

Your Elders' Joy (JL 111) Heb 13:17 Sunday, December 31, 2006

Hebrews chapter 13.

I thought I'd share with you some things that are
specific for us as we seek to OBEY this commandment
of Scripture as a congregation.

verse 17:

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

verse 17 is the **last** of a series of commands in chapter 13
that are offered by the writer of Hebrews
in light of the ***unshakable kingdom*** we have received.

Described in the end of chapter 12

Here God speaks of the *end of the age* –
when He will *shake everything that can be shaken ...*
and **He does so** *in order to*
show the things which **cannot be shaken**
which *remain.*

verse 28 ...

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

*In light of the glorious gift of eternal life –
an **unshakable** gift,*

the writer of Hebrews **challenges us** to *show gratitude* by
offering to God acceptable service ...

The service to which He calls the Christian
is **detailed** in chapter 13 in a series of commandments

Hebrews 13

1 Let love of the brethren continue.

2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

5 Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have;

for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," so that we confidently say,

***"The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.
What shall man do to me?"***

Next commandment ... verse 7 ...

**7 Remember those who led you, [who's that?]
*who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.***

***Remember them who spoke the word of God to you.
Spoke – is past tense ...***

This was probably not referring to their **present elders**,
but likely those **apostles** and **evangelists** who
established their church.

Here we find the **justification** for us to
remember saints of the past.

Not to venerate, **not** to make an *altar* or *statue*.

But ***remember them*** in order that we might ***imitate their faith.***

Read a good **Christian biography** – so that you can

Consider men of old who spoke the Word of God
who *lived a godly life* –
and whom *you may imitate.*

Not just *any* men – but men who have
finished the race well ...
men whom we can look at the
result of their conduct.

We **must** have a *healthy admiration* of
saints of ages past
who ***completed the race with honor.***

There is a **handing down** of the *baton* from
generation to generation –
from the **apostles** who first laid hands on faithful men
who then **entrusted** *other faithful men*
who were then sent out ...
and *on and on to this day* –
it continues
as **churches**, *as imperfect as they may be*,
recognize and **ordain** men to the ministry.

I had a man ask me about *whether he should start a church*,
he believed he was *called to be a pastor.*

My **recommendation** to him was that *if he was called*,
that there would be a **body** with which he could minister
– that can **recognize** his gifting and
lay hands upon him to serve as a pastor.

That is the pattern established by the early church,
and we **must** continue this pattern today.

Yet, I hear it *all the time* ...
God can do whatever He wants –
God even used a donkey ...

well, yes, indeed *God can do whatever He wants –*
*however, He usually works with **normative means** ...*

God has not changed his plan for the church
just because we live in apostasy ...

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever.

The next command ...

9 Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited.

This **command** is linked to

remembering those who spoke the Word of God to you,
and *imitating their faith.*

If we are *imitating the faith* *godly men and women*
of the past, we are on good ground –

we are *less likely* to be
carried away by strange teachings.

This is why as we are **establishing the** fundamentals
of *Bread of Life* –
we are **not** looking to break any new ground.

I am **very wary** when *all you hear about* is how
God is doing a new thing

Those **promises** are promises of the New Covenant ...
and yes, *in our lives*,
He is *continually making all things new* ...

But when it comes to the church,
we are **not** to *seek after new things* ...
the church should **not** be *characterized*
by constant change
with the whims and shifting sands of time

Thus,
We have made it our duty to examine the old paths –
the *paths followed by many a saint*
from *generation to generation*.

Much of the **modern church**, in its pride thinks that
it needs to **reinvent the church**.

We see this in all of the movements – from *revivalism* –
to *Purpose-Drivenness* –
on to today's Emergent church phenomenon.

(all the result of **not clinging** to the *old paths*)

We have not sought to be *anything "new"*

Rather, we have sought to **utilize**
ancient confessions and **creeds**

I was *speaking with a person* once who is **beginning a church**
– choosing rather to **not use any established creed** ...

he said something along the lines
that **put into question** the eternality of the Son of God
– *as if to suggest* that
we could not be sure that there *always was* a **Trinity** ...

It is when the church left the *old paths* that
most of today's thriving cults came into existence.

We realize the **errors of history** and the **false church**
and **false traditions of men**, but we also *remember* ...

The work of God's Holy Spirit in His church
through the generations.

Skip down to verse 14 which again sets our minds
on the ultimate reason for all of these **commands** ...

*For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are
seeking the city which is to come.*

the next commands ... Verse 15

*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a
sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that
give thanks to His name.*

We are to be *speaking to one another* with *thankful words*.

Eph 5:19-21 reminds us:

*speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual
songs, singing and making melody with your heart to
the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the
name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;
and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.*

We are to *sing praises to Him*.

We **sing** because it is a joy to sing

We **sing** because we are grateful

And we **sing**, because God commands us to do so.

Next command,

And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

And the last general command in verse 17,

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.

And here is where I want to *settle in* and **talk about** *briefly* today:

The importance of **godly leadership** in the church cannot be overestimated.

J. Oswald Sanders in his very widely read book *Spiritual Leadership* has written,

“The church has always prospered most when it has been blessed with strong, spiritual leaders ...”.

While the vitality and health of a church **depends greatly** upon its leaders, *on the other hand*, **certain responsibilities** are also placed upon its members.

Our text in Heb 13 tells us that the responsibility of making church life a joy and *not a burden* is placed upon its people.

This command to *obey those who rule over you* is not an unusual command.

The principle of authority and submission is woven into the fabric of every God-ordained institution (family Eph 5:21, government Rom 13:1).

Submission to authority is *necessary* for the proper ordering of society, and **the church is no exception**.

In fact the **church** should be **the example** and **model** in its **submission** –
as our **submission to God** will *naturally result in*
our **submission to human authorities ordained by God** –

whether they be our **governing authorities**,
our **supervisors at work**,
husbands and fathers in the home,
and **elders in the church**.

Where individual church members **choose to act** in *their own stubbornness*
or *in rebellion*,
or even in **preferring to do things** “*their way*”
than *with their church* ...
this will **adversely effect** the *whole body*.

We can't set out from harbor, if certain parties **refuse to get on board!**

We can't grow together as a unit, if some members **prefer their own thing**

All of this is said, *fully realizing* and *admitting* that **many**
church leaders have **usurped authority** and
have **dominated** *as a monarch*,
rather than **guided** and **led** *as a shepherd*.

Neither am I suggesting that **church members** should **blindly obey**
their elders.

Neither does this provide the basis for **authoritarian churches**
to **require members** to **submit every life-decision**
to the **discretion of their elders**.

Also, it should not be overlooked that
the people to whom this is written are **called upon**
to **submit to a plurality of leaders**.

It does **not say**, “*Obey your leader*,” but “**leaderS**.”

With these *caveats* in mind,
the elders of a church,
divested of any trappings of absolute rule,
must be **appreciated**,
*not so much for His **performance**,*
but *because of the very nature of **His calling**.*

1 Thess 5:12-13

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, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

We should be **motivated** to **obey** and **submit**
not based upon *personal feelings* toward a man or
whether we believe he has ‘earned our respect,’
but in *simple **obedience to God** who appointed them as overseers.*

Perhaps *besides the presidency*, the **pastorate** is the most
maligned of all callings.

People believe that pastors should be **super-human** ...

While *the man of God* who **leads the church**
must hold to a group of **Biblical standards**,

Pastors are **humans** who have been given a **great entrustment**,
an **entrustment *far greater than*** what a **man can handle** –
in **many ways**.

Pastors need **prayer** and **support** ...
yet they are *too often* the **target of criticism**.

This must not be – and to do such is a **violation of God’s command**.

Hebrews 13 continues as to *WHY* we must **obey** and **submit** ...

For they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.

While an **elder** *provides care* and *counsel* in **temporal matters**,
he is *primarily concerned* with the **eternal welfare of your soul**.

He must *always* keep before his mind's eye
that one day he will be challenged with the question,

“how did the saints fare on my watch?”

We find in Ezekiel 3 ...

That God held the **watchman of Israel**
accountable to warn the flock of God.

17 "Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die'; and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.

WE watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.

What a responsibility!

The assumption of Hebrew 13:17 is that **elders work** with a **keen sense**
that this **accounting awaits them**,
so we *therefore* **look after you**
as *conscientiously* and *wisely*
as we would **our own family**.

Paul knew that *as a shepherd* he bore the responsibility of the blood

As he was preparing to leave Ephesus
after spending 3 years with the Ephesian church ... in Acts 20:25-28

*25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more.
26 "Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the WHOLE PURPOSE of God.*

Then in verse 28, he lays the **same charge** on the elders who would follow after him.

28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

*Sadly today, there are **many men** who stand in pulpits who do not take this charge seriously ... they shrink *back from declaring the **WHOLE COUNSEL of God*** ... and so are not innocent of the blood of those who listen to them.*

Considering the **weight of this responsibility, the church**
THEN
is called upon to make their leader's work a *joy* and *great advantage to all*.

Heb 13:17

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.

The writer of *Hebrews*, up to this point has show the eternal reasons for the commands given, but here he gives a temporal reason.
He says, **obey this, because if you don't it will hurt YOU!**

If one is the **cause of grief** to his elder, they **bring grief** upon themselves and their church.

your own spiritual welfare is **tied**
to how others in the church **treat and respond** to your elders.

It is the **responsibility** of the church,
to *see* that its elders shepherd **with joy** .

A church that is hampered with **intramural affairs**
cannot be as **effective** in leading the flock ,
as the **energy** of the pastors is **diverted** from
 teaching and discipleship
to settling quarrels or dispelling rumors ,
or answering complaints .

Our spiritual welfare as a church is tied to *how you and others*
 in our church **treat and respond** to the elders .

So it would only seem appropriate that we *be diligent*
to *preserve the spirit of unity and the bond of peace*
 in our congregation by **keeping an eye out**
for **matters** that *might*
 keep your elders from **doing** what **we are called to do** .

So how can you practically obey this commandment?

John Owen points out that the **joy** or **grief** of the elder
comes **directly** out of his **requirement**
 to give an account for *the souls of his people* .

Which is what the text certainly suggests ...

**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 ,**

Do *WHAT* with **joy** and not with **grief** ?

keep watch over your souls, as one who will give an account

As we, as your pastors *think about* the
account that we have to give for your soul,
it either brings joy or grief.

False teaching and spiritual pitfalls **abound!**

At times it feels as though we are a **flock** that is **grazing** at the top of a cliff.

It is your **elders responsibility** to be a **watchman** *of your souls*.

We are *constantly* **considering** and **guarding** –
seeking out *your* **best interests**.

As the shepherd leads his flock from *pasture to pasture*,
avoiding the **dangerous grounds** ...
likewise we are leading amidst great danger.

And there are times when I sit down to pray and
consider the congregation,
and am in great distress as I *consider*
the **path** of sheep given to our care.

This brings great grief.

And there are times when I sit down to pray,
with my list in front of me, and I think ...
the flock is going in the right direction –
(of course everyone having their *ups and downs*,
but overall we're heading in the same direction.)

Such is a joy.

So as your elders consider that *we must give an account for your souls* –
it is YOUR duty then,
to make this a joy,
HOW?

by **obeying Jesus Christ, obeying the Word of God** –
and *growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ*.

John Owen writes:

The duty is urged, “*that they may give their account with joy.*”
It is matter of the **greatest joy** unto the pastors of the churches,
when they find the **souls** of them committed unto their charge
thriving under their ministry.

And when they give their account with praise, it fills their hearts
with joy.

And this, on many accounts, is profitable
for the church itself.

They will *quickly find the effects of the joy*
of their elders in their account,
by the **cheerful exercise of their ministry** ...

But Owen, continues ...

The sadness of the hearts of ministers of the gospel,
upon the **unprofitableness** of the people under their ministry,
... is not easy to be expressed.

With **what sighing, what groaning,** (as the word signifies,)
what mourning, their accounts unto Christ are
accompanied.

When it is like this, although they alone bear the burden
and **trouble of it, yet**

it is also **unprofitable** for the people,
both *here* and *hereafter.*

It is, and will be so, in the discouragement of their elders,
in the displeasure of Christ,
and in all the **severe consequents**
which will ensue thereon.

How can YOU as a church member bring joy to your elders?

Love Christ – please Him – obey His commands – *grow in grace!*

Let me offer a ten suggestions in closing –

- 1) Your elders ***rejoice*** as you articulate a clear and sincere **profession of faith**.

it *brings us joy* to hear you speak of *your justification*, and *know* that *your sin has not been imputed to you*.

Your Elders rejoice as we are assured of your salvation.

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? For you are our glory and joy.

Philp 1:3-6

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

- 2) Your elders ***rejoice*** as they see you walking in obedience, living a life **consistent with your profession**.

3 Jo 3-4

For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

3) Your elders **rejoice** as they see you **pursuing the unity of the body** (Phil 2:1-2);

Philp 2:1-2

make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

It brings us **great joy** to see you meet each other's needs – and **helping each other** –

Mark Dever writes:

*Friendship is one of the primary means of grace the Lord uses to keep church members **growing in grace** and bound to one another—like the sinews between muscles. Friendship helps church members to fight sin, disciple younger Christians, and spur one another on to love and good deeds. ... So a pastor who practices and encourages healthy [fellowship] in his congregation is building transmission lines between individuals for the free exchange of gospel goods.*

4) Your elders' **rejoice** as they know of your **prayers for them**

2 Cor 1:10-11

... And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many.

It is a **great joy** to know that you pray for us.

I am **particularly encouraged** to hear when one prays before service for the **message preached** – when I *hear* that prayer,

5) Your elders' **rejoice** as you express your **love** and **dependability** to them

2 Cor 7:5-7

For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.

This begins with simply attending regularly.

How can we ***give an account for you soul*** if we don't see you?

Your elders **rejoice** to **see you**!

Not just because you fill up a seat –
but we **rejoice** to **see your faces**.

We can tell *a lot* by the way you **look**.

6) Your Elders **rejoice** as you *voluntarily* seek their **counsel** and **direction**;

There are so many life decisions and choices we make.

And I know that the Holy Spirit is the One
with whom we must deliberate in making decisions ...

however, *the Holy Spirit has given you overseers ...*
who *must give an account for your soul*.

It is **good** to *discuss major life choices* with your elders.

“I’m praying about this relationship – what do you think?”

7) Your Elders rejoice as you receive their reproof with gratefulness;

This is a hard one ...

in today's church it is **just too easy** to deal with discipline,
by simply picking up and going to another church.

Few people when confronted with sin,
think that THEY just might be wrong.

Again, it is **very difficult** to *for us* confront – to exhort – to admonish –
but *that* is **what** we are called to do as elders.

If we ever need to offer you a loving rebuke,
realize that **we'd rather not**,
but that we deem it for your best –
as having to give an account.

If we warn you, it is *because we must watch over your souls*.

So don't disdain it, listen and when the
admonition is godly and sound,
obey and submit,

*despise not ... the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou
art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loves he chastens,*
(Heb 12:5-6)

8) Your elders rejoice as you believe the best about them (1 Tim 5:19).

1 Tim 5:19

*Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the
basis of two or three witnesses.*

If you hear an accusation made against your pastors ...
you **MUST dismiss it** –
it is your DUTY to strike it from the record –
not even consider it –
throw it out of your mind –

unless it come in the *mouths of two or three witnesses*.
9) **Your Elders rejoice** as you work alongside them in ministry.

Philp 1:3-5

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

...

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

The Bible doesn't simply tell Christians to attend church, it tells them to plot, plan, conspire, contrive, and design how to *stir up brothers and sisters to love and good works*.

10) **Your Elders rejoice** when they know that you care about their needs.

1 Tim 5:17-18

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

Thank you!