

ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEADERSHIP – Part 2
Hebrews 13:7 and 17

Two weeks ago we examined Hebrews chapter 13, verse 7, and what it had to say about church leaders. Today we continue this brief study on "Attitudes towards leadership" by looking at Hebrews 13, verse 17. But let's read both verses to start...

Hebrews 13:7 and 17

So, while verse 7 challenged the readers to "remember" or take notice of the way of life of our church leaders (and do our best to be like them), verse 17 begins with its challenge to **OBEY our leaders and submit to them.**

Many years ago I had the privilege of getting involved with a couple that was looking to get married. Because this young couple were attending the church, the parents of the girl (and soon to be bride) began to attend the church. This had been a strong Roman Catholic family for a long, long time, so to have followed their daughter OUT of the Catholic church and into an Evangelical Protestant church was a great leap. But just as the parents of the girl had faithfully attended the Roman Catholic Church they carried over that same kind of faithfulness or fidelity into their new Protestant church home. And so it was that I got to know them. They continued to faithfully come until, after about 3 years, they suddenly stopped showing up. Initially I thought they might be on vacation, or that one of them was ill. But when weeks turned into months I gave them a phone call. And it was at that time that I learned they had returned to the Roman Catholic Church. And what was the reason for their leaving the church I pastored? They said,

"As you know, we were raised Catholic. And in the Catholic Church you **show respect** for the priest. You listen to him and pretty much do what he tells you to do. But when we came to your church – though we liked it very much and really appreciated your sermons – we could not get over the amount of **disrespect shown towards you.** It was as if whatever you said, people didn't care. We just could not get over it. It bothered us so much that we finally decided to just go back to the Catholic Church."

Well, here in Hebrews 13:17 the author pushes this issue of respect to the max when the author **doesn't merely say, "Respect your leaders,"** but actually says, **"Obey...and submit" to your leaders.**

Now I don't know about you, but I don't ever recall joining any (Protestant) church where I was told that an expectation of me, as a member, was that I was to "OBEY" the church leaders. I was told

- I had to be in basic agreement with the church's statement of faith
- I had to faithfully support the work of the church
- I had to work to resolve any problems should they arise.

Those are things I was told I had to do. But I was never told I had to OBEY AND SUBMIT to the church leaders. But that's what the Bible teaches here in Hebrews 13:17

In **another land** that may go over alright

In **another time** that may go over alright

But in America...in the 21st century...in a Protestant church?

Ha! The only place that will work in modern Protestantism is either in a hyper-Charismatic church or in a cult. But in the rest of Protestantism...are you kidding? Why the modern American Protestant church is known far more for how it mistreats its pastors and leaders than it does for how it obeys and submits to them.

Now, why would the author push the issue this far?

1. Because the author actually believed that it was and is God's design to have some people OVER the church.

That is, just as God has established all kinds of hierarchies (be it in society, in marriage, parents over children, and so forth) so too, in the church, a hierarchy has been intended.

In Protestantism we don't tend to see it that way. Indeed, we call our church leaders OUR servants.

It's like that time, many years ago, when at the church in Lititz we had a Sunday morning foot washing service. We had a couple different pitchers, bowls and towels, and people were encouraged, if they felt that they needed to show service to a particular individual, to go to that person and ASK THEM if we might wash their feet. I began the service time by washing the feet of a man with whom I had had some conflicts. I wanted him to know of my sorrow over those conflicts and that I wanted to wash his feet. And so began the service. But what I will never forget is when an older woman, walked up to the front, in front of everyone, and without saying a word pointed at me and then pointed at her feet. And she didn't look happy. I got what she was saying. And so it was that I followed her back to her seat and washed her feet. What was behind all that, even to this day I have no idea. But she apparently wanted everyone to know that I was her servant...and so I was.

The case can certainly be made, from scripture, that the overseers of the church are there by God's appointment. We tend to think they are there by OUR ELECTION. But the whole election or affirmation process is much more modern, and American, than it is Biblical. Indeed, as we examine the New Testament scriptures it becomes quite clear that the elders who oversaw the various churches were APPOINTED to their positions of leadership.

But regardless of just HOW we have come to have the leaders we now have, there is no question but that they are to be held in high regard, revered, and even obeyed.

Recently I saw a film that came out in 2012 entitled Compliance. It is the true story of a girl who worked at a fast food restaurant and all was fine until one day her manager received a phone call from a police officer Daniels telling the manager that the girl had been reported to the police for having stolen money from a woman's purse, and that the police had a witness verifying the theft. Because of that, the officer said he **needed the compliance** of the manager to hold the girl until they could arrive. The manager complied, but then was asked to do more and more in terms of searching the girl, her purse, and her body – even to the point of having the girl undress - in pursuit of the stolen money. Halfway through the film, and the portrayal of the girl's violated privacy,

the viewer learns that the caller is not a police officer at all but some pervert getting a kick out of manipulating the people on the other end of the line. And so the film is a portrayal not only of a real life incident but of how far some will go in **trying to be compliant** to an authority figure – in this case the police.

Without question, it was this same sort of compliance to an authority figure that resulted in the sexual abuse of tens of thousands of children who were abused at the hands of priests, nuns or pastors.

And so this challenge to "obey and submit" to our leaders – and in particular church leaders – carries with it **an assumption of honesty, goodwill and integrity on the part of those leaders**. It is this compliance to church leadership that has also resulted in some church leaders – particularly those within charismatic circles – abusing that attitude of obedience and submission by claiming huge salaries for themselves while they "fleece the flock" of God even as they claim they are God's instruments. But they are not God's instruments, they are the devil's instruments meant only for the injury of the body of Christ.

2. The second reason we are told to obey and submit to our church leaders is because those leaders have been given the charge of keeping watch over our souls. And so we read here of the challenge to try and make life EASY...not difficult...for those leaders.

There are, as we all know, some people who **are difficult**. They are the kind of people that should everyone in the room vote for a proposal they will vote against it. They will vote against it not because they are really opposed to it but rather because they, for some reason, have decided that they are God's appointees to help keep things in balance. And since they have decided that nothing should ever be truly unanimous, they will **help God out** by making certain unanimity is not reached. They're difficult. I have known people like this. I can only say that I am glad that, currently, I don't know of any such people at Burning Hearts. Then again, if there were such people at Burning Hearts, these people would let us all know they are here.

And how can a church member make life easy for a church leader?

That's easy to answer: stay straight, avoid sin, live as you should.

"Enter by the narrow gate...for narrow is the gate and hard is the way that leads to life, and those who find it are few," Jesus said in Matthew 7. Yeah...stay on the hard way.

When I think of **LONG** Elders' meetings that I have been part of, inevitably those long meetings were because of **long discussions** as to what we should do about **some erring member**. Maybe it was theft, or adultery, or contumacy (there's a word you may not know, but which comes up at times of church discipline). But whatever it was, it led to **LONG DISCUSSIONS** and **LONG MEETINGS**.

So if you want your church leaders – your pastor and elders – to have **good nights of sleep**, stay on the way that leads to life.

Because the church leaders keep watch over your soul and will need to give an account for their oversight.

Which leads me to bring up a point I have brought up before and it has to do with the size of a church.

John 10:1-3

You may recall that it was my reading of this passage, time after time after time, over the course of some months, back in around 2008, that led to me **not thinking well of my roll as pastor**. For there were people attending the church whose names I did not know. Dairy farmers can tell you the name of every one of their cows – animals that to the rest of us look pretty much all alike. But as a pastor of a large church I couldn't name all the sheep under my care.

These many years later I am amazed – truly amazed – at the number of people who will attend a church wherein, due to its size, **they remain unknown to the pastor and leaders of that church**.

When a good friend of mine told me that he had **never met** the pastor of a large church that he had attended (and joined) for some 5 or so years, I made an appointment with the pastor of that church. At that meeting I told him about my friend and then pulled out thirty or forty dollars and put it in front of him. When I set the money in front of him he said, "What's that for?" I said, "That's for you to take my friend out to lunch. I want to **take away any excuse** that might be made as to why you have not met my good friend." Months later I was talking to my friend and said, "Hey, have you still not met the pastor of your church?" (I wanted to see what had happened to my money!) My friend said, "Funny you should ask. He called me up a month or so ago and invited me out to lunch. It was great." I didn't say a word...I just smiled inwardly.

But why someone would attend a church where the pastor doesn't even know one's name is beyond me.

For the pastor...the shepherd...is to keep watch over the souls of those under his care. And that "keeping watch" is to the degree that **he will be required to "give an account"** for how the sheep have done.

What a joke if on the day of judgment the Great Judge of all the earth says, "Pastor, let me ask you about a few of your congregants." And then God starts to name off people who were under his care and the pastor, at each name, hems and haws and says in effect, "I don't recall that person. Are you sure they were part of my congregation?" For how can the pastor "give an account" of that for which he has no recollection?

3. This obedience and submission to the church leaders is to be done joyfully, meaning willingly and with a good spirit.

It was about 15 years ago now that Ruth and I read together the book, "The Five Love Languages" by Gary Chapman. In case you have never read Chapman's book, his point is that we each tend to express our love for our spouse in the language – meaning in the way – that we appreciate. The five languages named by Chapman are:

- Words of affirmation
- Gifts
- Acts of service
- Quality time, and
- Physical touch

And so, for example, if a husband really likes receiving gifts, and considers that the way in which love is best expressed, he may shower his wife with gifts. But if the wife's love language is "quality time" regardless of all the gifts she may receive from her husband, if he is hardly ever around or when he is around he is not really present, she may inwardly groan that her husband doesn't truly love her. Chapman's point is that we need to learn the love language of our spouse, and then express our love **IN THEIR LANGUAGE**.

So we read the book and when we finished it I said, "Gary Chapman failed to mention **my** love language." For my love language – that which I personally appreciate MORE than words of affirmation, gifts, acts of service, quality time or physical touch is **A GOOD ATTITUDE**.

To me, **NOTHING** is as important as having a good attitude – an upbeat attitude, a positive spirit.

Recently I was talking to someone about church and churches and I said, "I really like Burning Hearts **and the attitude** that I see being currently exhibited. So, thank you! Thank you for making my pastoring a delight and not something over which I feel the desire to groan. Thank you!