

Elders and the Unruly

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There are three key passages of Scripture that place the responsibility of local church discipline upon the elders. In Acts 20:28–31 Paul tells elders to take heed to the flock, to feed it and to watch for grievous wolves that would come speaking, perverse things to draw away disciples. In 1 Timothy 3:5 elders are required to be able to take care of the church even as one would rule his own house. In Titus 1:9–11 Paul writes that an elder must be able to advance the Truth in a positive way, but also negatively (“convict the gainsayers”). The passage goes on to describe unruly men, vain talkers, and deceivers, whose mouths must be stopped because they are overthrowing whole families by teaching forbidden things. If these words do not convey the duty of elders to discipline unruly saints, along with giving them the authority required, it would be difficult to combine a set of words that would. To summarize, it is the duty of elders to watch for false teachers, to try to convict them of their errors, but if this is not possible, to silence them and prevent further conversions to their errors. This is a part of properly taking care of the church, and elders are remiss who fail to so act.

Those opposing the authority of elders are aiming ultimately at their disciplinary authority. If it can be so undermined that elders will not attempt, discipline where needed, or, if when attempted, the church has been so conditioned by false teaching that it will not follow the elders in necessary disciplinary action, then the church is at the mercy of any doctrine or practice that one might wish to establish. God did not so intend! In recent years a rising tide of teaching against the authority of elders has become observable. Such has caused some elders to be uncertain of what authority they have, and it has caused some saints to reject the authority God has given to these men.

Rebellion against the Lord's Word is rebellion against the Lord (John 12:48). Furthermore, rebellion against God's appointed leaders is also rebellion against God (Num. 16:1–35). To rebel against scripturally qualified men or to incite others to rebel against them out of selfishness, stubbornness, pride, jealousy, or any other sinful motive is to rebel against the authority of God.

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