

Hebrews 13:17-25
October 23, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We are wrapping up our study in Hebrews today. We will process the author's remaining suggestions to these young Christians. To help us get started:

Q: Most of us have been employed and therefore have had a boss you reported to. When you think about the supervisors or managers who had authority over you, which ones were easy for you to submit to and why?

The idea of obeying or yielding to your manager's authority is straightforward. If you don't do what you're told and don't do it well, then you will be dismissed. For the benefits your employer is willing to give you, it is understood that you will perform your job well in return for those benefits.

Transition: But today's lesson addresses obeying and submitting to our spiritual leaders. This is not a contractual relationship! When we join a local church, we are implicitly agreeing to be under the authority of our pastor. Let's read the text and then let's process this further.

All of us CAN bring joy to our spiritual leaders BY choosing to obey them and submit to their authority.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.17:

- 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.

V.18:

- Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.

V.19:

- I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon. (Specific prayer request)

V.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,

V.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.

V.22:

- Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.

V.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.

V.24:

- Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

V.25:

- Grace be with you all.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.17: The author has another request of his readers with regard to their spiritual leaders. What is it? [Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.]

Q: Why is it important to obey or submit to your spiritual leaders and 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.]

Q: So what does submitting to your spiritual leaders and their authority look like? [Let people engage]

Q: Is there ever a time that we shouldn't obey or submit to our spiritual leaders? [If there is false teaching or a leader persists in immorality, then no. X-REF Acts 17:11 (test the teaching), I Thess 5:21-22 (commanded to test all things)]

Note: A Christian leader who is a false teacher or immoral should be rebuked to encourage reform (Titus 1:13), and cannot separate his ministry from his life, expecting God to bless his preaching while privately he sins; he is "disqualified for every good work" (vv. 15-16).

Q: Who does the spiritual leader give account to for the people they shepherd? [The Lord]

Q: How does a spiritual leader know that they are doing a good job shepherding their people? What are the metrics? If it's spiritual growth, how is that measured? [Let people engage]

Q: The author offers a benefit that we give our spiritual leaders if we obey them. What is it? [Joy! The last thing we need to be is a "burden" to our leaders.]

Observation: Before we go to the next verse, I just want to make sure no one thinks that pastors are allowed to be dictators. "Neither [be] lords over God's heritage" (1 Peter 5:3). Some church members have a flippant attitude toward pastoral authority, and this is dangerous. One day every pastor will have to give an account of his ministry to the Lord, and he wants to be able to do it with joy.

Q V.18-19: As the author concludes his letter, what is his request? [Pray for us!]

Q: Why is it important to pray for our spiritual leaders? [Let people engage – spiritual warfare is alive and well]

Q: What is his specific request? [That the Lord would restore him to his fellow believers]

Observation: This may not seem significant, but this author appears to be a strong spiritual leader who wants to come along beside his struggling brothers and sisters in Christ.

Q: Would you go to this extent to encourage a believer who is really down? How far have you traveled to encourage a discouraged friend or family member? [Let people engage]

Q V.20-21: The author prays a blessing over his young believers. First, how does he describe Jesus? [Resurrected and the Great Shepherd of the sheep]

Q: Why do you think the author wanted to emphasize that Jesus was the Great Shepherd of the sheep? Jesus is obviously many things! [Let people engage]

Q: What does the author want the God of peace to do for his people? [That the Lord would equip them with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ.]

Point of Encouragement: X-Ref I Thess 5:24 “The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

Observation: Of all the things he could pray, his prayer presupposes that these discouraged believers won’t bail, but instead anticipate being “equipped with everything good for doing the Lord’s will.]

Rhetorical Q v.22: Don’t you just love that this author thinks he’s written a “short” letter?!

Q: As we wrap up our last lesson of Hebrews, I want you to consider this author. For example, what did you most appreciate about his letter? Or do you find this author to be a strong spiritual leader. If yes, why? [The author knows that these discouraged Christians made the biggest decision of their life. He went above and beyond to reach out to them until he could be reunited with them. If it was your child who made a decision for Jesus and then he/she became disillusioned with being a Christ-follower, wouldn’t you do everything possible to help them turn the corner? There is so much at stake!]

LOOK:

As we interact with our family and friends, let’s be spiritually sensitive to those who are discouraged and follow the lead of this author. ELEVATE the superiority of JESUS!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 328-331). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Submitting to Spiritual Leadership (Heb. 13:17, 24)

Three times the writer used the designation, “Them that have the rule over you.” The phrase refers to the spiritual leaders of the local assemblies. The church is an organism, but it is also an organization. If an organism is not organized, it will die! Wherever Paul went, he founded local churches and ordained qualified believers to lead them (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). “Saints ... bishops [elders], and deacons” (Phil. 1:1) summarize the membership and leadership of the New Testament churches.

Obey them (v. 17). When a servant of God is in the will of God, teaching the Word of God, the people of God should submit and obey. This does not mean that pastors should be dictators. “Neither [be] lords over God’s heritage” (1 Peter 5:3). Some church members have a flippant attitude toward pastoral authority, and this is dangerous. One day every pastor will have to give an account of his ministry to the Lord, and he wants to be able to do it with joy. A disobedient Christian will find on that day that the results of disobedience are unprofitable, not for the pastor, but for himself.

Quite frankly, it is much easier to “win souls” than it is to “watch for souls” (see Ezek. 3:16–21). The larger a church grows, the more difficult it becomes to care for the sheep. Sad to say, there are some ministers whose only work is to preach and “run the program”; they have no desire to minister to the souls placed in their care. Some are even “hirelings” who work only for money, and who run away when danger is near (John 10:11–14). However, when a shepherd is faithful to watch for souls, it is important that the sheep obey him.

Greet them (v. 24). The Jews used to greet each other with “Shalom—peace!” The Greeks often greeted one another with “Grace!” Paul combined these two and greeted the saints with, “Grace and peace be unto you!” (1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; and all his epistles except 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. When Paul wrote to pastors, he greeted them with, “Grace, *mercy*, and peace.” I wonder why?)

Of course, the writer of the Hebrew epistle was sending his personal greetings to the leaders of the church; but this is a good example for all of us to follow. *Every Christian should be on speaking terms with his pastor.* Never allow any “root of bitterness” to grow up in your heart (Heb. 12:15) because it will only poison you and hurt the whole church.

While it is true that each member of a local body has an important ministry to perform, it is also true that God has ordained spiritual leaders in the church. I have been privileged to preach in many churches in America, and I have noticed that where the people permit the pastors (elders) to lead, there is usually blessing and growth. I am not talking about highhanded, egotistical dictatorship, but true spiritual leadership. This is God’s pattern for the church.

Next the writer emphasizes the importance of *prayer* (Heb. 13:18–19). He was unable to visit the readers personally, but he did want their prayer help. It is possible that some of his enemies had lied about him, so he affirms his honesty and integrity. We do not know for certain who the writer was. Many think it was Paul. The reference to Timothy in Hebrews 13:23 would suggest Paul, as would also the “benediction of grace” in Hebrews 13:25 (see 2 Thes. 3:17–18). Some scholars have suggested that Peter referred to Paul’s authorship of Hebrews (2 Peter 3:15–

16); but that statement could also be applied to things Paul wrote in Romans. We do not know the name of the human writer of this book, nor is it important that we do.

Experiencing Spiritual Lordship (Heb. 13:20–21)

This benediction seems to gather together the major themes of Hebrews: peace, the resurrected Christ, the blood, the covenant, spiritual perfection (maturity), God's work in the believer. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ *died* for the sheep (John 10:11). As the Great Shepherd, He *lives* for the sheep in heaven today, working on their behalf. As the Chief Shepherd, He will *come for the sheep* at His return (1 Peter 5:4). Our Shepherd cares for His own in the past, present, and future. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Our Great High Priest is also our Great Shepherd. When He was on earth, He worked *for* us when He completed the great work of redemption (John 17:4). Now that He is in heaven, He is working *in us* to mature us in His will and bring us to a place of spiritual perfection. We will never reach that place until He returns (1 John 2:28–3:3); but while we are waiting, we are told to continue to grow.

The phrase “make you perfect” (**Heb. 13:21**) is the translation of one Greek word, *KATARTIDZO*. This is an unfamiliar word to us, but it was familiar to the people who received this letter. The doctors knew it because it meant “to set a broken bone.” To fishermen it meant “to mend a broken net” (see Matt. 4:21). To sailors it meant “to outfit a ship for a voyage.” To soldiers it meant “to equip an army for battle.”

Our Saviour in heaven wants to equip us for life on earth. Tenderly, He wants to set the “broken bones” in our lives so that we might walk straight and run our life-races successfully. He wants to repair the breaks in the nets so that we might catch fish and win souls. He wants to equip us for battle and outfit us so that we will not be battered in the storms of life. In brief, He wants to mature us so that He can work *in* us and *through* us that which pleases Him and accomplishes His will.

How does He equip us? By tracing this word *KATARTIDZO* in the New Testament, we can discover the tools that God uses to mature and equip His children. He uses the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17) and prayer (1 Thes. 3:10) in the fellowship of the local church (Eph. 4:11–12). He also uses individual believers to equip us and mend us (Gal. 6:1). Finally, He uses suffering to perfect His children (1 Peter 5:10), and this relates to what we learned from Hebrews 12 about chastening.

What a difference it would make in our lives if we would turn Hebrews 13:20–21 into a personal prayer each day. “Lord, make me perfect in every good work to do Thy will. Work in me that which is well-pleasing in Thy sight. Do it through Jesus Christ and may He receive the glory.”

The basis for this marvelous work is “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (**Heb. 13:20**). This is the New Covenant that was discussed in Hebrews 8, a covenant based on the sacrifice discussed in Hebrews 10. Because this New Covenant was a part of God's eternal plan of salvation, and because it guarantees everlasting life, it is called “the everlasting covenant.” But apart from the death of Jesus Christ, we can share in none of the blessings named in this profound benediction.

The “Amen” at the end of the benediction closed the body of the epistle. All that remained was for the writer to add a few words of greeting and personal information.

He had written a long letter, and in it he had dealt with some profound and difficult doctrines; so he encouraged his readers to “bear with [suffer]” this letter of encouragement. This seems like a long letter to us, but he felt it was just a “few words.” No doubt some members of the congregation responded negatively to this letter, while others received it and acted on it. Paul (1 Thes. 2:13) tells us how we should respond to God’s Word. Read the verse carefully—and practice it.

What Timothy’s relationship to the group was, we do not know. He was a prominent minister in that day and most of the Christians would either know him or know about him. These personal touches remind us that God is interested in individuals and not just in groups of people.

“They of Italy salute you” (**Heb. 13:24**) could mean that the writer was in Italy at the time, or that saints from Italy were with him and wanted to send their greetings.

These personal references at the end of the letter raise questions that we cannot answer now. But the total impact of Hebrews answers the important question, “How can I stand firm in a world that is shaking all around me?” The answer: know the superior Person, Jesus Christ; trust His superior priesthood; and live by the superior principle of faith. Build your life on the things of heaven that will never shake. Be confident! Jesus Christ saves to the uttermost!

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 812). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

13:17. If former **leaders** were to be remembered and their teachings retained (vv. 7–8), present ones were to be obeyed. Their responsibility before God was to be recognized and their shepherding tasks should not be complicated by disobedience. (**So that their work will be a joy** possibly should be, “so their accounting [to God for you] may be with joy.”)

13:18–19. With that same sense of spiritual humility that led him to use “we” in most of his warning sections, the writer requested the prayers of his readers, and **particularly** that he might **be restored to them soon**. His interest in them was personal, and he was eager to see them.

13:20–21. In a lovely benediction which captures a number of the major themes of the epistle (e.g., **peace, blood, covenant**, Resurrection, **Shepherd, equip**), the writer expressed confidence in **our Lord Jesus** as the **Great Shepherd** of New-Covenant people, through whom God was able to effect His will (equip is *katartisai*, “to prepare, make ready for use”; cf. Eph. 4:12) in the readers and in himself. This indeed is what he prayed for his readers.

13:22–25. Urging once again that his readers **bear with his word of exhortation**, he expressed the hope that he and **Timothy** would soon **see** them. After giving them greetings, he committed them to God’s **grace**.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1838). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

13:20 Skeptics often object that God cannot be a “God of peace” since the OT portrays Him as a God of war who ordered people to be killed. These characteristics, however, are not incompatible. The Lord loves peace, but He also combats unrighteousness and those who act

contrary to His purposes. People can be the same way—peaceful by nature but willing to fight when times call for it.

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