

Leadership in Biblical Perspective
Officer Ordination and Installation
“Leadership in Biblical Perspective”
Hebrews 13:17
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This study has to do with something that we readily acknowledge and that’s a doctrine of the church which we call ecclesiology that is how the church is to be governed, framed and cared for from the Word of God. It’s the reason we are called Presbyterian which comes from the word presbyter and that word in this Bible is translated elder so it means government by elders. And the elders are assisted by deacons.

The early church in Jerusalem was overwhelmed by the numbers and it was probably 18,000 to 19,000 because they had 3,000 then 5,000 (which were just counting the men) and then everyday people were being converted. So these Apostles were overwhelmed as they were operating as the elders in the church and as they ran into help they raised up deacons. The deacons focused on the administration, stewardship and mercy ministry of the church that then freed the elders up to make their focus upon the shepherding, discipling and teaching of the church.

This is how the church is governed and it’s a secondary doctrine. In other words, a person can get this one wrong and still be saved. In other words, my favorite line is you don’t have to be a Presbyterian to get to heaven but perhaps maybe you don’t want to take a chance if you’re not one. Even though a doctrine is secondary it does not mean it’s unimportant. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable. We fully recognize there are secondary and tertiary doctrines which are doctrines that aren’t essential to get right for salvation in Christ and the Gospel.

That’s why Paul says in I Corinthians 15:3–4, [3] *For I delivered to you as of first importance* (the Gospel) *what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.* If something is of first importance then that says that other things are of second importance but it doesn’t mean it’s unimportant for it is still important for the wellbeing of God’s people and church government falls into the category. So I want to use the book of Hebrews to bring our focus to this area.

The book of Hebrews is a glorious book that was written to tell the Hebrews that had become believers not to look back at the Old Covenant for the purpose of the Old Covenant has been fulfilled in Christ. Now they are in the better the covenant, the New Covenant and the fulfillment of all that God has promised. You don’t have Moses, Aaron, Melchizedek, the offerings, or the rituals but you have the One that they all were pointing to, Jesus, who is the fulfillment of everything and God has finally spoken in His Son who is the glory of the fulfillment of the New Covenant. Then the book of Hebrews ends with a series of exhortations, ten to be exact and then the benediction but I’m going to show you one of those exhortations.

Hebrews 13:17 says [17] *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.* This passage speaks to this congregation for there will be an opportunity for you to publically affirm your submission to the elders. Granted all authority that is delegated by the Lord is limited. Anytime an elder gives you

direction that is contrary to God's Word you must obey God rather than man, but we enter into the relationship by submitting ourselves to the Lord by submitting to the Lord's working and governing of His church through His officers.

This passage tells you to obey in a way that gives them joy. I have now been in the ministry 40 plus years and there have been moments in the ministry where you're trying to lead God's people and their response does not exactly bring joy to your heart and soul. There are some challenging times in the church of Jesus Christ. Won't it be wonderful when we live together in glory, but living down here is another story for we have some challenges in our relationships because we're sinners saved by grace. You want to do this in such a way that they will do their tasks as officers with joy and not with groaning so it shows that they are grateful for the calling they have and God's people are upholding them in prayer, obedience, submission and encouragement in the Lord.

I have had the privilege to pastor three churches. I pastored three years in Miami, Florida. I planted a daughter church of Briarwood in Charlotte, North Carolina from 1983 to 1999 and then the Lord called me here to Briarwood. Before all of that, while in seminary I had the privilege to be a student pastor in an independent church. There was one man and his wife who started coming and to this day he is the most negative man I have ever met in my life. He was not only negative but cynical. I was determined to turn this around so I set up meetings with him once a week and after about five weeks, I'd get out of my car, look in the restaurant to see where he was sitting, take a deep breath and pray 'Lord, get me through this.'

During our meeting I would say something positive and he would say something negative and that would go on for a while. Finally, he won and I was so discouraged I was thinking about leaving the ministry and everything possible because it was so discouraging. You need to be honest with your officers and leaders so if you're struggling with things or have questions about things we certainly want transparency, honesty and meaningful communication, but we can always do it in a spirit of encouragement, a heart of obedience and anticipating and giving the judgment of charity to our officers as they serve us in the Lord.

In the midst of this exhortation the writer is saying something else. While this is aimed at followers there is something interesting here and if you're not careful you miss it in this text. He is telling the officers of the church something essential about what as officers you are to do. He says *'for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.'* You are to keep watch over the souls of your people. Why that language?

He is telling you the church is essentially a ministry of spiritual health and vitality. It doesn't mean we are to be concerned whether people have something to eat or drink. That's not what this means. It means our focus is on the spiritual vitality of the wellbeing of those in our charge. This past week I ran across the old movie 'Sully' a movie by Clint Eastwood about the US Air pilot who when he got up in the air coming out of LaGuardia had a bird strike, lost both engines and had to turn around and just land the plane in the Hudson River. It was an extraordinary act that he did. When he said 'give me the count' they responded to him 'all 178 souls are accounted for.' If you go and read the news reports when the Titanic went down you will read about the number of 'souls' that were lost at sea.

It's interesting language to use 'souls' so why do they use that kind of language? That language is there because of the past prevalence in our culture of a Christian world and life view. That is, we know what sets men and women apart if you can get beyond the foolishness of Darwinian atheistic evolution for you are made in the image of God but God is a Spirit. He doesn't have a body. Your body comes in the image of your parents but your bearing of God's

image is your soul. That's what makes you, you. When God made Adam from the dust of the ground he was a corpse until God breathed into him and then it says that Adam became a living soul.

What is death? It is the separation of the soul from the body. It was something that was never created to be separated – the soul and the body. They are like two threads woven into one cloth. So death is that unnatural separation of the soul from the body which is why Jesus tells us in Matthew 10 not to fear those who can kill the body for you are to fear only the One who can kill the soul. This is what makes you, you.

So elders, the people we pastor, have a soul that is in need of nourishment. That doesn't mean we're uncaring about physical issues but it does tell us we care for their souls because it's from their soul that they deal with the issues of a broken life, a broken body, a broken world. In order to deal with the brokenness of this world it comes from a soul that is well nourished. Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name (Psalm 103:1). We do it by keeping watch over them. Our forbearers used to have to get on a horse or carriage and go from person to person to person and we still need to have that visitation face to face, touch to touch but just think of all the ways God has given us to stay in touch, to keep watch, to stay in contact with God's people.

Do you hear the language of a shepherd in this text? Keep watch. That is what a shepherd does. They keep watch over their flock by night so we long to be faithful shepherds underneath our great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, to keep watch over the souls of our people, not only because that's how they're made in the image of God, but also one day their body will be laid aside and absent from the body is present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8). We want them on that day to be ready – ready because they know Jesus as Lord and Savior and that they are ready to meet Him.

There is coming a day, if Jesus doesn't come first, when everyone will get up one morning and not get back to that bed or there may come a time where they don't get up that morning. It's like the prayer poem says;

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take.
If I should live for other days,
I pray thee, Lord, to guide my ways.
Amen.*

Now I'm ready to meet the Lord and we have the instruments as elders with personal contact, keeping watch, prayer, preaching, discipling, shepherding, and visiting. O the day of visitation when those who represent Christ come into the lives of those whom they keep watch over before the Lord.

One of the elements of stewardship is accountability. Now my dear brothers, we are accountable for our office and according to this text in Hebrews we have to answer to the Lord for what we do. God has called us to give an account for those whom He has entrusted to us. It's an awesome thing. One of the things I'm called to do is to work hard at preaching and teaching and Saturday nights just don't go well for me because I know what's ahead. I pray for you because I know what it means to pray over a decision that perhaps has to do with those you are shepherding.

I know the sacred calling that is there and in a sense we'd almost want to run from it because we have to give an account but don't run from it. Run to it for the great Shepherd will help you. You will do it imperfectly and unevenly but run to the people of God. They need you as physicians of their soul.

Deacons you have no idea what you do, not only in mercy but in stewardship and administration that's crucial. We have an Embers to a Flame conference being held here next week and there are so many churches represented that come to it that are struggling. When I get to talking with them part of the problem is the pastor is having to do the work of the elders and the elders are doing the work of the deacons and the deacons just don't have any work to do. If we get the deacons to be doing the work of the deacons and the elders doing the work of the elders and the pastors shepherding, teaching and equipping then that's how people's souls can be ministered to.

You have a choice – you can sit in a pew and critique or you can submit, obey and encourage those who keep watch over your soul. For those being ordained – we can run from or we can run to.

I met a man at my sister's funeral this past week and his name was Frank. He was a high school football coach. He was sharing about this moment where his team was outmanned and they somehow reached the fourth quarter being only five points behind with three seconds left on the clock and they were on the two yard line with the ball. He called a time out. Typically if you're a coach in this situation and you only have one play you're looking at your ball handlers but as he looked in the huddle all of his ball handlers avoided his eyes, except one. Hanging out of this player's mouth was his mouth guard but with clear eyes he looked at his coach without saying a word, and pointed to his chest telling the coach he was ready – give me the ball.

Satan has mounted an attack in this culture against evangelical Christianity. We don't need to run from it. We need to run to it and by the grace of God, not with arrogance, just say to the Lord, 'Give me the ball, I'm ready to do my part.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for this life and death ministry that brings the glorious message of vitality of life to the soul now, fitting of the soul for eternity then and the caring of the soul throughout life even in this very present age. Father, I pray for those who now take this charge and I thank You for them. Help them to rely upon You even as they step forward to serve You. Fill them to overflowing for the sake of Christ and to the glory of Christ. Father, thank You so much for the legacy of our pastors, from our founding pastor to our founding elders and now into our 60th year. O God, You have been good to us and we give You praise in Jesus' Name, Amen.