

## The Rule of Elders

### Introduction:

- A. Extremes beget extremes.
    - 1. In the fifties and sixties institutional brethren broadened the rule of elders beyond scriptural limits.
      - a. sponsoring church
      - b. “The elders decide; it’s not my business.”
    - 2. For the last thirty years Charles Holt has led a charge to the opposite extreme, denying elders any rule in the local church.
    - 3. Some are now arguing for popular, democratic rule in the local church.
    - 4. With the Scriptures as our compass, we must chart a course away from all false positions and to the truth.
  - B. The Father wills that each local church develop and appoint elders. - Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5
  - C. What authority do the Scriptures assign to elders?
- I. God has assigned leadership in every divinely ordained relationship.
- A. the home - Ephesians 5:22-24
  - B. civil government - Romans 13:1-2
  - C. the church - Ephesians 1:22-23; Luke 22:14,29-30
- II. Rule in the local church is the function of elders.
- A. They are called “overseers.” - Acts 20:17,28
    - 1. This is the Greek word “*episkopos*,” translated “bishop” in Titus 1:7.
    - 2. It means “*an overseer*, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, *any curator, guardian or superintendent*” (Thayer. 243).
  - B. They are to rule. - 1 Timothy 5:17 (“rule”: “*to be over, to superintend, preside over*” [Thayer. 539])
- III. What are the duties of members to the elders?
- A. know and esteem - 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
  - B. honor - 1 Timothy 5:17; cf. vv. 3,18
  - C. follow - Hebrews 13:17
  - D. obey - Hebrews 13:17
    - 1. They were selected as elders for their wisdom. - 1 Timothy 3:2
    - 2. They are the divinely constituted overseers of the local church. - Acts 20:28

#### IV. How is their rule limited?

A. All human rule is subordinate to and limited by divine authority. - Acts 17:24; 5:29

1. civil rulers - Acts 5:29
2. employers - Colossians 4:1
3. parents - Ephesians 6:1
4. husbands - Colossians 3:18

B. How is the rule of elders limited?

1. They rule only the local church where they are members. - 1 Peter 5:1-4
2. They are not “lords over God’s heritage.” - 1 Peter 5:3
  - a. This is the principle behind all service in the kingdom of Christ. - Matthew 20:25-28
  - b. This does not eliminate rule but qualifies that rule. - Luke 22:24,29-30
  - c. Jesus is the perfect example of this rule.
    - (1) He has all authority. - Matthew 28:18; Colossians 3:17
    - (2) But He served. - John 13:13-15
    - (3) In love He seeks what is best for His bride. - Ephesians 5:25; 1 John 5:3
    - (4) He does not simply issue orders but has set an example how to live. - 1 Peter 2:21-22
3. Elders do not have the right to:
  - a. legislate laws or to lead the church in unauthorized paths. - James 4:12; 2 John 9; Acts 20:28-30
  - b. forbid a preacher to preach any Bible truth. - Acts 20:26-27; Titus 1:10-13
  - c. tell members what they may study. - 2 Corinthians 1:24
  - d. tell Christians how to run their private lives in matters of opinion. - Acts 5:3-4
4. Elders should not enforce their own will in matters of liberty against the will and/or good of the congregation. - Titus 1:7
5. No elder should seek preeminence in the church. - 3 John 9-10

V. In making decisions for the church, elders should:

- A. learn and consider the needs and opinions of the congregation. - Acts 6:1
- B. inform the whole church of decisions that affect the whole church. - Acts 6:3; 15:19-20

Conclusion:

- A. For years I have heard brethren talk about the shortage of preachers.
- B. The real shortage in the Lord’s church is of qualified, dedicated elders.
- C. Elders should go about their work with serious dedication. - Hebrews 13:17
- D. The members should so behave toward the elders that we would deserve to have good elders.