

Listening, Learning and Loving

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[0 : 00] I would like to go back to Hebrews 13 this evening to look at this last theme that we have on leadership. We are going to look at the verses particularly. I am going to switch about and get one or two verses from other places. I look at verse 17, particularly verse 17, obey your leaders and submit to their authorities. Keep watch over you as a man who must give account, obey them so that the work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Sexual immorality, that is the theme that surrounds this verse here that we have on the screens. You are not your own, you were bought with a price. That is the subject that Paul is dealing with in 1 Corinthians 6 verse 20 about being sexually pure as Christians. What has that got to do with leadership? I guess it should have a fair bit to do with leadership.

Over the years, the number of leaders that have lost their spiritual authority because a lack of sexual purity would make it particularly relevant to leaders. I would like to remind you and remind myself that there is a broader concept here that you are not your own, you were bought with a price. It relates to all of us as Christians this evening. The Holy Spirit reminds us that we are people who are under authority. Andrew was mentioned this morning that we are not our own, we have been bought with a price. Jesus in the Great Commission says all authority under heaven and earth is given to me. He says go and make disciples, teaching them to do what? Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. We have this recognition right from the beginning that we are a people who are under authority, we are people who are under Jesus authority, we are people who have been bought with a price.

We are very special, not in and of ourselves, but because of the ransom that has been paid for us, the blood of God, the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ has been shed in order for our salvation. Jesus Christ is our Lord. He is Colossians 1 before all things and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church, of which we are apart this evening. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything He might have the supremacy. So that Jesus has the supremacy in everything. Now may the God of peace see Bruce 13 who through the blood of the eternal covenant, Bokbrat, Jesus from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything for doing His will and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him. So you've got this picture that comes in many different places in the New Testament that we are a people under authority, we are people who are submitting to the Lord Jesus Christ because we are people who have been bought with a price. So we're encouraged and I'm encouraging you in this last of the series on leadership to consider in the first place that we are people who submit to our great shepherd. It spoke about in verse 20 of Hebrews 13 where we're reading the Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep. So that we're people who are to submit to this our great shepherd. Now I know that's quite probably for an urban sophisticated modern congregation, the idea of being under a great shepherd is not an easy one for us because we don't really have day to day experience of shepherding, well some do but not many have experience of shepherd but we'll hopefully unpack that a little bit in different ways and we've heard a lot about it over the years in our understanding of our relationship but we're to submit to our great, the great shepherd of the sheep.

[4 : 37] Now submission I would argue is probably a bit of a dirty word for you. I'm not sure how many of us like that word submission. It's got slavish connotations, Andrew very unhelpfully and harshly accused me of being a slave master to him this morning. How unfair!

He's had a life of lorry, it's like I'm only joking, he's worked very hard and we've struggled with every cup of coffee we've had to drink. It's all been in the name of the gospel but we do have that connotation with submission, maybe even abusive connotations and certainly in my upbringing the idea of submission had behind it the idea of defeat, being nailed to the carpet by my big brother, bending my arm backward and saying submit, submit or I'll break it and of course you shout submit

and it was that whole idea of failure, of defeat, of getting beaten by your big brother. So that goes right from our childhood, this idea of submission has not been a good thing. But I do think we have to overcome that, we have to overcome the whole thinking behind that and we recognise don't we that in the society in which we live, in the world in which we live, it's full of submission.

There's submission in the home for children, there's submission in the workplace to our bosses, there's submission in the school to our teachers, there's submission in the university to somebody I'm sure, there's submission at various levels and even probably in the anarchic society there's submission and leadership to which the anarchists will bow at one level or another. And so it's just we recognise naturally submission is there, it's part of the world in which we live but spiritually we embrace that and we take that on board because of who Jesus Christ is and Jesus Christ is Lord. And when we've been baptised, when we've confessed our faith, when we've said that we are Jesus Christ, when we've come into membership of the church, we've said Jesus Christ is our boss. Jesus

Christ is our Lord. Jesus Christ is our leader. Jesus Christ is the one to whom we submit as the eternal God. More than anyone else we could ever submit to, we are in awe of Him. I wish we were more, I wish I was more. He is the author of our life, He has given me breath today. The gifts that I have are His. He is just, He is pure, He is good, He is holy and He is my Lord. I have been made to worship and serve Him. He has redeemed me by His astonishing commitment to the cross as His image bearer I am being healed through this race. And I want to pray the Jesus prayer, not my will but yours be done. That in a sense is the core, the fundamental, the basic prayer of our lives, not my will but yours be done.

And that of course is an earthquake in our heart. It's an absolute tornado in our soul that we are making that prayer, which is a prayer for Jesus' will to be done, not our own. It challenges us at every point, in every aspect of every day of our lives. He is Lord and He is our great shepherd. This great shepherd of the sheep who, like all great shepherds, knows us, feeds us, leads us, protects us. That's His work. I think I probably told you this before, I think I might have told you this story before. It's one of Katrina's stories about her dad who is no longer with us, but her dad was a shepherd and he had probably about roughly two and a half thousand sheep at any one time and we went with him on holiday once to the borders, to a cottage in the borders and as we were driving through some of the roads even with fields on either side of them, he would be able to sort of say, I know that's my sheep, that's one of my sheep, that's one of the sheep that was sold last year, two years ago and he would know the sheep that had been his in the borders, which is hundreds of miles away from where he is in the Highlands, if you didn't know that and he just had this knowledge of his sheep and that is part of the picture that we have of Jesus with us, that is this great knowledge, this great desire to feed us, to lead us, to protect us, to care for us and our solemn responsibility and privilege is to follow him and to trust him and to submit to him in love because he's the great shepherd and what does the great shepherd do? The great shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, that's the mark of his shepherding, that's the mark of his commitment that he lays down his life for the sheep, so our motivation to follow him is because as God he lays down his life for us, that's the greatest sacrifice isn't it? No one loves you more than that, you don't know anyone who loves you more than that, even the best human being if they lay down their life for you wouldn't be loving you with the same purity and the same perfection as God did in giving himself and laying down his life for you in that way, the great cost, the great shepherd of our sheep, so we're asked to submit to him and that's the kind of foundation of what I'm saying tonight, that in our Christian lives we have this fundamental and basic philosophy and thought process which says we are going to lay down, we are going to submit our lives, we are going to obey and serve Jesus Christ, he is Lord, I am his disciple, he's king, I am his citizen, he's God, I am his creation, I'm one of his children.

[11 : 22] So then we have following on from that our responsibility to, and this is much harder of course isn't it for all of us, to submit to his under shepherds, those that he's appointed in the church. In Hebrews 1 Peter 5 says to the elders among you, that's the church leaders, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who will also share in the glory to be you, be shepherds of God's flock that are under your care, watching over them not because you must but because you are willing as God wants you to be. So we have that picture again in the New Testament of God is the great shepherd, Jesus Christ the great shepherd and in the church he appoints elders that are under shepherds that are to be leaders in the church. He puts men in charge as it were of the church under himself that the church is to recognise and submit to. Hugely unpopular, hugely out of sync with the mode and structure of the society in which we live, but it remains the New Testament

pattern that God has given us. We find that wherever God placed churches, wherever people became Christians in any village or town or city that very soon after the elders were appointed or send under God to lead these churches and we recognise that as something significant, that's part of the first Peter picture. But in Titus he says, the reason

I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you. An elder goes on to say, must be blameless, faithful to one wife, a man whose children believe in so on, given the characteristics and the qualifications for eldership. But that New Testament pattern was set and hasn't been superseded and hasn't been changed. The church to be led by godly men who the church recognises has the significant gifting for leadership and who are mature Christians, as you've seen already in earlier sermons on this subject, and who are servant leaders, who are under shepherds, who imitate Jesus, who are to be recognised that they are to be like Jesus, accountable under God, with that huge burden and huge responsibility and huge privilege.

There's never been, and there never will be, and there never should be a mandate within the scripture for an abuse of that position, an abuse of power, an authoritarianism or a dictatorial kind of structure or model of church leadership. Our model as elders, as leaders in the church, is Jesus Christ, the servant leader who gave up his life, who washed the disciples' feet. And that's a huge burden and responsibility for the leaders of any church. But his model, his pattern for us as believers in the church is to submit to Jesus and to submit to his under shepherds, to recognise their place and position and to obey them. We read that in Hebrews 13, obey your leaders and submit to their authority.

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you. It's that shepherding picture. It's not that they're keeping an eye on you in a kind of judgmental or want to find out the worst things about you. It's keeping watch over you in that loving way in order to reflect the love of Jesus Christ. Obey them. It's repeated again. Obey them so that their world will be a joy and not a burden. So Christ's expectation, what is Christ's expectation for us? To recognise his lordship in our lives and within the church, within the church structure, within the community, within the family of believers, to recognise what one, to recognise that you're part of the church as a believer. You're not part of the church by choice, but by design. You don't come and go from church and decide that you want to be part of the church or not be part of the church. By coming to Christ, by belonging to the head of the body who is Christ, you belong to the church of Christ. And we're going to look at that a little bit more in the next number of weeks when we look at membership by design. You're part of, in confessing Christ as your Lord, you're part of the worshiping family. You're part of the community of believers. You're part of his flock. So it simply isn't an option for you, under scripture and under the word, to ignore him and his church and his family and his structures and the pastoral care that he set up and the accountability that he expects of us, because the church is the bride of Christ that he shed his blood for. He is the head of this church to which we belong and we come under it in all our individuality, in all our freedom and all the joy that we share. We come under this authority structure. So we recognise that we're part of the church. We recognise the elders of the church as our spiritual leaders. You recognise them as your spiritual leaders.

I'm going to go back, I'll come back to that one. These are those who are set apart by God, set apart and called to shepherds who have this duty to lead and guide God's people.

[17 : 43] These then are the things you should teach, encourage and rebuke with all authority Jesus says. That is what we're to know and to recognise and to remember in our lives. We urge you, brothers, that Sir Judy warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage and disheartened.

Help the weak, be patient with everyone, make sure nobody pays back wrong with wrong. Strive to do what's good with each other and with everyone else. All these commands that were given in the New Testament. I give you this chance, preach the word, be prepared and season out of season, correct, rebuke and encourage you with great patience, careful instruction.

And what we have here in this passage, keep watch. That is why your spiritual leaders are commanded to do. Keep watch, to be spiritually alert, to have a costly love for their people, that love that will be willing to die for them. It's not about position, it's not about power, it's not about popularity, it's about knowing, feeding, leading and protecting.

It must always be, your spiritual leaders must always be more than just your friends. They can't just be your friends. They must be more than that. They must be those to whom you're accountable spiritually that will be honest with you, that will humbly challenge you about your life, that will rebuke

you, that will be an encouragement to you because they themselves must be that to one another and under Christ. Because as we're told here, we are people who give account. People that will stand before God for what we have done as leaders, for example here in St. Clement, what a great burden, but it's also an amazing privilege and responsibility. So that is recognize the elders as your spiritual leaders and then you're called to submit to their leadership, called to come under their spiritual authority in your lives. You have a duty, as we're told here, obey your leaders, submit to their spiritual authority, their authority in the Lord. Be willing, in other words as people, in a congregation, in a family, be willing to be spiritually led. You ask any shepherd what it's like to lead recalcitrant sheep, sheep that always want to go the wrong way.

It's not an easy thing to do. Biddable sheep are rare, but wonderful for the shepherd. And so spiritually, you know what, you know that's the case, don't you? You know that you're called to acknowledge your leaders, their lives, their example, and their role and to be accountable to them, to be accountable and be honest with them, to work with them as they come to you with scripture. And I think this is probably the key to the authority in leadership, that we come with the authority of script and with the word of scripture into your lives. Hugely important. You know, leaders aren't coming into your Christian life and oughtn't to be coming into your Christian life with kind of fancy ideas or their own opinions of what you should do. They're coming under Christ with his authority and his word. And they're sharing that word with you and they're putting and seeking to put that word into, to apply that word to your life. So come under their leadership and submit to that. Submit to the preaching and the teaching of God's word as it reflects scripture and the truth of scripture to you. Learn from older Christians formally and informally, as we saw before, come under their authority, older women teaching and leading and guiding younger women and older men. Likewise, we saw that before and allow our lives to be transformed by the power of the spirit together as we are under submission to Christ's model and to Christ's teaching. Practice submission in our lives. It's easy to be sinfully individualistic from a leader's point of view and also from a congregation's point of view, to be unaccountable, to be uncommitted, to be complaining, to be grumbling, to take the huff if anyone challenges you about spiritual things or exposes aspects of your life that may be dishonoring to God.

[22 : 39] Easy to be dysfunctional in these areas. Easy to walk away. Easy to find fault with others who would seek to do that. And the only answer really to that is to be grace filled together, to humbly work together and to humbly be exposed and open to one another's needs spiritually.

And therefore when we do that, when we recognise that, when we're submitting to Jesus and to His teaching and to His structures within the church and as we serve one another in that way, leaders serving and people following and submitting, then we create biblically joy.

We create joy. Obey them so that there will be a joy, not a burden, for that will be of no advantage to you. Leaders well led and being followed under Christ creates joy. And in 23 years of ministry, at a wider level, what seems to have been the case is friction. Lots of friction in churches, lots of division, lots of separation, lots of lovelessness and lots of, or a lack of submission to Jesus and to His truth. At a wider level, that seems sometimes to be the case. But by God's grace and goodness and love in the churches that I've served and I've known such joy because of the people. And that is something to protect and to recognise and to give thanks to God for, because I think for many people that is rare. And yet joy is so important to us in our lives, so that our service and our work and our offering to Christ is joyful both as people and as leaders within the church. It may be a pleasure to serve

Christ through serving one another as servant leaders and as people under authority. I may recognise submission in its rightful biblical context, a voluntary submission of love to the one who gave his life for us. And may we likewise give our lives to him.

I mean, let's bow our heads briefly in prayer. Thank you Lord God for your truth and for your word. Thank you for the structures that you have left in place. We know that they will be ridiculed and sniggered at and laughed at in this modern and sophisticated society.

[25 : 35] But we thank you that they are based on your truth and your knowledge of our hearts and your knowledge of what will bring joy. And we pray that we would be submissive as Christians in the rightful sense of being submitting to the right lordship of Jesus Christ, acknowledging his great shepherding concern for our lives, even when it's difficult, even when it seems that he's far away, even when we don't understand what he's doing, that we would trust, that we would persevere, that we would not thrash out at maybe other people instead and the church and blame the church and

its leaders with all our failings and faults, that rather we would submit to understanding Christ's ways and trusting even when we can't see them.

Or give us that sense of joy and help us to be accountable to one another and receive rebuke and encouragement and teaching and give it also because we have that type of relationship together. Maybe not just be Sunday Christians, but help us to look out for and each of us have as it were, shepherds' heart for one another. For Jesus' sake, amen.