

Following Our Leader: One Crucial Role for the Congregation

(guidance for selecting new members of the Shepherding Board)

Hebrews 13:17

March 9, 2008

by John Miller

Big Idea: Even godly leaders need a congregation who will trust God enough to follow them.

Introduction: The Rebel

I'm going to read a passage of Scripture – just one part of one verse – and I want you to record your first reaction as you hear this verse. You can either write it down or just remember it. Nobody else will see it. I just want you to notice your reaction. Here's the verse.

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them...

What's the first thought that comes to your mind when I read Hebrews 13:17? Remember that thought. We'll come back to it later. But let me quote a different kind of verse. Some of you might recognize this one, especially if you're male and over the age of 55.

*Johnny Yuma was a rebel.
He roamed through the west, did Johnny Yuma, the rebel.
He wandered alone.*

*He got fightin' mad, this rebel lad.
He packed no star as he wandered far,
Where the only law was a hook and a draw.
The rebel, Johnny Yuma.*

*He searched the land, this restless lad.
He was panther quick and leather tough,
If he figured that he'd been pushed enough.
The rebel, Johnny Yuma.*

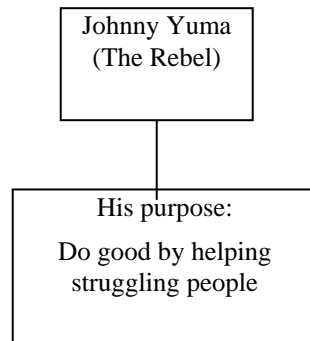
*Fightin' mad, this rebel lad
With a dream he'd hold 'til his dyin' breath,
He'd search his soul and gamble with death.
The rebel, Johnny Yuma.*

- Andrew J. Fenady (originally sung by Johnny Cash)

Okay men! Where did I get this story about Johnny Yuma? ... "The Rebel," starring Nick Adams as Johnny Yuma! That show ran on TV almost 50 years ago, and you remember it!

October 4, 1959 to June 18, 1961. Seventy-six episodes in two years, and as a young boy, I loved “The Rebel.”

Do you remember the story line? Johnny Yuma was a restless, brooding, ex-Confederate soldier who wandered around the far West after the Civil War ended. As he wandered, he’d come across people who needed help – usually against some bad guy – and he’d help ‘em, even when nobody else would. He was a lone-ranger who went around doing good as he searched for satisfaction in life. I loved that show! I loved Johnny Yuma’s toughness, and his fearlessness, and his independence. Nobody told Johnny Yuma what to do! If we were to put Johnny Yuma’s life into an organizational chart, it would look something like this:



Johnny Yuma was a man of high morals, and his high morals always directed his actions. But nobody else directed him. Nobody stood in authority over him. He obeyed nobody.

Is Johnny Yuma a good model for us to follow in the Church of Jesus Christ? Is it enough to practice high morals and to go around doing good, but obeying nobody? Let me ask this another way. Is God glorified – is God magnified – is God made famous when each of us simply does what is right in our own eyes?

You might remember the condemnation God laid on His own people at the end of the Old Testament book of Judges – Judges 21:25. He didn’t look at His rebellious people and say, “*Everybody did wrong.*” He said, “*Every man did what was right in his own eyes.*” Each did his own thing with no intent to obey another authority. That’s Johnny Yuma! Doing good, but as a rebel, not as an obedient servant. Is this a good model to follow in the Church of Jesus Christ? Hebrews 13:17 indicates that there is a better way to live. And what is that better way?

A Better Way to Live

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them...

Hebrews 13:17 is not a beloved verse of Scripture! Nobody I know has ever taken Hebrews 13:17 as their life verse. Not in America anyway! We’re not into submitting. We’re into self-autonomy! “*I decide what I will or will not do. It’s every man for himself. I make the rules. Nobody has the right to tell me what to do!*”

Do you remember the riots that broke out on the Hill – here in Cedar Falls – five or six years ago? It was homecoming weekend and students were hitting the bars pretty hard. I'm not sure what started it, but somebody got stirred up about something, and one thing led to another and pretty soon a full riot broke out on the Hill. People were throwing rocks, and turning over cars, and I think one car was set on fire. It was ugly! So the police came in and shut down everything – including the bars. The next day I heard an interview with one of the students on the street that night, and he was outraged! At the fighting? At the turning over of cars? At the destruction of other people's property? No! He was outraged that the police made the crowd disperse! These are his exact words. "*Nobody has the right to tell me what to do!*" Even during a riot! I think that young man has a lot of hard lessons coming in his life! He'll have to learn the hard way that there are authorities who have the right to tell us what to do, and one of those authorities reigns over all the others – God Almighty! He has the right to tell us what to do! But, we in the Church of Jesus Christ already understand this. Right? We know that God is the ultimate authority in our lives. We know that obedience to God is evidence of our love for God. That's what Jesus says in John 14:21.

²¹ "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me..."

You and I already understand that God has the right to tell us what to do. So we have no problem at all obeying God's commands... including Hebrews 13:17.

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them...

Is that what you wrote down as your first reaction to this verse when I read it at the opening of this sermon? That you have no problem with this verse at all? Or did you find yourself saying, "*Well, that depends on who the leaders are.*" Or "*that depends on what the leaders do.*" Or, "*that depends on whether I agree with the leaders or not.*" Or "*that depends on whether I like the process the leaders went through in making their decision.*" Or maybe you thought of some other exception clause that you are just certain ought to be included in Hebrews 13:17 but isn't. How do you respond to this command?

Let me clarify who these leaders are. They are church leaders, not government, or community leaders. We know this because of the job description given to them in this verse.

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls...

This is what makes spiritual leadership different than leadership in the business community or leadership in the government sector or leadership in the military community. All of those are important, but they have a different bottom line than leadership in the church. The bottom line for church leaders is not how well the church runs. That is a secondary priority. The bottom line for church leaders is the health of people's souls! Leaders in a church are entrusted with the two most precious objects on the face of the earth other than God Himself: the Gospel of Jesus Christ (by which people are saved from their sin by believing in Christ crucified and risen again), and human souls – that eternal existence possessed by all men and women, some of whom will spend it in heaven and some of whom will spend it in hell.

Church leaders “keep watch over your souls.” They do whatever it takes to get souls saved and to keep souls healthy. And notice that church leaders are accountable to their own leader.

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.

The New Living Translation says...

¹⁷ ...Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God.

God is never completely separated from we human leaders who labor in His church. He always stands as our mentor, as our overseer, as the judge of the sincerity by which we watch over the souls of the people. God Himself is always present when human leaders lead. This doesn't mean that leaders can't make mistakes, or that we can't make bad decisions, or that we can't make wrong or even sinful decisions. But God has established safeguards to protect against ungodly decisions by church leaders.

- The New Testament always refers to multiple leaders in a local church – never just one. It's much harder for nine leaders to make a mistake than for one.
- 1 Timothy 3 commands that every leader in the church has to possess high standards of character and of life habits. This helps protect the church against bad decisions.
- Leaders have to obey the teachings of the Bible, and this helps protect the church against bad decisions.
- Leaders have to become “of one mind” as they make their decisions. We saw this in Acts 15 last week, and this helps guard the church against bad decisions by its leaders.
- The process of making decisions has to include a sensitivity to the congregation, as we saw in Acts 15 and could see in other places like Acts 6. This also helps protect the church against bad decisions by its leaders.

God has set up safeguards for His church – with respect to the humans who are appointed to lead His church here on earth – and God Himself stands with those leaders to teach us, to reprove us, to correct us, to train us in righteousness. This is the system that God has chosen to set up for the leading of His church. And what does He want from the congregation? Well...

- When you've taken your concerns to the leaders of the church, like the congregation did in Acts 6...
- When you've had the opportunity to be heard by the leaders of the church, as the whole church did in Acts 15 through Paul and Barnabas... (They didn't all go to the leaders, but some of their representatives did.)
- When the leaders of the church have prayed and listened to God and debated the issue and considered the needs of the congregation and have come to one mind and have chosen to set one direction that they believe God is calling them to go...

- At that point, the response that God wants from His congregation is this...

¹⁷ Obey your leaders...

We could translate it this way: ‘be persuaded by’ your leaders. If they election process has been a healthy one, there are multiple, godly people who have been seeking to understand God’s will, who have debated among themselves how to best understand God’s will, who have spoken with people in the congregation, who have considered the dangers that can sneak up on a church, and have come to an agreement which they are now presenting to the congregation. “Be persuaded by” your leaders...

¹⁷ ...and submit to them...

This means “yield” to them. Give them the right-away. When an ambulance comes up behind you with his lights flashing, you yield the road to him. You have a right to be on the road, but you recognize the urgency of that ambulance driver’s job. Somebody’s life is at stake, so you yield your rights to him. That’s what God instructs us to do toward leaders within the church. Leaders are no closer to God than you are – we believe in the priesthood of believers – we’re all priests before God – but our leaders have been given an urgent responsibility. They help the church understand and pursue the will of God. They guard the church against people and doctrines and practices that might lead us away from God. They “keep watch over your souls.” And it is to your advantage to yield to them and to let them lead! Look what the rest of Hebrews 13:17 says.

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.

It’s the congregation that suffers when the congregation fights against its leaders or refuses to follow its leaders. In Hebrews 13, God challenges the church on this point! We are to be putting our best people in positions of leadership, and then we are to be trusting that God Himself is teaching them, and reproofing them, and correcting them, and training them and showing them the path that He wants His church to follow. Then He calls the church demonstrate its trust in God by obeying its leaders and yielding to them.

This is hard for Americans! We don’t like to yield to anybody! It goes against our nature. Maybe that’s why God demands that we yield. He’s changing our nature. He’s getting rid of our sinful ways, our prideful ways, our self-centered ways, our “me-first” ways, our “do it my way” ways. And He’s transforming us into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ...,

- Who “gave Himself up for me” Paul said in Galatians 2:20,
- who “gave Himself up for us” Paul said to the believers in Ephesus,
- who “gave Himself up for [the church]” Paul said to that same group,
- who “gave Himself as a ransom for all” Paul wrote to Timothy,

- who “gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” Titus 2:14

There is a time when the godly thing to do is to give yourself up. Jesus knew what it was to yield to a purpose bigger than him, and in Hebrews 13:17, God challenges His people to act like Jesus and trust God to have their best interests on His heart. It’s okay to question. It’s okay to debate. It’s okay to enter into the decision making process, and to urge leaders to consider other courses or to reconsider their current course. We talked about this last week and I mentioned it again today. The congregation needs to be part of the decision making process. But at some point, the congregation has to play the role of Jesus and submit. It’s the right thing to do, according to Hebrews 13:17.

Conclusion

You know, I liked Johnny Yuma! I liked him a lot. I liked his toughness, I liked his fearlessness, I liked his independence. I liked it that nobody could tell him what to do! But for that reason, he can’t be my hero. He obeyed nothing but His own morals, and that’s not what God calls us to do. He didn’t yield to anybody, and that’s not what God calls us to do. He made for good television in 1950, but it would make for a weak church in the 21st century. Johnny Yuma was a rebel. Those who love God are not! They trust God enough to obey their leaders and to submit to them.

- Who are those leaders who can help this church understand and pursue the will of God.
- Who are those leaders who can guard the church against people, doctrines, and practices that might lead us away from the will of God?
- Who are those leaders who you can look at and say, “I’ll follow that person! I’ll yield to that person! That person stays close to God!

Who are these people? You now get a chance to say. On your sermon guide, please write down one or two names. No more! We will tally these nominations and then begin talking to the top 8-10 qualified nominees. From that list, we hope to present four, two of which you will elect to our Shepherding Board in June. And I’m trusting that God Himself is overseeing the whole process.

FOLLOWING OUR LEADER: BIBLICAL PICTURES OF LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP

March 9, 2007

Review from Last Week:

**The Shepherds We Elect Become
Members of Our Ruling Board.**

Question: What does God expect our Shepherds to do?

Answer:

- 1) Help this church understand and pursue God's will for Trinity Bible Church.**

The Biblical Picture: Acts 15:1-33

Notice such things as

- a) the people going to the leaders for clarification of God's will (v. 2)
- b) the leaders deciding to take up this matter for the people (v. 6)
- c) the active debate that took place trying to discern God's will (v. 7-21)
- d) the willingness of the leaders to involve the congregation in the debate (v. 12 & v. 22)
- e) the commitment of the leaders to help the congregation pursue God's will (v. 22-29)
- f) the congregation's acceptance of the leaders' decision and the joy and peace that they enjoyed from this decision (v. 30-35, esp. 31, 33).

This is a tremendous picture of biblical church leadership!

- 2) Help this church guard against a person, doctrine, or practice that might lead us away from God's will.**

The Biblical Picture: Acts 20:28

Notice that both the leaders and the flock need to be guarded. The leaders are told to "be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock...". As Canadian theologian Red Green says, "We're all in this together!"

A Leadership Lesson for Today:

Question: As we appoint leaders and they labor to do what God intends leaders to do, what does God expect the Congregation to do?

Answer:

_____ your leaders and _____ to them.

The Biblical Picture: Hebrews 13:17

Who among our members can do the two things on page one better than anybody else, and will be a leader you will joyfully follow as an expression of your trust that God is leading this person and the whole Shepherding Board to which s/he belongs? Write down a possible nominee or two on the page following.

Your Nomination:

Our 'Active Members' are listed on the following page. From among these people, select one or two (no more than two!) who could fulfill the responsibilities listed on the sermon guide. Do not name a pastor or a current Shepherding Board member. These people will already be on next year's Board except for one. They are as follows:

Current SB members are:

Marty Colwell	(until June '09)
Steve Riggs	(until June '09)
Shelly Hornback	(until June '10)
John Keiser	(until June '10)

Exiting the SB in June and ineligible for one year:

Trent Simpson*

* John Crabb & Phil Rohrbaugh served the final year of Paul Herring's term. Each remains eligible for re-nomination.

What two people do you believe can best fulfill the biblical responsibilities of a Shepherd?

Circle one response for each question below:

Are you a formal member of TBC? Yes No

How old are you? High School Beyond High School

Way Beyond High School!

Please leave this form in a basket
at the door as you exit the sanctuary
or you may turn it into the office in a few days.