# RULERS IN THE CHURCH

***Obey Those Who Rule Over You***

It sounds very strange, almost sacrilegious, to speak of the Lord’s church having “rulers.” Yet consider these scriptures which speak of this very thing.

“*for if a man does not know how to* ***rule*** *his own house, how will he take care of the church of God*?” (I Timothy 3:5 – giving qualifications for elders in the church)

“*Let the elders who* ***rule*** *well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine*.” (I Timothy 5:17)

“*Remember those who* ***rule over*** *you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct*.” (Hebrews 13:7)

“*Obey those who* ***rule over*** *you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you*.” (Hebrews 13:17)

“*Greet all those who* ***rule over*** *you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you*.” (Hebrews 13:24)

The word “rule” is the Greek ***hegeomai*** and is defined as “to go before, to be a leader; to rule or to have authority over.”

For instance, it is used of Joseph in Acts 7:10 when Pharaoh “*appointed him* ***ruler*** *over Egypt*.” In Acts 15:22 it is used of Barsabbas and Silas who were said to be “*leading men*” among the brethren. The fact is, other translations help us to put this in perspective when the HCSB, ESV, NIV, RSV and the NASB all translate the word as “*leaders*.”

God, in His infinite wisdom, knew that there had to be spiritual leaders in the organization of the church. Without leadership there can easily develop chaos. I have been in churches without godly leadership and it resulted in times of disorder and confusion. Teenagers and novices in the faith often had input in the direction of the church. This is not a good thing. God sure knew what He was doing when he commanded preachers to “*set in order what is lacking, appointing elders in every church*” (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

The elders, also called in scripture “*pastors*” (Eph. 4:11), “*shepherds*” (I Peter 5:1-4), “*bishops*” (Philippians 1:1) and “*overseers*” (Acts 20:28), are men of developed faith and godliness that the church has asked to lead them to heaven. They willingly submit to these men and their leadership, accepting their combined judgments in matters of opinion. Please note, these “rulers” do not have legislative authority to make laws, but only delegated authority to carry out Christ’s laws for the church.

Having said that, it is still a matter every member of this local church must consider when the elders use their God-given judgment to call for us to worship or have Bible study on Sunday mornings (9:30 and 10:30), Sunday nights (5:00), and Wednesday nights (7:00). They are “***ruling***” when they do this.

So, are you of a mind to “*submit*” to their “*rule over you*” as they ask you to assemble so that they may “*feed the flock of God*” (Acts 20:28)? Can they do this “*with joy and not with grief*” as they “*watch out for your souls*?”

What is the word you would use when a child rejects their parents’ leadership? Or a citizen disregards a policeman’s orders? Or an employee refuses their employers rules? Or a student ignores a teacher’s instructions? Or a soldier disobeys an officers command?

Those same words used in answer to the above questions would perfectly describe how, if God’s rulers ask you to assemble, and you purposefully choose not to come, what God would think of you. It might be called insubordination (a refusal to submit). Others might call it rebellion, or defiance, or disobedience.

While there are scenarios that permit your absence from the assembly (sickness, travel, work, emergencies, treacherous weather, etc.), the fact that the Sunday night and Wednesday night assemblies are often a fraction of the Sunday morning assembly is alarming to the “*rulers*” who are trying so desperately to “*feed the flock*.” It is as if their desire to “*lead*” you to heaven has become a burden. That “burden” – which is nothing more than an mere *inconvenience* – has, in God’s eyes, become an act of disobedience.

Consider well this command from heaven as found in Hebrews 13:17,

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

As an elder (pastor, overseer, shepherd, ruler) of this flock I write these words in the sincere hope, and the fervent prayer, that all those in the Lord’s church will take to heart the seriousness of God’s call for His people to “*not forsake the assembling of yourselves together… but exhorting one another… as you see the Day approaching*” (Heb. 10:25). We are only reminding you of what the Chief Shepherd (Jesus) commanded. In point of fact, the elders would be in rebellion to Christ for not fulfilling our God-given duty to feed the flock through these assemblies.

We ask you to please come to every assembly you possibly can in order to “*provoke one another to love and good works*” (Heb. 10:24), and to join hearts and hands in praise to our Lord “*who gave Himself for us … and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works*” (Tit. 2:14).

If you would not refuse Christ’s invitation, we ask that you not refuse our invitation to assemble. While God calls us “rulers” – we are only His postmen, delivering His mail.

This letter is sealed with a kiss. – Rick