

Authority & the Church

by Aaron Rock

This sermon discusses the importance of understanding authority within the church, emphasizing the need for ongoing discussions about church authority based on biblical principles. Negative examples are highlighted to illustrate the unbiblical understandings of church authority. The sermon delves into the qualifications, motivations, boundaries, and relationships of pastors and elders within the church, emphasizing the need for biblical teaching, imitation of faith, and listening to leaders grounded in the unchanging nature of Christ.

Scripture: Hebrews 13:17, 1 Timothy 3:1, 1 Peter 5:2, Hebrews 13:7

Topics: "Church Authority", "Biblical Leadership"

Description

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Transcript

So today's sermon is entitled Authority and the Church, and it's part of this sermon series called All Under God. As I've spent many, many years of my life in the church, talking to pastors, talking to congregants, being talked to by pastors, being talked to by congregants, every once in a while, you hear things that are a little off base, that indicate a lack of understanding, a certain ignorance to scripture. And with regard to the question of authority within the church, I just wanna give some negative examples to illustrate the need, the fundamental need for us to have ongoing discussions about church and authority and the authority that God has given to his church.

So for example, recently, just a week or so ago, I heard a church leader online say that if you have an issue that you would like to discuss with him, and you've prayed about it, and you have fasted about it, he said, even if you are right, I will not listen to you. I've talked to several pastors and heard several pastors over the past couple of years, say, you know, we're in a crisis in culture, I'd like to lead my church in this direction, but I don't have congregational approval. Everybody doesn't agree with me, so we're just gonna sort of stay stuck in the water, like a ship without a sail, just going nowhere.

I've also heard Christians say things like, I love Jesus, I have my own Bible, I've been hurt or burned by churches in the past, so I don't go to church. I just stay home, I read Our Daily Bread, I listen to an online sermon or two, I play some Christian worship music, and that's sufficient for my faith. Well, brothers and sisters, I would like to suggest to you today that all three of these examples are unbiblical understandings of the church, the church's authority, the authority that God has given to pastors and elders.

The first example I gave is really an example of a cult leader, an unaccountable leader. That's a problem. There's nowhere in scriptures that say, church leaders are unaccountable, they can do whatever they want, say whatever they want, and even if someone wants to give them good feedback, they don't have to listen.

If that's your mindset, you're a cult leader. Nowhere in scripture does it say that pastors and elders need to wait around until they get democratic approval from the congregations for the decisions that they make. The problem with that sort of a paradigm is the pastor is no longer a leader, he becomes the church's employee.

Nowhere in scripture does it say that a family or an individual can sit at home on Sundays and play church. Your family is not a church. A New Testament church is composed of at least two families.

You know why we know that? Because every duly appointed and organized New Testament church has to have at least two elders. So therefore you have to have at least two families. So it's important for us as leaders, as followers, to think clearly and biblically about what the church is, about what authority God has given to the church and hasn't given to the church, what authority God has given to leaders within the church, and what authority God hasn't given to leaders within the church.

Now in the word of God, it's interesting that God has a very high view of the church. It's actually called his bride, the bride of Christ. That's a pretty intimate and exciting description of the nature of the church.

God has a high view of the church. He doesn't speak ill of the church as some Christians tend to do. Sometimes he speaks ill of Christians that aren't acting like Christians, but God never trash talks the church.

He has a high view of the church. He encouraged the early apostles to plant churches. They wrote letters to churches.

They greeted the churches. They wished the churches all God's best. And within biblical discussions about the church are also discussions about leadership and authority.

And broadly speaking, in the word of God, we learn that God has granted some pretty significant authority to the Christian church over spiritual matters. He has also given strict qualifications to people who might aspire for leadership over his church. And he reminds Christian people over and over again that the church doesn't exist apart from Christ.

The church, just like the state, just like your marriage, just like your family, are in fact under God. In fact, this whole sermon series is a great reminder that every human who is over anyone else is ultimately under God. Any human, Christian or not, who is over any other human being is under God.

And it's no different with the church. The church has a measure of authority over spiritual matters. Church leaders have a ministry description that contains their qualifications, their tasks, their accountability

structures.

They're called pastors or elders, by the way. But all of them are under God. This is why when we refer to pastors in our churches, we sometimes say, well, they are under shepherds.

The word pastor means shepherd. So pastors are under shepherds, under who? Under the great pastor of the church, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. So if you're just joining us, this is our fourth sermon in the series, All Under God.

By way of review, we have been studying Christ's authority, claim to authority based on Colossians 1 over all of creation. I'm gonna read that passage for you again in a moment. But that passage essentially says that all authority in heaven and on earth has been granted to Christ.

And anyone, a cop, a teacher, a father, a parent, a pastor, a crossing guard, anybody that has any level of authority, their authority actually is delegated authority. It comes to them by God. No human being can rightly claim any authority over any other person without acknowledging that their authority comes from God.

By the way, what happens when they fail to remember that or acknowledge that? They become tyrants. They request your worship, your unlimited homage. We see that in culture, where one of the biggest problems in our own country is statism, where the state thinks it has authority over every aspect of life.

But that's not true. But the problem is not just with the state, the problem is husbands that don't understand the authority that they have over their wives. The problem is parents that don't understand the authority they have over their children.

The problem is pastors that don't understand the authority they have over churches. We tend to live in a culture where everyone's scared of being in charge. Or on the other hand, they abuse their authority over those under their leadership.

So we're preaching this series because we wanna un-muddle and un-befuddle the confusion that exists in culture around the state, the family, and the church. We're preaching this sermon series because we live at a point in time where the government has changed, has claimed authority over all of life. We're preaching this series to correct the false understanding that submission to authority is somehow a bad thing.

We're preaching this series to bring clarity and boundaries to our roles. So if I'm gonna be a proper citizen, a husband, a father, a church leader, I wanna make sure I'm clear-headed about what my job description is and what my job description isn't, what my authority is, and what the limits of my authority are. This just brings great clarity to life.

And it also brings a certain peace and calm knowing that I'm not in charge of everything and everybody. And I can submit here and I can submit there to those that are in authority over me, but I don't have to submit to everybody on every point and every suggestion that they give to me. So we're gonna start today with our theme verse, Colossians 1, verse 16.

I've read this every week now for four weeks. Colossians 1, verse 16, it's a great verse for you just to kind of commit to memory, to be familiar with, to be able to find in your Bible. And the verse is speaking of Christ and of Christ, the one who spoke the world into existence.

It says, quote, for by him, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him. You'll notice that twice we have the language, all things. There's a point of emphasis there.

Doesn't want anybody to go away thinking, well, he doesn't really mean all things. He just means some things. No, he means all things.

Just all things that are created that we can see, taste, touch, smell, and hear. No, even that which is immaterial, the spirits, the angels, the demons who've rebelled against God are in fact under his authority. Anyone who presides over a dominion or rules a nation or a tribe, anyone who sits on a throne, anyone that has authority, notice it's plural, all authority is in fact under Christ.

And if in this broken world, we saw more people acknowledge that, we'd see less destruction, less war, less abuse, et cetera. So this is our theme verse, all things are under Christ and all includes the church. So we want to talk specifically about the church as a part of that all.

And I want to begin by discussing broadly the authority that Christ actually delegates to the church as a whole. Did you know that the church of Jesus Christ as a whole, not just its leaders, but the church of Jesus Christ as a whole represents Christ in the world and has a measure of authority granted to them by Christ. So find your way to the gospel of Matthew.

And what I'd like to do is look at Matthew chapter 16. And then I want to look at Matthew chapter 18. Now, Matthew chapter 16 is an interesting passage.

We're going to look at verses 18 to just 18 and 19. This is a passage that is often debated between folks from the Roman church and folks from the Protestant churches as to what Peter's role is in the church. And as you know, Catholics believe that this passage grants papal authority to Peter and his successors and Protestants believe that the emphasis of this passage is upon Peter's confession.

So it's not upon Peter getting more authority than the other apostles or God establishing papal authority for one man to preside over the church. But in fact, Peter is the first to make this incredible declaration that Jesus Christ is the son of a living God. And so Jesus' response to him in Matthew chapter 16 verses 18 is this.

And he says, and I tell you, you are Peter and Peter's name basically means rock. And on this rock, probably a play on the meaning of his name and also his rock solid confession as the first one to say, Jesus Christ is the son of a living God. I will build my church.

So the church is built not on a man, but it's on a profession of faith that Jesus Christ is Lord over all, that he's the son of the living God and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Against what? Not the person, but the gates of hell will not prevail against the church that professes that Jesus Christ is the son of a living God. He goes on to say, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

So clearly what Christ is doing is he's granting some sort of spiritual authority in Matthew chapter 16 over temporal affairs. Now, again, some Christians would say, no, this is authority granted to a specific man. Others would say, no, it's granted to the church.

Well, I can prove to you that it's not granted to one specific man. It's granted to the church because if you go two chapters over to Matthew chapter 18, we have the exact same declaration given there in a passage that relates to church discipline. So the idea here is that if someone is living in sin, they're claiming to be a Christian and they've been confronted by the church and they're like, take a hike, I'm going to continue to live in sin.

And they've been confronted again. And they're like, forget it. I'm going to continue to live in sin.

Then the church has authority to discipline them. And so in Matthew chapter 18, the exact same language there, this binding and loosing language is mentioned. And then after that in verse 19 and 20, it says, again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my father in heaven for where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.

Now, this verse is one of those commonly butchered passages of the Bible. And you often hear Christians, and please don't do this in my presence at least, say, well, this, where two or three people are gathered together, that's a church. No, it's not about what minimum number constitutes a church.

This is a church discipline passage. This is a passage that says, when Christians gather together, and let's say such and such is committing adultery and refuses to repent, the church has authority granted to them by God to say, you, sir, are not a Christian, or you're living in sin, or you need to repent and you're excommunicated from the body of Christ until you clean up your act and start actually living like a Christian. So this is what the binding and loosing means.

If a church pronounces judgment upon a Christian that's living in sin, heaven acknowledges that pronouncement. Think about that. If a church loses, someone says, we're no longer subjecting you to church discipline.

You've clearly repented of your sins. You're welcome to come back in and re-fellowship with the body of Christ. Heaven acknowledges the pronouncement of the church.

So this is a fascinating notion, that God has such a high view of the church that he literally gives the church the ability to excommunicate or to pronounce someone as being rightly repentant. We are Christ's bride. And as his bride, we are his spokesman.

We preach on his behalf. We teach on his behalf. We discipline one another on his behalf.

This is the authority that Christ has granted to his church. And what I find interesting about these two passages, because we often don't think this way as Christians, is it's almost like heaven is waiting for the church to do its job. And when the church does its job, as Christ has commissioned it to do its job, heaven acknowledges the rightful, just, diligent work of God's people on earth.

We usually think of it as the other way around, that we're just waiting for God to tell us what to do. Now, we're not suggesting here that we can manipulate heaven or manipulate God, but God apparently often waits for the church to act in a way that's godly and biblical, and then acknowledges the authority that we've wielded over other believers who are living in sin or repenting. So this is a pretty interesting passage because it reminds us that the church represents Christ, pronounces judgment on his behalf, and to the degree that the church properly exercises that judgment, heaven acknowledges her authority.

Now, within the church of Jesus Christ, we have authority structures. So the church as a whole has authority with regard to church discipline, but within the church, we also have leadership structures. And the leadership structures of Christian churches are not particularly complicated.

I think sometimes people are confused because they go to a church and there's all sorts of language thrown around. There's team leaders and directors and pastors and elders and bishops and popes and archbishops and cardinals and youth directors and youth pastors and deacons and deaconesses and managers and on and on and on. And you're like, oh, this is confusing.

Like how many different roles are there in the church? Well, there's nothing wrong with giving people titles, but the bottom line is biblically speaking, there's only two offices. There's pastor elders and there's deacons and deaconesses. That's it.

And pastor elders are qualified men that must be able to teach and oversee the life of the church. So if you hear the word pastor or elder, they're synonyms. And deacons and deaconesses are ministering servants that need to understand scripture.

They don't have to be able to teach or preach who serve the practical purposes of the Christian church. We're going to focus in on the highest office in the church and that is the office of elder pastors because really they are leaders within the church. And the Bible calls Christians within the church to submit and obey elders and pastors in the Christian church.

So let's go to Hebrews chapter 13, verse 17. And we have some pretty clear language there. It says, obey your leaders and submit to them.

A lot of Christian, I don't obey my, I'm not submitting to anybody. I'm just going to submit to Jesus. Well, read your Bible again.

Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you. So just a few quick points to commit this to memory.

We have two basic fundamental responses that Christian people are called to give to elders and pastors. The one is obey. Now, what are you supposed to obey? You're supposed to obey them insofar as they are keeping watch over your souls.

So we'll flesh this out a little bit further, but fundamentally pastors and elders are teaching and instructing and applying the word of God to our life and to your life. And when they do that properly, you're supposed to obey them and you're supposed to submit to them within the limits of their delegated authority. So as we look at several passages today, I'll just tip you off right up front.

Pastors and elders, if you're a mom and dad, have no responsibility to make sure your kids grow up to be functioning Christians. It's not our job. So if your notion is, well, I'm not very good at parenting, so I'm just gonna drop my kid off at youth group or drop them off at harvest kids and just let them raise my children.

That's an abdication of your authority. We're not gonna take that authority on. We're gonna bear zero responsibility as pastors and elders to make sure your kids are properly disciplined.

We'll come alongside and help you all day long. We'll help you, we'll encourage you, we'll pastor you and we'll shepherd you and we'll give you great advice. But ultimately we're not gonna take responsibility for you raising your children.

Because as we discussed in our sermon on the family, it's the parent's responsibility to raise their child for Christ. Nor will the Christian church through its elders and pastors take responsibility to make sure your marriage works so well. Husbands, that's your job to lead and guide and direct your wife and to make sure your marriage is intact.

But every so often you have people whose marriage has fallen apart and they rush into the pastor's office and they expect me to bring out my magic wand and wave it over them and fix their marriage. And when I don't, well, the church let me down. The church didn't handle my marital dispute properly.

Or another thing I've noticed among Christian couples, this is a fascinating phenomenon, is they come into the office and they're at each other's throat, they can't get along and as soon as you start confronting them, they're like, hey, now we have found a common enemy and they go away feeling great about themselves for a period of time. But I would remind while pastors preach about Christian marriages and Christian families, I feel no obligation to make sure your marriage works out. And I feel no obligation to make sure your children turn out.

I hope they do. I want them to and I pray for your families and I love your families, but the elder, the rest of the elders and myself, it's not our job to make your marriage work. It's not our job to put food on your table.

It's not our job to decide what kind of car you drive. It's not our job to decide where you live. That's your job.

But as we keep watch over your souls, meaning direct you in terms of spiritual matters and spiritual affairs, you are called to submit to and to obey your leaders. And then we have this little notion here. Let's make it easy for both of us.

Make it a joy for me to lead and I'll try to make it a joy for you to follow. And if we can both agree on that, everybody wins. It's an advantage to both of us.

What authority has God delegated to elder pastors? I wanna flesh this out a little bit more. So I'm gonna look at several passages with you. I just wanna put meat on the bones here.

So let's be very specific. So we're called to obey and submit, but what does that actually mean? What does it mean? Well, to understand this further, we need to begin by having clear thinking with regard to the qualifications of pastors and elders. So 1 Timothy 3, verses one to seven, doesn't give us an exhaustive list of all the things that pastors and elders might be doing in a particular week, how many sermons they should preach or how long the sermon should be or who they should counsel or specifically how they're supposed to administrate the church.

But it does give us a very clear list of their qualifications. This is really, really important for you to understand as congregants. And it's really, really important for elders to understand this.

Going to seminary doesn't make you a pastor. Going to seminary doesn't make you a pastor. You can go to university, get a nursing degree, and you're a nurse.

You can go to university, get an engineering degree, and you're an engineer. You don't go to seminary and get a master of theology and become a pastor. Going to seminary is fine.

I spent nine years in Bible college in seminary, but that's not what makes a person a pastor and elder. A person could have 15 years of schooling or none. What determines a person's qualifications are the list that we're given here in 1 Timothy chapter three.

And this is not a negotiable list. It's like if you score 50%, you don't qualify. So we have a high view of the church office.

And I think that in a world that seems to be marked by a lot of failed church leadership, it's pretty important for the church to get back to passages like this and remind pastors and remind churches what pastors actually are and what the qualifications are. The Bible says, this is 1 Timothy chapter three, verses one to seven. The saying is trustworthy.

If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, that's another word for elder, he desires a noble task. So what's qualification number one? You have to wanna do it. It's not a family business.

It's not something people should force or coerce you into. You have to aspire to it. So that's qualification number one.

Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, which is defined by the community. Does he have a good reputation or a bad reputation? He must be the husband of one wife, not a runaround, not a polygamist. He's committed to his one wife, sober-minded, meaning he thinks clearly.

If you don't have the capacity to think clearly, do people a favor and serve in another area. He must be self-controlled, not a spaz, as we used to say. Not someone that's out of control.

He must be respectable. In other words, someone that a person would wanna emulate. He must be hospitable, meaning he's good with strangers.

Every once in a while you have a guy, he's good in every other areas, but he's just terrible with new people. Then he's not an elder. Because elders must be hospitable to strangers.

They must have sufficient people skills to interact with people they've never met before. He must be able to teach, not math, not biology, not chemistry, this is a reference to the Bible. So he must be able to teach the Bible.

He must not be a drunkard. The Bible does not forbid, sorry for those of you that are a little bit more conservative, because I was raised to think this too, but I've come to discover it's not. The Bible does not forbid the consumption of alcohol.

It just doesn't. Let's not add commandments to the Bible that aren't there. But the Bible does forbid and condemn drunkenness.

If you ever get drunk, you're sinning. Period. Not violent, but gentle.

Not quarrelsome. Not a lover of money. So you see all these very practical things.

It's not arguing back and forth. As a pastor, you obviously wanna debate, but there comes a point where you're going back and forth, back and forth. You're like, okay, this is no longer a debate.

This is quarreling. I'm out. I'm out of the conversation.

He's not in it for the cash. He must manage his own household well, and with all dignity, keep his children submissive. So that's a good reminder for what we studied under the family sermon, where children are called to submit to their parents.

And if a child doesn't submit to their parents, or a man can't manage his family, do the church a favor, and don't take on the role of elder pastor. Why? Well, look what God says. Very practical.

For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. So you gotta have some time in the trenches. You sort of prove yourself.

It's not like, you know, I got saved last week. I'm an elder this week. No, you need some time in the trenches.

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders so that he may not fall into disgrace, into the snare of the devil. So we have some reminders here of the qualifications that God has given for elders. Now, of course, there might be times in a person's life where for a moment, they're not sober-minded, or for a moment, they're not obeying this command not to be quarrelsome.

So we shouldn't expect that these qualifications are necessarily going to be perfectly adhered to 100% of the time. But nevertheless, they are qualifications that 100% need to be manifested in an elder or pastor's life. So I know of a pastor who recently has a major scandalous problem with one of his children.

One of his children is actually coming to church dressed as, and demanding to be referred to as a man. He's a young teenager. And when the elders of his church talked to him about it, he's just like, I don't know what to do.

Okay, well, if you don't know what to do, okay, let's be compassionate. We'll help you work through that. But in the meanwhile, you're not a pastor.

You're not an elder. Because if you don't know how to handle a child who's acting like a sex that they were not born with, then how in the world are you gonna be counseling other people in the churches children may be struggling with the same issues? Now, if your children are grown, they're out of the house, they've left and cleft, they've formed their own household, then you bear no responsibility for your adult children. But a pastor must take responsibility for his marriage.

If his marriage is on the rocks, there's probably a pun in that for our marriage. But if his marriage is not rock solid, but on the rocks, or his children are out of control, people in the church would be like, why do I wanna listen to this guy? I wanna take counsel from this guy. His wife's out of control, his children are out of control, they're little maniacs.

I'm not going to him for counsel. So it's really important that we understand the need for pastors to diligently work toward meeting these qualifications. I would say, just to be super contemporary about this, that perhaps the two most overlooked qualifications in the modern church are able to teach and managing

your own household.

So we've already talked about the latter, but let's just talk about being able to teach. A pastor, in order to instruct the church, should be familiar with all 66 books of the Bible. Not perfectly, but be familiar with all 66 books of the Bible, be familiar with all the major doctrines of scripture, have the capacity to speak to pretty much any biblical subject with competency.

And yet, across our country, we have pastors that are teaching their people. And when you start to listen to their sermon series, they all kind of sound the same. It's all about the most basic, most fundamental virtues of Christian living.

But we have many churches that aren't instructed in systematic theology. They have no idea, they don't have an adequate doctrine of the Holy Spirit, or Christ, or sin, or salvation, or man, or the end times, or Christology. They have no idea.

We have people sometimes come to our church and say, I've been in church for 20, 30 years, I've never even thought about half of this stuff. Well, that's a failure on behalf of pastors and elders to do their job. If we actually upheld these qualifications, we would want to follow such men.

Can you imagine going to your physician and say, you know, doctor, I got this pain in my stomach. And he's like, yeah. You know what, I've never even thought about anything below the neck.

I'm just a head doctor. I have no advice for you. Imagine going to your mechanic, saying there's this clunking in my engine.

Wow, I've been a mechanic for 20 years. I'm just a tire guy, I just know about tires. No, you would expect that a mechanic would have a general knowledge of the whole vehicle, that a physician would have a general knowledge of the whole body.

So then we should also expect pastors and teachers to have a general knowledge of the whole, of the word of God in order that they might instruct the people of God in the things and ways of God. The third question I would like to wrestle with is what should motivate pastors and elders? Because we have to be careful that we don't allow people to enter into leadership in the church, because leadership is so critical for the whole direction of life of the church, that are improperly motivated. So we have a passage here at our disposal, 1 Peter 5, verse three, that helps us to understand what should motivate, what should guide and direct pastors and elders in their ministry.

And as Peter instructs pastors and elders what should motivate them, he also acknowledges that he is functioning in this role as well. So he says, I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ. That means he's also an apostle, because apostles saw the risen Christ in person.

By the way, you're not an apostle if you weren't there in the first century. An apostle has to have seen the risen Christ. That's a critical qualification for apostleship.

So he's an elder, but he's also a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. And he says, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, so there's authority there. Don't be afraid to oversee the people, but not under compulsion, which kind of goes back to 1 Peter chapter three.

We don't want to coerce people into leadership, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, not for the paycheck, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. So what should motivate pastors? Well, it shouldn't be, well, my mom said I had to go be a priest, or well, my dad was a pastor, so I guess I should be a pastor. I have three sons.

One of them is training for pastoral ministry, but I remember when they were younger, people would say, oh, do you think your boys are all going to be pastors? I'm like, I don't know. Just because I'm a pastor, I'm not going to assume all my boys are going to be pastors. I'm not going to put pressure on them to go into the family business.

If God calls them and qualifies them, so be it. I'm not going to be more proud of them because one's a pastor and one's a pipe fitter. They need to follow God's path and plan for their lives.

So we never put pressure on people to become pastors and elders, but if the Lord has gifted them as such, we fan the flame. Secondly, we want to make sure that pastors and elders aren't serving for shameful gain. So probably what the writer has in mind here is primarily money.

There's nothing wrong with the church financially supporting pastors to do the work of the ministry, but if you're going into ministry because while you're unemployed and can't think of anything else to do, or you're in ministry for the money, you know what's going to happen? You're going to be easily manipulated because as soon as your paycheck is threatened, you're going to buckle. And I think this is what we're seeing across our country where so many churches, a couple thousand of them took money from the government as soon as the lockdowns happened. So now they're taking money from a state that they're not even paying taxes to, so now the state has authority over them.

With pastors that are on staff, they're like, well, I can't boldly lead my church because I might get fired. Who cares? I've said to the elders many, many times, please do me a favor at some point and fire me. Tongue in cheek.

But the point is, is I'm very thankful for the church, for the fact that this church generously supports my family financially. It does, I'm very thankful for that. But I'm not in this for the money and I've never made a decision in 20 some odd years of pastoring this church wondering, hmm, I wonder if this is going to affect my paycheck.

If that's my mindset, shame on me, I actually have disqualified myself from ministry. And what this does is this allows you to serve in a more free handed way. If people know this guy's not in it for the money, we're not going to then be able to manipulate him with money.

And if he's not in it for the money, then he's not going to make decisions to pad his own pocket book. Now, you know, there's lots of stories in culture of the televangelists and the ripoff artists that are bilking money from people and telling people that they have to give beyond their means in order to, I don't know, buy them a \$67 million jet or whatever it might be. That's shameful game.

And it's something that no pastor should ever participate in. And then the third point here is not domineering, but being an example. Nothing wrong with being an authority.

Don't be afraid. If the Lord has put you in a position of authority, don't ever be afraid of being in a position of authority. If you're a police officer, and you know what your boundaries of authority are, don't ever apologize to people for being a cop.

If you're a parent, don't apologize to your kids for having authority. If you're in political office and God has given you, you don't need to apologize for authority, but you don't domineer over people. You speak the truth, you guide, you direct.

But fundamentally, you know what's going to be more of a blessing to your people long-term than your exercise of power? Your example. Your example. This, by the way, is why long-term ministry is always better than short-term ministry.

Because people are naturally suspicious of leadership. But if you stay in the saddle, whatever area you're serving in in the church, long-term, people are like, okay, now I have an example to follow. Now I can see that that person is the real deal.

So these are some things for pastors to consider when they're assessing their own motive. And then we have the pastor-elder's relationship to the church. So what does that relationship look like? Well, let's go to 1 Timothy again.

We're gonna look at chapter five, verses 17 to 18. Let the elders who rule well. So this is a strong word that probably many people aren't used to because they think of pastors primarily as just facilitators.

But it actually uses the word rule. It's not ruling to the exclusion of Christ. It's delegated rulership, but the elders are to rule the church, which is a strong word.

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. So in the eldership of a church, all elders must be apt to teach. We read that qualification earlier.

But not all elders necessarily labor at preaching and teaching. When I was young, growing up in a brethren church, we were sort of taught that everybody has to be able to preach and teach. Fairsy-squaresy, even Stephen.

If you're an elder, you need equal pulpit time to everyone else. Sorry, that's not biblical. Every elder has to be able to preach and teach, and we don't bring elders into the ministry of our church that can't, but there will be some that distinguish themselves in this area, just like there will be some that will distinguish themselves in administration or pastoral care or counseling.

But for those that labor at preaching and teaching, it says they're worthy of double honor, and this is a reference to financial support, because the Bible goes on to say, the scripture says, you shall not muzzle an ox when he treads out his grain, and the laborer deserves his wages. So if someone is laboring in leadership over the church, don't make it difficult on him by not adequately supporting him. I remember when I was much younger, I was talking to a friend, and he said, you know, my dad was an elder.

My dad was a pastor, actually, a preaching pastor in a church, he said, and the church we were in, I mean, the deacon's board treated my dad like dirt, treated him like dirt. If my dad, he said, we lived in a parsonage, a house owned by the church. If my dad would preach anything in a sermon that the deacons didn't like, one guy would come over and he'd turn the power off for the week.

He would get into fighting matches with my dad. He would say, all you deserve as a pastor is two chickens a week and two loaves of bread. You should be content with that.

So this was this mindset that pastors should starve. Everyone else in the church can make money and flourish, and if we even have millionaires in the church, I mean, we'll pat them on the back and congratulate them, but if you're a pastor and you have a little bit of money left over at the end of the month, shame on you. And if you dare say anything or preach anything that we don't like, shame on you.

Well, folks, that mindset of keeping pastors under your thumb or keeping them poor so you can keep them humble is not found in the word of God. Just as pastors should be very generous in their desire to meet the needs of people, so churches should be generous in their desire to support and encourage their pastors. That's what the Bible says, so we don't need to apologize for it.

And then fourth, how do we submit to pastors and elders? What are their boundaries of authority? In Hebrews chapter 13, verses seven to nine, we have our final passage where it says, "Remember your leaders, "those who spoke to you the word of God." So fundamentally, this is the core job description of pastors and elders, whether they're counseling, teaching a class, preaching, or having a conversation in the foyer, the fundamental task of a leader in the church is to preach and teach and remind people about what God has said. "Consider the outcome of their way of life "and imitate their faith. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

"Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, "for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, "not by foods, which have not benefited "those devoted to them." So the first thing that Christians are to do is to remember their leaders, remember what they taught them, remember what they preached to them, remember what they instructed them in. We don't need to remember what the pastor, elder, or biblical counselor said if it's just their personal opinion, but to the degree that their advice or their teaching is rooted in the word of God, we're called to remember that. And we're called to remember that because their preaching and teaching has been delegated to them by God.

So to the degree that I adequately preached the word of God to you, you're actually hearing from God, which is, by the way, rather intimidating as a pastor to think about. But if I adequately and accurately preach to you God's word, you should listen to what I've said because I have preached and taught to you what God wants you to hear. And then we have imitate.

If a pastor practices what he preaches, if their life is worth imitating, we should follow them. Now, I've heard so many Christians say things like, I follow nobody but Christ. Okay, Mr. Super spiritual.

Because the Christian faith is an imitative faith. We're always learning from each other. Why do we have parents if that isn't true? Why do we even have pastors if that isn't true? The Christian faith is an imitative faith.

And when we hear truth, we're often like, what does that actually look like? Okay, then we look around, we're like, okay. Okay, now I know what a Christian marriage looks like. I see how that couple is living it out.

Okay, that's what it means to handle your money properly. I see that couple living it out. It's an imitative faith.

And we're called to remember our leaders and we're called to imitate our leaders. I can tell you, I have been the beneficiary of countless men before me who have taught and preached into my life and imitated for me what it means to be a Christian. I didn't just figure this all out by myself.

I've benefited from others. And I want the next generation to benefit from my example. The imitative nature of Christianity is a biblical concept.

And when we see someone living out the Christian faith, we would do well to imitate them to the degree that they're imitating the Lord Jesus Christ. And finally, we're called to listen. Listening to them is grounded, of course, if you look at verse eight, in the changeless nature of Christ.

Leaders will never present you with diverse and strange teachings that diverge from what Jesus Christ taught us. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If Jesus was God in the first century, he's God now.

If Jesus was virgin born in the first century, he's virgin born now. He's the same yesterday and today, today and forever. The beatitudes that Jesus taught us in the first century still apply today.

So as we point people back to Christ, the author, the center of our faith, we will make sure that we're not leading our church into diverse and strange teachings. We will be blessed, and the church will be blessed as a whole. So brothers and sisters, I hope you've benefited from this message and from the series.

A reminder, the state is not granted authority over the Christian church. The state is granted authority over public justice. Husbands are granted authority over their wives.

They will give an account to God for the spiritual direction of their marriage. They don't need to apologize for that. Parents are given authority over their children.

Children are called to submit to their parents. Let's not recreate a new paradigm and contradiction to scripture. Christ has given the church authority over church discipline.

And within the church, Christ has designated pastors and elders to guide and direct the Christian church in spiritual matters, to teach you the word of God. And as we keep these spheres in place and understand the boundaries of authority, everybody benefits from this. The problem, as we've noticed, that our culture is all of these lines and categories have become blended.

Any husband seeking to wield authority is considered a male chauvinist pig. A parent seeking to exercise authority over their children is considered unenlightened. Pastors that try to exercise authority over their church are often accused of being domineering.

But at the same time, the state wants to have authority over everything, doesn't it? Has no problem apologizing for that. So let's make sure that we understand these spheres of authority. We call it sphere sovereignty and live out our various relationships within the boundaries that God has established for us.

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