



First Baptist Church Fair Oaks Ranch

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.”

Leadership is one of the most rewarding and trying realities in life. The ministry is unfortunately no exception to this conflicting dualism. There are seasons when leadership is exciting and edifying, when the leader can pour into the lives of followers and see results. There are also times when the burden of command weighs heavy on the heart and mind and the unpopular decision that must be made is met with grumbling and complaining or flat-out rejection and rebellion. This is especially true in 21st Century Christianity when disgruntled congregants, focused on preference than biblical adherence, can simply leave and go down the street to a sister church with little question as to why they left their previous flock or shepherd. Admittedly, there may very well be legitimate reasons to leave verses endure. Issues such as articulable abuse in any of its many fashions (emotional, spiritual, etc), fraud, theological infidelity, or a biblical disqualification are certainly reason to reject leadership in search for a new shepherd; however, worship style, budgeting priorities, or the lack of strawberry filled donuts in the café are hardly reasons to break fellowship. Hebrews 13:17 gives instructions for how to respond to proper biblical authority that results in unity and blessing to the church.

The principle regarding the relationship between church members and their leaders emphasizes the importance of obedience and submission, not merely as acts of compliance but as expressions of spiritual maturity and communal harmony. The terms “obey” and “submit” are often used interchangeably in English, but they carry distinct connotations, especially within a biblical context. The Greek word for “obey” is “peitho,” which implies being persuaded or convinced. It suggests a rational and voluntary act of following directives because one is convinced of their validity and righteousness. Obedience, therefore, is an active response to authority, grounded in trust and understanding. This is not obedience because you have the full picture or perspective of the one in leadership, but you trust that God has placed the right person in the decision-making place. The Greek term for “submit” is “hupeiko,” which means to yield or give way. This is more about an attitude of the heart, a readiness to defer to another’s authority out of respect and humility. This is demonstrated through aligning one’s will with that of another. Neither of these reflect the abandonment of one’s own preference or personality but the setting aside of them for harmonious fellowship.

These acts are not merely about maintaining order but are integral to spiritual growth and community well-being. Leaders are tasked with the eternal responsibility of watching over the souls of their flock and will be held accountable for their stewardship. Since this leadership task is not optional, the eagerness of followers makes the role enjoyable and rewarding. When church members obey and submit willingly, it brings joy to their leaders, enabling them to serve with enthusiasm and dedication. Conversely, resistance and defiance cause grief, which can hinder the leaders’ ability to serve effectively and eventually result in the spiritual decline of the leader and that of a congregation.

Although this text may appear self-serving; there are many practical ways that a church can submit and support their leadership. When a new initiative, such as a community outreach program or new small group plan is introduced, the congregation’s response can significantly impact the leader’s ability to serve with joy. If the members actively support and participate in the initiative, it can bring joy and encouragement to the leader, and the congregation will sense the momentum as well. In situations



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where leaders must make difficult decisions, such as a change in worship style or church policies or cast a fresh vision, the congregation's attitude is crucial. Respecting and trusting the leaders' decisions can foster a positive and supportive environment. Lastly simple acts of encouragement and appreciation go a long way in supporting joyful leadership. Expressing gratitude for the leaders' efforts, offering words of encouragement, and praying for them can uplift their spirits and strengthen their resolve.

Conversely, when church members resist or reject their leaders, it can have several negative consequences. Hebrews warns that such resistance is "of no advantage" to the congregation. This rejection can manifest in various ways, such as open defiance, passive resistance, or lack of support. Rejection can lead to discouragement and burnout. Sadly, according to recent survey, the average tenure of Pastors in churches is less than 4 years. Additionally, a church that rejects its leaders may experience stagnation and decline. Without the guidance and direction of effective leaders, the church may struggle to grow and thrive. This can lead to a lack of vision, purpose, and momentum, ultimately impacting the church's ability to fulfill its mission.

The joy of leadership in a church setting is not about personal satisfaction for the leaders. Admittedly 'joy' is a fruit of the Spirit that should exist regardless of environment and is the responsibility of the leader to foster; however, a church can help fan the flame to greater heights. When leaders serve with joy, it reflects a healthy and harmonious church environment. Joyful leadership is characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and a positive outlook, which can inspire and uplift the entire congregation. A joyful leader is a more courageous leader who is willing to challenge the church to greater vision and heights and is more ready to confront the wolves within their midst. Joy in the leader's heart opens an avenue of creativity in which the Holy Spirit can flow which becomes contagious to the rest of the church.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, your word calls us to submit and obey our spiritual leaders. We may not always agree or understand the why behind decisions or directions; however, you call us to trust and walk in unity and fellowship. Help us to do this eagerly so it will be joyful to those who serve and an advantage and blessing to your church. In Jesus Name.