



Part 9 – The Church’s Leadership

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them...

Words like obey and submit have started to resonate in our ears as white noise. We often carry with us experiences that have taught us to mistrust and be skeptical of leaders, even in the church. Many have abused their power, self-

promoted, and lied (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Therefore, it is easy for us to side with the mantra of our culture and push back against the historical notion of male authority (Romans 13:2). Obedience and submission have become comfortably known as obscenities.

Yet God has called his children on a different path, a historical path reaching back to the first man, Adam. From the beginning of time God has ordained his chosen people to be led by chosen men, fellow sinners who are called to serve, self-sacrifice, and shepherd the people of God (1 Peter 5:2-3). The church’s leadership has always been tasked with the weighty role of caring for souls (Hebrews 13:17). This is the work of pursuing people and problems, moving courageously toward the pain of sin, disease, and death while proclaiming the hope and joy of the gospel.

Leaders are imperfect and at times will disappoint. Jesus was no stranger to the failings and sin of his young apprentices. It is appropriate for leaders to be held accountable for their words and actions (James 3:1). Simultaneously, the author of Hebrews teaches us that church authority is not something to rail against but an advantageous gift. We the church are called to bring joy to our leaders by the manner in which we follow. There is one supreme leader of whom we will all give an account, the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:3-6).

Main Idea: The gospel frees us to submit willingly to those in leadership.

1. Submit to the shepherds

- Obey and submit: How do you respond to these words? What experiences have taught you to respond in that way?
- These words have been used to abuse and control people. Leaders of all kinds have used their titles and authority to manipulate, control, and satisfy their evil desires.
- Paul warned there would be an acceleration of rebellion against God’s law and authority in the last days. Examine 2 Timothy 3:2-4.
- The sinful heart’s desire is to rebel against anyone or anything that declares what to do, how to act, or who to be. Our culture has glorified rebellion and allowed submission to become the adversary.
- Biblical categories of submission:
 - Submission to worldly authorities - 1 Peter 2:13-17; Romans 13:1-7
 - Submission in the family – Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 5:22-33, 6:1-4; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:1-6
 - Submission in the church – Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Timothy 5:17-19; 1 Thess. 5:12-13
- Christians are called to submit to and obey their God and God’s design for leadership.

2. Shepherds and wolves will each give an account

Shepherds—take vows to their flock and the Scripture gives parameters on their authority. The PCA has reiterated these in the Book of Church Order.

- BCO 3-4 “The power of the church is exclusively spiritual.”
- BCO 7-3 “No one who holds office in the Church ought to usurp authority therein, or receive any official titles of spiritual preeminence, except such as are employed in the Scriptures.”
- BCO 11-2 “They can make no laws binding the conscience.”
- Vows come with serious accountability, before God and men.
- James 3:1 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Wolves—teachers of false doctrines within the church.

- Matthew 7:15-16a, Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.
- Why then do so many follow these masqueraders? Why are the largest and wealthiest churches in the world led by those who teach half-truths?
- 2 Timothy 4:3-4, For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.
- Church members have vowed to pursue the purity and peace of the church. Holding leaders accountable is part of this vow. Exposing wolves is a kindness to the church and to those who do not yet believe.

3. Make the shepherd's work a joy

- What does it look like to you to follow well?
- How could you encourage and support your leaders in ways that you are not currently?
- How could you handle disappointment and disagreement while still honoring your leaders?
- How can you lead others in pursuing the above?
- How does Jesus' example of leadership and submission inform your role as a church member?