

“SPIRITUAL LEADING AND FOLLOWING.”

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Scripture Texts: I Peter 5:1-7

Prayer: Holy Father, pour out your Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the proclaiming of your Word that we may know you. Make us both hearers and doers of your Word. By your Holy Spirit, fall afresh upon us and help us for the sake of your glory and your gospel. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Introduction.

I have made reference in the past weeks to something called sphere sovereignty. The three spheres of authority are the family, the church and the state.

We have already talked about this at the national and state level. This morning let us consider another sphere of sovereignty called the church over which God has placed elders.

I Peter 5:1-4, an exhortation to leaders.

Don't tune me out if you aren't an elder, this text has application to all leaders, pastors, elders, deacons, spiritual leaders, community leaders, teachers, parents, employers, all who have some position of leadership or authority. If you are a person with some spiritual oversight or influence in someone else's life then there is application here for you.

Also don't tune out because we are all under the spiritual leadership of our elders and that has implications for all of us, and certainly for how we respond to our leaders and pray for them.

One of the paradoxes of leadership is it's always done by sinners for sinners. Every pastor, elder and deacon who has ever served this church has been a sinner. And every sinner called by God to lead has the unenviable job of trying to lead a bunch of sinners. Why does God do it this way? Why not send angels to lead us? He has done it to keep us humble.

No leader is perfect and if you expect or demand perfection from your leaders you will be disappointed and maybe even become bitter or angry. This is also true in our homes and state.

The conduct of leaders.

While leaders are sinners and not perfect, that doesn't mean there aren't some standards of character, some expectations for conduct. While we may not always live up to them, we should always strive for them.

Peter says leaders are to be an example to the flock that is worthy of being imitated. There is a challenge here for leaders to watch their life and faith closely as others are watching.

Peter identifies three common problems among those who aspire to be leaders, three dangers to be avoided and three ways to avoid them. First, laziness; second, greed for gain (money); and third, power or praise. Lust for ease, lust for some gain, lust for power. And as antidotes to these three viruses he offers three remedies: first, willing desire; second, eager joy; and third, humble example.

First, leaders serve not as one who must be compelled, but willingly, as one devoted to the task. Not as one constrained or forced out of necessity or duty. He who desires to be an elder, desires a noble task (I Timothy 3:1).

As a general rule, men are spiritually lazy. We are glad to let someone else do the spiritual heavy lifting. Actually saying it that way exposes part of the problem. Spiritual things are not seen as heavy lifting. They are things to be left to women and children. Men like physical activity more than spiritual activity.

God wants men who see spiritual things as weighty matters, eternally important, men who are ready for action, men willing to do hard things like leading their family and leading their church.

The antidote to this problem is seeing Jesus on the cross willing to serve and sacrifice for His flock. Brothers, fight the temptation to slothfulness with a Holy Spirit-enabled willingness to serve. Especially in this season. Make the most of the opportunity for personal devotions and family devotions, of Scripture and prayer. More in the Word than in the world.

Second, leaders don't seek personal gain or benefit, but gladly seek what's best for the church.

I saw this in action last Tuesday night as the elders wrestled with when we should reopen worship. Each one started out sharing their opinion. And there was quite a range, from open today to open next week, to open in a few weeks, to wait for more information and clarity.

Then in the discussion that followed there was a shift away from what each of us wanted individually to what was God's will, and what was very best for the flock. What did love for each other look like? What would safeguard health and what would safeguard our witness for the sake of the gospel in our community? And what would set an example in humility and submission?

We were well aware we couldn't please or satisfy everyone. And we were aware that Satan loves division and he would love nothing more than to get us arguing or accusing or complaining.

Did they make the wrong judgment call? That's possible. Should we submit to it? That's the second part of Peter's admonition, his call for humble leaders and humble followers.

I Peter 5:5-7, an exhortation to followers.

I Peter 5:5-7 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Another paradox of leadership is we are asked by God to submit to these leaders even though they are sinners and not perfect and sometimes make decisions or say things we don't agree with.

Leadership is often making judgment calls based on their best understanding of the best information that they have at the time, sometimes they get it right, sometimes they get it wrong.

Some people like their decisions and others dislike them. Every president, boss, coach, teacher, judge, pastor and parent knows the fickleness of affection and dissatisfaction.

That's why it's called submission. If our leaders only did and said things we agreed with or if they only asked us to do things we already wanted to do, that's not submission.

Teenagers aren't submitting if their parents ask them to do what they already want to do. Submission happens when they are asked to do their homework or clean their room or be home by eleven.

The paradox of leadership is trusting God and showing our faith in Him by humbly submitting to those over us, those who love us and pray for us and are accountable to God for our souls. God is sovereign over all things, even wrong decisions. This is what gives me peace in this Covid situation, that God is sovereign over every bad or wrong action. God will bend it to His good.

You understand I am not talking about decisions or actions that are clearly unbiblical, immoral, unethical or illegal. Of course, in any of those situations it's right to question and challenge.

We are witnessing in many cities across our nation one kind of response when something happens that is unbiblical, immoral, unethical and illegal. We are seeing evil being returned with evil, more actions that are unbiblical, immoral, unethical and illegal. We are witnessing the chaos that ensues when unlawful actions follow unlawful actions.

What should be done? We should follow the rule of law and order. We should use legal channels to seek justice and redress.

Applying this to pastors and elders, if we think they have done something unbiblical, something wrong, before we start yelling and throwing things, we humbly go to them and share our concern and ask for clarification, understanding, and if needed, correction.

Peter says that there are two things that should characterize a flock, a congregation's attitude toward their leaders, *submission and humility*.

Neither of those are easy. In fact they both go against our grain, they don't come naturally, but are contrary to our flesh. And they go against the spirit of our age in America. Someone once said that within all of us lies the soul of a king. We all desire to be king, boss, in charge. We resist others telling us what to do or not to do.

Submission

I Thessalonians 5:12-13 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Biblical followers who submit please God, bring joy to the leaders, and unity and good to the whole body.

Humility.

Submission isn't possible without humility, being intentionally clothed in humility.

By definition a church should be a gathering of humble people. All of us are sinners, right? We all admit that we have sinned against God and one another, that we all have a lot of sin in our hearts, that we are poor and needy spiritually, that we can't save ourselves. Who can boast? We all have a log in our eye.

Human community thrives where there is humility, whether we are talking about family and relatives, school, sports, work, or church. Pride ruins relationships.

So what is humility? Humility is simply the attitude which puts others first, which gives the needs, desires and thoughts of others attention before our own.

Paul defines it well in Philippians 2:

Philippians 2:3-4 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Humility means trusting by faith that what seems like a bad path, a path that looks like a serious disadvantage, is in God's providence in our best interest and in due time will turn out well and to our advantage when He chooses to exalt us.

The loving providence of God is on display here today. He so cares so much for the needs of your soul that He has given to you men as spiritual leaders so that you are not lacking in spiritual care, in leading and guiding, in protecting and guarding.

God has set these men in your midst and over you for your good. God has not called you to murmur, complain or grumble against them. Resist every temptation or opportunity to gossip or criticize your leaders. God was exceedingly displeased when the congregation grumbled against Moses and Aaron. When you have an issue with one of your leaders don't talk about them, talk with them. Let's set an example in this community of the

right way to speak to and about one another. Let's set an example that reflects well on Christ, on our leaders and on our unity.

Implications and Application.

Being submissive and humble are not possible in the flesh. *All of this can only be done by the help of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.*

Without our own personal Pentecost and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in our lives we won't do it. To die to ourselves and our own wants and desires comes only by the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:15-21 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ... but be filled with the Spirit, ... 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Submission frees us from always having to be right, from always having to get our own way, from always having to be in control, or control the outcomes and results.

Submission sets us free from selfishness, self-absorption, self-interest, self-pity.

The greatest symbol of submission is the cross. Jesus bids us to daily take up our cross and die to ourselves and live for others. As Jesus humbled Himself, so let us go and do likewise.

God has placed us in three spheres of authority. It is interesting that in all three spheres our pride and lack of humility are exposed again and again. You get the feeling pride just might be a major sin issue for all of us. God will not let us remain proud.

God is testing His church right now, humbling us by taking away our control and exposing our lack of humility and submission.

God tests our obedience through those He places over us. Those who in pride resist will find themselves the enemy of God and come into battle with Him.

Humility is a very hard lesson to learn, and learning it over and over is what God does to all our pride, arrogance, self-promoting.

Go from here determined to be clothed with humility. Let humility guard your mouth and thoughts, let it permeate your actions. Humble yourself before God and each other and leave it to God when He exalts you and how. Because of His care for you, cast your cares on Him.

Finally, Pray for your spiritual leaders, the elders, deacons, staff, volunteers. They have targets painted on them. If the enemy can bring them down then it is easier to scatter the sheep. God has called them, accept them as His gift and His grace to you.

Prayer: Holy Father, we know that we are a proud and rebellious people and that we live in a nation of proud and rebellious people. More and more we resist what is right, we resist those who are trying under your authority to lead. Have mercy on us. Start this morning Lord by your Spirit to convict us and start this morning to lead us. Thank you for the example of Jesus who submitted to a humble life on earth, who humbled himself even to death on a cross at the hands of ungodly leaders and was lifted up and exalted by you. Help us follow this example in light of the promised reward that is ours in eternity.

I pray for your Fatherly blessing to be upon this flock. Make us faithful and fruitful for your glory. And above all, dear Father, grant that our lives will increasingly bring glory to your dear Son, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, in ways completely disproportionate to who we are and what we have. This we ask in the infinitely precious name of Jesus. Amen.