**Series**: The Book of Hebrews

**Title**: Happiness in the Church, Part 2 - Fruit of Faith

**Scripture**: Hebrews 13:17-25

**Description**: It's not only Leaders that impact the joy of the church. Every member has a duty to do their part! Christ has Joy in store for those who will live by faith.

Review: Though this passage has great implications for leaders, this is really addressed to the congregation following them!

# Read

* "***your leaders***' - we understand by that word, not 'bosses', but being at the forefront, paving the way, drawing others along with them - and indeed *church leadership's* main intention is to draw the congregation along with them as they all move toward maturity - *the leader himself has not arrived*!
* However, the word translated is ***'rulers'***. ***Your rulers***. Our modern translations prefer the word ***leaders***, because to talk about "obeying rulers", is contrary to contemporary culture, immediately conveys thoughts of abuse by power-wielding despots in Myanmar. Today the idea of authority, and submission is offensive - ... and so the **translators** chose the word ***'leaders'*** I think, since ***'leading'*** in today's language is a better characterisation of **the Chief Shepherd**, Jesus, who by his authority washed feet and told the disciples to do as he did.
* **The point** though is that the elders of a church are not only servants, but authorities. That's why we find the word of God saying "*Obey... and submit to them*"

Part 1, last week, was a charge to the new eldership team, You are accountable to the Chief Shepherd: So **Watch Souls, Watch your self**!

Part 2, today, is a charge to the congregation - Having a leadership which is Accountable to God, and Honourable before Him has implication for you - actually 2 specific implications

# Pray

Implication 1:

# Let yourself be persuaded!

* Let's understand that first phrase - "***Obey*** *your leaders*"
* Interestingly, same Greek word is used in **v18** - "*pray for us, for we are* ***'sure'***"
* i.e Since your leaders are accountable to God, and Honourable before Him, "*be* ***sure*** *of them*" or better: "***Let yourself*** be ***persuaded***...and ***entrust*** yourself to them"
  + (cf Prov 3:5-6 *Trust the Lord with all your heart -* Be persuaded*)*
* **If God so designs** His Body on earth to have overseers/ shepherds/ elders, who are Accountable to **God's** expectations, and **Faithfully** desiring to meet them... **and if you are** **blessed**  to be in a Body like that... **Be persuaded**, to **trust and follow** their **lead**, their **directing**.
  + There can be any number of carnal reasons to refuse submitting to their leadership...
    - **What God calls a 'Stiff neck'** - purely stubborn refusal, because you don't like them, they don't embelish your idea of a great leader
    - **Past abuse** - you once did trust a church leader, and you got damaged; so you resolved never to trust any church leader / other authority again
    - **Avoiding accountability** - you just don't want someone intervening in your spiritual life;
    - **... did you know that Timothy** (who Paul said was unique in his genuine concern for people's welfare), was **despised** by some congregants for being young - "*Let no one despise you for your youth*" (1Tim 4:12)
    - ... **did you know that Paul himself** was dismissed because of his stature! This was what they were saying about him, (and he heard this through the grape vine): "*His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account*" (2Cor10:10) - when people finally met the man, they were disappointed at his lack of Presence, AND his *preaching* was unimpressive!! [some of us can relate to that...] - So in that letter, Paul's having to defend his apostleship, as many of the Corinthians will not **let** themselves '***be persuaded***' **to Him**.
  + These are all carnal reasons - flesh-driven, not Spirit-driven reasons
  + Now there are ***Spirit-driven reasons*** to not entrust yourself, .. Don't be persuaded by the WRONG leaders: Matt 27:20

Now the chief priests and the elders **persuaded** the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

* + - (If there is good CAUSE for mistrust - 1 Tim 5:20--- As for elders who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear)... **but if that is NOT the case** ***become persuaded***.
  + **(7)** *'Remember your leaders who spoke*...' - By now, enough time has passed to see the pattern, to discern between **false authority** and **true authority**.
  + True Authority is in Leaders who rightly honour the Word of God - I mean, that is our ultimate authority - Act 17:4, 18:4, 19:8 -

"some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks" "he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade" "spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom"

* + True Authority holds up **the word of God**,... even today as we read Hebrews 13:17 you are to be Persuaded **by the word**, ... to become **persuaded of the leadership - to entrust yourself to their authority**

Completing the thought, is literally one word in the Greek, Our follow-on implication -

# Yield!

* If you are persuaded by their authority - this is the natural next step.
* '*submit to them*' ... = '***yield***' - The only place in the Bible where this word appears! And it means:
* ***give in***!
  + It implies there's a natural **resistance**... '***Resist No Longer***'.. Let yourself be persuaded, Let them take the Lead...
  + **ILLUS**: I was thinking about the difference between **Obey** and **Yield**, and was reminded of the story of the young boy in the passenger seat of the car climbing out of his seatbelt to stand on the chair! "Sit down, boy, put your belt on! It's unsafe! "No!" the little boy refused. "Sit down, dear, Listen to mommy! You're in danger! " the mother insisted. "No!" came the stubborn reply. Finally, she reaches over and pulls him down. He sits there sullenly for a moment, then says, "*I may be sitting down on the outside, but I'm standing up on the inside*."[[1]](#footnote-2)
  + He was **obeying** his mum, but he had not **yielded**, had he?!
* We must understand this in v17 - It's an appeal for a surrendered heart, not mechanical conformance - they can look the same on the outside, but God desires the obedience to come from a truly ***yielded*** heart
* ILLUS: It's not only in deeply spiritual matters: I think everyone agrees that it is legit for an elder to instruct another member: Brother, you need to show love to that enemy! But yielding is in practical matters too! In the NT, part of the story of the church is leaders making practical decisions based on what seems right to them - no "right" or "wrong" answer, but a practical decision has to be made - they prayerfully consider the issue and the church follows
  + **Act 6:2** - delegating distribution of food
  + **Act 15:22** - How to best represent the full Gospel to other churches "*Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas*."
  + **1 Cor 16:1-2** - practicalities on collecting money and parcels for the poor - *Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come*
* I wonder how many people ever think about the connection between a powerful church ministry and yielding to their lead. ILLUS, Typical examples, practical areas - it's always practical -
  + **2015 Indaba - RE:Mission** - The leaders saw the need to make the church more Present and Accessible in our community - to impact more people simply by letting them know we exist, and are accessible to them. Part of that strategy meant getting the congregation to give input through a survey - on their impressions of our ministry, and their passions for ministry- because God has so gifted the members with His Spirit.. we'd spend a Saturday together, with lunch, to workshop and kick off change. It was a powerful moment in the life of the church. I got TB and Mark took the lead at the last minute. We planned it for months, advertised, and put huge effort into it. But there were some members who didn't respond AT ALL. Didn't respond to surveys, didn't attend any meetings. One member totally ignored the process and wrote me 2 personal letters on how I'd been failing as a pastor, along with bulleted points on activities he thought every pastor should do - of course they didn't fill in a survey or attend any meetings.
  + Or calling each person to make sure they join some " **Prayer group**" - Why? Because it's God's will to pray always, without ceasing;
  + Or what about **sermon applications**: Matching the Bible text with Life - "Becoming Unstill" - "How to Pray" - "Living in Faith"
  + Or calling the members to **attend a missions breakfast**: why? To show honour to the missionaries who've gone out forsaking all for the sake of His Name
  + Or urging the members - **Join a midweek group**! Why? Because a Sunday sermon is not enough - you need fellowship and Christian encouragement that meets you where you're at.
  + Or in **counselling** - "*You need to go and speak to that person, and tell them how they've hurt you-- I'll come too if you need help*"; Why? Reconciliation, forgiveness... "No, I'll be fine"
  + Or "**Wear your mask** over your nose and mouth" !
* The Baptists come from a heritage very nervous of Church Authorities - learning the error of obeying the Pope - so we have a congregational model where the members themselves hold voting authority. We do that so that no leadership can become authoritarian. The whole congregation gets to chose their leaders, and have a say in important decisions. But **appointing leaders** brings a responsibility to **let them lead you**!

# Application - effort on your part

**Firstly, Persuasion takes effort**

* It's easier to avoid the topic. Instead, pay attention to the leadership, listen to what they're saying. In the background, they're meeting every week on a Wednesday evening for over an hour, and constantly chatting over Whatsapp and Email, in an effort to develop the church - not the building, the ministry to the people. Engage with them. Test what they're saying. Grapple with things that are hard and find what is unconvincing, search for the truth. Come to see that they carry God's expectations seriously and are doing what they're able to make this the best ministry they can.

**Secondly, Yielding take effort**

* It's easier to avoid ***change***. (Doesn't Yield imply change?!) You ought to be expecting change - to resist no longer! "Change"
* See the purpose of the elders Preaching, Teaching, Directing, Counselling, Oversight (PS preaching and teaching a fair amount but teaching, directing, counselling absent - expect more!).
* The purpose of Joining a Church is not to receive, but to receive in order to change = to transform, to grow beyond knowledge, to grow in the soul ... not just the outside but the inside... and that taking place on the outside! Individually and as a Church.
  + Even preaching - our sermons can be long - trust me, that is not our goal; But look at (23) - Hebrews 1 to 13, this 'brief' word of exhortation! ... "Bear with me for your benefit"
  + Do you know the hours of studying and formation that goes into bringing the Word of God to you - ask the wives: they lose their husbands for up to 2 weeks - to digest the Word and help you to understand it and apply it - will you meet them half way? Come with a notebook and pen;
  + The hours of strategising to build the church and reach the community - finding that unless we phone and cajole people they're very unmotivated to attend these activities - unless you force the child to sit in the chair, he'd still be standing...
  + On 25th the elders will be getting away to pay careful attention to how our church can be changed from the inside, according to Go's expectations.

# What hangs in the Balance - the Final Motivation

* Your elders are carrying the responsibility under God to work this in you. Yield to them.
* **What hangs in the balance?**

I'll read a more literal translation which gives good sense:

**Be persuaded by your leaders**

**and**

**Yield,**

(for

they keep watch on behalf of your souls, ... )

**WHY?**

**in order that**

with joy they may do this

and not groaning,

for this will not profit you.

When the members refuse to be persuaded and yield, the leaders take on a burden : "literally, groaning". Besides the legit burden God gives them, of accountability, the Congregation pass on an illegit. burden:

* inside, the elder will start to lose heart in his ministry - "*Am I actually achieving anything here*, *or am I wasting everyone's time*?"
* and in the face of that, become demotivated - will stop pursuing people, strategising the ministry

( I don't think there's any elder who hasn't felt that. I think of 5:11

11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

and Paul in Gal 4:19-20

19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! 20 I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

even Jesus Himself, Mark 8:11-12

11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. 12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.")

* It's a double-duzi result : a congregation who is not benefiting, and a leadership who are groaning. That makes for disaster. Satan has accomplished his will.
* The 5th and last 'fruit of faith' is **Joyful relationship between Leaders and Congregation.** Christ has Joy in store for those who will live by faith.
* let's give ourselves wholeheartedly to **God's expectations**, and watch him produce glory - far above **our expectations**!

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen

1. Adapted from Bill Bright https://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/insights-from-bill-bright/standing-up-while-sitting-down-june-20.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)