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Hebrews 13:17-21

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.

18. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.

19. And I urge *you* all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

20. Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord,

21. equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

I chose this passage of Scripture because I noticed down at the Christian bookstore that October has been deemed “clergy appreciation month.” Now while I do not understand the New Testament to reestablish the dichotomy of a clergy/laity system like the Old Testament priesthood under the Law of Moses, I do believe it is important to recognize and appreciate those leaders whom

Jesus has placed within His church.

Verses 20 and 21 of Hebrews chapter 13 call out Jesus as the “great Shepherd of the sheep,” and points out that God Himself equips the church leader “in every good thing to do God’s will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.” Ephesians 4:11 indicates that Jesus selects specific individuals as gifts to His church, to serve in specific positions of leadership. Ephesians 4:12 then goes on to charge all church leaders to “equip the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” Leaders in Christ’s church are to equip others through both instruction and by example.

Today’s passage, verse 17, commands Christians to “obey your leaders and submit to them.” Christ has given His evangelists, elders (who are also called pastors or overseers), and deacons great authority in the church. For this reason God has given very specific qualifications for elders and deacons in I Timothy, Titus, and I Peter. For true evangelists, the life and work of Paul serve as a model for these leaders in Christ’s church.

With their great authority, legitimate church leaders are to take on great responsibilities. As our text states in verse 17: “They keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.” On the day of judgment, those who did not handle their responsibilities appropriately will be in big trouble. James 3:1 states: “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, known that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.”

Hebrews 13:17 ends with this statement to Christians: “Let them (your Christian leaders) do this (keep watch over your soul) with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” In other words, Christians are to bring joy to their leaders, as they see the ones under their charge growing and serving Christ with ever-increasing measure.

On the other hand, those Christians who constantly grieve the Godly leaders whom Christ has positioned in His church, are given a warning here. Church leaders expect to have the world give them grief. But for a Christian to do so slows the mission of the church, and puts that individual’s salvation in jeopardy.

I pray that each of us will be a joy to the leaders we serve under; this month and in all months to come. And so be a blessing and a joy to Christ Himself.