

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Part I: The Responsibility **of** Leadership

Part II: The Responsibility **to** Leadership

We are talking about this because the text does. (Visiting?)

This passage (like so many others in Scripture) can easily be abused (and surely it has been)

- Harmful authoritarianism
  - There has been a long history of this kind of abuse and failure (I am sorry)
- It is a failure to heed the Words of Christ to the disciples in Mark 10:42-45
  - 42 **Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.**
  - 43 **"But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant;**
  - 44 **and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.**
  - 45 **"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."**
- **"But it shall not be so among you"** has been greatly ignored
- But the first leaders of the church got this an echoed it
- 2 Corinthians 1:24 (Paul); 1 Peter 5:3 (Peter)
  - **Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy**
  - **Nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.**

There is this strange dichotomy: Leaders in the church are servant-leaders—but with authority

- They serve the church
- But they are to be obeyed by the church
- Jesus is our model for that (John 13 and Revelation 19—The Lion and the Lamb)

But, to preface this verse this morning—we must all acknowledge that leaders in the Church should be humble servants, who are accountable to Christ and others

- Because they represent Jesus and are stewards of what is His
  - **What He loves dearly—His truth and His church**
  - Therefore they don't lead from themselves or for themselves

Leaders in the Church are not to be unconditionally obeyed

And here we have to strike a balance

- Paul said: **Follow me as I follow Christ** (1 Cor 11:1, NIV)
  - We should expect our leaders to lead according to the will of God (Cf. **1 Peter 5:2**)
- If they are not—if there are outright inconsistencies with the person of Christ and the Word of God
  - When they are violating the Spirit of Scripture or the Character of Christ
  - We need not follow
- **But**
  - Remember: We should not expect our leaders to be perfect and without flaws or defects
  - True submission is the willingness to obey, follow, and submit even to leadership that is imperfect!
    - **Not because of who they are but because of who Christ is!**

- **This is always the basis for biblical submission**
  - Cf. Wives submit to your husbands as unto the Lord (Eph 5:22)
  - Cf. Children obey your parents in the Lord (Eph 6:1)
  - Cf. Slaves submit to your masters as to Christ... not as men pleasers but as slaves of Christ (Eph 6:5-6)
    - **All of this is set in the overarching Christian theme of**
      - And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Eph 5:21)
      - Mutual submission is the basic rule!
      - It is not about superiority, but God honoring roles
      - Cf. The Trinity
        - And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Eph 5:21)
- In the same way, as we think about obeying our leaders in the church and submitting to them
  - It is for the sake of Christ!
  - Wow: Obeying your leaders is one of the ways... we obey Christ. (Cf. Heb 13:17)

How is this experienced in the rest of the NT?

- Leaders in the church are to be obeyed and loved (for Christ as they follow Christ)

Obeyed:

Philippians 2:12-13

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

II Thessalonians 3:14-15

14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.

15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Loved:

1 Timothy 5:17

17 The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

I Thessalonians 5:11-13

11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,

13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

Here is a sad thing we see in the church

- We are totally a personality and celebrity driven culture in America
- We seem to have an inability to break out of the mindset in the church
  - So we:
    - 1. Put leaders on pedestals
    - 2. Shoot them
      - Just like we do with celebrities: Too much praise/too much criticism
      - So destructive!

Don't exalt leaders in the church: Merely love, appreciate, and obey them

- Not because of who they are, but because of who Christ is!

What does it mean to obey?

- To follow the commands or guidance of another

- Compliance with the demands or requests of one in authority
  - The injunction to obey assumes the fact that there will be times where we don't want to

What does it mean to **submit**?

- To yield oneself to the authority or will of another (Jesus in Gethsemane)
- A willing act—Not under obligation
- An act of humility
  - Again, it assumes there will be times we want our way in the church over the leaders

I will tell you when you really know for the first time whether or not you are someone's pastor:

- **The first time you tell them no...**
- Submission means nothing unless we have a desire to do otherwise

What is clear in Scripture is that leaders are not kings, but they do have delegated authority

- **1 Peter 5:1-5**
- They have no authority to lord it over the people, but to lead them in the ways of Christ
  - by informing and instructing them
  - explaining the word of God to them
  - and applying it to their lives and situations
- They are not to make laws of their own, but to interpret the laws of God
- Their interpretation is not to be immediately received without examination
  - But the people must search the scriptures (**Acts 17 and Bereans**)
  - As they teach you the Word of God you respond to – The Word of God

1 Thessalonians 2:10-13

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;

11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,

12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

13 For this reason **we also constantly thank God** that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

Paul here was rejoicing in the right response to the authoritative teaching of the Word of God

Examples (What leaders should expect from congregations):

- |                          |                                  |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Sermons                | • Writing letters to the city    |
| • Blessing the community | • Serving the children           |
| • Being on mission       | • Calls to prayer                |
| • Driving and parking    | • Home Groups                    |
| • Riding bikes           | • Giving                         |
| • Carpooling             | • Life decisions (in counseling) |

Just like so many leaders have failed to lead well, at least as many congregations have not followed well

- The church has not been well trained in this
- They have a consumer mentality—"please me or I'm taking my business elsewhere" (some here)
- They have not been held accountable (easier to hold leaders accountable)
  - Both failures (leaders and congregants) cause chaos in the church

Because of the call of leader, **the joy of the leader** is to see the congregation responding

- 3 John 4  
I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

- Phil 2:17-18
  - 17 But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.
  - 18 You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.
- 1 Thess 2:19-20
  - 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?
  - 20 For you are our glory and joy.
- The joy of leaders is the spiritual well being of the church!
  - Partly because this is what God has called them to and for (it fills their sails)
  - Partly because they **will give an account** (it chills their bones)
    - They will stand before Jesus and answer for the spiritual well-being of those entrusted to their care and leadership (oh no!!!)
    - They **keep watch over your souls**
      - Leaders lose sleep over this
      - **Keep watch** has the etymological sense of **losing sleep**!<sup>1</sup>
        - 1. Because we will answer to Jesus
        - 2. Because we love Christ's church
          - There is no greater grief in the ministerial life of the leader than when the people are shirking their responsibilities to Christ
          - If the greatest joy is to see them walking in truth, the greatest sorrow is when they are not
          - **Let them do this with joy and not with grief**
            - **with grief** (literally, *groaning*)<sup>2</sup>

Jesus did not have fits because of the Pharisees nor was he derailed by the devil

- But He did weep because of wayward sheep
- Satan could not conquer Him and the scribes and Pharisees could not confound Him, but the people could grieve Him:
- Luke 13:34
  - Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, **and you would not have it!** **(That is just wrong!)**

The church is to do this (**obey and submit**) recognizing the special responsibility of its leaders and the need to encourage them in their God-given role.<sup>3</sup>

- **If** individuals yield willingly to responsible, Christ-led leadership, it will make the leaders' work a **joy** and will be of great **advantage** to all.

So our text says: **let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you**

- I'm not sure what that means but it doesn't sound good

Realize that the responsibility (to a large degree) of the joy experienced in the church depends not upon the leaders—but upon you—the congregation.

<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Hebrews)*, 386.

<sup>2</sup> The Pulpit Commentary: Hebrews, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 396.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary* : 21st Century Edition, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Heb 13:1.