

Nobody “Rules Over” Anyone Else in the Body of Christ

Hebrews 13

The biggest proof-text for the idea of someone ruling, (being over others in authority) in the church and particularly with the elders doing so, is found in Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24. These verses say:

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (Hebrews 13:7).

“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” (Hebrews 13:17).

“Salute (to draw to one’s self) all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you” (Hebrews 13:24).

There are several observations to make about the above three verses:

1. **The word elder or pastor does not appear in these verses.** Not once. It simply is not there. To justify where a pastor or elder can rule over anybody, one better point out where pastor or elder is mentioned in this text, and it can’t be done.
2. **The word “over” is not actually in any one of these three verses,** so we must lay it aside as an unfortunate and an unwarranted addition to the text by translators because the Greek word for “over” is simply not there in the original text.
3. **It’s also worthy of note that Hebrews 13:7 verse is written in the past tense** though incorrectly translated by the KJV in the present tense. The verse is to be correctly translated this way:

“Remember those *who were your guides (past tense)*, whose faith you are to imitate, taking note of how they *were faithful* to the very end of life” (Hebrews 13:7).

Hebrews 13:7 is a verse that is reminding the Hebrew Christians of all those mentioned in chapters 11 and 12. It follows verse 6 which refers to not fearing man, which these people did not do, and gave their lives because of being fearless. It may even include the Apostles themselves.

To make guides to mean “elders” or “pastors” is an addition to the text. In proper biblical interpretation, pastors or elders cannot be considered since they are not mentioned either in the text or in the context.

4. **In Hebrews 13:17, three words give some trouble as translated in the King James Version.** As mentioned above, the word “over” is not in the text - so we will drop it. The three English words that were chosen to be used by King James translators are: **Obey, rule and submit.**

Obey - In the Greek it is *peitho*. This word means “to persuade, to win over.” When it is in the passive and middle voices, it means “to be persuaded, to listen to.” For example, (in Acts 5:40 *peitho* is in the passive voice and it is properly translated “they agreed.”

The obedience suggested in the text of Hebrews 13:17 is *not a submission to any authority*, but an agreement resulting from persuasion. According to W. E. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, *peitho* means "to follow because of being persuaded." It does not mean obedience the way the western mind thinks of obedience. The obedience of Hebrews 13:17 is due to an internal reasoning and agreement that results from persuasion, not an external conformity as a result of authoritative control.

Rule - In the Greek it is *hegeomai*. This word means "to lead, to go before, to be a leader." This word does not carry the connotation of ruling over, but that of giving leadership in a church (see Strong's Word Studies). So, according to Strong again, true leadership is nothing more than going on ahead.

Submit - In the Greek it is *hypeikete*. This word is in the present imperative active tense, and it means "to choose to submit or to follow or to yield." This is the ONLY appearance in the entire New Testament of the word *hypeikete*. It most likely should be translated "yield."

There is a Greek word that means **to be subject to and obey**. It is *peitharcho* (*peith-ar-KAY-o*), one of the words built upon **arche**, which means **ruler**. It is found three times in the New Testament, twice in **Acts 5:29 & 27:21** and once in **Titus 3:1**. In these places as well as other writings outside the New Testament, it describes obedience to someone who is in civil authority or to God, but that word is not the word used here in Hebrews.

Even Paul counted himself as a fellow servant. He said in II Corinthians 1:24, "Not that we have dominion [*archo*] over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy, for by faith you stand."

- 5. For a better understanding of Hebrews 13:24 see the above for Hebrews 13:7** and the meaning of the Greek word translated rule.

So, the better translation of the Greek language in these verses would be:

"Remember those who were (past tense) your guides, who led the way with the Word: whose faith imitate, considering the strong way they ended their life" (Hebrews 13:7).

"Choose to yield to those who are out in front leading you because you are persuaded, they are likewise being faithful in their task, knowing they will be held accountable" (Hebrews 13:17).

"Embrace all those who are your guides or leaders, as well as all the Saints. They of Italy embrace you as well" (Hebrews 13:24).

There is no concept of lording authority over someone in the church.

There is simply NO TEXTUAL justification for an office of any kind in the New Testament local church with inherent authority vested in it.

This is not to say there are not ministries that can be called pastoral or elder ministries or even deacon ministries in a local church.

What can be said is that New Testament local church authority was totally different than any cultural concept of being over so.