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# Authority in the Church

## I Peter 5:1-5

### Introduction

For the month of March we will be continuing our evening discussions in a series that is dealing with a few aspects of church life. We do hope to answer some questions many of you who are somewhat new to the fellowship here may have. For those who have been here for some time we hope to update and refresh your memories. At the very least we hope to stimulate your thinking about the community of believers that you have entered in relationship with as to what the fellowship is to look like and behave in the current culture and in relationship to the written Word.

We stated that this series is important for a number of reasons. One of which is the attack on the church that exists within contemporary Christendom. The challenge requires us to focus our work to continue to build the church upon the foundation of Christ that is clearly presented in the text of Holy Scripture we will be training the flock to stand upon the Word and in hope prepare you for the onslaught of the many churches and friends who are falling prey to less than adequate thinking with regards to how the church should stand and function in 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

Over the next four weeks we will be continuing this study by focusing on church governance and leadership. Much of what is being said is distilled from the “Introduction to Eldership” course that is offered periodically here in the Chapel ministry.

The Leadership situation is distinctive here at Clearcreek Chapel. I won't say that it is unique but it is a rarity among evangelical churches. Even in the way that leadership is nuanced from churches very similarly we still are somewhat different. You hear us say a lot about our attempts to be consistently Biblical in all that we do here in ministry at the Chapel and its leadership structure especially follows that desire. In saying that, we don't want to sound presumptuous in suggesting that the particular interpretation and application of the various texts that deal with this area that we are infallible in our views and that other options are wrong. But we do feel that when all the Biblical data is taken seriously the model used for leadership at Clearcreek Chapel best fits that data. I have had discussions with people regarding various church administrative and leadership patterns and often it will lead off into areas where the Bible can be disconnected. The argument usually goes like this that the Scriptures only offer general patterns based on antiquated and imperfect social conventions. We don't use the Bible in this manner in any other area and we don't use it that way when talking leadership and authority as well.

### The Church's Essence

Before we begin let's consider some observations about the idea of the church. To best fit this into our thinking we must base our concepts on the concept of God's working all things to bring the most glory to the Son. [Read Ephesians 1:3-14] This text suggests that we as his people have been fashioned in a plan to bring God the Son ultimate glory. This has been

brought forth in the life of man in various social structures to give us pictures that represent the ultimate relationship we will have with the Son in glory. We are his family (even extended as a clan) we are under his rule in a kingdom structures. When we come to the New Covenant era we have a concept of a Greek idea that is translated “church.” It could also be translated community. It was often used to designate assemblies for voting or for “trade guilds.” It represents a group that is identified outside the total structures of the society at large. God’s people in this era are separate from the society at large but are to be a solid community existing in love and service. God’s people exist in a community to grow and change.

## The Church’s Authority

So if we are to grow together by what authority can we make life changing and determining choices?

First of all our authority resides in Jesus Christ the sovereign Lord of the church and He alone rules the church. Continuing in our reading in Ephesians [Ephesians 1:18-23] we find Christ established as above all things and as the “head” or source of authority in the church. The author of Hebrews in 3:3-6 demonstrates Christ as the builder of the house, and Peter in his first epistle presents Christ as the chief shepherd of a flock (another community metaphor).

## The Church’s Truth

But Jesus is not visibly present with us therefore his rule is a mediated rule, mediated through the truth found in his apostles. This is Paul’s implication in I Corinthians 14:37. Peter in his second epistle indicates this continues on in a commitment to Scripture. In II Peter 1:3 we find that we have been given “all things that pertain to life and godliness,” that indeed that is found in the “knowledge of him who called us” and is seen in the “prophetic word (vs. 19)” that actually comes to us from “men who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (vs. 21).” Therefore the Lord now rules over the church through the Scriptures, which are the inspired, inerrant, infallible deposit of apostolic and prophetic teaching.

## The Church’s Mission

We are to be engaged in the mission and work placed before us of extending God’s presence and kingdom. We each have a responsibility and have direct access to him and his word for direction. But not all believers function in the same role. God’s providence has shaped believer’s beliefs, experiences, and abilities and his Holy Spirit gives different gifts to each believer. That is the impact of Romans 12:3-8. Therefore texts that indicate there are leaders and teachers do not eliminate the idea of following. Authority and subordination do not deny equality. This allows for authoritative leaders with the equality in the church as implied from the subordination we see even in the role among the members of the Trinity.

## The Church’s Leading

Some of the best thinking in this regard then is not to think of authority in tension between leaders and group. We make decisions (i.e. follow the Word as it informs us about Christ) as a group being led by teachers and guides equipped for that ministry. Churches often

find themselves in tension either when the group thinks they make all decisions or when leadership thinks it functions independent from the people it is called to lead by the word. As Russ said this morning:

*“WE NEED HUMBLE, STRONG, DECISIVE, CHRIST-LIKE, GOD-FEARING, RIGHTEOUS, BIBLE BELIEVING AND OBEYING LEADERSHIP.* I am deeply concerned that Christian leadership has gone down slope two ways: (1) we are so insipid, weak and spineless that we will even allow the core doctrines and holiness of the church to be compromised with little real reaction; or (2) we are so domineering, dictatorial, unkind and un-Christlike that we lose our sense of humble, servant-like, measured leadership and the core doctrines and holiness of the church are diminished, disdained and denied.”

That brings us to the text of the evening: I Peter 5:1-5. The exhortation is to those who have teaching/guiding functions in the body. They are challenged to shepherd the flock among them. Note the metaphor of shepherding, i.e. herding sheep, and that the flock is “among” them, not under or behind them. Verse 3 points out the quality of this leadership and exercise of authority, it is exemplary not “domineering.” But verse 5 makes sure that we see there is a real and tangible oversight that the idea of “subjection” can be used, the authority although mediated and in some regard communal is still to be followed and is embodied in particularly qualified and established individuals. Tonight we are going to leave it at that and build upon this in the ensuing weeks. Come back next week for more.

## Conclusion

So let’s conclude with a few ideas about authority.

1. Christ alone should determine the course of our lives.
2. Christ has given us the Spirit and his Word to provide all that we need for “life and godliness.”
3. We need to put our energies and attention to observe to do this revealed will.
4. Most of our sin is a rebellion against Christ’s authority.

I want to finish with some recommendations for further reading and give you the opportunity for some questions?