

church of Christ at Greenwood

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Working with Elders

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Hebrews 13:17 says, *“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”* When the writer mentions those *“that have the rule over you,”* it is a clear reference to the elders. 1 Timothy 5:17 speaks of *“elders that rule well.”* Now, what are we to do in respect to the elders? ***“Obey them... and submit yourselves.”***

In what areas should we obey and submit to the elders? In matters of faith and doctrine? Absolutely not — at least not if they teach or instruct us in anything that is different from the word of God (Galatians 1:8,9). We should always *“obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29). And so, our submission in matters of faith and doctrine is to the Lord, and not to any man (2 John 9-11).

It seems then that the only area where the elders have decision making power — to which we must submit — is in matters of judgment. In the authorized work of any local congregation there will be many judgments to make about our collective work. Where? When? Who? And to some extent, How? These are all questions that must be decided. Now, the elders ought not to attempt to be “lords over God’s heritage” (1 Peter 5:3). We would hope that they are constantly seeking the input of every faithful member as such decisions are made. But when the final judgment is made — whether it was in agreement with our own personal judgment or not — we have a command: ***“Obey them...and submit yourselves.”***

The next time you are tempted to question some decision of the elders, or to argue for your own point-of-view, think again about the instruction of Hebrews 13:17. If it is a matter of faith or doctrine, then be ready to stand firmly for what is right. But if it is an area of judgment, give in quickly to the decision that has been made, humbly submitting yourself.