



Chapter 3 A Fresh Look at Ruling Authority

It is likely that we have all been told, at one time or another, “*submit to those who have the rule over you*”, when we were wrestling with some declaration of our Church leadership. It always sounds so ominous and so final, as though if we disagreed with our leadership and decided to go another direction that we were somehow inevitably denying the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives.

And to compound the issue, there are certainly times when to go our own way, when the leadership have called for obedience and a different direction, is to violate the will of God, Who was trying to speak through the leadership.

As we will see in this chapter, the concept of “rule,” as relates to leadership authority, is not a translation mandated by the actual meaning and usage of the Greek word behind this English translation. It is more the product of Catholic Church hierarchical thinking than the true meaning of the original Greek language. It is a forced meaning, that more reflects the motives of those leading, at the time the bible was translated into English, than the true meaning of the word itself. This concept of leadership has done more to support abusive and controlling leadership than any other word in the New Testament. It has been used to justify coercion, manipulation, lording it over, control, and harshness. It, all by itself, has had a greater negative impact than all other words connected with Church leadership, and has led to millions of people driven away from the Church, and into the jaws of the wolf.

Where is the balance? In this chapter we will consider the concept of Leadership Authority, and see that it is not some imperious sort of rulership, as though their every word was the Word of God just because they spoke it. It is one thing for leadership to share their concern and belief about what would be the best direction for a given saint's life, but to go beyond that gentle sharing to manipulation and intimidation is to violate the spirit of gentle humble serving leadership that Jesus taught.

We will see, it is one thing to communicate the “Word of the Lord,” and quite another to express counsel or opinion on the direction of the Church or an individual believer.

Leadership does not Equal Control!

As a leader I have to rid myself of the notion that God expects me to control the lives of those I lead so as to insure that they live a righteous and safe lifestyle. It simply isn't so. I am not responsible to make sure that I have used every means available to me to secure their obedience to the principles that I believe are best for those I lead. To allow them to make mistakes, and let them know that I still love them and am available to them, is to reflect the gracious spirit of leadership that Jesus shows them when they return to Him after having stumbled in their journey.

In looking at words dealing with leadership authority we will only explore those words that are used in relation to Church leadership.

To Lead is to Protect & Care For

Our first word is **Prohistami** - This is probably **the preeminent word** used in the New Testament for Church leadership.

According to Reicke, in Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, it means to preside, in the sense “*to lead, conduct, direct, and govern.*” There is also the thought of “*standing or going before someone or something in protection.*” Out of this comes the sense “*to assist, to join with, more precisely defined as to protect, to represent, to care for, to help, to further.*”

It was used in reference to a woman being given to her husband in marriage as to one who would look after her and care for her.

The sense of “*protection*” arises again and again in ancient non-biblical usage.

It is a compound word made up of two words “*pro*” and “*histami*”. “*Pro*” means to be before, and “*histami*” means to stand. Thus, this is ***one who stands before the people to provide care and protection.*** Reicke goes on to say “*The sense of overbearing power or authority is entirely absent in this word's meaning.*” Yet in the minds of many leaders it seems as though this word gives them just this ‘right,’ and in the minds of many followers it seems to them that leaders believe they have the right to use overbearing authority.

In Rom.12:8 the meaning is “*to care with zeal*”.

Rom 12:8 (NKJV) he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who ***leads, with diligence***; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Leadership is to exercise zealous care. The whole passage is speaking of the gifts of grace imparted to different leadership, so that these leaders are a special group separated by the Spirit for the primary task of caring for others.

This thought carries nicely into 1 Thess.5:12

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are ***over you*** (are leaders in caring for you) in the Lord and admonish you.”

The idea is that of being responsible to watch and care over them. Reicke comments again, “*The emphasis is not on their rank or authority but on their efforts for the eternal salvation of believers.*” The concept of rank is entirely absent in Paul’s description of Church leadership. Those who lead are not over in rank, but over in the sense of those who look out over the flock, as one standing on a hill looks over a valley, to observe needs and provide accurate care and protection.

This word is used in 1 Tim.3:4, when referring to the qualifications of an Elder, he is to be one who knows how to care for his family. This is clearly seen in vs.5 where Paul goes on to say :

“for if a man does not know how **to lead (care for)** his own house, how will he take care of the Church of God?”

So also it is used in 1 Tim.3:12 for the deacon's responsibility to care for his family.

When we recognize that excellent leadership is composed of a zealous caring ministry, rather than oppressive authority, then we can see why a congregation will be willing to extend extra

provision to those who manifest such leadership. Though, in saying this, it must not be understood as meaning elders would receive a consistent salary or wage. Such a concept had no place in the apostle's or early Church thinking. Provisional care would have come more in the form of food, clothing, assistance, etc. Because the institutionalization of the Church was nowhere in sight we must not read into Paul's words a meaning that would have been entirely foreign to him, and in all likelihood abhorrent. For Paul, service to the family of God was an entirely familial matter, and thus not one that anticipated actual remuneration. As a father doesn't look to his children for wages for the love and care he provides, so the apostles did not see their ministry as being that which mandated wages or salary. Paul's words in Romans 13 "owe no man anything, except love," would have framed their entire thinking on blessings attached to having faithfully served the body. All a body owes its leaders was to love them. Beyond that, if the Lord so leads to bless them in monetary or physical ways that too would have been an acceptable manner of expressing appreciation in love.

1 Tim.5:17 "Let the elders who lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine."

Just holding an office, and just teaching, are not the qualifications for this double honor. Double honor results from double caring, and this double caring is to be a caring that the people recognize as caring. It's amazing how easily the flock identifies such people. It will never be those who are work-a-holics and drive the flock; self impressed with all that they do for the Church. It will always be those who, with gentleness and a clear servant humility, serve the flock tirelessly with a gracious diet of the Word of God.

Reicke goes on to say, "The context shows that the reference is not merely to elders who rule well but especially to those who exercise a sincere care of souls. This is not to deny that here, too, the leaders have a special dignity and play a leading role as elders. In all instances however, the verb has in the New Testament the primary senses of both "to lead" and "to care for," and this agrees with the distinctive nature of the office in the New Testament, since according to Luke 22:26 the one who is chief is to be as he who serves."

If we are going to attach the concept of "to rule" with this word, we could express it as the "rule of love, or the rule of care, or the rule of protection." We might even, in modern vernacular, say it this way, "Love rules, or Care rules, or Protection rules." It is the virtue that rules, not the person through whom the virtue manifests itself.

In both Titus 3:8 & 14, the idea is to devote oneself to good works of care.

Titus 3:8 (NKJV) This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. 14 And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.

If leaders could just come to the place of recognizing this principle their leadership would be far more fruitful when administered sensitively, transparently, and graciously, and then they might be more inclined to set aside manipulation and fear as their means of controlling the flocks they serve.

Highly Esteem the Servant Leader

Our next word for Ruling is "*Hegeomai*" - It means to lead, to think, to believe, to regard as, to esteem, to value highly.

It carries with it the sense of appropriate respect and appreciation for those called to lead the

flock.

It is significant that Jesus has earlier framed the attitudes of those who would wear this title “*Hegeomai - Governor- Leader*”. In Luke 22:26 he is to be one who serves. A servant leader. Not a power leader, not necessarily a gifted administrator or manager, but a servant leader.

Luke 22:24 Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. 25 And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ 26 “But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs **as he who serves**. 27 “For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.

So that, when we come to the passages in Pauline literature where the flock is called to submit to these men, the men they are to submit to are to be those whom Jesus described in Luke 22. If they aren't, then it is questionable if they should be leaders in the first place, and secondly, if the people should submit to them. Paul assumes that the leaders who will be chosen will be Luke 22 types, but unfortunately this is not always the case.

All too often we raise up to leadership those who manifest valued giftings, charismatic personality, creativity, skills of administration, and oratorical abilities, before we have allowed them to learn to love serving and caring for the body of Christ. We do not do them a service by doing so, and we certainly don't help the body.

Authority to lead is not primarily in the title, but in the character. In fact, there is no indication the apostles had any notion of power connected to a title. It does not appear that leaders were given titles. The terms used to describe their leadership, were far less titles and far more terms to describe “function.” In fact, there is no indication that anyone referred to Paul as “Apostle Paul.” This surprises us, who have been so indoctrinated in Church traditions, but if you look through the New Testament, you will not find any cases where Paul is referred to being anything other than Paul, or brother Paul.

Individuals are only representatives of Jesus Christ, and if their representation is not congruent with Christ then their leadership is null and void by virtue of their lack of character. Certainly perfection of character is not implied, but a solidity of godly character must mark those who would lead.

Anyone who would disagree with the above statement would do so because of the potential door it might leave open to rebellion. But, consider the concern from the opposite end of the spectrum. If a leader was clearly evil in his leadership and was obviously abusing the flock one would certainly not be expected to obey such leadership.

I am not suggesting that those who lead in the body of Christ have no authority. This word clearly indicates they do. The question is “When do they have authority?” Not, “Do they have authority?” Certainly they do, but only as they function as “Servant” leaders, and as their words reflect the “Word of the Lord.”

Their authority is derived from the evidence of their love, wisdom, humility, revelation, example, and servant's heart. Nothing about this word implies that leaders have authority simply by virtue of some hierarchical position or title. No hierarchical positions are indicated in the New Testament. Rather, they derive their authority by virtue of their Christlikeness and Christ connectedness. If this be absent, then though they have a title of “elder” they have no authority. In fact, they should not have a title of “elder” if they lack the character requisite for such a function.

We could even go so far as to say there is no evidence in the earliest church that “elder” was ever used as a title for an individual, but simply as a descriptive term for one who functions in an eldering way. We would not have expected to hear someone referred to as “Elder Jones,” etc.. Jesus is very careful to define this word, as it relates to those who lead. May we be so careful who lead.

New Testament submission is a heart attitude before it is manifested in acts of obedience. While a follower may not be able to obey a given leader, they are still to maintain an attitude of submission. Again this is clear from the apostles themselves.

Acts 5:29 (NKJV) But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.

It is used to refer to people of “*renown*” in Acts 7:10; 14:12; 15:22.

It is used for political and military leaders. *Hegoumenoi* can also be leaders outside the community, e.g., military leaders in 1 Macc. 9:30, national leaders in Ezek. 43:7, princes in 1 Clem. 5.7, leading priests in the papyri. Quoting Mic. 5:1ff., Mt. 2:6 has the term for a national ruler, and Acts 7:10 has it for Joseph as the governor of Egypt. Thus this term is capable of expressing hierarchical leadership, but is never used as such in any context within the New Testament. Jesus and the Apostles never refer to Church leadership in hierarchical forms.

It is used to refer to expressing “*esteem*” in Phil.2:3; 1 Thess.5:13; Heb.11:26.

It is used to refer to “*careful consideration*” in Acts 26:2; 2 Cor.9:5; Phil.2:6, 25; 3:7,8; 2 Thess.3:15; 1 Tim.1:12; 6:1; Heb.10:29; 11:11; Ja.1:2; 2 Pet.1:13; 2:13; 3:9,15.

It is used to refer to those in “*leadership capacity*” in Heb.13:7, 17, 24. In each of these cases proper esteem is to be given to those who lead with the type of character described in Luke 22. We especially note the characteristic choice of words the KJV and NKJV translations put to this Greek word. While this word is capable of a “rule” translation, it is the more obscure meaning than the common meaning. Something other (Church politics) than “general meaning” framed the translators’ translation.

Heb 13:7 (NKJV) Remember those who **rule over you** (exercise consistent care), who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

Heb 13:17 (NKJV) Obey those who **rule over you** (exercise consistent care), and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Heb 13:24 (NKJV) Greet all those who **rule over you** (exercise consistent care), and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

Therefore, from this chapter we have discovered that leadership is more indicative of responsibility to convey the character of Christ, than it is a “to be ruled” mandate on those following, or to obey every whim of their leadership. Leaders who would be followed will gain such a following by consistently exhibiting caring concern and appropriate protection of their flock, not by manipulation and intimidation.