

General Topics :: Question on authority in Church

Question on authority in Church - posted by Sree (), on: 2017/10/14 13:57

We recently have someone leave the local Church, because they believed the authority in the Church should be for entire body. The body should decide who should speak in the church, who should lead the Church etc.

I was always of the opinion that God will appoint authority in the Church. He will make decisions in the Church through his appointed authority. The body can tell its opinion but the authority whom the Lord appointed should make decision and they should be accountable for it. Everyone who is part of the body should submit to this authority. They can leave the Church if they do not agree with authority. But should not stay and rebel against authority.

Now my question is, what are some scriptures that you can associate with this 2 kinds of thinking? I can quote scriptures as well but my scriptural understanding could be influenced based on my belief. Please let us know your understanding on this subject.

Re: Question on authority in Church - posted by narrowpath, on: 2017/10/14 15:20

Hi Sree, I can relate to that. Recently some folks criticised me behind my back. I could not ignore it because it could have harmed the fellowship.

I knew I was on the spot. Would it deal with them in the same spirit as they did to me? Would I be irritated and defensive?

2 verses came to my mind:

1) The command to submit to leadership:

1 Peter 5:5 (NKJV) Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

2) The spirit in which the leaders should deal with issues. It is extremely important not to show a harsh attitude but try to win back the brother because he will fall under God's judgment and malign your fellowship and leadership.

2 Timothy 2:24-25 (NKJV) And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,

In our fellowship I addressed the group as a whole without pointing at individuals that they should solve their issues according to Matthew 18 and not talk behind people's back. I then sought these brothers and sisters individually and asked them to present their case and be specific.

I told them that the Bible must be the authority by which truth can be established, not opinions of man.

None of them were able to substantiate their complaints and present their case citing Bible references.

Things have calmed down now and they have seen that I gave them room and did not oppress them. I think they have recognized that.

Also, it is best to talk to such a person with a group of leaders. It is better to have 2 or more witnesses. One alone can be too biased.

Re: - posted by Sree (), on: 2017/10/14 22:16

Thank you Narrowpath, there is lot of wisdom in what you have written. Good to know that there are brothers who are going through what I am going through.

Re: Question on authority in Church - posted by Gloryandgrace (), on: 2017/10/14 23:29

Over the millennia there have been a various Church government models out there.

Moses model

Congregational model

Hierarchical model

Basically Moses model is Pastor is selected by the congregation and he selects his elders. The pastor has final authority and his elders have delegated authority.

Congregational where the congregation votes in the pastor and the elders, their authority is based on permission granted from the congregational approval

Hierarchical is where pastors and elders are appointed from other church bodies or governing bodies and sent to the congregation as representatives of the governing bodies keeping up the bylaws and policies of the articles of incorporation and approved doctrines of the governing body.

Over the centuries all 3 of these (and there might be others) have been practiced with scriptures to prove their usage.

You might easily guess that each one has its pitfalls. and Sree as you stated earlier. "The body can tell its opinion but the authority whom the Lord appointed should make a decision and they should be accountable for it. Everyone who is part of the body should submit to this authority. They can leave the Church if they do not agree with authority. But should not stay and rebel against authority." The problem arises and has certainly arisen where these in authority are in direct contradiction to plain scripture...but as you stated are in direct opposition to the authority in that body, therefore they should leave. Truth is, those in authority have no authority to override the word of God, therefore their authority over you is false and have no rightful power to judge you.

Other pitfalls in other governing models can also be found, but for brevity, I'll say do not insist on one model because the Church through the centuries has not, therefore we individually do not have veto power to anathematize another Church body and its rule.

Re: Question on authority in Church - posted by savannah, on: 2017/10/15 21:00

Matthew 20:25-28 and Mark 10:42-45

In these passages Jesus clearly points out that spiritual authority is exercised in an entirely different way from worldly authority. To rule or "oversee" the church means to serve the church. In the household of God, the concept of "oversight" is radically transformed and interpreted entirely in terms of "deaconship" or "ministry" or "service." Peter states this explicitly in 1 Peter 5:1-5. "I exhort the elders...to pastor the flock of God among you, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly" (vv. 1,2, my translation). Furthermore, they are not to exercise authority as "lords" but as "examples" (v. 3). "In the same way" younger Christians are to accept the authority of the elders (v. 5a); "and all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another" (v. 5b, NRSV).

Note that key phrase in verse 5a, "in the same way," as well as the sentiment in the remainder of the verse and the context of the passage. Yes, younger Christians are to submit to the older and wiser Christians in the church; but the elders in turn submit and defer to the interests of others. Pastoral authority must not be taken out of the context of the mutual business of submitting and serving in the church.

The ramifications of this fact are far-reaching. It means that the elders are not the primary decision-makers in the church, contrary to much church practice. In the early church it was the Holy Spirit operating through the context of the entire body which made decisions on behalf of the church (cp. Acts 13:2,3; 15:22; 1 Cor. 1:10-15).

To illustrate this point we need look no further than Jesus' great disciplinary outline of Matthew 18:15-20. Of course it is the duty of any member of the body, not just a (serving) leader, to approach the one who has sinned; and in any case a member who has been sinned against must also approach the offender to reconcile (cp. also Luke 17:3,4). If reconciliation and/or repentance is not achieved, does the case then go to the elders? Not necessarily. A third and possibly fourth party is brought in, but Jesus doesn't indicate that the third or fourth parties need to be elders. If that effort is unsuccessful, does it then go to the elders? No. On the contrary, it goes straight to the entire church body for prayerful resolution. Just where are the elders in all of this? If they truly are the "rulers" and decision-makers of the church, surely they would

figure prominently in this passage. But they don't.

This is what most strongly implies that the oversight of the church is not an office but a function. Leaders lead by example and by submission. Elders are just that: older, wiser people in the church who are known and trusted and admired and imitated, whose opinions and insights and advice are sought, whose character and spirituality are beyond reproach. This pastoring is a role or function, but it is not an office invested with certain powers or political authority.

This has implications also for the titles that we tragically associate with church leaders - an association which should be precluded by Jesus' teaching in Matthew 23: 8-12:

"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (NIV).

Difficult words! How are they to be taken? Obviously Jesus wasn't teaching that there are no human fathers or teachers. Paul writes about human fathers in Ephesians 6:4 and pastors-teachers as gifts from God in Ephesians 4:11. The context of Matthew 23 - which is about the religious hypocrisy of the Pharisees - makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is talking about religious titles. Jesus' disciples are not to attach titles to their names, nor are they to use religious titles when addressing others. Why not? Because such titles set the leaders apart from and above the rest of the body, marking them out as greater.

Pastors who would prove that they aren't above their congregations would do well to heed Jesus' command and drop their titles altogether, eradicating them from the bulletins and letterhead and discouraging their use. (M. Mattison)

Re: Question on authority in Church - posted by narrowpath, on: 2017/10/16 13:09

Hi Sree,

here is a very helpful teaching by David Pawson on the topic of church authority.<http://davidpawson.org/resources/series/church-membership>

especially the one on church government.

http://davidpawson.org/resources/resource/927?return_url=http%3A%2F%2Fdavidpawson.org%2Fresources%2Fseries%2Fchurch-membership

It also came to my mind that when Moses faced rebellion, the first thing he did was to fall on his face before the Lord Numbers 16:4. This will help not to react in the flesh.

Re: - posted by Sree (), on: 2017/10/16 18:04

My question is not, how authority should be in a Church, but how authority should be determined in a Church. Just like we have so many bad examples of people in authority, we also have 100 times poor examples of submission.

Re: how - posted by savannah, on: 2017/10/17 8:10

I thought what I posted answered your question.

Specifically here, "...the elders are not the primary decision-makers in the church, contrary to much church practice. In the early church it was the Holy Spirit operating through the context of the entire body which made decisions on behalf of the church (cp. Acts 13:2,3; 15:22; 1 Cor. 1:10-15)."

The congregation is made up of families. No authority usurps the authority of that order which God has established. No other mere man is an authority over another man, i.e. his head. Christ is the head of every man, the man of the woman, and God of Christ. When this order is tampered with, it leads to confusion and lawlessness. Even within the context and confines of a church.

Consider these two truths laid side by side written by a reformer ages ago;

A christian man is the most free lord of all and subject to none; a christian man is the most dutiful servant of all and subject to everyone.

Re: - posted by havok20x, on: 2017/10/17 9:14

Sree,

Can you ask your question again in a different way. I thought I understood your question, but after reading your responses to everyone else's, I am not so sure.

Re: - posted by Sree (), on: 2017/10/17 11:44

Quote:

Specifically here, "...the elders are not the primary decision-makers in the church, contrary to much church practice. In the early church it was the Holy Spirit operating through the context of the entire body which made decisions on behalf of the church (cp. Acts 13:2,3; 15:22; 1 Cor. 1:10-15)."

It kind of addresses my question. I really appreciate your answers. I expect more scriptural references that are apt to our discussion here. But I do not find any scriptural proof of it. We cannot use Acts as Acts is just a history book. 1 Cor 10-15 is nothing related to decision making. It is only in regard to judging things which everyone has right to judge as we are commanded to Judge righteously. If we create a theology based on acts then we should also cast lots to choose our apostles! We cannot pick and choose things from Acts based on what we need. The Epistles are the authority for us to run the church.

Paul asked Corinthian Church to put out the man in adultery. He did not ask the Church to decide whether to put him out or not. In fact he rebuked the Church for not doing it. Paul asked Titus to appoint Elders in Crete. He did not ask the congregation in Crete to choose their elders!

I see God's working pattern is same with respect to Israel as well. He appointed the Kings over them. He never allowed them to elect the King. Church can discuss their concerns to the elders, but the final decision is by the elders according to the wisdom God has given them. Any rebellion that the Church has against the elders is rebellion against God.

Quote:

When this order is tampered with, it leads to confusion and lawlessness. Even within the context and confines of a church.

Christ is the head of every man. But it is not in the context of Church. What it means that only Christ can tell you what to do in personal matters. No one can tell you what is right or wrong in your personal life, like whom to marry etc. But in the context of Church, there should be an order. Church is compared to body of Christ, which is then compared to human body in Ephesians 4. In human body none of my organs make any decision. Whether my legs are tired or not, if my brain commands it to walk, it has to walk.

In the Church, the elders are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the Church. In revelation Jesus wrote letters to the messenger of the Church which holding him responsible for the spiritual condition of Church. It is totally disloyal to expect the elders to stand accountable before Jesus while the decisions are made by entire body! Poor guy, why should he be sacrificed!

Re: - posted by Sree (), on: 2017/10/17 11:54

Quote:

Can you ask your question again in a different way. I thought I understood your question, but after reading your responses to everyone else's, I am not so sure.

Most part of the answers here are addressing how the authority in the Church should behave. The scripture is very clear about it in 1 Peter 5. So my question is not related to it. I know most of the examples we see in Christendom are bad execution of authority.

My question is, who should have authority and how is it determined. Does the body have authority to make decisions? Does the body determine who should be their elders? I see these 2 questions directly against Epistles. Other than few misrepresented situations from Acts, there is no example of body having any authority in it.

I think it is 100 times more dangerous for a body that has authority to make decisions than a single man who is misusing his authority.

Re: - posted by havok20x, on: 2017/10/17 12:44

Excellent question, Sree! I actually enjoy this topic, but it isn't as clear cut as we'd like to make it on some of this issue. The bible simply does not say, "Thou shalt establish eldership in this way...". There are examples of the men planting churches and appointing elders, as found in Titus 1:

"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" 6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7 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,** 8 **but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled,** 9 **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."**

But that man doesn't always exist. What if the church has been there for a long time and there isn't a Titus to come help them. Can the congregation appoint the elders? I don't see why not, so long as it is fraught with prayer and the men are qualified. Now, when those elders are appointed, the church needs to allow them to do what they are called to do and to submit to their authority, and those elders need to do what they are called to do and submit themselves to serving their brethren and Christ--and if everyone is serving the other in their varying capacities, we have a beautiful picture of Christ and his bride. I think the Bible is not prescriptive on HOW to select elders, the main focus is the qualifications of those men.

Re: - posted by havok20x, on: 2017/10/17 12:47

Also,

If there is an established Eldership, I think it is acceptable for those Elders to appoint elders IF, again, it is fraught with prayer and those men are qualified.

Do you want to put people's names in a hat and draw them out or cast lots for them--then, although I totally would never do that--as long as it is fraught with prayer and the men who are selected are qualified, then I guess that is acceptable to o.

Re: - posted by Sree (), on: 2017/10/17 13:37

Quote:

But that man doesn't always exist. What if the church has been there for a long time and there isn't a Titus to come help them. Can the congregation appoint the elders?

Good point. I know a situation in the local Church that I was part of in India. There was a time (some 15 years back) when no one was found worthy to lead the fellowship. Then the fellowship prayed that God should send a Godly man in their midst who is fit enough to lead them. God did answer their prayer.

God has always had men like Titus in our midst. We only fail to acknowledge them. My criteria for a Titus is simple, has he planted a Church, how is the quality of his Church, is his Church living as a bride who adorns herself? If there is a man who has planted such a Church, then I would submit to such a man to appoint elders. But the problem is no one is willing to look for Titus. Titus would have been no use to Crete if Crete did not recognize his authority. I am very thankful to the Lord for leading me to such Titus who has planned many Churches that are functioning as a true Bride of Christ.