

# (The Full Gospel) 24. Submission to the Elders of the Church

by Zac Poonen

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*We must submit to our church elders in all matters, while having freedom to make decisions in personal matters, and distinguish between church and personal matters to avoid rebellion and strife.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 6:16

**Topics:** "Church Leadership", "Spiritual Submission"

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## Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the importance of obeying and submitting to church leaders, emphasizing the need to distinguish between church matters and personal matters. In church matters, total submission to elders is crucial as they are the shepherds appointed by God. Submission to imperfect authorities, like Jesus did with Joseph and Mary, is a foundational step in the new and living way. Rebellion against God-appointed leadership is condemned, and if one cannot submit to their elders, they are free to prayerfully consider leaving and starting a new work under God's direction.

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## Transcript

"Obey your leaders and submit to them" (Hebrews 13:17).

Where you have confidence in your local church-elders, it is easy to submit to them in all matters. But perhaps you do not have confidence in your elders. Then you must distinguish between church matters and personal matters, so that you know clearly where you have to submit to your elders and where you don't have to.

### Church Matters

Church matters include the conduct of the meetings of the church, the spiritual direction the church is going, the emphasis in the ministry of that church, the activities arranged by the church, etc., etc.

In such matters, there must always be total submission to the directions given by the elders. This is not because you respect them as mature brothers, or because you have confidence in them, but just because they are the shepherds in the church in which God has placed you - provided you are sure that God has placed you there.

Jesus submitted to Joseph and Mary, even though they were imperfect and less mature than Him, because His Father had placed Him in their home. That was how He began opening the new and living way through His flesh - in Nazareth during His first 30 years.

We must never forget this fact that the first steps of the new and living way were opened by Jesus through submission to imperfect authorities at home. All the other steps came later.

You must never be the cause of strife in any church - for God hates those who sow discord among the brothers - however spiritual or zealous they may consider themselves to be (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Rebellion against God-appointed leadership is always Satanic. It is the way of Korah (Jude 11; Numbers 16), and is always the result of pride and arrogance.

If however you are not sure that God has placed you in a particular church, then you must consider before God whether you should leave that church and join another one. But you must never stay in a church and create confusion there, for God will never tolerate that.

Neither should you be like a visitor in a church, eating the 'food' there as you would in a restaurant, with no sense of responsibility. The church is not a restaurant but a home. So you must commit yourself totally to some local church. Otherwise you will not grow spiritually.

Remember however, that you will never find an ideal church, for every church is imperfect. But look for a church that is closest to the Word of God - as you understand it at present.

If you feel some time that you should bring in a new emphasis (that is lacking) into a church, then the proper way to do it is by first discussing the issue with the elder brothers, and then to do exactly as they direct. The improper way is to bring in your emphasis in the meetings, by preaching the Word in contradiction to the direction set by the elders.

If you disagree strongly with your elders in any matter, and feel that you cannot submit to their eldership, or if you feel that the elders are leading the church in a wrong direction, then remember that you are always free to leave such a church and start one of your own, with the emphasis that you feel is necessary and important.

If God is with you, He will bless you in your new step - as He blessed Martin Luther, John Wesley, William Booth, Watchman Nee and many others in many lands, through the centuries, who left their original churches and started new ones, under the direction of God.

If however you are acting in your own stubbornness, and God is not with you, you will find yourself following in the footsteps of Theudas and Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:36, 37) and many thousands of others in these twenty centuries of Christianity, who started new movements and ended up in confusion and frustration finally.

## Personal Matters

Personal matters include matters such as what clothes you wear, how you spend your money, what sort of house you choose to live in, where or how you travel (by air or by train), what clothes you and your family members wear, what food you eat, what toys you buy for your children, whether your children play computer games or not, whether you allow your children to watch sporting events on a neighbour's

television or not, what job you take, where you work etc., etc.

In such matters you have perfect freedom to do whatever you feel you should do. You don't have to obey or even consult your elders in such matters, if you don't have confidence in them. If you are in doubt about some such matter, you could even consult an older brother in another place, if you have more confidence in that brother than in your local elders. The final decision in such matters however, is always yours.

There is no rebellion in doing things differently in such matters, unless your elders feel that your conduct or your dress or your children are a stumbling-block to others in the church - in which case, you must be willing to listen to what they have to tell you about it.

The way of wisdom then is to distinguish between where you must submit to the elders in a church, and where you don't have to.

A lack of confidence in your local elders does not mean that you are rebellious - for not all elder brothers are spiritually minded, and not all elder brothers necessarily inspire confidence.

But if you end up submitting to no-one anywhere, then it is easy for you to become a law unto yourself and thus become an easy target for Satan to knock off and destroy.

May God help us all to walk in the way of wisdom at all times.

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