

Christian Ethics, Pt. 4: Submission and Supplication

Scripture: Hebrews 13:7–8, 17–21

Code: 1642

I. THE ETHICS (vv. 1-19)

A. In Relation to Others (vv. 1-3)

B. In Relation to Ourselves (vv. 4-9)

C. In Relation to God (vv. 10-19)

1. Separation (vv. 10-14)

2. Sacrifice (vv. 15-16)

3. Submission (v. 17)

a. The Request (v. 17a) "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves . . . " This verse delineates a Christian's responsibility toward God, who mediates much of His rule in this world through men. Throughout the Old Testament, God mediated His rule through kings, prophets, and judges. In this age, God mediates His rule through Spirit-controlled men and governmental authorities. And someday, God will mediate His rule in the living Christ who sits on the throne of David and rules the world (Ps. 2:6-12).

1) The Persons of Leadership At this time, God is ruling His people through Spirit-led men in the church. They do not rule for their own sake however; they rule in the place of Christ as His undershepherds. Our submission is not only to them, but ultimately to God.

a) Ephesians 4:11--After Christ had defeated death at the cross, He ascended into heaven and gave gifts to men for the establishment of the church: "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. " God gave spiritual leaders to the church to instruct it.

b) Acts 14:23--Paul and Barnabas "ordained elders in every church" in the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.

c) Titus 1:5--Paul instructed Titus to "ordain elders in every city" In every local congregation there were to be men who ruled. There are some church governments today where the congregation rules the leaders, but that is foreign to the New Testament. It is true that there needs to be comprehensive interaction between the leaders and the congregation, but the rule of the church always belongs to gifted men placed in control by the Spirit of God. They serve as part of God's chain of command within the framework of the church. The phrase "them that rule over you" is basically one word in the Greek: hegeomai. It means "chief or leader. " It is translated "governor" in Acts 7:10 and "chief" in Luke 22:26. It is the responsibility of those men to determine the direction of a church by presiding over it, teaching the Word, and reproving and exhorting the flock with patience and meekness (2 Tim. 4:2).

2) The Perils of Leadership In 1 Peter 5, Peter delineates several perils of being an elder or overseer of the church:

a) Covetousness "The elders who are among you I exhort, whom am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory [a witness of the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-4)] that shall be revealed: Feed [pastor] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight of it, not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. " (vv. 1-3). Some people want to rule because they covet authority, a professional position, bigger churches, or more money. They end up being petty tyrants who dominate their churches. But an elder is not to lead as a dictator; rather, he is to be an example. Paul said this to Timothy: ". . . be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12).

b) Conceit "In like manner, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for

God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (vv. 5-6). In the pastorate, there is the peril of desiring to be exalted above others. c) Compromise"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith . . . " (vv. 8-9). There's always the danger of compromise: Don't give in to Satan by watering down your convictions for the sake of expediency. 3) The Payment of LeadershipFirst Timothy 5:17 says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. " The next verse states, ". . . The laborer is worthy of his reward. " The clear implication is that "double honor" refers to monetary compensation. 4) The Practice of Leadershipa) 1 Thessalonians 5:12--"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. " Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to have a deep appreciation for their spiritual leaders who labored on their behalf. It's a tragedy when pastors and elders are led around by the congregation. God intended the church leadership to rule and have oversight of the congregation. However, that doesn't mean that elders rule as dictators. They must be responsive to the needs of people. b) 1 Peter 5:4--Pastors and elders are undershepherds of Christ: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. " Elders have a tremendous responsibility to feed and care for the flock, to warn it of impending danger, to discipline its members when they stray from the path, and to provide direction. c) 1 Timothy 3:1--The "office of a bishop [Gk. episkopos = `to watch over`] . . . " involves watching over the affairs of others. The Greek term for "bishop" was a title used by the Athenians for officers that were sent to manage the affairs of a subjected state. The office of a bishop is a serious position. The church has the responsibility of obeying the teaching of their leaders and submitting to their authority, because they rule in the place of Christ. d) John 13:20--Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me. " Submitting to those who have been placed in the rule of the church is the equivalent of receiving Christ, and the Father as well. Being subject to leaders is your obligation to God. When there aren't Spirit-filled leaders who rule well and people who obey the Word that they teach, a church will experience disunity. The rest of verse 17 tells why the congregation should submit to its leadership:b. The Reasons (v. 17b-d)1) Accountability to Jesus (v. 17b)". . . for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account . . . "Church leaders watch over the congregation like shepherds: They watch over their sheep, care for them, prevent them from going astray, and protect them from harm. They are responsible to watch them carefully, knowing that they must give an account to God for the way they ministered to the souls that were entrusted to them. a) James 3:1-2--"My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many things we all stumble. . . . " Unfortunately, when a man of God who leads others falls, he usually doesn't fall alone; he causes many of those who are following him to stumble as well. That is what causes "greater condemnation. "b) 1 Timothy 4:16--Paul says, "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee. " Since church leaders can be a determining factor in the salvation of those who follow them, it is important how they live. Someday they will have to give an account to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, of how they ruled over their congregations. 2) An Attitude of Joy (v. 17c-d)a) For the Pastor (v. 17c)". . . that they may do it with joy, and not with grief . . . "You should submit to the leaders of your church because of the joy that it brings them. I think the most grieved group of men are often ministers who deal with stubborn congregations that will not submit to them. That robs them of the joy of their ministry. The word "grief" conveys the idea of groaning over a thankless task. There are many men whose ministry is thankless labor. A congregation ought to submit for the joy of the one who labors for them. (1) The Philippians' ExampleThe Apostle Paul experienced that joy as a result of the Philippians. Whereas Paul didn't experience much joy over the Corinthians, he was able to say this

about the submissive Philippians: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy" (1:3-4). When you read the letter to the Philippians, you don't find any rebellion at all-- just a couple of cantankerous women who were having some personal problems (4:2-3). Paul encouraged the Philippians to keep "holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain" (2:16). At the same time, he warned them about those who opposed the gospel and were a cause of grief: ". . . For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18). For that reason, Paul said, "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them who walk even as ye have us for an example" (v. 17). Paul found joy in those who were obedient and followed his example. But those who wouldn't walk as he taught them gave him grief. (2) The Thessalonians' Example The other letter in the New Testament that indicates a healthy submissive church is 1 Thessalonians. Of them Paul could confidently say, "For what is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" (2:19). And the writer of Hebrews: "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. "

A. The Source (v. 20)

Not only does God give you the ethics and the example, He gives you the energy as well--His power. Only God can "make you perfect . . . working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight . . . " Your Christian growth has little to do with your own power. It's primarily God working in you. There can be all kinds of rules you may want to follow, but in your human strength you will never be able to carry them out. You must recognize that the power is not yours but God's. Notice that verse 20 explodes with the power of God that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. The resurrection and the salvation of mankind are the greatest displays of divine power in the history of the universe. The writer of Hebrews asserts that the powerful God who raised Christ is the One who can make you perfect. You can't function on your own energy and hope to be spiritual. The Christian life doesn't work that way.

B. The Sufficiency (v. 21)

1. 2 Corinthians 3:5--"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God. " God wants to make you complete and mature, lacking in nothing. He doesn't stop half way through. He wants to make you perfect so that you can perform His will by His power. I'm excited to know that God not only gives the orders, but gives us the power to fulfill them as we yield to Him. One of the keys to the Christian life is yielding to God's control.

2. 2 Corinthians 9:8--"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. " You will have the sufficiency for every good work when you are yielding to God's power. As long as you try to accomplish His will in your own strength, you are fighting the only power that can do it. But when you let God work through you, Jesus Christ will get the glory--and rightly so, for He deserves it.

3. Philippians 2:13--"For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. " God is your sufficiency for accomplishing His will. He provides the necessary energy. The New Covenant and the grace it bestows does not imply that we can do whatever we want--there are important ethics that must be followed. Beyond the ethics, there are living examples--Jesus Christ and the leaders of His church. Beyond the example, there is energy--the power of God in your life!

Focusing on the Facts

1. Through whom did God mediate His rule in the Old Testament? Through whom will He mediate it in the future? How is God presently ruling His people?

2. What spiritual leaders did Christ give to the church?
3. Whom does the rule of the church always belong to, according to the New Testament?
4. What are some of the perils of being a leader in a church? Support your answer with Scripture.
5. What are elders that do a good job ruling worthy of (1 Tim. 5:17-18)? Explain.
6. What are some of the responsibilities of pastors and elders as undershepherds of Christ?
7. What will a church experience when it fails to obey its Spirit-filled leaders?
8. Why must the leaders of a church watch over their congregations carefully?
9. What usually happens when a spiritual leader stumbles that makes him susceptible to "greater condemnation"? (Js. 3:1)
10. What attitude does a submissive congregation bring to a pastor (Heb. 13:17)?
11. What two churches especially caused Paul to be joyful?
12. If you fail to submit to your church leadership, what do you forfeit? What will a lack of submission also result in?
13. When is submission to a church leader not appropriate? How should such a situation be handled (1 Tim. 5:19-20)?
14. Why do men of God in places of leadership probably bear the brunt of Satan's attack?
15. Explain the role of the conscience.
16. For what specific reason did the writer of Hebrews request prayer, according to Hebrews 13:19?
17. Whom are Christians supposed to pattern their lives after, according to Hebrews 13:7? Why is Jesus Christ the supreme example?
18. What is the source of energy for living the Christian life?
19. What are the greatest displays of power in the history of the universe?
20. How can a Christian have sufficient energy for every good work? As a result, who will get the glory?

Pondering the Principles

1. Do you think your pastor could praise your congregation as much as Paul praised the Philippians and the Thessalonians? Have you ever wondered if your church is a cause of joy or grief to him? What does your church need to do to bring joy to your pastor? Is there anything you could do specifically that might help motivate the members to have submissive spirits? If your pastor is struggling under the pressure of many responsibilities, are there some that could be fulfilled by qualified church members? For your own part, dedicate yourself to being a cause for joy to your church leaders, and you will certainly profit from it.
2. Although your church leaders may have never asked you to pray on their behalf, are you praying for them regularly? What things can you ask for? If you have never asked how you could pray for them, have them give you a few suggestions. Because of the nature of their roles as leaders, they may not be eager to have you pray for their most personal struggles. Therefore, realizing their humanness, you can assume that they can use your prayers in the areas of humility, faithfulness, contentment, purity, and encouragement.
3. Do you have a clear conscience, or has your conscience been convicting you about something that you should or shouldn't do? Are you taking the appropriate action to resolve that conviction, or are you ignoring it, hoping that it will take of itself? Be careful that you don't shipwreck your faith because you failed to listen to your guiding conscience.
4. Since your church leaders and Jesus Christ are the examples that you should follow, how often are you interacting with those leaders and reading the Bible in order that you can observe and imitate their lives?

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