

HEBREWS: REPLACING MAN'S RITUALISM WITH CHRIST
"Part XXVII: Functioning Well When Church Leaders Are At Risk"
(Hebrews 13:18-25)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

It is almost common knowledge that Church leadership in Bible-believing, Bible-teaching churches is "at risk" today:

(1) Neil Wiseman has written a book revealing that Evangelical pastors are leaving the pastorate under duress at an alarming rate.

(2) A couple of years ago, Sean Coughlin shared with me that he had heard troubling news at a gathering of Christians. According to the speaker at this meeting, Sean reported that they have found that the least fulfilling career in America today is that of the pastor of a church!

(3) Often throughout the history of the Church here at Nepaug, the board members and I have had to deal with issues that come up that weigh heavily upon us so that it may be hard even to sleep at times. It seems that there is no easy solution to a very difficult set of circumstances, and that we may have no option but to create unrest by doing what is right!

Well, when leaders have their credibility put at risk, or are hampered in some way from being "at home" in their efforts in the Church, doesn't that put the whole church "at risk" for spiritual failure?

Is there a solution for such challenging times?!

(We turn to the sermon "need" section . . .)

Need: "Things run well in a church when its pastor and board members are well, believed and followed. However, if a leader's credibility is questioned, or if he's inhibited from ministering easily, IS the CHURCH at risk for failure? What about such times?!"

- I. **The author of Hebrews wrote to Hebrew Christians who were used to the massive organizational security of Israel's national religion and temple functions in Judaism, Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, p. 1729.**
- II. **However, the SECURITY of that ritual establishment was not only ABSENT for them as separated CHRISTIANS, but their Church LEADERS were at risk, leaving them seemingly open to failure:**
 - A. The author noted that at least he and those with him in prison (v. 18-19, 23 implied) were sure they possessed a "good conscience."
 - B. This expression is rare: typically, the word "good" that modifies the "conscience" is the term, *agathos*, not kalos as appearing in this text, B. F. Westcott, Hebrews, p. 446.
 - C. The word *kalos* focuses on the **appearance** of goodness rather than its **intrinsic** value as does *agathos*, Abbott-Smith, Manual Grk. Lex. of the N.T., p. 228. Apparently the author of Hebrews was in need of being **seen** by his **readers** to be **innocent** of his being in prison.
 - D. This credibility question shows up also in the writer's appeal for his readers even to bear with his exhortation in Hebrews 13:22.
 - E. The author even urged his readers to greet their church leaders, 13:24. This could have meant the readers were tending to resist heeding **any** leaders because of the credibility question of the imprisoned author!
 - F. Besides, the leaders were in prison, alienating them from both ministry as well the opportunity to defend their credibility, Hebrews 13:19, 23.
- III. **To handle this critical "leadership at risk" status, the writer of Hebrews resorted to his confidence in God's oversight as signaled in what God had already done in meeting this need:**
 - A. The author expressed complete confidence in God that he and his co-workers would be reunited with the church for their good, 18a, 19.
 - B. He also assured them God would equip the body with all it needed to do His will effectively, Hebrews 13:20a, 21.
 - C. His reason for this confidence was expressed in recalling God's work to provide the Church with its **Overshepherd's** leadership turnaround!
 1. The Great Shepherd of the Sheep, Jesus Christ, had once been "disabled" by **physically dying** on the cross, Hebrews 13:20b.
 2. However, God the Father had raised Him up from the dead to shepherd the Church, revealing that no obstacle was too great for God to supply what was needed to shepherd His people now:

- a. We recall that even Christ's **credibility** was damaged before His followers upon His dying, cf. Mtt. 26:56b; Lk. 24:19-21.
 - b. Yet, the Father raised Him from the dead and **restored** Christ's **credibility** and hence **leadership** of the disciples, Mtt. 28:1-20.
 - c. The author related this amazing leadership "turnaround" event of Christ to encourage his readers whose leaders were "at risk" in their influence and credibility in relating to **them**.
3. As God had so raised up the **Chief** Shepherd, God would equip the body now for ministry effectiveness when their **undershepherds** were "at risk" in their leadership of **them**, Hebrews 13:20c.
 4. Just **HOW** God equips believers for ministry effectiveness is described elsewhere in the New Testament as follows:
 - a. God has given His Holy Spirit to every believer to indwell him (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9b) as a "Parent", John 14:16, 18 NIV.
 - b. God's Spirit supplies each believer a spiritual enabling to serve God in the discipling process, 1 Peter 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:4-7.
 - c. The Holy Spirit equips every believer to discern Scripture's truth for use, 1 Corinthians 2:9-12; John 14:23, 26; 16:13-14.
 - d. The Holy Spirit who indwells every believer works to make the local church united as **He** wills it to be, Ephesians 4:3. The individual believer is then responsible to preserve that Holy Spirit-created unity so the local assembly can function well. Obviously, the Lord must lead in how and where the upright believers in the Body are to work to sustain that unity!

Application: *To handle a church matter that involves leaders "at risk," (1) believe in Christ to become part of the spiritual Body of Christ and be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Jn. 3:16; Rom. 8:9b; 1 Cor. 12:4-7. (2) Then, as a true Christian, seek to preserve the unity the Holy Spirit produces with true believers in the local church by (a) confessing any sins outstanding we have done (1 Jn. 1:9) and (b) leaning on the Spirit's power and leading at every step. (3) GOD steps in to "take up the slack" and right the tottering church flock!*

Lesson: *When local church leaders are questioned as to their credibility, or are logistically hampered from ministering in full strength, GOD who brought the Church's CHIEF Shepherd from the dead to provide for the Church's redemption takes up the slack involved for the Church's sake!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

One of the great moments in Church history occurred on April 18, 1521. On that day Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk in the Catholic Church, stood to answer questions at a Diet in Worms, Germany. These dealt with his written beliefs that salvation was by faith alone without the sale of indulgences or the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Great Light, p. 64)

Documents of the Christian Church, p. 282-283)

God stepped in and had Luther safely **kidnapped** and **hidden** by a friendly official. While in a castle hideaway, Luther translated the Bible into the German language for the common man, and the Reformation was on!

When we face "at risk" situations in the local church or even in Church HISTORY as did Martin Luther, our part is simply to TRUST God **and** function in faith and a pure conscience that it will all work out. After all, GOD makes the Church "go": Matthew 16:18 records Jesus, saying, ". . . I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."