

58-13-04.wpd --Being Equipped to Live out Our Faith

leaders, teaching, exhortation, obedience, prayer

Heb 13:17-25

God uses pastoral leaders to keep us moving forward in Christ.

INTRODUCTION:

--One of the challenges of growing up is to become *independent*. That challenge is balanced by another challenge, which is to realize and live out our *interdependence*. For our own safety and well-being, we must look to others for help in getting along in life. One element in that help is leadership. The Bible illustrates this need for leadership in the way sheep need a shepherd. This is where we get our concept of a "pastor" [Latin word for shepherd].

--Our faith is also both *independent* and *interdependent*, *personal* as well and *corporate*. God's plan for individuals is set within the context of a body of believers, the church. God didn't intend for us to be "Lone Ranger" Christians, because we all need help in living out the Christian life. Part of (**Title**) is to have pastoral leaders. **HOM.idea.**

I. How Our Response to Leadership Helps Equip Us, v.17

- A. Jesus is the "*great Shepherd of the sheep*" and pastors are only "under-shepherds" who tend the flock for Him....
- B. The principle meaning of "*Obey your leaders*" is "to be persuaded" by them (carries also the meaning of "*listening*" and "*trusting*").
 1. A good Christian leader wants to *persuade* the flock to follow the "*great Shepherd of the sheep*" (a sermon is a *persuasive* speech about *believing* and *practicing* the Christian faith)
 2. *Listening* to leaders is more than hearing their preaching. It is to heed or obey the truth they are teaching from God's Word.
- C. The concept of *submitting to leadership* assumes that leaders have "*authority*" or *power* from God. [as do police officers enforcing the law.]
 1. *Authority* is partially due to position, but even more so, when a pastor is living in a committed personal relationship with God.
 2. To "*submit*" means to "*stand under*" -- there are blessings to be received from standing under the ministry of a godly leader:
 - a. The teaching of a pastor can bring *spiritual enlightenment*.
 - b. The prayer of a pastor can be a channel of God's *healing*.

- c. The counsel of a pastor can be a means of *God's guidance*.

TRANS: Pastoral ministry is a "*joy*" when a flock is *persuaded* to follow Jesus, the "*great Shepherd of the sheep*," but it's a "*burden*"-some "*work*" when believers do not *heed* the ministry of leader. There's no happier minister than one whose gifts are used to "equip the saints for the work" of serving God, and no congregation is more fulfilled than by receiving the fruits of a leader's ministry when it is under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It will keep them **moving forward in Christ**.

II. How We Need to Pray for Our Leaders, v.18-19

- A. Leaders are as human and as vulnerable to the trials of life as those they lead. They may have both spiritual *authority* and a sincere *spirituality* ("*We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.*"), but as part of the church, they are not *independent* but *interdependent*, and must ask: "*Pray for us.*"
- B. Notice the specific nature of the prayer request, v.19, "*I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.*"
 1. A leader would not be a true leader who did not feel a burden to fulfill the call to minister that God has given. (The *Epistle to the Hebrews* is evidence that its author felt the need to minister even in his absence.)
 2. *Health* problems, *home* problems, unproductive *habit* problems, and (in my case) bivocational work problems, can be a challenge to that calling. (Still only 24 hours in a day, even for ministers, and they need prayer for wisdom in maintaining a balanced life.)
 3. But ministry cannot take place in a spiritual vacuum. [article in the Leadership Journal magazine: "How all-too human preachers can prepare their souls to preach"] The bottom-line prayer for pastors and other spiritual leaders should be for their spiritual walk with God, so that they will hear from Him and communicate what they hear.

TRANS: I can speak for both Terry and myself when I say, with the author of Hebrews, "*Pray for us.*" Each of us are bivocational and have a family life, with homes to take care of. If it is God's intention to use pastoral leaders to keep us moving forward in Christ, then we need prayer, because both of us are extremely human people....

III. How We Prosper Spiritually by Pastoral Exhortation, v.20-22

A. In the last part of this epistle, in v.20-21, is a familiar benediction:

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

(This should be the hope of all pastoral leaders and their desire for how their own ministry is used by God to help bring that blessing.)

1. It places the emphasis not on the human instrument (the leader), but on the work of God, motivated by peace, infused with the power of the Cross and Resurrection, and *coordinated* under one "great Shepherd of the sheep," the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. It explains the whole goal of pastoral exhortation:
 - a. That believers become fully equipped "*with everything good*" (**not just a knowledge** of what our Christian faith should look like, **but the grace and power** behind that knowledge)
 - b. That the fruit of a leader's ministry will be God's people "*doing his will*" (clearing and preparing the way for Him to "*work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ*").
 - c. That the effect of pastoral leadership among believers will bring, not glory to the pastor or leader, but "*glory for ever and ever*" to our Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION:

--It's a bit humorous that the author of this long letter says in v.22, "*Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.*" I could say about the same thing about this long sermon series in Hebrews that I've preached off and on for 2 years and two months. This is my 32nd and final message in that series.

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That is the reason for this pulpit's central place in our meeting together as Christians, and my continuing prayer as a leader for you is the same benediction given as the last words of this epistle: "*Grace be with you all.*"

Heb 13:17-25 (NIV) Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. {18} Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. {19} I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon. {20} May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, {21} equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. {22} Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter. {23} I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you. {24} Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings. {25} Grace be with you all.