

ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEADERSHIP – Part 1
Hebrews 13:7 and 17

As we continue in our study of the book of Hebrews we come, this morning, to two verses in chapter 13 regarding church leaders and how those in the church should view these leaders. The two verses are not sequential, but we'll deal with them together nonetheless...

Hebrews 13:7 and 17

Following the leading words of these two verses (Remember your leaders, and obey your leaders), we'll deal with these leading words as **the two main points** with every thing else falling beneath these two points...

But first, a couple thoughts on leaders and leadership.

1. As Christians we should embrace hierarchal structures, for that is what the scriptures teach.

From beginning to end, the scriptures teach hierarchal structures both in the heavens and on the earth.

In the heavens we have God existing as a hierarchal being wherein there is a Father, a Son and a Holy Spirit. And while we believe these three to be "one" and "equal," nonetheless there is no question but that the Son is portrayed in scripture as being subordinate to the Father and the Father's will, and if the church has historically grasped things correctly, then the Holy Spirit is in subordination to both the Father and the Son.

Thus, while our modern world has chafed at any notion of subordination within marriage, it has, in its quest for "equal rights for women" glossed over this **divine archetypal design** wherein we find **equality and subordination working together just fine**. But modern women think they know better about such things than God who made them.

Beneath the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit we have the whole spirit realm of angels. But even among angels we learn of "Michael, the archangel" in the book of Jude.

On earth, God has ordained that

- Just as Christ is over the church, a husband is to be over his wife.
- Parents are to be over their children.
- The government is to be over its citizens
- A master is to be over his servant
- An employer is over his or her employees
- And church leaders are to be over those in the congregation

It is not despotism that is being taught; it is leadership.

This does not suggest or imply that leaders are perfect...that leaders never make mistakes or are mistaken. It simply means that in nearly every aspect or phase of life, there will be those who are over others.

Or to put it another way, **God is against anarchy**.

You may consider yourself a libertarian. You may believe that the less government is involved in your life (or any of our lives) the better. And that is fine for you, as a Christian, to believe and to advocate. But you cannot advocate anarchy.

For anarchy is not the espousing of LESS government, but of NO government. And whereas one can make a Biblical case for LESS government, one will **come up dry** in making the case for NO government. For the apostle Paul was exceedingly clear in Romans chapter 13 that government – meaning those that are in control or in authority over a people's citizenry – has been **ordained by God**. Indeed Paul, in that chapter will go on to say that "whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."

(I saw a YouTube video recently of a fellow being pulled over by a police officer and through his on dash video camera it becomes clear that this fellow was determined to give that officer grief...claiming his rights and governmental intrusion when the officer asked for the man to roll down his window or to pass over his driver's license. The fellow, in the video, acts like he is really smart and an upholder of freedom against a tyrannical governmental pawn but the truth is he is a jerk who is being disobedient to what the scriptures teach.)

Paul says in Romans 13 that those who "resist the authorities" will incur judgment and while Paul is not specific about **who it is** that will meet out that judgment the inference SEEMS to be that it is God who will bring about that judgment.

Now, let's talk about parents and children for a minute...

More than once I have heard well meaning Christian parents get sucked into an argument with their children when that parent has prescribed some sort of behavior, or activity, or refraining from an activity, that the child doesn't like. And so, like any child, the child protests "**WHY CAN'T I GO TO BILLY'S HOUSE?**" (or whatever the issue at hand happened to be).

Now the fact that the child is questioning the parent's judgment is itself a problem, but we'll skip over that for now.

But the child will whine and whimper and, in effect, let the parent know that they don't accept the parent's answer. And if the child pushes it, the parent will likely say something like, "Look, I don't care what Tommy's parents said or even Michael's parent said. I'm YOUR parent and I'm saying you're not going."

Now, on the one hand I say, "Good for that parent." What other parents are doing is truly immaterial. For every parent or set of parents have their own responsibility with their child or children. So good for that parent for having the strength to take a stand.

But, at times, Christian parents MISS a golden opportunity to let that child GROAN not just against them, but also against God. And it is not that we, as parents, want to just "pass the buck." But, as parents, we have every right to say, "Look, God has put me over you. And if you have a problem with that, then **you have a problem with God**." That is to say, I think, at times, we as parents have MISSED a golden opportunity to make our children **WRESTLE with a theological truth** that is much bigger than suggesting to a child that what they are getting is merely a parent's opinion on a matter. The child's resistance

against the parent is ultimately a resistance to God, and we should not be afraid to make that point.

2. The church, while under tremendous pressure to conform to the world's standards and ways of thinking, can show itself to be a teacher of truth by standing strong on God's Word.

Today, church after church, and denomination after denomination, is capitulating to the latest "winds of doctrine" – winds which are reminiscent of playing in a park situated to the east side of a sewage treatment on a warm summer day when the wind is blowing in from the west.

The latest winds of doctrine have been pertaining to sexual issues – which is a reminder to us all that for all the changes that have taken place in the past 2,000 years, nothing has substantially changed. We know that sexually little has changed based upon what was found at the archeological digs in Pompeii, the record of temple prostitutes at Corinth or historical records pertaining to Caligula and the leaders of Rome. It should not surprise us that first in the apostle Paul's 1 Corinthians chapter 6 list of sins that will keep people out of the eternal kingdom of God are those sins that are sexual. Yes, little to nothing has really changed.

But these churches that **now smell like sewer gas** think they have a new understanding...and a better appreciation for the work of Jesus than did the early church or someone as stuck in the mud as the apostle Paul. And so they have advocated a new position on sexuality...a new understanding... a kinder, gentler way.

But what are they **really doing**? What they are really doing is undermining a structure of authority. They have decided that what the scriptures teach or what the church has taught for literally 2000 years, is immaterial. **These people are ecclesiastical anarchists.** They want to throw off all restraint and suggest that they are now **FREE to decide for themselves** what is right and what is wrong. This is, of course, the EXACT model, that lost mankind has been advocating since the beginning of human history.

Well, the old saying is "Birds of a feather flock together" and so these smelly churches may find that they are now great friends with the world, but in seeking that friendship they have given up friendship with God.

Now to our text...

1. (From verse 7) Remember your leaders...those who spoke the word of God to you.

I was at Home Depot this past week and there saw a man I had not seen in 12 or 13 years. His name was Chuck. I actually couldn't remember his first name but I did remember his last name. He said, "I am amazed to see you. For literally this week, I was talking to someone and your name came up." The man seemed genuinely happy to see me.

Well, for some years I had been his leader...his pastor. And unlike many, when I was his pastor, Chuck and his wife, Lisa, would sit right up front. They avoided the back seats. For, he said, they always wanted to be right up close when the word of God was being preached. Today they are at a different church, under a different leader and he let me know they still sit right up front. But this past week Chuck said he was

remembering me. And when he did, it seemed, his thoughts were pleasant thoughts. And for that I am glad.

For Hebrews 13:7 goes on to say...

A. "Consider the outcome of their way of life."

I have never seen a statistical analysis on **the life expectancy of a pastor**, but in writing this sermon I tried to find exactly that. Along the way here is what I found, based upon some articles in the New York Times from a few years back...

- Pastors suffer obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans
- The rate of depression among pastors is 11% - about double the national rate
- 13% report issues with anxiety
- 33% say that being in the ministry is an outright hazard to their family
- 70% don't have any close friends
- 90% work more than 50 hours a week, and
- 1,500 pastors in America leave their ministries each month due to burnout, conflict, or moral failure.

Well, if THAT is what the writer of Hebrews had in mind when he said, "Consider the outcome of their lives" it would seem the writer was suggesting, "Be smart! Look at what happens to church leaders! **No one in their right mind** would want to end up like that, so pay attention to what happens to them **and avoid the same!**"

But listen to me now, not all church leaders – not all pastors – were ever truly called to be pastors. Just like the prophets of old spoke against the "shepherds of Israel" (e.g., Zechariah 11) suggesting they were not TRUE shepherds, so too, there are a lot of pastors that are not TRUE pastors. And the New York Times likely isn't making or even seeing that distinction.

I grew up in a pastor's home and married a pastor's daughter. And I can tell you that neither of those father pastors was overweight, distraught, or more inclined towards depression than the average American.

Neither of those pastors considered the ministry a hazard to their family. And neither lacked for having friends.

Both worked a reasonable work week, and both stayed in the ministry for over 50 years.

And while I've been pastoring for only 33 years, I don't think I'm obese, my wife loves me and I'm happy to consider you my among my many friends. Amen?

So I don't think the writer of Hebrews was referencing an article in the New York Times when he said "consider the outcome of their way of life." What I **do think** the writer was referencing was that he (or she...whoever it was) had observed a good number of early church leaders and had found them to be those who had a heart for God's people and wanted to see them well-fed by God's word. But many of

today's pastors should never have become pastors, never gone to seminary, and shouldn't be serving today.

It's like that difference that I have noted between those that are saved and those that are **SAVED**.

Well there are pastors and there are **PASTORS**. And I'm not sure the New York Times would know that difference if it was right in front of them.

So when the writer says, "Consider the outcome of their way of life" what is meant is **look at them... really look at them.**

- If you're older, is that pastor the kind of man that you would be proud to have as a son?
- Is that pastor the kind of man you would want as a friend?
- Is your pastor a man's man, yet also one to whom the deepest issues of life can be shared?
- Do you think your pastor is dependable...a man of his word?
- Does he appear to walk with God? Does he speak of Christ?
- Would a stranger meeting him think, "There's something about that man that is attractive... winsome?"
- Has God met his needs?
- Is he a good provider? Or is he lazy...stupid...a failure of a man?
- Is he the kind of man that you would wish your sister had married, or is he the kind of man that you are so sorry your sister **DID** marry?
- Who is he? Does he point you to Jesus?

That's what the writer is talking about.

And that leads into the rest of verse 7...

B. "And imitate their faith."

The apostle Paul definitely grasped this concept – that he was to be a model for others to follow or imitate, for a number of times in his letters he says words to the effect that people should imitate him. The best known is 1 Corinthians 11:1...

1 Corinthians 11:1

If we were to apply that to our church leaders (which according to Hebrews 13:7 is **EXACTLY** what we should be doing), then there is a two-fold obligation here:

1. There is an obligation for the church leader to be living a kind of life and faith that is truly Christ-like, and
2. There is an obligation for the church member, assuming the Christ-likeness of the church leader, to take actions to imitate them. So it is **NOT ENOUGH** to simply observe, "Oh, my pastor is **REALLY SERIOUS** about living a Christ-like life." Rather, the person in the pew must also be saying, "So, whatever he is doing, I should be doing as well."

To me this is back to the challenge – given to us in 1 Peter 5 – that church leaders should be "EXAMPLES" or models to the church body. On a personal level that means that I should be living the kind of life that anyone with a real heart for God would WANT to imitate. And so that, in a good way, puts pressure on me to make certain that

- I'm physically fit
- My marriage is in good shape
- My finances are in order
- I'm serious about spiritually growing
- I'm strong in my faith and willing to test or prove or push that faith to newer and higher levels all the time.

And what I say of myself **should be applied to all** those who are in a position of spiritual leadership or desire to be in a place of spiritual leadership.

That's why,

- When a pastor or church leader is found to be involved in some area of moral failure they should be removed from that position of leadership.
- A church that fails to remove such a leader is being unfaithful to the Word of God by allowing such a leader to stay in place.
- And those church denominations that are ordaining those who, by definition, are involved in moral failure, are SHOUTING to the world that they no longer respect the Word of God or believe in putting before their congregations those whose lives are a good model to follow.

Well, more on this next week...