

## Lesson Twenty-six

(13:7-25)

### LEADERS FOR LIFE.

7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. <sup>9</sup> Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings; for it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited their adherents. <sup>10</sup> We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup> For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. <sup>12</sup> So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. <sup>13</sup> Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, and bear the abuse he endured. <sup>14</sup> For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. <sup>15</sup> Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. <sup>16</sup> Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let

them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you.

18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. 19 I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

22 I appeal to you, brethren, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. 23 You should understand that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. 24 Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. 25 Grace be with all of you. Amen.

The scriptures have much to say directly or by implication about the importance of leadership, or of following the right leader. God in various ways made himself known to his human creation, beginning with Adam. He spoke directly at times, as to Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Joshua. Beginning with the Mosaic law, he gave to the Jews a number of leaders besides himself to help them walk in the paths of righteousness. Late in the Mosaic period, he condemned some of Israel's leaders, called shepherds, because they had been entrusted with an important task and had miserably failed, Ezekiel 34. During the ministry of Jesus, he too warned the people against the Jewish leaders because they were not good examples to follow, Matthew 23:1ff. In the establishment of the Church, Jesus was to be the example all are to follow, but he also gave the church men as shepherds and overseers, 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. As the man is to lead in the home, the elders are to lead in the church. The apostles, divinely directed, served as the first human leaders, but God had to establish a permanent pattern, and thus gave the eldership to shepherd and instruct.

In our lesson text, leaders receive a special mention in v. 7 and 17, and Jesus is presented as the chief shepherd, vv. 20-21. It is doubtful if the leaders then present were apostles, but earlier leaders might have included an apostle. If Paul be the author of the letter, in some way this epistle would represent his leadership. However, the aim and intent of the instruction is about those who made up the congregation(s) at the time of writing, and those who were leading them.

We today are much like the first readers in that we too need good leadership, and we too need to follow good leadership. We are more

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fortunate than those early Christians in that we have access to much of God's revealed will in our Bible, at least that portion of his will which he thought necessary to write down and preserve. So we have both a greater privilege and a greater responsibility than they, in that we can more carefully study God's will to ascertain that which he would have us to do, in choosing good leaders and in keeping his will. May we do so!

13:7 — **Remember** — Another command to be continuously observed. The leaders in question probably were the ones who first spoke to them about Christianity, and led them into fellowship with Jesus. Their message was of salvation in Jesus, and their lives were lived in such a way that they were examples for the flock.

**leaders** — Note here I Thessalonians 5:12-13, as well as the more familiar texts in Timothy and Titus, and that in I Peter 5.

Much could be said about leadership in the church and its responsibility. These few observations will have to suffice: Jesus is the head and the authority, human leaders are neither. They are to lead by example and through teaching, but the authority is in Christ.

Even as Paul said, people were to imitate him only as he imitated Jesus, I Corinthians 11:1. Those who follow must consider carefully those whom they choose to lead them, and be willing to listen and follow in light of the above. As far as the congregation goes, where God's word has spoken, there is no room for question, no need for a decision. In this area, the church is not a democracy with power to legislate, etc. It is simply to obey. Some areas in which God has given no direction may be considered and acted upon as decided, either by the whole church, its chosen leaders, or whoever. One area where God has spoken little, if at all, is in the area of method. Hence, much of the church's methodology is a matter of indifference insofar as God's revealed will is concerned. In matters not doctrine, then, the local leadership may be vested by the group they serve to lead in such areas. And it may well be added that the New Covenant scriptures do not present any picture of some elder or elders ruling (There is no Greek word for "rule" in I Timothy 5:17. The idea is of "leading" or "guiding.") over any congregation or over areas, etc. While the apostles had authority for such things, no elders are pictured as having such. Notice too that we have presented elders, plural, not elder singular. It may be that some congregation has only one man who can serve in such a position, but the ideal is a plurality. No one man can be a model for all, and a group of men is more likely to lead well, Proverbs 11:14; 15:22.

V. 8 — **Jesus Christ** — In direct contrast to elders who come and go, and whose lives are often less than ideal, Jesus Christ abides forever, both as the example to follow and the authority to obey.

V. 9 — **Do not be led away** — The new is not always wrong, nor the

old always right, even in religion. However, God has spoken in his son, both finally and completely. Since this be so, no new revelation is to be expected other than what came in apostolic times. In the case of those early Christians, this verse implies that they had knowledge of Christianity and could compare any new or different doctrine presented to them against what they already possessed. Here they are encouraged to stay with what they have received from their former leaders who gave them the word of life.

**foods** — Those in Colosse had somewhat the same problem, Colossians 2:16ff. This may have had reference to Jewish customs with the foods that could/could not be eaten, or some other religious food of the day. Read the apostle's word on this in I Timothy 4:1-5. Local customs or taboos may enter in to what a Christian can do, but food in itself is clean, Romans 14:14. However, on some occasions it is still wrong to eat certain foods, either because of the people present, or that which the food represents. The whole section of Romans 14:1 — 15:13 and I Corinthians 8:1 — 11:1 relates to this point.

V. 10 — **We have an altar** — That is, we have Jesus and all that he represents. This is in special contrast to Judaism with its altar and what it represented.

V. 11 — Some sacrifices offered by Jews could be eaten by priests or people or both. It may have been that some of those early Christians had been Jews, and were being tempted by such things, or were being encouraged to become Jewish so that they could participate.

V. 12 — In distinction to the Jewish altar located in the temple area within the city of Jerusalem, Jesus was sacrificed outside the city, and represented a different system, not to be mixed with Judaism.

V. 13 — **bearing abuse** — The implication is here that pressure was either being exerted or would be exerted upon those first readers. In some communities, Jews were in positions of power, and could cause considerable trouble. Ref. Saul's mission to Damascus, and Acts 13, 14, 17, 21-24.

**outside the camp** — The expression in v. 12, "outside the gate," and here, "outside the camp," are clear statements that tell us Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem as it was then. The gospel accounts are not too clear in this regard.

V. 14 — **we seek the city** — Remembrance of 11:10; 14-16, and that in 12:18-29 is good here.

V. 15 — **Through him** — Jesus is to be the focal point of the Christian life. He is both our sacrifice and our high priest. Notice how carefully and continuously the author keeps the Christian way before the eyes of his readers.

**sacrifice of praise** — Here the sacrifice is to be the result of speaking

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(fruit of lips). While we use the word sacrifice almost exclusively to mean something above and beyond what is normally done, the Bible commonly uses it in both covenants to mean that which is commanded. The sacrifices in the Old Testament age were mostly what was expected. The sacrifice of one's whole life with all that is implied is what is expected of the Christian, Romans 12:1-2. We just need to keep working at using Bible terms in Bible ways.

**acknowledge** — From the Greek term *ὁμολογέω*, normally translated "confess." This acknowledgement is to be done throughout life rather than just "between repentance and immersion" as is commonly practiced. In fact, one's life until death is to be a public confession of the fact that he is Christian, for it ought to be with every Christian that for him to live is for Christ to live.

V. 16 — **Do not neglect** — Same form and meaning as in v. 2, with the same general import.

**to share** — Our familiar word *κοινωνία*, as in Acts 2:42 and Galatians 6:6. These are sacrifices that are to be a part of life, as long as one is Christian.

V. 17 — **Obey** — In the same sense that they speak God's word, and in contrast to any false teachers. See comments on v. 7. The "outcome" of their lives would be one reason for submission. A second reason would be that stated in this verse, that leadership involves responsibility, James 3:1, and it ill-behooves any Christian to fail to follow a godly leader in respect to things God has spoken. In other matters not doctrinal in nature, the issue is different. However, those chosen to lead the congregation as well as those being led should recognize the difference between doctrine and non-doctrine and act accordingly. Again, for leaders, it is not a matter of authority in matters of doctrine — they have none; but it is a matter of leadership, and the example of godly living that they can offer. (Note I Pet. 5:1-4 about elders and authority.)

The New Covenant scriptures represent rather clearly that elders are the overseers (bishops, presbyters, shepherds, etc.) of the congregation. This statement needs to be made in light of this truth and in conjunction with the above remarks. We do not find the unscriptural practice of some churches today, that of having a "pastor" who rules the elders (if any are allowed) and the congregation. The converse, as stated above, is true: the elders are to lead in every matter, the "pastor" and all else are to follow, with everyone recognizing that Jesus is the head and the only authority. He has placed elders as the leaders of each local congregation. If there is any "obedience" to be rendered, it is to Jesus. To those who have been selected to be elders, all must consider their teaching and examples. They do have positions of responsibility, if not positions of authority. They should be as shepherds who lead the sheep in the

right paths. (Even Jesus, as the "great shepherd" does not force the sheep, but leads them, Jn. 10:1ff.) As sheep, the example and teaching of the elders should be carefully and constantly considered.

In reference to our text, it needs to be said that the congregation evidently had good leaders, and they were to be followed as such. We should remember, too, that this epistle had authority from its inspiration, and as such had to be heeded. If any of the leaders had some special gift from God, such as prophecy, etc., in that respect, they were to be obeyed. The situation in the early years of the church, during the apostolic age, was considerably different than today. We have no apostles, but we do have the written word. We have leaders, but none with any authority, as indicated above. Thus, the understanding of our text and the application thereof is changed insofar as the situations are not parallel.

**joyfully . . . sadly** — The expressions would vary depending upon what each individual did. The leaders, however, would know the "outcome" of a faithful life or one not so, and the reaction would be accordingly.

V. 18 — These last verses, while a part of the concluding section according to the outline on page ix, are placed with this lesson because of their bearing on the lesson topic of leadership.

**Pray for us** — The author was apparently well-known to the readers, and seemingly in circumstances that were questionable in the eyes of some. If the author were Paul, many people would have found reason to question his sincerity or wisdom in the various things that he did or that happened to him. However, the author asserts that whatever was in question was such that he had no misgivings about it, but was in good conscience. It is worthy of note that Paul, prior to his conversion, in good conscience even killed Christians. Hence, it is entirely possible to be in good conscience and be condemned to hell. All of us must continually check our thinking and actions against the revealed will of God.

V. 19 — **May be restored** — Some sort of detainment was true for the author, whether it be prison or something else. We know only what is stated.

V. 20 — This verse has the only direct reference to the resurrection. Some suggest it is implied in 1:3; 6:19 and 12:2, where Jesus has died and has gone to be seated at the right hand of God. Of course, we read the implication in there — it is possible for one to die and go to heaven without having a bodily resurrection.

**God of peace** — God is the one who makes it possible to have a right relationship with him. He made the first move, not because we were worthy, but because he loved us.

**the great shepherd** — Jesus is presented as the shepherd above all others. The elders are to shepherd the flock, Acts 20:28, but only as God's Word directs. Jesus has been God's spokesman to the church, giving the

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directives for the flock, including the elders who shepherd.

**eternal covenant** — Much of this book of Hebrews has been on this point. We may be somewhat weary of the matter, but the author felt the need to emphasize once again how vast the distance between the Mosaic covenant, temporary and shadow, and the covenant in Christ, permanent and real.

V. 21 — **equip** — The sentence reads: “May God . . . equip you.” The idea of equip is to supply what is lacking, to prepare as fit. The Greek term *καρτίζω* is to be seen in 10:5 and 11:3, then in such texts as Matthew 4:21; 21:16; Mark 1:19; Luke 6:40; Romans 9:22; I Corinthians 1:10; II Corinthians 13:9, 11; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:12; I Thessalonians 3:10. A good text to read here is Philippians 2:13, then Ephesians 2:10.

**through Jesus Christ** — Again, the imperative point about being in Christ, and of allowing him to use us as he pleases. Let none be afraid to allow God in Christ to use their life — what better hands could one be in than God’s? As with Mary in Luke 1:38, whatever God desires to do with us, let us do, willingly, joyfully, thankfully. Now read Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:20-21 and conclude with Jude, vv. 24-25.

V. 22 — **bear with** — Hold up and receive it, he means. It has been a masterful presentation of the best God has to offer: Christianity.

**word of exhortation** — The Greek is *λόγου τῆς παρακλήσεως*. The first word is seen in John 1:1, etc. The last one is variously used to mean persuade, or exhort, as in Romans 12:1, 8; or in reference to the Holy Spirit, John 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:7.

**briefly** — It is not actually long, for it can be read in a short time. Much more could have been said, but the epistle is still clear and covers the subject adequately, yea, as God directed.

V. 23 — **Timothy** — Probably the one Bible readers know.

**with whom** — The author evidently believed that whatever was then a hindrance would be resolved, and he could accompany Timothy to the brethren.

V. 24 — **Greet** — Very much like Paul’s letters elsewhere, though it was common in letters of the day.

**those . . . from Italy** — It is not clear whether the people in question are in Italy, or are natives of Italy though in another place.

V. 25 — **Grace** — One of the great words of Christianity! It is God’s grace that makes Christianity what it is, for it came through Jesus Christ, John 1:17, and teaches us how to live, Titus 2:11-14, for in it we are to grow, II Peter 3:18. So, may grace be with all of you who read this!

## QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 26:

253. It would be good, one more time, to write out, by memory if possible, the outline of this whole book.

254. In thinking about leaders and followers, who primarily is the Christian's leader and who is to be followed?
255. How has God made it possible for Christians to know his will in Christ, and hence to follow it?
256. What would be one essential difference between the leaders in the Apostolic age and those in later years?
257. In what areas is the congregation not a democracy with the power to legislate?
258. How does the Bible use the word sacrifice? Give examples.
259. Why has repeated emphasis been given to Jesus as the great shepherd, to his own shed blood, and the eternal nature of the covenant through him?
260. Who equips Christians to do good works?

*ἡ χάρις μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν*