of an elder.

I appreciate elders because they work with the least encouragement of any people I know. I've often wondered how long I would continue to preach if I received criticism as elders do with so little encouragement. Few people in any congregation think to give a word to encourage elders. I appreciate men that will give years of helping the church grow, struggle with its problems, accept criticism, receive little or no encouragement, and continue to do its work.

I appreciate elders because of their families. First, they have done a good job in training their children and in building a stable marriage. My hat is off to the man that has a family that makes it possible for him to serve as an elder. I appreciate elders because of the sacrifices they make so that they can serve. Time that might be spent with his family is often used in doing the work of the Lord. I appreciate families that are willing to allow the husband and father to spend the time that is needed in dealing with the problems, planning the work of the church, and being concerned about the welfare of people that are under their oversight.

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