

Hebrews

Hebrews 13:17 – Words of Wisdom - Part 5

May 23, 2010

I. Words of Wisdom

A. **Hebrews 13:17** . . . Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

B. Prayer

II. Words of Wisdom – The Spiritual Value of Obedience and Submission

A. **Hebrews 13:17** . . . Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

1. This portion of God's word is not about lifting up the church leaders – as if to assure their position of authority over you. It is about a path of spiritual profit for you – a path which develops and nurtures godly character in you who are under authority as members of the body of Christ.

2. Before talking about what your attitude and actions need to be toward those over you in order to reap a spiritual profit, I want to make clear what the attitude and actions of those over you ought to be.

a. **Luke 22:24-27** . . . And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. [25] And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' [26] "But **it is not this way with you**, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. [27] "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

b. **I Peter 5:1-3** . . . Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, [2] shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight – not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and

not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; [3] **nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge**, but proving to be examples to the flock.

B. Returning to **Hebrews 13:17** and the path to spiritual profitability of those under the leadership of church leaders, we read “**Obey your leaders and submit to them.**”

1. Now I fully understand that this is the USA, and as a nation we have fought hard to gain and maintain our freedom from anyone who would lord it over us. In fact, our government is by the people for the people. We believe in freedom, not slavery; democracy, not autocracy. And in our pursuit of freedom we have come to enjoy immense “personal freedom,” and we have learned to stand up for “our rights,” to the point that it is an affront to our personhood to be told that we **have to** or we **must** submit to anyone.
 - a. I also understand that many in authority have abused their position and used it to further their own interests and gratify their own desires – which further sensitizes us to any demand for submission and the loss of personal freedom.
 - b. However, what God is bringing to our attention today has nothing to do with the American way. And as much as we may need such wisdom, God is not – in this passage of scripture – talking about how to deal with selfish and corrupt leadership. So neither will we.
 - c. What I want to talk about today is the fact that the right attitude and the right behavior toward those over you is spiritually beneficial to you.
2. To help you see the spiritual profit or benefit of obeying and submitting to your leaders, I want to begin with a principle that is at work here which is no different from the principle that is at work in how children respond to their parents.
 - a. Here is the principle – a willing and cheerful attitude toward obedience and submission is just as important for the development of a child’s character and maturity as is obedience itself.
 - b. In other words, willing obedience and cheerful submission is a significant factor in building character and maturity. Why? Because even though simple obedience builds good behavior, a willing and cheerful attitude toward obedience and submission builds good character.

- c. And it is the spiritual profit of a good character that comes from a right attitude in obeying your leaders and submitting to them, that I want us to focus in on today.
- 3. The Profit of Obedience and Impoverishment of Disobedience
 - a. To have an attitude of willing obedience nurtures faith in God. It supports a spiritually healthy humility. It feeds a sensible mindset. It promotes a properly working conscience. It helps develop good values.
 - (1) My point here is that an **attitude of willing obedience** breeds character qualities that are spiritually beneficial for staying on the narrow path and growing beyond your current level of maturity and understanding.
 - (2) In other words, the **attitude of willing obedience** to those over you is as much a source of spiritual growth in purity of heart, health of conscience, and holiness of life as the growth that results from the obedience itself.
 - b. On the other side of willing obedience, we have grudging obedience and willful disobedience.
 - (1) Though **grudging obedience** is far better than disobedience, it is harmful to the healthy development of your faith in God and Christian character. Grudging obedience exalts you over God and your wisdom over God's wisdom, it reinforces distrust of God, it keeps pride alive, it stirs up selfishness, it promotes resentment and anger over having to do what you don't really want to do, and it results in a hardness of heart toward those things that are spiritually best.
 - (2) Beyond grudging obedience we have willful disobedience. To **willingly disobey** – whether you are honest with yourself about your disobedience or you live in denial about it – leads to a hardening of your heart toward God, toward the Word of God, and toward those God has placed over you in the church.
 - (3) When you harden your heart toward submitting to those in authority over you, the hardening brings with it a distrust of God, the sickness of pride, the arrogance of self-rule, a lowering of your values, the weakening of your conscience, and a degrading of your character – all of which handicap you in regard to receiving the truth of

God's word, living a holy life, and growing further in godliness.

- (4) Please think about this truth! Grudgingly obeying or willfully disobeying does not hurt those God has placed over you, **it hurts you**.
4. Let me try to take this further by talking about it in relation to submission in contrast to self-rule or going your own way.
 - a. To submit – willingly and even cheerfully – nurtures the kind of meekness and humility Jesus has and wants us to learn of from him.
 - (1) To willingly submit when you don't want to or when you are thinking your leaders are not looking out for your interests or when you think they are wrong, nurtures a faith in God that raises you out of self-rule and every spiritually unhealthy form of self-protection.
 - (2) When you choose to trust God enough to turn your back on self-rule and ungodly self-protection, you are – at the very same time – choosing to pursue and nurture the very same kind of meekness and humility of heart that we find in Jesus.
 - (3) The point I am trying to get across is that willing submission to those over you produces in you the character qualities belonging to Jesus Christ.
 - b. On the other hand, to resist submitting to those over you feeds self-rule. It feeds the pride of Aaron and Miriam – who thought they were of such spiritual quality that God would speak to them like He spoke to Moses. It feeds the arrogance of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who thought they were equal to Moses and Aaron in knowing what God was saying for the purpose of teaching and leading the people.
 - (1) I am confident we all understand that self-rule, pride, and arrogance take us away from God and godliness rather than toward God and godliness.
 - (2) And as I have been trying to help us see today: self-rule, pride, and arrogance are not just actions, they start at the deepest reaches of our character as unholy attitudes and values which drive our self-rule, pride, and arrogance.
5. Once again, the point I am trying to make today is that a willing and cheerful attitude toward obedience and submission produces rich spiritual profit on the deeper reaches of your Christian

character. And though the refusal to submit may be American, it is costly to your spiritual well-being.

- a. I am confident you already know this, but let me remind you again. Obedience and submission requires the crushing of your pride and every other passion that drives you to exalt yourself – not only above God, but also above those over you.
 - b. Yet when you crush your pride and self-rule, the character qualities of Jesus find the healthiest soil in which to grow.
6. For an example of willing and cheerful obedience and submission, consider Jesus.
- a. **John 4:34** . . . [34] Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.”
 - b. **John 6:38** . . . “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”
 - c. **Philippians 2:5-8** . . . Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, [6] who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. [8] Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
 - d. Imagine: Jesus Christ is the Almighty, the Alpha and Omega, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Son of God, and God in human flesh. He is the One who created all things – including you and me.
 - (1) Yet Jesus subjected himself – not only to God, but to man – for your sake and mine. He humbled himself – being despised, rejected, brutally mistreated, and finally murdered in one of the most shameful and painful ways known at that time.
 - (2) And though there are many reasons why he did this, one of them is so that we might no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf. However, we cannot put an end to living for ourselves and turn to living for Him without putting an end to pride and self-rule, and without nurturing the qualities of willing obedience and cheerful submission.

C. **Hebrews 13:17** goes on to say: “For they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.”

1. for they – those in leadership – keep watch over your souls
 - a. What is at stake? Your spiritual health and eternal destiny.
 - b. **Ephesians 4:11-13** . . . And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, [12] for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.
2. as those who will give an account
 - a. In relation to the coming judgment of God, it is far safer to live in subjection – as one under authority – than to be in the place of authority.
 - b. **James 3:1-2** . . . Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. [2] For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

- D. And finally, we read: “Let them do this with joy and not with grief for this would be unprofitable for you.”
1. Let them do this with joy and not with grief
 2. for this would be unprofitable for you

III. Conclusion

- A. Let me summarize. The act of willingly obeying and cheerfully submitting to those over you in the church is God’s will for you. This is not for the purpose of exalting the leaders, but to bring you into the riches of spiritual growth.
- B. Your attitude in obeying and submitting to those over you is just as important as the obedience itself because your attitude has as much to do with Christian character development as obedience. Therefore, if you nurture the meekness and humility of Christ in your obedience and submission, you will soon discover that you are nurturing holiness at the deeper levels of character, values, attitudes and faith.