

Heb. 13: 7-19; I Peter 5:1-5; Regarding your Leader I. Their Identity II. Their Calling III. Our Responsibility

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, true church leadership has fallen on hard times. In a recent movement called the Emergent Church, the local church is structured around a “no leader but only facilitators” model. Church leaders do not lead or give direction, they only seek to help others reach their potential. On the other extreme, you have the RCC model with their hierarchy and unquestionable authority. When the pope speaks from the church, it is the unquestionable law. Yet today we find that the church of Jesus Christ is called to have and to view church leaders in their proper light. Next week we have our congregational meeting scheduled- with the election of next pair of elders in our church. It is important to understand exactly how we should view and respond to these men and their leadership. In the broader context of Heb. 13- we are in the midst of New Covenant worship- called to love each other as brothers and sisters within the church. So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ appoints local leaders for the benefit of the local church.

I. Their Identity

In our first point, we consider the identity of these men who are called leaders in both v. 7 and again in v. 17. Remember your leaders- obey your leaders. Now this might seem obvious, but the first designation and title given is that these men are called leaders. Not governmental- but local, spiritual leaders who speak and teach the Word in the church. To be clear, we would refer to these men as the elders and pastor of the congregation. These men are called leaders because they have oversight- they are called to govern- give direction- and mobilize the local congregation. They are literally called the ones who rule- the focus in v. 7 and in v. 17 is they that have authority! As I Tim. 5:17 states- let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor- especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. So the elders of the church are those who rule- they have a delegated authority from God. They are placed over the church as the local head and governor- ruling under the authority of Christ directly. This is not only a great honor- it is a great responsibility as we will see in a few moments. So Christ rules His church by way of local leaders- the Great Shepherd of the church calls local shepherds to lead His flock. They men are appointed by God- not by man. They rule on

behalf of Christ- representing the office of Christ's Kingship. Added to their identity as leaders, they are called to be teachers and examples. As v. 7 concludes, consider their way of life and imitate their faith. Consider the words they have spoken, and receive them as they are; not the words of men but the words of God! When elders bring the Word of God to you, they become a messenger of God. They must be able to teach as I Tim. 3 states. Their words have the authority of God's word. Added to that, their lives are to be a model of righteousness. They are to set an example in how they live- showing what it means to walk and live a life worthy of our calling. As I Peter 5 says, they are to be an example to the flock. It is often said that morality only rises as high as the standard. In other words, we are prone to imitate and reflect those who are over us. So the local elders are set in our midst to be models of faith and piety- and messengers of wisdom and truth. It is so important to have good role models- we crave someone to look up to. Well- the elders of the church are the God-given role models for our Christian walk! Not those celebrities you see on TV- but the men you see every Sunday! These should be the ones we look up to! They are also overseers- as v. 17 says- they keep watch. As an identity, elders are to be on the lookout- standing on the walls of the city. As we read in I Peter 5- they are shepherds who exercise oversight. They have a God-given mandate to look at the lives of the members of this church- to consider their doctrine and their lives. As we confess in the form for profession of faith- if we stray in our teaching or belief- if we wander and stray off the path- the elders are to watch over us, see this error, and call us back to the straight and narrow. This truly is a privileged position! Elder are called bishops, overseers, shepherd and leaders- that is what they are! They are sent from Christ to the church- to rule over us on Christ's behalf. Not domineering as we read in I Peter 5- not with harshness and duplicity- but honestly and with integrity. Like a captain of a platoon, leading troops into war at the command of the chief general and commander of the army. So Jesus sends elders to lead on His behalf within the church.

II. Their Calling

Now that we understand the identity of our elders, we move on to consider how this is evidenced in their work. For example- in I Peter 5 elders are called shepherds who are called to shepherd the flock! In our text

from Heb. 13- elders are called leaders. Now how do these men lead- what are they called to do? Well, the first thing we find in v. 7 is that these men are the ones who spoke the Word of God to the church. Elders are called to lead by teaching, instructing and applying God's Word to the lives of members of the church. There is a doctrinal instruction that takes place. This is principally seen in the preaching of the Word- every Sunday as the Word is expounded and applied to our hearts by way of this public means of grace. The Holy Spirit illuminates our minds and opens our hearts to receive the word- and proper discipleship takes place as we are all made into disciples through the teaching. As Jesus said in Mt. 26- teaching them to observe all that He has commanded us. But this instruction is not limited to the preaching on Sunday. As the elders visit- as they speak to you at church or on the phone- when you meet with them later this month for family visitation- they are bringing God's Word to bear on your lives. So when they encourage- and when the rebuke when necessary- they are fulfilling this calling of speaking God's word to us. These men are also called to watch over your souls- as v. 17 puts it- they are spiritual guardians. Good shepherds are always watching out for the wolves and the bears of the wild- so elders are watching out for the wolves and bears of this world! What false teaching is being pushed upon our church? What spiritual forces of darkness are waging war? How can we better defend this flock from attacks from without and from within? But the work of the elders is not just for the sake of the flock- for the good of the church- it is also work performed on behalf of Christ and as a part of the service to Christ. In other words, we will have to give an account to Christ for how we performed our task. You see- Jesus is not only working through the elders- the elders are working on behalf of Jesus! The flock remains Christ's flock- His bride! Elders are stewards of the flock- shepherds working for the chief shepherd. It is the loving leadership of Christ that must be seen in them! In this way- by sending faithful elders- Christ shows His love! Christ proves His care for His people by sending men called to this office. So these men will want to be faithful to that calling- and even reflecting a proper attitude as they are called to this work. As v. 17 says, let them do this work with joy and not with grumbling. They are to be eager- cheerful, glad and even filled with delight in the work set before them. Elders are to be happy to serve! Or as we read in I Peter- serving willingly when called upon. Elders are to guard their hearts- it is not enough just to

get the work done- but even the manner in which you work is important. Not bitter or angry. Not avoiding the work you are called to perform! The image a dragging your feet comes to mind- you do it because it must be done- but with little desire and even less joy! No- we are called to serve with joy- because as we have seen- we love God's people! Brotherly love- and hospitality have become a part of our lives! We love Christ and we love His people! So when called to serve- when called to teach, visit, encourage, disciple and even discipline- we do all these with a heart of joy! This truly is a challenging calling- a high and important obligation! It is an honor and a privilege- those who desire to be an elder desire a good thing. But as James 3 says, those who teach will be held to a higher standard- judged with greater strictness because of the influence that we have on others!

III. Our Responsibility

As we come to our last point, we find our responsibility. How should we view and respond to the work of these God- appointed leaders? As v. 7 opens, remember your leaders. And again in v. 18- pray for us. As a congregation, we are to be mindful of our leaders- to lift them up in our prayers- to ask God to equip them for their work and that God would keep them and their families free from sin and temptation. Why do we need to pray for our leaders? Why should we pray for our elders and the preaching of the word? Well, one reason is that these leaders are under added stress and pressure. Since they are leaders of the church, they are the special target of the devil and his minion. The first attack on the church usually falls on the leaders of that church. The first to suffer reproach are usually those in positions of authority. Since the leaders represent the church, the world directs its attacks on them first. And as we consider, remember and pray for our leaders, we are mindful of the fact that our leaders are normal, fallen people- just like we are. We need to pray for these men because they are just as weak, timid and needy as you are! They are men of the same nature that you have! They stand in need of the same grace as you do! They are not perfect; they are not all powerful and all knowing. That is why they need our prayers! We all need wisdom and insight to lead the precious bride of Christ! But there is good news- I can tell you someone who is perfectly sufficient- as v. 8 continues-

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever! Jesus Christ is all powerful and He has all knowledge! It is Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith- He is the object of our faith and trust- not our elders. And Jesus sends His Spirit to equip these men for the work they are called to! So we need to pray for our elders- and be patient with their shortcomings. Being mindful of our own weaknesses- and how we too need to be saved by Christ the Lord of the church! So pray for these men- that God would equip them- and work through their office for our God! And honor them for the sake of their work- because they represent Christ! And as they represent Christ, we can safely follow in their footsteps. Consider their lives- and imitate their piety and wisdom. As Paul said in I Cor. 11- Imitate me as I imitate Christ! As far as our elders look, speak and act like Christ, we do well to imitate them! Consider the outcome of their life- imitate their faith we read in v. 7. We all need oversight- none of us are meant to go at it alone. Even our elders are under the oversight of the other elders- and we are all under the watchful eye of our shepherd Jesus. But as these men walk in the front of the flock- leading us to the Son- we do well to follow in their footsteps. And finally, as v. 17 begins- obey your leaders and submit to them. To pray for them is in fact to cooperate with them in their work! We promise to submit to them when we make profession of faith. Evidently in the early church, there were those who refused to submit and obey. It seems like there were some who rebelled, spoke against and even slandered the leaders of this young church. I'm sure most of you have heard of a congregation that continually undermines their own leaders. What kind of example does this set for the world? To obey is to content to follow- to submit is to have a willing and humble heart. Without grumbling and complaining- we are eager to do as we are asked. Not questioning every decision, but humble enough to yield. The elders are the husbands of the church in way- they represent the Lordship of Christ the true husband. The congregation is the bride in this sense- we are to submit and obey in all things lawful. To reject and rebel against our leaders is to rebel against the one who sent these leaders. Now I know this is sensitive issue in our day and age. But this is a message that Christ is bringing to us as a church this morning. In His providence, we have come up to this text in Heb. 13 in the middle of a pandemic- so it must be necessary for us all to hear it. Our leaders are called upon to lead- to make decisions that will not make everyone happy. When we are good

sheep- when we willingly follow- when we cooperate with our elders, we make their work so much easier- so much more enjoyable- that they are in turn blessed! And as our elders cheerfully and joyfully serve- we are faithfully lead and are blessed as well! Rebellious sheep not only suffer for their own rebellion, they make it difficult on the leaders of the church! Obedient and submissive members make the life of the church joyful in every regard! To say this another way, cheerful obedience and submission is not only a pleasant thing for the elders, it is even for your own good- it is for your own advantage v. 17 ends! You become a blessing and encouragement to the elders- who in turn are strengthened to be eager and joyful in their work! Now it is easy to submit and obey when you agree with everything that is going on- when life has no trial or conflict. But what about cheerful obedience and submission when you do not agree with everything that is going on- with ever decision that your elders make? Well, that takes patience, faith and humility doesn't it! In fact, humility is the exact quality required in I Peter 5- humble yourself under God's almighty hand. Remember that these elders are appointed by God- they serve on the behalf of Christ and they speak the Word's of God! Unless it can be proven that a decision is contrary to God's word, we are all called to humble ourselves and cheerfully obey. Now this is not easy for our human nature to take is it? Well, that is why we need to pray for a spirit of humility. Let us not resist or complain. Being obstinate not only hinder the work of the elders, but it also takes the joy out of your own service as well. So let us all willingly obey and cheerfully submit because these men serve on behalf of Christ for your good! And when new elders are appointed in this church, let us anoint them with our prayers and encourage them in their work- for they are working for our good!

To conclude, understanding the nature of the office of elders helps us keep a proper view of their work and authority. Sent from God to speak God's Word- to represent Christ in our midst. Cheerful leading by our elders and obedience by the members of the congregation are the building blocks of unity, peace and harmony. As our theme states: Jesus Christ appoints local leaders for the benefit of the local church. So let us all rededicate ourselves to being obedient sheep who faithfully listen to voice of our Good Shepherd.