



## A Study of Leadership from Hebrews 13

### Highly Esteem the Servant Leader

<p>Hebrews 13:7 The New International Version 7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.</p>	<p>Hebrews 13:7 The New King James Version 7 Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.</p>
<p>Hebrews 13:17 The New International Version 17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.</p>	<p>Hebrews 13:17 The New King James Version 17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.</p>
<p>Hebrews 13:24 The New International Version 24 Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.</p>	<p>Hebrews 13:24 The New King James Version 24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.</p>

### A Closer Look at Hebrews 13:17

We will focus our look at Hebrews 13:17, but we will also consider vss. 7 & 24. It is vs.17 that is the most frequently abused passage on this whole subject of submission to Church leadership, so we will expand the translation of this verse to expose the writer of Hebrews real intent.

Heb 13:17 (NKJV) **Obey** those who **rule over** you, and **be submissive**, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

We will begin with the word **Obey**. It is derived from the Greek word *Pathometha* - which means to obey as a result of being convinced and confident in the correctness of what is being said.

This word does not command blind obedience. In connection with Hupako **be submissive**, this verse is teaching that the believer is to yield and obey as a result of being **convinced and confident** in the correctness of what is being counseled or taught.

Leadership are not allowed to command absolute obedience just because they are leaders. They are responsible to present their character and their wisdom in such a manner that they inspire

confidence in those they lead.

This is the only place where this word is used in relationship to leadership. In every other case it is always referring to either persuasion or confidence. It is used 30 times in these ways. The following are just samples - Mt.27:20; 28:14; Acts 19:8; Rom.8:38; Phil.1:6; 3:3; 2 Thess.3:4 and would be worth the readers time reading and considering.

It also carries the strong idea of *Trust*, in such passages as Mt.27:43; Phil.2:24; Heb.2:13.

Every other place this word is used for *obey*, the element of obedience as a result of being convinced by something or someone is clearly evident - Acts 5:36,37; Rom.2:8; Gal.3:1; 5:7.

For leaders to think they can lead without first having established trust and confidence in those they lead is nothing short of arrogance. It takes time for people to trust. It takes repetition of gentle serving behavior to relax the sheep enough to follow peacefully. Those who violate this principle in favor of *getting something done*, ultimately lose much more than they ever gain.

The Greek word the writer of the book of Hebrews uses for **Rule over** is *Hegeomai* - It means to lead, to think, to believe, to regard as, to esteem, to value highly, to be a ruling leader..

Kittel's Theological Dictionary defines *Hegeomai*:

Community leaders, examples of the faith, pastors responsible to God, ones who are to be obeyed, yet checked cautiously by Lk. 22:26 - the heart of a servant.

A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament defines *Hegeomai*:

1. Lead, guide, ruler, leader, princely authority, military commands, leaders of religious bodies, heads of a Christian church, leading men among the brethren, a chief speaker.
2. Think, consider, regard, look upon, consider someone or something as someone or something, esteem, respect.

It carries with it the sense of appropriate respect and appreciation for those called to lead the flock.

It is significant that Jesus has earlier framed the attitudes of those who would wear this title *Hegeomai* - *Governor* - *Leader* - *Ruler*. In Luke 22:26 he is to be one who serves. A servant leader. Not a power leader, but a servant leader. So that when we come to the passages in Pauline literature where the flock is called to submit to these men, the men they are to submit to are to be those whom Jesus described in Luke 22. If they aren't, then it is questionable if they should be leaders in the first place, and secondly if the people should submit to them. Paul assumes that the leaders who will be chosen will be Luke 22 types, but unfortunately this is not always the case. All too often we raise up to leadership those who manifest valued giftings, before we have allowed them to learn to love serving and caring for the body of Christ. We do not do them a service by doing so, and we certainly don't help the body. Authority to lead is not in the title only, but in the character. Leaders are to be representatives of Jesus Christ, and if their representation is not congruent with Christ then their leadership is null and void by virtue of their lack of character. Certainly perfection of character is not implied, but a solidity of godly character must mark those who would lead.

Anyone who would disagree with the above statement would do so because of the potential door it might leave open to rebellion. But, consider the concern from the opposite end of the spectrum. If a leader was clearly evil in his leadership and was obviously abusing the flock one would certainly not be expected to obey such leadership.

New Testament submission is a heart attitude before it is manifested in acts of obedience. While a follower may not be able to obey a given leader, they are still to maintain an attitude of submission. Again this is clear from the apostles themselves.

Acts 5:29 (NKJV) But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: We ought to obey God rather than men.

It is used to refer to people of *renown* in Acts 7:10; 14:12; 15:22.

It is used to refer to expressing *esteem* in Phil.2:3; 1 Thess.5:13; Heb.11:26.

It is used to refer to *careful consideration* in Acts 26:2; 2 Cor.9:5; Phil.2:6, 25; 3:7,8; 2 Thess.3:15; 1 Tim.1:12; 6:1; Heb.10:29; 11:11; Ja.1:2; 2 Pet.1:13; 2:13; 3:9,15.

It is used to refer to those in *leadership capacity* in Heb.13:7, 17, 24. In each of these cases proper esteem is to be placed on those who lead with the type of character described in Luke 22.

Therefore, from this chapter we have discovered that ruling leadership is more indicative of responsibility to convey the character of Christ, than it is a mandate on those following to obey every whim of their leadership. Leaders who would be followed will gain such a following by consistently exhibiting caring concern and appropriate protection of their flock, not by manipulation and intimidation.

Our next phrase *be submissive* comes from the word Hupako - a compound of *Hupo* and *Ako*. Again *Hupo* means to come under, and *Ako* means to *yield*. The two in combination mean to yield under the authority of someone else.

It is only used in Heb.13:17, and carries the idea of *yielding to the servant authority* of those over you in the Lord. And this will only take place, when properly applied, in situations where leaders inspire their followers to follow them as a result of having used confidence inspiring wisdom and a spirit of humility expressed in service and mutual submission.

We have already looked at the phrase *Rule over*, so we won't repeat that study. Now notice a combined translation taking into account the study presented on each of the key words in this verse:

Heb 13:17 (NKJV) **Obey** (as a result of being convinced and confident in the correctness and spirit of what is being counseled or taught ) those who **rule over** you (who are esteemed due to manifesting a gentle non-coercive servant's heart), and **be submissive** (yield to the servant authority of those over you in the Lord, as unto the Lord ), for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."

All too often leaders have read the phrase *those who must give account* and have felt an undue weight of responsibility put upon them. It is not the leader's responsibility to secure the obedience of those he leads. It is the leader's responsibility to lead his flock in such a servant and grace oriented manner that when the Chief Shepherd appears and asks the under shepherd for an accounting of his leadership he can in all honesty of conscience reply that he had consistently led his flock with gentleness and humility, skillfully ministering the Word while attempting to inspire confidence and trust in those he led. He will not be held to account for those who messed up their lives while properly shepherded, but he will certainly be held to account for having abused his leadership and caused his flock to wander off into the wolves due to attempting to escape abusive

leadership. A simple study of Ezekiel, chapter 34, will make this quite clear.

As is so often the case with New Testament Greek words, they come out of a culture and a pool of meanings, rather than being easily reduced to one simple word. Each word carries with it an expanded meaning. These three words, as defined, indicate a far different meaning than is generally ascribed to this verse.

This is not blind obedience to power hungry leaders, but rather it represents the type of obedience and submission based on the kind of leaders they are to obey. Far from allowing for abusive and coercive leadership it calls for those who can only anticipate obedience as they have been successful in being gentle teachers of truth, having convinced and created confidence in those they desire to lead. They must be leaders who clearly manifest a humble servant's heart and whose leadership inspires confidence and yielding on the part of those who follow. If the people are not convinced, and if the leadership have not inspired their followers by their conduct and character then in effect their leadership is null and void and their only recourse is to take the time to create such confidence and yielding in their flocks by so lovingly serving them and setting an example of a gentle servant that the people in time relax and follow their lead. To use any other means or technique, whether it be salesmanship or abusive authoritarianism, is to disqualify the leader in the eyes of God and his flock. Not a permanent disqualification, but an evidence that time and growth is needed to adjust the leaders concepts and character.

## **Don't Give up if you don't Measure Up**

It is important to say here, for those who are hurting with what has been said so far, that re-qualification is always possible. Many who read these words may be feeling about now that they should step out of ministry and do something else. Quite to the contrary. The mercy and power of Christ is such that if a leader will humble him or herself and acknowledge, in humility, that they have not measured up to Christ's standard for servant leadership, He is more than able to develop this kind of leadership. It is appropriate to make apologies to those they have exercised abusive authority over, but having done so they will frequently find that such transparency and humility will be the very thing to create the beginnings of new love and trust for the leader.

We live in a day where people are so hungry for genuinely humble and loving leaders. We are used to corruption in the realm of political leadership and all too often we are familiar with either Church leaders who have embezzled money from the Church, run off with the Church secretary, or led with abusive force those they were commissioned to love and serve.

If those who presently hold offices of Church leadership will humbly evaluate their leadership style and make themselves accountable once more to their flocks it is just possible that their honesty and transparency may well turn their Churches around and lead them into a wonderful season of refreshing and renewal. Humility will always, in time, lead to exaltation.

Phil 2:5 (NKJV) Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a Bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He ***humbled Himself*** and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has ***highly exalted Him*** and given Him the name which is above every name,...