



Overseeing vs. Domineering 1 Timothy 3

1 Timothy 3:1

¹Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer (episkopos), he desires a noble task.

There has long been a controversy as to whether the bishop/episkopos and elder/presbuteros, are one and the same person. We won't spend much time discussing this, but I wanted you to have these notes.

Historical facts relating to Elder / Presbuteros:

1. It sometimes signifies greater in age than someone else. Luke 15:25; 1 Tim. 5:1,2
2. It can refer to spiritual fathers of the past. Heb. 11:2; Matt. 15:2
3. Because Timothy is called to be an elder, and New Testament study, as well as the words used to describe him, show him to have been called around age 20, we know this term can be used for younger men. 1 Tim. 4:12-14; Acts 16:1-3
4. In Egypt we find examples of this word used as an honorable title for certain village or communal officers. The equivalent of political leadership.
5. In ancient times they were appealed to in connection with the rent of land, the issuing of public notices, the lease of pasturage, the payment of barley for military purposes, in questions in taxation, and members of a corporation. The equivalent of executives.
6. A term for priests of pagan temples.
7. Among the Jews, the congregation of a synagogue in Jerusalem used this word to denote its officers, before 70 A.D.
8. A group within the Sanhedrin were called "elders", Matt. 16:21; 26:3
9. As used amongst the early Christians.
 - a. Ones in authority in the Jerusalem Church. Acts 15:1-6
 - b. Officials in various local churches. Acts 11:27-30; 20:15-17
 - c. Teachers in the local church. Acts 21:15-18; 1 Tim. 5:17-19; James 5:14
 - d. The 24 elders before God, in Rev. 4:4,10; 5:5-14; 7:11,13

Historical facts relating to Bishop / Episkopos:

1. A term predominantly used in the Greek rather than Jewish culture.
2. It carries far more the aspect of duty, whereas Elder carries the idea of dignity.
3. From a study of the Septuagint, we discover the various meanings for this word as inspector, taskmaster, captain, and president.
4. It was used in Egypt of the officers of a temple.
5. It was used in Greece to describe guardians in general, or of municipal and financial officers.
6. It was a political term for a commissioner who regulated colonies and states.
7. The same officers of the church in Ephesus are alternately called elders and bishops. Acts 20:17, 28.

8. Paul describes one and the same office as both elders and bishops. 1 Tim. 3:1-3; 5:17-19; Titus 1:5-7.
9. Peter blends the two titles into one person. 1 Pet. 5:1,2
10. It was only in the 2nd century that Bishop began to be used as a title supreme to Elder.

Without question, one of the most potentially destructive elements of a Local Church is the use of Authority by those called to lead the body of Christ.

More churches have been divided over this issue than for just about any other cause. More people have left their Local Churches over either a real or perceived abuse of authority than for practically any other reason. Control issues are serious!

The following passage, as far as I can tell, forms the main body of thinking on this subject, that the apostles did nothing more than amplify and apply. Whatever they wrote was simply Holy Spirit amplification of this passage. This passage provides the spirit or attitude that is to be behind the very idea of leadership. If this spirit is not evident and obvious in all church leadership then their leadership is seriously in question, and following them may be injurious to your spiritual health. I'm going to make a bold statement that the remainder of this article will amplify, and it is this: *if your leaders do not clearly manifest the humble gracious spirit of a servant then you may have someone other than God's choice of leadership for you.*

Mat 20:20 (NKJV) Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." 22 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." 23 So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father." 24 And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "***You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave; 28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."***"

An English philosopher was quoted as saying, "If power tends to corrupt, then absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely."

Without a doubt one of the most self deceptive and carnality stimulating dimensions of life is the dimension of having power over other's lives. When we possess power we more quickly tend to deny our tendency to be deceived in our motivations for the use of that power than in any other area of life. How often have we seen men and women who have spoken of one purpose for their authority, but the reality was ultimately very different.

For those who have never held a position of authority over the life of another it is hard to imagine the intoxication that comes with being able to exercise that power. To be able to control others just by virtue of your position is an awesome and addictive thing. The question we must explore when we come to the New Testament is, "What kind of authority and what limitations, if any, are there to that authority in the lives of those who are called to lead the body of Christ?" How similar is the use of New Testament authority to that expressed in the world?

We'll consider 3 main elements of Jesus' style of leadership.

1. CEO or CEG?

Are New Testament pastors the basic equivalent to CEO's—Chief Executive Officers in the corporations of this world? Does the world's exercise of authority form the appropriate model for the Church? Or are we too look for something different? Something more like a CEG's—Chief Examples of Grace?

Jesus' pattern is radically different than anything we have ever seen. Don't look to the world for an example of it.

2. Lord it over or Love it over?

There is no question that the New Testament refers to leaders being "*Over*" their followers, but how that "*Over*" is expressed is the crucial matter.

We'll consider Jesus' choice of words to express His pattern.

a. Don't "*Lord it over*".

The first word that we meet is the Greek word "*Katakuriouo*", translated "**Lord it over**". It also carries with it the idea of "master, gain dominion over, subdue, rule over someone or something."

Foerster, in *Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, has the following to say on this word: Its meaning is "To exercise dominion against someone, i.e. **to one's own advantage...for themselves** and therewith against those entrusted to them."

Thus the concern is one of motivation. If the exercise of authority is ever for personal control so as to effectuate one's personal goals, rather than exclusively for the good of the one submitting to their authority, then that authority is corrupt.

Jesus said it: "*Not my will, but Yours be done.*" Leaders must never forget this.

All too often leaders, having become so familiar with their role of leadership, begin to slip into the subtle deception of thinking that they, by virtue of their position, have the responsibility to control the lives of those they lead. And, with the passage of time and a desensitization of their awareness in this area, it becomes easier and easier for leadership to develop a thinking that encourages them to develop their own vision for their flock and then move them towards that vision in ways that become more like control than servant example leadership.

b. Leadership is to be "*For*" not "*Against*".

The use of the preposition "kata" strongly suggests authority used "against" someone, rather than for them. How subtle is a leader's tendency to use authority in a way that is really an attack against the integrity of another individual by attempting to coerce them into accomplishing the leader's goals for their lives so as to protect the leader's personal agenda.

1) For the follower's good, not just the leader's.

2) For Exalting God, not Self.

When leaders forget that each believer is to be encouraged to stand on their own before God, and leaders begin to take too much responsibility for the actions and outcomes of their people then the tendency to overstep their authority becomes highly tempting. To weaken a believer's sense of connection and responsibility to seek the mind of Christ for their own lives is to set them up to be led into heresy, and is to develop in the leader a "God Complex." Leaders are not to lead in such a fashion that their personal preferences become indistinguishable from the authority of the Word of God. Leaders must always be cautious lest they allow their flocks to depend too exclusively on their opinions or ideas.

3) Watch out for: *"I just want to submit my life to you pastor."*

c. Leadership is to *Empower not Overpower.*

Mark 10:42 (NKJV) But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

Mark uses a different Greek word, but it has the same meaning. It is also used in a very graphic passage.

Acts 19:15-16 (NKJV) "And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" 16 Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, **overpowered** them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."

The goal is to empower our people to follow Christ by the principle of Grace and the leading of the Spirit. When we attempt to change people so that they will accomplish our goals we run into the role of the Holy Spirit who refuses to assist us in usurping His role. We're allowed to share the vision Christ has given us, but the accomplishment of it must be left to the Holy Spirit to inspire in the people.

Church discipline for serious matters of sin will require a stronger use of authority, but such strength of authority must be limited to such matters.

d. Peter echoes Jesus' words in 1 Peter 5:1-5

1 Pet 5:1 (NKJV) "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as **being lords over** those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 5 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."

1) *Not by compulsion.*

This phrase indicates that leaders in the body are to recognize their calling by God and

volunteer to lead, rather than having to be drafted like unwilling soldiers. They are to be willing and eager servants of the body of Christ, rather than having to be coerced and chided into service.

2) *Not for dishonest gain.*

The Greek word "aiskrokerdas", means to lead for any kind of personal gain, which is sought in a selfish way. It certainly covers the idea of serving to obtain exorbitant financial gain, but when it is realized that first century elders were not salaried, it is clear that this word covers far more than just financial gain. Peter warns about using the office of elder for any personal selfish reasons, whether it is the exhilaration that comes from knowing that you can control people to your own ends, or the ability to manipulate people so as to protect your own personal goals for their lives.

3) *Be examples.*

"Tupos", from which we get "type". To be a pattern, example, model, or standard. It means to so portray the *image* of the Servant, the Lord Jesus, that others are drawn to follow your pattern or example and do the will of God. Peter had learned that Jesus didn't use any other means to secure his following so he simply passes on what he has seen modeled for him. It simply doesn't require manipulation, control and intimidation to move people together towards God's vision for their corporate or individual lives. True servant leadership, given time to germinate, will produce the will of God in the lives of those being led. If it doesn't then we should have a little more confidence in the sovereignty of God, recognizing that it may not have been in His ultimate plan for certain things to take place, rather than trying to make something happen which in the end will do more to alienate those who follow due to undue pressure placed upon them.

Ultimately the issue of example is the ***Power of Influence.***

If influence is unsuccessful you, as leaders, have no other recourse. Manipulation, coercion, fear, intimidation, etc. are not acceptable alternatives to trusting in Influence.

4) *Submit yourselves.*

The word submit - "*hupotasso*", is a significant choice of words to use. We'll look at it in more depth later, but for now it means "to lose or surrender one's own rights or will **voluntarily**, rather than as a result of compulsion."

It is significant too, that Peter goes on to say that whatever this submission is, it is not primarily an inferior to a superior, as much as it is an equal to an equal, with everyone willing to submit to everyone else as a demonstration of love and humility.

When leaders submit to their flock in humility it then releases the Lord Jesus to grant grace and exaltation (verse 6). Those who would ever demand that they be exalted and obeyed, simply because they possess an office of leadership show by their doing so that they in fact do not possess that office but are rather grasping at it in selfish desperation.

e. Compulsion or Compassion?

The next word in the Matthew 20 passage that we will take up is "*Katexousiadzo*" - Exercise

Authority Over.

Mat 20:25 (NKJV) But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great ***exercise authority over*** them.

Foerster, in *Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, comments on this word's meaning: "Its primary sense is that they exercise power over them. There is no earthly government without the use of force. But if the reference in "those who are great" is not merely to the political authorities, it is likely that the word implies the **tendency towards compulsion or oppression** which is immanent in all earthly power, and not merely in political."

However we are to lead and get the job done it isn't to be any different than Jesus did when He was on earth. He didn't force any of His disciples to do anything. He didn't use compulsion or oppression or manipulation to accomplish anything. He didn't get much accomplished in His three year ministry, as some would count accomplishments. He barely kept 12 rag tag disciples from defecting and one of them gave up before He left. But because He modeled the kind of loving service and non-coercive leadership that He did, they so loved Him that they went out from the upper room ready to give every ounce of their life's strength to building His kingdom. Now what other leader do you personally know who has used that little coercion, and that much loving service and seen that great of results and dedication in those He led?

3. Servant Leadership is true Leadership.

The issue of servant leadership is at the heart of Jesus' words. This is really what distinguishes Gentile leadership from Jesus leadership.

The comment that I have heard more often than any other by those legitimately frustrated with the manipulation and coercion of their leaders, is that they feel their leadership treat them as though they, the people, live to serve them, the leaders, rather than the other way around. Everything about Jesus taught in opposition to this. Once the servant element is lost or submerged, the whole spirit of leadership goes sour.

John 13 is our clearest example.

Leaders, don't reverse the roles! You are beneath your followers, when it comes to your attitude about your leadership. It is their job to submit to the Holy Spirit and place you above themselves, in terms of respect and authority.