

Jesus Christ - The Author and Finisher of Our Faith

in the Book of Hebrews

(Part 3 - Chapters 11-13)

Meeting 8

Now we come to another very practical point which is not in the natural concept of many people today: having proper respect for those who lead the saints (see Outline V. F.). *“Remember those who rule [lead] over you...”* (Heb. 13:7a) and *“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive...”* (Heb. 13:17a). The NKJV translation says, “those who rule over you,” but it should read “those who **lead** you.” Peter told the elders not to rule over the church like a king (1 Pet. 5:3) but to lead the flock as parents lead their children in a way so that they will grow up properly to be useful citizens and respectful people. Leading is not by authority, power, ruling and controlling, but by love and by care. You don’t kick your dog and throw him out if it disobeys you. If we would care for the saints with loving care, that would be a great thing! Don’t rule over the saints.

The above verses have been misunderstood by Christians and people in the world. They are so misused by those who lead churches, by elders who became so powerful, having the attitude that they were appointed by God and insisting that everyone must listen to them. Everybody is afraid of them and does what they say. Even if they are wrong, nobody dares to say anything. In this country, though officials should be servants of the people, they have become dictators to whom everyone must listen. This is the worldly way. The Lord said clearly that the world has kings to rule over them to control them and make them do whatever they want them to do (Matt. 20:25). But what if the rulers are wrong? We must be reasonable; and we are not children anymore. The Lord then said, *“Yet it shall not be so among you...”* (Matt. 20:26), and *“...for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren”* (Matt.

23:8b). This is the fundamental rule to understand these verses. Peter told the elders not to rule as if the church belonged to them, as if it were their possession. No, the church is the church of God – He paid the price! Paul said that the church is the herd (flock) of God (Acts 20:28). It is not the elder’s herd. He is just a shepherd. If an elder must demand respect from the saints, then something is not right. He has no need to demand respect because he is a servant, not a “ruler.” The Lord is our Shepherd. He leads us and protects us. His staff is not there to beat us until we obey, but to protect us.

Who Care for the Spiritual Well-Being of the Souls of the Saints

Those who lead must **“watch out for your souls”** (v. 17b), to care for the spiritual well-being of the souls of the saints. Obey them if they are right. Don’t argue and fight with those who lead you. And to those who lead, it is not just about teaching doctrines, but nourishing and cherishing the saints for Christ’s sake. Christ must use someone to care for the saints, just like loving parents should care for the growth and education of their children. This is what the elders are supposed to do. They **“watch out for your souls, as those who must give account”** (v. 17c). They must give an account to the great Shepherd of the flock. To those who are elders, watch out! Don’t think that you are heading up the church and that it is your responsibility. You will have to give an account when the Chief Shepherd appears (1 Pet. 5:4) – will you be in trouble or not? Think about it! And when He comes, don’t blame the church or the saints! The Lord will not blame the church but blame you. Even the world knows that if things go wrong, the CEO gets fired, not the employees. If you want to be a CEO then be a good one, who takes good care of your employees. If you take care of the saints, do it properly. You don’t need to command them to listen to you; they will automatically take your advice because of respect.

It is not easy to be a good shepherd. A shepherd is not about teaching sheep but feeding and nourishing them. The Lord told us that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11, 15). He is our Good Shepherd; He is the great example! If you want the saints to grow and go on in their spiritual life, to be transformed in their souls, and to be saved to the uttermost through the Lord Jesus, then the way is to lay

down your life for them. John said, *“By this we know love because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren”* (1 John 3:16). This is the way to be a leading brother, or the better word is serving brother, because you are serving the saints, not the other way around!

The elders must also **have a good conscience** (Acts 23:1; 24:16). The problem of many of the leading ones is that they no longer have a good conscience that functions properly because they are used to ruling: if they don't like someone or if someone doesn't listen to them, they get rid of you. Such a person has no more conscience with regards to taking care of the brothers and sisters and has lost that particular feeling for the saints because he is so used to being the boss. It is very hard for a boss to become an employee because it is the boss's habit to tell other people what to do. Nobody can tell the boss what to do. If somebody criticizes him, that person is finished. Do not be like that! No one is perfect. I appreciate it if you tell me that I'm wrong. If I am really wrong, then I will tell you, *“Thank you for telling me!”* If you have a good conscience before God and before man, then you will be a good brother shepherding the church.

They must also **in all things desire to live honorably** (Heb. 13:18). If you are such a serving one in the church, you will not need to demand anyone to listen to you or to obey you. Also, it will not matter – if they are not submissive to you, you cannot force them. Have you always been submissive to God? Certainly not! Did God kick you out, show you the door, say *“You're no longer My son,”* or *“I'm going to take away your salvation”*? No, that is not how God treats you; then why would you treat other people like that?

In Matthew 18, when Peter asked the Lord if forgiving someone seven times was enough. the Lord answered that he should forgive up to seventy times seven times (Matt. 18:21-22) – that means you must always forgive! Peter probably thought, *“Who can do that? I can't make it!”* So, the Lord told the story of the servant who owed his master so much and begged for forgiveness. And his master forgave him all the debt he owed him! But then he went out and saw a fellow servant who just owed him very little, and wrung his neck telling him to pay the debt.

He couldn't pay, so that servant threw him into prison. Then his fellow servants reported him to the master; and the master called that servant back: *"...I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him"* (Matt. 18:32b-34). This is not just a story – remember it! May the Lord help us to remember our own condition. Then we will be compassionate to those who are suffering because we have gone through suffering ourselves. So, any who are bearing any responsibility must learn this – elders, children's meeting teachers, or any kind of service as a deacon.

Who Have Spoken the Word of God to You

*"Remember those who lead you, **who have spoken the word of God to you**"* (Heb. 13:7a), not those who just give sermons or teach you doctrine. God needs people to speak today. The Lord used the apostles to speak; they spoke through the Holy Spirit, through Christ in them. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you"* (2 Cor. 13:3). It was not Paul but Christ who was speaking; and that speaking was powerful in those who heard it and penetrated their hearts. That does not mean the saints should just believe everything that leading ones say. Remember Paul spoke of the Bereans, who were more honorable, because they checked every word in the Scripture to see if what Paul spoke was true or not (Acts 17:11). Don't just accept everything and take it for granted but go home and check it out to see if what they are speaking is according to the word of God or whether they are speaking nonsense. Once a pastor told his congregation, "There should be no divorce according to the Bible. But I'll teach you how to pray – pray that your husband will die quickly so you can marry someone else." Everybody laughed as if it were a joke. Would you still listen to that kind of speaking? That is not the word of God; that is the word of the devil! So, do not only observe attentively and closely that what the leading ones are saying is according to the word of God, but also be more honorable and more noble by checking it out yourself in the word of God.

If you are mature in life, you will not listen to such “junk” and do not need people to teach you all the time. Hebrews 5:12 says, *“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again...and you have come to need milk and not solid food.”* That is why we all need to grow. If you don’t grow, you will forever be stuck in the same place. You don’t go back to elementary school or college because you have graduated, and now you should be teaching others. You don’t call your professors every day to ask them what you should do for every little detail at work. Then why do you spiritually still need your pastor every Sunday? I’m so glad that most of the time we are bringing wonderful offerings of Christ to the Father. This is normal and is well pleasing to God – to serve God acceptably by bringing Him the best offerings like Abel. And in bringing the offerings to the Father, it should be the best; and then the Father will share the best part with the priesthood. That is why we are enjoying these wonderful offerings to the Father because He gives the best part to the priesthood! God told the priesthood, *“I am your portion and your inheritance”* (Num. 18:20b). You get the best!

Then the saints must also **observe attentively the outcome of the conduct of those who are leading them and imitate their faith.**

“Remember those who lead you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow considering the outcome of their conduct” (Heb. 13:7). The Lord told His disciples to do what the Pharisees said but not what they did (Matt. 23:3). The Pharisees spoke the commandments but did not live according to them – their lifestyle was different from what they spoke. Paul said to follow the faith of those who lead you *“considering the outcome of their conduct,”* their manner of life. Don’t just listen to a speaker’s wonderful message and lift him up. That will result in people respecting the speakers more than they fear God. That is not good! To “consider” in Greek means “to observe carefully” – consider the outcome of their conduct. In the past, we have experienced unrighteous and gross conduct in some churches, but those things were not addressed because the messages were good. So what if the messages are wonderful? Does God care about the good messages more than what is really happening in their life? Our God is a righteous God; He is not a blind God! So, the last part of this verse is very important. Consider, carefully observe, the outcome of their conduct.

The leading ones should be the examples of the flock. You are not an example through your teachings, but by your conduct – your conduct speaks more than your words. That’s why I don’t understand why many people want to be elders. Can you imagine a nine-year old wanting to be an elder? The very name “elder” indicates that this person is more mature in life. And if you are more mature in your spiritual life, you will be an example to the saints. That is the way to lead. If you don’t do it but ask others to do it, you are a Pharisee. But if you are an example, you must do it first. So, imitate the faith of those who are good examples.

And do not be blind followers of blind leaders. The Lord said this several times; it is a very strong warning. If you are a blind follower of blind leaders, then you will both fall into the pit (Matt. 15:14), not just the leader! So, whose fault is it? Both. Don’t blame the blind leader if you follow him blindly – then you must also blame yourself.

Have a spirit of discernment. 1 Corinthians 14:29 says, *“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.”* The verse does not say that the others should follow blindly and say “Amen.” The prophets are not perfect! The saints should discern and judge. Will you judge the prophet? Yes! Otherwise, the prophet can just say anything he likes. Everyone should discern, should judge, not just blindly say “Amen” (even before he has finished speaking). So, say “Amen” slower, not so quickly. Have the spirit of discernment as the Bereans did.

Then you must **go on to maturity and be perfected.** That is the way that we honor those who lead us.

Finally, **pray for the serving ones** (Heb. 13:18a). Don’t think they don’t need prayer. They need more prayer because they are under the attack of the enemy. If they don’t do the job right, and the whole flock is following, they will bring the whole flock into the pit, not just themselves.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Jesus Christ never changes; but people who think they are rulers change

all the time. Our Lord does not change because He is the absolute truth. There is no need for Him to change. He is almighty, all powerful; His wisdom is infinite; whatever He says is always right. But what we understand concerning His living, powerful word should always be growing and becoming richer and more wonderful. God Himself as God does not need to change. We need to change – for the better and not for the worse! *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”* This verse is inserted between 7 and 9, because those who lead (v. 7) and doctrines (v. 9) may change, but the Lord does not. Therefore, you must know the Lord regardless of people or doctrines. The main thing is to know this wonderful Christ! You can only know more about Him; but He Himself will never change.

“Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines” (Heb. 13:9a). The example of the minister who said you should pray for your husband to die is not only strange but evil. Though everyone laughed, do you think God and the myriads of angels watching were laughing? The devil is the one who is laughing in such a situation. The only way not to be carried about with strange doctrines is to grow and mature in life. Paul said, *“that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting”* (Eph. 4:14). *“For it is a good thing that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them”* (Heb. 13:9b). In the early days people came together to eat and drink with food from the sacrifices. Good food is not a good reason to come together for the conference; we come here because we have heavenly food; we come to gain Christ.

I hope we all learn something from Paul, especially after having gone through so many situations all these years. We are always learning to go on, to press toward the goal. Praise God! May the Lord bless these words and write them in our hearts so that we learn and mingle them with faith and thank God!

Note: The above content has not been reviewed by the speaker.