

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

By God's unmerited grace, simply because God loves us, we are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. But receiving such a Kingdom has consequences. If we would live in this Kingdom, we can no longer live according to the flesh. The Apostle teaches that as God's children, we should "be thankful. Let us worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe."

And that we might know quite specifically what such a life looks like, that we might learn to live a Christian life, the Apostle continues: Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers. Remember the prisoners. Marriage is honorable among all. Let your conduct be without covetousness. Be content with what you have.

But in the 13th chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle is not finished. "Remember those who rule over you", he writes, those "who spoke the Word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. Do not forget to do good and to share. Obey those who rule over you. Finally, the Apostle asks, "Pray for us."

We live in a time in which men do not obey those who rule over them. But we must be clear about which "leaders" the Apostle is referring to. The Apostle is not writing against civil disobedience. The Apostle is not saying that it is wrong mount protests in the state capital. To say that would be to misuse the Words of Hebrews 13.

In the seventh verse of the same chapter the Apostle defines who "those who rule over you" are – they are those "who spoke the Word of God to you." They are those whose faith and life are exemplary to the Church. These are the "leaders" to which the Apostle refers in verse 13 when he says "Obey those who rule over you." Hebrews 13 isn't a lesson in civil obedience. It is a lesson in ecclesiology. For we all know, as the Chief of the Apostles says, "...we ought to obey God rather than men."

As Lutherans we bristle at lists of things to do. We rightly see justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation. From that formula we exclude works, and that rightly. So lists like the Apostolic teaching of Hebrews 13 make us uncomfortable. Paul's language is Law. And there is a little antinomian in all of us. It starts with our fallen flesh, with which we inherit the antinomian actions of our first parents as they disobeyed God.

We must receive the Apostolic Word of Hebrews 13 just as we receive the Apostolic Word of Romans 3 and 4. Elsewhere, to be sure, the Apostle writes that we are to subject to governing authorities, a reference to civil government, because God has allowed or appointed them to rule over us. That is nothing more than to say obey the Fourth Commandment, for we have God-ordained parents in the home, in the Church, and in the civil realm.

At the same time we bristle at "to do" lists, we must admit that faith takes joy in the life the Apostle describes in Hebrews. It is a godly life. It is a God pleasing life. It is based on the example of our fathers in the faith. And that example is based on the life of our Lord. By such a

life God is pleased. We shouldn't be afraid to say so. And we should all aspire to such a life; we should strive to live as the Scripture describes. That's what faith does. It's called sanctification.

But we must be clear about the source of our ability to live such a life. It does not come from us. It is not the life that we as fleshly men live, nor is it the life that as fleshly men we desire to live, although in an effort to seem pious we may say that we do. The ability to please God with our lives flows first from the cross. It flows from Christ's Blood. It flows from faith, saving faith. And that faith is a free gift of God – not of works, lest any man boast. And still, we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

And that Word of the Apostle shows that his Words in Ephesians, His Words in Romans, and the Words we read in Hebrews are in complete accord. We are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. That is an act of grace. God freely bestows it upon us because God the Son died for us. God the Son rose for us. In baptism we are "created in Christ Jesus", born anew, born from above, children of God. In baptism your sins are washed away. In baptism Jesus' atoning death is made yours, and from the font you rise to new life with Him, a citizen of His Kingdom.

You rise to new life in faith, faith in Christ, faith that is thankful, faith that worships God acceptably, with reverence and awe, for saving faith can do no other. And that faith desires to search the Scriptures, to learn about God, to learn what pleases God, and to live that way. Saving faith can do no other.

Brotherly love. Hospitality. Concern for prisoners. Honorable marriage. Gracious conduct. Contentment. Learning from the lives of the saints, both the saints of old and the saints in your life, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Seeking pure doctrine. Doing good. Charity. And yes, obedience. They are all the fruit of faith, the fruit of the Spirit working in the redeemed. So can we confess with the Apostle: "The Lord is my Helper, I shall not fear. What can man do to me?"

And we can confess it because God Himself has said "I will not leave you nor forsake you." His promise works faith. Saving faith clings to the Promise. The justified strive for sanctification, that God be glorified, that God be praised, and that God be pleased. And that in you and in your life God be glorified, that in you and in your life God be praised, that in you and in your life God be pleased – this is what "those who rule over you" most desire. For they desire nothing other than your salvation.

Now may the God of peace, who brought up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the Blood of the everlasting Testament, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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