



Hebrews 13:17
Beware of the Sheep

Heb. 13:17 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.

Tonight we will be installing Dr. David Olson as an Elder of the church, and I was considering what to preach on for that occasion, my mind kept coming back to this verse, and to Peter's similar admonition in 1 Peter 5:1-5. Because I am convinced that verses like this one, that speak of the duties of Church members to the elders of the church, are some of the least known and these days, most necessary to be known verses in the bible. And certainly unless a church body has some elementary grasp of these concepts, and a willingness to put them into action, then the ministry of even the best elders will inevitably fail.

Because if sheep are absolutely resistant to being shepherded, then the ministry of the shepherd will be without joy and filled with grief. Verses like this make clear in fact, that whether or not an elders time acting as an overseer will be a time of joy, or a time of grief, not only depends upon his own relationship to the Lord and His faithfulness to His calling, but also to the disposition of the flock. Will they submit to His oversight?

In this regard, I will confess that while my time as an overseer has not been without heartaches, it has been much, much easier than the time many of my fellow elders have experienced. I remember a time in a candidates committee when we were talking with a young man who had just finished an pastoral internship, and I asked him what was the most important lesson he had learned during that time. He answered immediately, "*Sheep Bite!*" Another brother I spent a few hours speaking to last week, who has met constant resistance since he entered the pastorate of a particular church, commented that he felt that there should have been a sign on the front door of his church saying. "**Beware of the Sheep**"

I daresay that these men, and countless others like them were not the greatest shepherds who have ever walked the face of the earth, they were no Spurgeons, or Lloyd-Jones', or Baxters, or Calvins, but they were not bad elders, not bad shepherds. And there was no reason that their ministry to the sheep HAD to be unprofitable but they were, so I'd like to share some ways in which you, as sheep, can work to make the ministry of those who rule over you PROFITABLE. Not for the sake of the shepherds alone, but for your sake.

I. The first instruction that we find in this verse is to "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive" Now we need to be willing to admit that this is hard for modern Americans generally to

do. We live in an age when people want to identify themselves as “spiritual but not religious” In a recent poll in Parade Magazine entitled “*How Spiritual are We?*” Even 70% those who identified themselves as “religious” indicated that they participate in organized religion sporadically or not at all.

As far as authority in the church is concerned only 17% answered “Who would you turn to first for guidance if you had a problem?” with “Spiritual leader.” We want to be sheep, but very few want to be part of the flock, and even those don’t want to hear from the shepherds. This obviously is a grievous situation. If you would prosper you must avoid this. Because it is the calling not just of the great shepherd but the undershepherds as well to watch over the sheep:

1 Peter 5:1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

So submitting to the elders is something the bible calls explicitly necessary. Now admittedly you are not called to submit to unlawful rules and mere opinions, the bible does not call people to an implicit faith. In fact the calling of elders is to teach only that which Christ has given to them he calls upon the church in Matt. 28:20 when it comes to what they should teach the disciples:

20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

But when they receive this teaching it is not merely the opinion of men ***1 Thess. 2:13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.***

JFB – “not only obey in cases where no sacrifice of self is required, and where you are persuaded they are right (so the Greek, for "obey"), but "submit yourselves" as a matter of dutiful yielding, when your judgment and natural will incline you in an opposite direction.”

The Modern attitude that makes ministry so unprofitable. Po-Motivators –SNEER *Authority - Everything other than my opinion is just someone else’s personal opinion*

Rather BE Teachable, BE willing to Obey - Christians must submit to be instructed by their ministers, and not think themselves too wise, too good, or too great, to learn from them; and, when they find that what is being taught is in keeping with the written word, they must obey them.

II. Why should you do this? Because they are given a charge to Watch out for the Sheep, to literally be a guardian of your soul

Sheep in the wilderness do not do well without shepherds.

But it is a hard calling:

2 Tim 4:2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

Acts 20:26 "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

27 "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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.

III. They will have to give an account to God someday for their ministry:

James 3:1 *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*

CHRYSOSTOM was deeply struck with these words, as he tells us [On the Priesthood, 6], "The fear of this threat continually agitates my soul."

IV. Cause them to Serve Joyfully and remember if you do not their ministry WILL be unprofitable to you - As they do their part, so do you yours.

If they give up their account with grief, it will be the people's loss as well as theirs. It is the interest of hearers that the account their ministers give of them may be with joy, and not with grief. If faithful ministers be not successful, the grief will be theirs, but the loss will be the people's. **Faithful ministers have delivered their own souls, but a fruitless and faithless people's blood and ruin will be upon their own heads.**

"It is bad when no one rings the alarm and warns, it is a thousand times worse for you and for me when we are deaf to a true warning." – Lenski

Ezek 33:2 "Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: 'When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman,

3 'when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people,

4 'then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head.

5 'He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life.

6 'But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'

7 " So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me.

8 "When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.

They must give an account how they have discharged their duty, and what has become of the souls committed to their trust, whether any have been lost through their neglect, and whether any of them have been brought in and built up under their ministry.

V. Finally remember as If they must render God an account of their negligence, so must you for your ingratitude to them [GROTIUS].

See how Paul speaks of them!

Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.