

## DICTATORIAL ELDERS

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Elders are expected, even commanded, to "exercise oversight" in their congregations (1 Pet. 5:2). Every word used to designate those we call "elders," even "elders" itself considering its Old Testament background, implies the right to make some decisions on behalf of those they oversee. But the command is to "exercise oversight... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3).

Jesus spoke clearly of acceptable and unacceptable styles of leadership for his kingdom: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28).

One does not have to deny that elders have decision making responsibilities to speak out against "lord and master" attitudes exhibited by some elderships.

Elders who have a closed door policy and will not accept or respond to suggestions or criticisms are surely "exercising authority over" the church in the way Jesus forbids. When a major decision affecting the whole church is made behind closed doors and the first the church knows the matter is even being considered is when the decision is announced as a "done deal," the elders are "lording it over" the congregation.

Elders should encourage the congregation to participate in major decisions. They do not have to abdicate their authority to seek and consider input from the congregation. "Everyone cannot have their way, but all should have their say."

The local Montgomery paper, the Montgomery Advertiser, ran a front page article on division in churches (4/13/07, page A1). One of the churches featured has had the police called three times to break up shouting matches that developed during Sunday services. Among other things some members object to the Pastor's refusal to open up financial records. He said, "The Pastor is called by God. God is the reason I am at (this church). Leading a church is like commanding a military unit." Unfortunately high-handed leadership in the military manner is not exclusive to denominational pastors.

Certainly some matters handled by elders are rightly confidential, but an atmosphere of secrecy surrounding the business of the church and most decisions of the elders is disruptive of the trust members should be able to place in their elders.

Members need to take to heart the admonition: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account" (Heb. 13:17). Elders need to take to heart the admonition: "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight,... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3).

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