

Elders and Benediction Hebrews 13:17-25 bible-sermons.org January 8, 2017

In our last two sermons in this last section in Hebrews we saw the church was exhorted to let brotherly love continue, to love strangers, to remember those in prison and those who are mistreated, to honor marriage, and to be free from the love of money, because we have something much greater, the abiding presence of Christ (Hebrews 13:1-5).

He went on to tell them to imitate the faith of the leaders, to avoid strange teachings, and to continually offer a sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:7; 9; 15). We saw that these qualities should be evidence of the life of Christ in us. If these are missing in our lives we must ask ourselves why we are resisting the life Spirit in these areas. Why are we not embracing the prompting of the Spirit's promptings? We usually find it has to do with selfishness, which is yielding to our old nature instead of letting the resurrected life of Jesus be manifest in our mortal bodies (2 Corinthians 4:11).

In today's passage, the author returns to the subject of leadership in the church and the members relationship with them. In verse seven He told them ⁷ *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.* Hebrews 13:7 Leaders in the church are those who proclaim the Word of God, who feed the flock the sincere milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:2). They are to be examples that the congregation can look to as godly. Their faith should be worth imitating. The author does not use the title of elder at first, perhaps because not all leaders officially have the title. If someone shares the pure Word of God, if they have the fruit of the Spirit and live a life that is worthy of imitating, it does not matter if they have the title or not. They will be serving the congregation and be in unity with the designated elders of the church.

Other passages in the New Testament describe the leaders with the title of elder. For example 1 Peter 5:1-5. ¹ *So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed;* ² *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;* ³ *not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.* ⁴ *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.* ⁵ *Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

Notice that Peter calls himself an elder. The elders are to shepherd the flock, which is the word we also translate as pastor. They are to exercise oversight, not because of financial gain or because they must, but because they willingly desire to bless the congregation they serve. They are to be examples. We see that qualification in Hebrews as living a life that is worthy of imitating. The young are to submit to the elders. This can mean older physically, or more mature in the Lord, or having the title of elder. The later meaning would compare with the verse that opened our text for today. ¹⁷ *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those*

Commented [PW1]: Hebrews 13:1-5 (ESV)

- ¹ Let brotherly love continue.
- ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
- ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.
- ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.
- ⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Commented [PW2]: Hebrews 13:7 (ESV)

- ⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Commented [PW3]: Hebrews 13:9 (ESV)

- ⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

Commented [PW4]: Hebrews 13:15 (ESV)

- ¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Commented [PW5]: 2 Corinthians 4:11 (ESV)

- ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Commented [PW6]: 1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

- ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:17

This is a very contentious subject. It is contentious, not because the Scriptures are not clear, but rather because of bad experiences and abuse. It is contentious because of American individualism and subjectivism. In Titus, Paul instructed the ordination of elders in every city where churches had been planted (Titus 1:5). The person representing the Apostles was to appoint multiple elders in each church.

When I began in ministry as an assistant pastor, the pastor I served under had issues and was eventually asked to step down. I could see the problems, but the district overseer thought I was just seeking to take over rather than having genuine concern for the flock. I felt I had to disassociate from the situation because of the bad example being set. It was a very difficult time. It was so heart rending that I began to be depressed. I even sought professional help. The Lord called me there so I did not feel I could leave until the Lord clearly released me.

When I finally knew I had God's permission to leave, I began to seek the Lord about why this situation went on so long. That is when I discovered from the Scriptures the role of elders in the church. The Bible gives very clear standards and describes the group of elders as equals accountable to one another (Titus 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 3:2-7). That kind of Biblical church oversight can help prevent an errant leader from lingering on and doing more damage. The elders can ask the errant elder to step down while they carry on with the same care and direction that God has been leading them. They may have one among them who does the majority of the preaching and is supported by the church so they can give their time to ministry (1 Corinthians 9:4-7), but that does not put him above the other elders. It must be a group of men who seek God's heart on issues and not their own preferences (Acts 13:1-3). They can't be a gathering of "yes men". They need to come as close as possible to the Biblical qualifications. No one is perfect. We will all make mistakes. But since this is clearly the Scriptural way to govern a church, it is the safest and most fruitful way.

I first came to Wayside one year before I became pastor here. The pastoral search committee interviewed me, but we did not see eye to eye on the issue of elders being equal and accountable with the preaching pastor. However, our by-laws clearly have the role of elders as the spiritual overseers of the church. The denomination I came from asked about my return, but there too, this important issue kept me from returning. I did not want to go through the same experience again, nor did I want to ignore the Word of God.

When our passage for today tells us to submit to our leaders, it is telling us to submit to men who meet the qualifications of an elder. They should be those who can teach the Word. **They are to be gentle servants of the congregation.** They should not be given to any vices or the love of money. They should not be volatile. They should have well behaved children, and have a good reputation in the community (1 Timothy 3:2-7). Most of all, they should love the Lord and the people of God and have a heart to serve

Commented [PW7]: Titus 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

Commented [PW8]: Titus 1:6-9 (ESV)

⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Commented [PW9]: 1 Timothy 3:2-7 (ESV)

² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,

⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outside ... [1]

Commented [PW10]: 1 Corinthians 9:4-7 (ESV)

⁴ Do we not have the right to eat and drink?

⁵ Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?

⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

Commented [PW11]: Acts 13:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

² While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Commented [PW12]: 1 Timothy 3:2-7 (ESV)

² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

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⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,

⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ... [2]

the congregation. They may not agree with one another on non-essential doctrines, but they are firm on the essentials of the faith. Understanding that this is their description, the frightening word "submit" is not so fearful. Most sincere believers long to be led by those who love and care for us with godly concern and who can discern the best direction for the church.

This does not mean that we are to follow them blindly. The Word of God is our ultimate authority (Acts 5:29). We should never follow any instruction that is not in accordance with the Word. I don't know of any cults led by a group of men who are equal and accountable to one another. Cults are almost always led by one egomaniac who puts himself up as God's sole messenger to whom all must obey.

Notice also that in verse 17 we submit because the elders watch for our souls. **Elders must give an account to God for how they shepherd you.** If they make a mistake or give you wrong direction, they will have to answer to God for it (James 3:1). Sometimes a person from the congregation or from our extended congregation on-line will ask me what they should do in a specific situation. Unless the Holy Spirit speaks very clearly to me or the Word is clear on the issue, I will only suggest they seek God. I take this warning very seriously. I don't want to stand before God and have to say I directed someone in the wrong way. Most of the time your answer is in the Word or the Lord will show you. Then you must decide if you will obey. Elders only direct you to the Word and prayer. Submission is regarding the general direction of the church and decisions about worship, missions, and encouraging your spiritual welfare. It is not dictatorially running your lives.

There are times when church discipline is necessary (1 Corinthians 5:9-12). This is only when the congregation is affected and aware of blatant sin among us. We will not police your private life. We may ask you if there is a struggle in your life with sin. We are certainly available if you need to talk about your situation. The elders are always available to pray for you for healing of an illness or freedom from an enslaving sin (James 5:13-15).

The great responsibility given to the elders is probably what brought about the authors next request. ***18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.*** Hebrews 13:18 The effectiveness of the church, the power in the message, the fruit in Sunday School all hinge on your prayers and our obedience. Some Sunday mornings I can tell you have been praying for me. The message comes with the power of the Holy Spirit. Everyone who ministers here needs your prayers from janitor to elder, Sunday school teachers to worship team members. Will you pray? Will you commit to praying for this church and those who have a part in the ministry of the church, especially your elders?

Though we are bound to make mistakes, above all else the elders want to have clear consciences. We may not have always done the right thing, but to know we did what we believed the Lord wanted us to do is a great relief. That takes courage. To act honorably in every situation is what we desire. There is often a temptation to

Commented [PW13]: Acts 5:29 (ESV)

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Commented [PW14]: James 3:1 (ESV)

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Commented [PW15]: James 3:1 (ESV)

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Commented [PW16]: James 5:13-15 (ESV)

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

compromise to avoid conflict or lessen the tensions that can build over situations. Please pray for us that we have a clear conscience and always act honorably at the leading of the Holy Spirit. Pray for us to clearly discern God's will (Acts 22:14).

19 I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. Hebrews 13:19 The author saw a connection between the prayers of the church and his ability to get back to visit them.

Then the author closes the letter with a beautiful benediction. *20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.* Hebrews 13:20-21 He asks that the God of peace do this. Peace in Greek comes from the root word "to join." Peace is joining with God by faith in Jesus. It implies quietness and rest for we know God is abounding in steadfast love and all-powerful to carry out His will. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He calls to the weary and burdened and invites them to come to Him and find rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28-30). It's an end of all our vain striving, of all our efforts to be good enough, for in Him there is real love and peace (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

He brought Jesus from the dead and He can give resurrection life, renewed life, to sinners like us. He fills us with His own life and makes us new (2 Corinthians 5:17). One day He will finish this work in us that He has begun (Philippians 1:6). Then we will no longer wonder why it is He would choose us to be His glorious bride, for we will see one another clothed in the glory of Christ (Revelation 21:2).

He is the great shepherd of the sheep. Your elders are His under-shepherds. They may make mistakes, but He never does. He oversees those under-shepherds and will deal with us and straighten us out when we err. Take great comfort in knowing you have a great shepherd who directs you to green pastures and still waters, who walks with you through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:2-4).

By the blood of the eternal covenant He equips you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight (Ephesians 2:10; 1 Peter 5:10). "Equip" here in the Greek implies being mended. We have a lot of problems due to our fallen nature, but by the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus mends them or helps us deal with them. Jesus' covenant with us in His own blood is eternal. He won't change His mind one day. He won't run out of patience. He sees the end product and knows how to get us there (Isaiah 46:10). Don't give up. You are in covenant with the great shepherd of the sheep. He will give you every good thing to do His will. He will work in and through you that which is pleasing to God, for Jesus has taken up residence in you (John 14:23). All the glory goes to Him. It's all about Him. Aren't you glad He chose you (John 15:16)!

22 I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. Hebrews 13:22 The author has said some pretty tough things in this letter. He is asking them to hear him out. They were asked to consider it without emotionally

Commented [PW17]: Acts 22:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth;

Commented [PW18]: Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Commented [PW19]: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (ESV)

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Commented [PW20]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Commented [PW21]: Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Commented [PW22]: Revelation 21:2 (ESV)

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Commented [PW23]: Psalm 23:2-4 (ESV)

² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Commented [PW24]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Commented [PW25]: 1 Peter 5:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in ... [3]

Commented [PW26]: Isaiah 46:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' ... [4]

Commented [PW27]: John 14:23 (ESV)

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Commented [PW28]: John 15:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit ar ... [5]

rejecting it because he has rebuked them in numerous ways. He has told them their desire to compromise for physical security is to walk away from every good thing we have in Jesus (Luke 9:62). He has told them to endure persecution and trust God to see them through. That's a tough message to receive. Can we receive it?

²³ *You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.* Hebrews 13:23 Here is one more reason to think the author is Paul or his associate. Timothy was Paul's disciple. Apparently he had spent some time in jail and was just released. Timothy had set an example for them of standing for the faith no matter what we have to endure. He would certainly be an encouragement to them when he was able to visit them, just as we are encouraged by those who have endured great hardship and stood firm share their testimony with us.

²⁴ *Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.* ²⁵ *Grace be with all of you.* Hebrews 13:24-25 Letters often closed with a greeting from the author and those with him. The greetings went out to the elders and all the congregation. The final word is a request for grace to be with them all. Grace is the beautiful spirit of Jesus, whose patience and love puts up with all kinds of shortfalls. It overlooks offences and takes all expressions with the best possible intent (Philippians 1:10). How we need God's grace and how we need to extend it to others! Who doesn't need more grace; and if we sow grace the Word promises that we will receive grace (Galatians 6:8).

And so we close our journey through Hebrews. We've seen the matchless wonder of Jesus, to whom none can compare. We've been warned to remember what we have heard and tie ourselves securely to it. We've been challenged to come boldly before the throne of God to find grace in time of need. We've been challenged to live like the saints in faith's hall of fame, to throw off every weight and sin the slows us down and run with patience the race that is set before us as we keep our eyes on Jesus. And in this last chapter we've seen what that looks like in practical ways. Now what will we do with what we have heard? I hope our study in Hebrews has strengthened your resolve to take whatever comes your way with faith in Jesus, and to uncompromisingly proclaim Him as our only hope, our peace with God, our Great High Priest, our place of rest in a fallen world.

The struggle of this church of Hebrew believers in Jesus was to keep Jesus first in their lives, even over personal security and possessions. It's the same challenge we all face. Is Jesus first in our heart and mind, or are we preoccupied with something else? Will we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, or are other things vying for first place in our lives? Nothing compares with Jesus! Is He first in your life?

²⁰ *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,* ²¹ *equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.* Hebrews 13:20-21 ²⁵ *Grace be with all of you.* Hebrews 13:25

Commented [PW29]: Luke 9:62 (ESV)

⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Commented [PW30]: Philippians 1:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,

Commented [PW31]: Galatians 6:8 (ESV)

⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Questions:

- 1 Review the previous instructions.
- 2 How does 1 Peter 5:1-5 describe elders?
- 3 Why is there contention over verse 17?
- 4 What is the danger in having a single elder?
- 5 What are the qualifications of an elder?
- 6 Why should we obey them?
- 7 Why must we pray?
- 8 Who does the benediction call on? Implications?
- 9 What does the benediction ask of God?
- 10 Review some highlights in Hebrews.

Page 2: [1] Commented [PW9] Paul 12/30/2016 10:35:00 AM

1 Timothy 3:2-7 (ESV)

² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,

⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Page 2: [2] Commented [PW12] Paul 1/8/2017 6:08:00 AM

1 Timothy 3:2-7 (ESV)

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³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

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⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Page 4: [3] Commented [PW25] Paul 12/30/2016 11:14:00 AM

1 Peter 5:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Page 4: [4] Commented [PW26] Paul 12/30/2016 11:16:00 AM

Isaiah 46:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

Page 4: [5] Commented [PW28] Paul 1/8/2017 6:22:00 AM

John 15:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.