

Do Not Yield

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There are many “pastors,” “apostles,” “prophets,” “elders” and such these days who demand blind obedience from their followers. A favorite verse of these Nicolaitan usurpers and charlatans is “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves to them...” (Heb. 13:17 KJV) Yet when we examine the real meanings of the Greek words, we find that this verse says something entirely different than the way it is used by these modern despots. Though this authoritarian posturing poses obvious contradictions to Jesus’ clear command, “This shall not be so among you!” (Mt. 20:25-26, Mk. 10:42-43 and Lk. 22:25-26), this rendering is the ace in the hole for every Nicolaitan clergy power monger. But the more accurate rendering, pointed to in nearly every Greek dictionary of merit, would be, “Be persuaded by what those who have gone before you have said.” In fact, in Heb. 13:7, the leaders have gone so far ahead that we’re supposed to note the end of their lives – that is, the leaders whom the author of Hebrews has in view were already dead! But the Nicolaitan clergy (under whatever title they conceal themselves) need their proof text so as to be able to hide among the genuine wheat and so this rendering has remained somewhat obscured until this final hour.

The word so poorly rendered “obey” is *peitho* [3982], a primary verb that means “to convince” or “be convinced.” The word poorly rendered “rule over you” is *hegeomai* [2233] and it really refers to those who lead because they have, by virtue of maturity and experience, more of Christ’s characteristics. The word rendered “submit” is *hupeiko* [5226] which means to “yield.” If these words were used in the context of a military army, one might be able to raise the relatively weak argument that these words infer the idea of authority having been delegated to the one who convinces, to the one who leads, to the one who is served. But since these words are applied to the body of Christ, of whom He alone is the Head (1 Cor. 11:3, Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22, etc.), to use this argument in favor of authoritarian control of the people of Christ is to rip these words completely out of the context of the entire New Testament. Anyone who exercises authority apart from the headship of Christ is acting apart from Christ – and such false authority is nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

Against the Deception

Paul wrote to the Galatians, “But this [that not even Titus was compelled to be circumcised by the Jerusalem ekklesia and Judaizers] occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” (Gal. 2:4-5, see also vv. 1-3)

This passage speaks more directly to our time of apostasy than it might at first seem. Just as Paul warns here of false brethren secretly brought in by stealth, so too did Peter warn, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.” (2 Pet. 2:1-2) Here again, we find a similar pattern of linguistic deception and misunderstanding. When we read this verse even with the poor renderings, it has an impact all on its own. Peter is saying that just as false prophets operated all throughout Israel’s history (as is amply indicated by the Old Testament, especially Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micah) so too will there be false teachers among the people, especially during the

end times. This is an echo of Paul's warning that the people would heap up teachers to tickle and scratch their ears as they turned away from truth and sound doctrine. (2 Tim. 4:3-4) This warning alone is well worth heeding!

But Peter's warning gains even more impact when we re-discover what is actually being said here. We read this verse and most often we think that "destructive heresies" here is referring to "error" that leads people to fall under the control of some spiritually bizarre cult. That is, we most often think of someone teaching blatantly false teachings that stand in stark contrast to the standard, basic teachings of the New Testament and using these errors to draw people away from those "nice folks" who regularly attend "church" and into some weird fringe or over-the-edge group. And this false understanding is aided along nicely by the KJV's rendering as "*damnable heresies*." But this is not what Peter was speaking of.

The Greek word here is "haireisis" [139] and it has several meanings. It can refer to "the act of taking or capturing," as in storming a city. It can refer to "choosing, a choice or that which is chosen." It can refer to "a body of men following their own tenets" (a sect or party like the Sadducees, Pharisees and even Christians). Or it can refer to "dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims." It is a direct opposite to the concept of the body of Christ which is based in unity and oneness. "Hairesis" is dividedness and multiplicity.

Since "error that arises from differing factions" is only a tangential meaning of the word "haireisis," why do we assume that this tangential meaning, and not the primary meaning, is what Peter has in mind here? Especially since we know that Jesus, Paul and Peter were referring to a *great* falling away from the faith that involves *many*, perhaps even *most*, we must step back and re-evaluate what Peter would be referring to if he intended us to use the primary meaning of "haireisis."

In this light, Peter would not be referring to the error but to the divisions – various groups of "Christians" (some perhaps even possessing elements of genuine faith in Christ Jesus) each separating off into their own little place and refusing to have much, if anything, to do with other groups who claim to have Christ but who also have a different understanding on some doctrine, tenet, practice or feature of "Christianity." Today, we call that denominationalism – and even though it is condemned in the New Testament (Gal. 5:20-21), it is now the accepted order of "following" Christ.

When Peter says these divisions were secretly introduced, it is meant in much the same way as what Jesus said about how the tares were planted – men slept and were unaware of events that might otherwise be obvious and deemed unacceptable. (Mt. 13:25) And when Peter says that these divisions deny the Lord who bought them, he used the unusual Greek word *despotes* [1203] ("despot") for "Lord" so that, in a prophetically "cryptic" way, the Spirit could tell us that those who are in these divisions do not really practice submission to the Lordship of Christ Jesus. Like the Jews who opposed Jesus, they give God mere "lip service" – but as many a preacher has lamented from the 3rd century on, the "church" has progressively stepped away from direct and personal obedience to the only true Shepherd. Instead, the "church," in its spiritual state of slumber and unawareness, has negligently turned instead toward the Nicolaitan doctrines of clergy and laity to keep the crowds quiet, passive, controlled and ultimately ineffective for Christ. Unfortunately for many, this sleep ends in eternal death.

Liberty

Paul wrote, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (emancipation from bondage, freedom)." (2 Cor. 3:17 Amplified) Paul also warned, "Do

not quench the Spirit.” (1 Ths. 5:19) One inference that can be made is that where the Spirit is followed, we have liberty from sin, self and Satan. Where sin, self or Satan are followed (intentionally or unintentionally), there will be bondage to men or to ideas or even to spiritual beings that war against the will and way of God. Paul spoke elsewhere of such bondage to sin, self or Satan as “the snare of the devil” which those who have not known truth and have stubbornly resisted the Spirit’s work in regard to their actions and beliefs fall into. (see 2 Tim. 2:26, 1 Tim. 4:1, etc.)

Paul clearly warned, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Gal. 5:13) We are indeed called to great liberty (which is attended by great responsibility!) so we must not use our liberty to gratify our flesh any more than we should use our liberty from law to indulge in sin and lawlessness. (Rom. 6:15, 1 Jn. 3:4)

In this context of the New Testament’s standard of truth (based not on the written text of the New Testament over which “theologians” and Bible “scholars” argue over the nuances and meanings of the various texts – a thing which did not exist in Paul’s time – but based on the individual’s personal obedience to the leading of the Spirit of truth; see Jn. 16:13, etc.), in this context, Paul refused to yield submission to the leaders and Judaizers of the Jerusalem assembly in the matter of deception that had crept in. It is not to be missed that these leaders and Judaizers clearly believed that Jesus was the Messiah or else they would not even have been involved with the persecuted “Nazarene sect,” let alone have been recognized as leaders. (Acts 5:13, 24:5, etc.) But as is true of many of today’s “church” leaders, these men were not in error regarding the identity of the Messiah – they were simply adding things to the way of following Him that He did not require. In so doing, these men were no longer leaders in the body of Christ but had become false brothers. Serious and sobering indeed!

Submission, Not Subjugation

The idea of submission in the New Testament is not what most “pastors,” “apostles” and “churches” suppose and propagate. Their notions stem more from the world than from the mind of Christ, to say the least. When Paul said, “...we did not *yield submission* even for an hour...” (Gal. 2:5), he used the Greek words *eiko* [1502] and *hupotage* [5292]. The former word, *eiko*, is incorporated in the Greek word used in the instruction to “submit” to our leaders (*hupeiko* [5226] – Heb. 13:17) and the latter word, *hupotage*, and the closely related *hupotasso* – [5293] are perhaps best rendered as “subordinate.” Again, if all one knows is the world’s paradigm of authority and its rigid structures of titles and positions of wieldable power, one will think it only right and proper to lord over one’s brothers and sisters in Christ. But Paul said to all followers of Christ, “Submit (*hupotasso* – [5293]) to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Eph. 5:21) He did not single out the “pastor” or the “apostle” or even the “elders” as the ones to submit to – he said we should *all* be submissive or subordinate to *one another*. Even when Peter, recognizing the superior experience and wisdom of genuine elders, wrote, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders,” he then immediately went on, as did Paul, to say, “...*all of you* be submissive (*hupotasso* [5293]) to one another...” (1 Pet. 5:5) Submission is not a “one-way street” in the New Testament!

Paul expressed this elsewhere by saying, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Phlp. 2:4) Submission is simply the idea of not having to be in the position of first (as in first violin in an orchestra) but being content and

diligent as a second (as in second violin in an orchestra – a position some conductors view as the hardest position to try to fill!)

There is a curious tendency within people and all human beings can be (perhaps oversimplistically) roughly divided into two categories – a “number one” kind of person or a “number two” kind of person. That is, some people have a predisposition toward having to be first, chief, principal, boss, number one, top dog, “pastor,” etc. These people find their sense of personal fulfillment gratified in the number of people who look to them for leadership or in how often they get to stand up in front of their group and direct the group’s actions. The second category does not share this need to be first or to be visible as “leadership” (though they may still insist and work “behind the scene” so that their views and ideas are followed) and they find their sense of personal fulfillment gratified in their having chosen the right “number one” guy to follow and support (even if they then manipulate and use that person to attain their own agendas). All this is, at least in part, an expression of the deeper nature of mankind in that, in our relations with God, we are all called to be “number two” kind of people though in our reflection of Him we should all be “number one” kind of people leading others to Him! But sin enters in by causing the “number one” people to walk in some place or position that rightly belongs only to Christ or God or, as “number two” people, to put some other person, idea or thing in some place or position that rightly belongs only to Christ or God. This is also the particular work of the spirit of antichrist (“anti” in Greek being both “against” and “in the place of.” See *antichrist* [500]) and this spirit is quite active and effective in using this human tendency against us and to its own advantage.

Carnal Enmity Against God

Paul wrote, “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject (*hupotasso* [5293]) to the law of God, nor indeed can it be.” (Rom. 8:7) Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.” (1 Cor. 3:1) As Paul seeks to remedy all that is wrong with the Corinthian assembly in Christ, he must grapple with the root problem of spiritual immaturity because these people had not progressed in Christ by following only the Spirit of God but had rather aligned themselves behind their favorite teacher. (1 Cor. 3:4) This alignment was not a spiritual action but a carnal action that expressed their flesh’s enmity against the will and way of God. It is not possible to progress toward spiritual maturity in Christ if one is encouraged and taught to practice carnality – especially when that carnality is taught and practiced as “the right way” to follow Christ! And so long as one claims to follow after a man rather than the Spirit of Christ and God, that one is carnal and at war with God.

Paul wrote, “[God] put all things under [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the ekklesia.” (Eph. 1:22) He did not put some things under Christ’s feet and some under the “pastor’s” or the “apostle’s” or the “elder’s” feet. He put *all* things under Christ’s feet and gave *Him* to be head over *all* things to the ekklesia, His people who assemble to attend to His kingdom. Only as any person truly works or operates in Christ by the leading of His Spirit will his or her works be a true work of God. Any title or work that takes a person outside of Christ is merely a work of deception and causes a person to practice lawlessness, what is merely right in one’s own eyes. (Mt. 7:22-23, Jdgs. 21:25) Any work that is merely lawlessness is opposed to the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 6:14) The Jews of Paul’s day were “ignorant of God’s righteousness” and tried, through the law of Moses, “to establish their own righteousness” and thus did “not submit (*hupotasso* [5293]) to the righteousness of God.” (Rom. 10:3) The

“pastors,” “apostles,” “elders” and “church”-ites of today are equally ignorant or unacquainted with the righteousness of God (either through failure to recognize His standards or by supposing it to be unimportant or unnecessary in their own lives.) They settle for doing whatever is right in their own eyes (embracing their own preferred denomination or “theology” or practice according to their own personality and desires.) Thus they practice carnality and do not submit to the righteousness of God. The result is the same – only the particular thing that diverts them from the will of God differs from the Jews whom Paul wrote of. Their end and pending judgment will be equally similar.

Responsibility

The author of Hebrews wrote, “Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection (*hupotasso* [5293]) to the Father of spirits and live?” (Heb. 12:9) Jesus said of Himself, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do, for whatever the Father does, the Son also does in like manner.” (Jn. 5:19) Obedience to the Father, through the leading of the Spirit who dwells within us, is the core of what we have been called into. It is not a religion or a philosophy but a relationship with God expressed in obedience to God which will primarily be expressed as love toward God and our fellow human beings. Anything else is mere religious deception. Obeying Christ and God is not following a list of do-s and don’t-s but a spiritual interaction with the head of His body. It is not a heavy burden of impossible requirements (Mt. 11:29-30) but rather an enablement to do the right and good things of God. (Phlp. 4:13) But if we do not obey the Father of our spirits, by what insanity do we think we have attained to the right to live? (see also Rom. 8:14) Further, for those who live their lives doing what is right only in their own eyes, from what source do they then live their lives? If in reality they are not practicing obedience to God but rather practice obedience to their flesh or to demons, where does the power come from? Is God really empowering these people to practice sin and lawlessness? Or is some demon inserting itself into their existence and usurping some rightful place of Christ and God? Those who continue on in such manner are not guiltless and will be judged for what they have done to others in the name of Christ and God.

James wrote, “Therefore submit (*hupotasso* [5293]) yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (Jas. 4:7-10) As immense and wonderful as God’s mercy and grace are, it is not enough to simply know what Christ and God have done for us – we must actually and willfully and obediently respond to what He has done. If we will not submit to God but instead submit to others, we have no reason to expect reward from Him. If we will not submit to God but instead submit to our own flesh nature, we can expect only fiery judgment as an adversary of God. Only as we submit to God and follow Him will we be able to resist the devil and walk in the things that God has provided and prepared for us to walk and live in.

Paul’s act of refusal at Jerusalem to yield to the deceived and deceptive Judaizers would be labeled by most clergy and religious hucksters today as an “act of disobedience,” perhaps even disobedience *to God!* Yet Paul’s underlying purpose was so “...that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” (Gal. 2:5) The ekklesia of the living God (not the “church” and certainly not the “church” building!) is called to be “the house of God [and] the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Tim. 3:15) The ekklesia, those people called out of this world’s darkness so as

to be spiritually able and equipped to attend to the issues and affairs of Christ's kingdom of light, *is* His house, His dwelling place. Christ's ekklesia is also called to be the standard of truth and light that shines brightly in this dark world. A pillar stands erect and remains only when it is truly perpendicular and not out of balance in any direction. And the ground is the unmoving anchor upon which a building can be built and not be shaken or destroyed by the forces of nature. But because the ekklesia has ceased to be ekklesia and has instead become "church" – merely another element of this world's darkness – there simply are very few examples of truth and light that stand out as direct representations of the divinity and transcendence of Christ and God. Because too many have submitted to false brothers who secretly draw followers after themselves and divide the body of Christ according to demonic or man-made notions, the world has again become a very dark place indeed. If people would simply follow Christ rather than follow men who claim to lead in His name, what a different world it might be. And when those who truly follow the Lamb do again stand with Him on Mt. Zion (a picture of again being the genuine ekklesia of Christ and God – Heb. 12:22, Rev. 14:1-4), His true followers, those who are truly sons of the kingdom, will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Mt. 13:43)

In one of the earliest encounters Jesus' disciples had with the established religious status quo, the disciples had to choose to what they would submit. They rightly responded, "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Acts 5:29-32) God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him and we are then enabled to stand as witnesses to His resurrection – a resurrection gained at the cost of His being murdered at the hands of the established religious status quo. The *only* possible right response to anything that contradicts or opposes God must therefore be "We ought to obey God rather than men." Anything less is to submit ourselves to that which opposes God and to reject the wonderful things He has done for us. It is to count them as unworthy and unacceptable in our eyes. (see Heb. 10:29) This *is* the ongoing war into which we have been born and it is our responsibility to choose on which side we will fight. There simply is no middle ground, no de-militarized zone, no neutral parties. We stand with Christ and God or we stand against Christ and God. Do not yield to men who would lead you away from Him, not even for one minute. It *is* that simple.

Let he who has ears hear.

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