



September 30, 2007

Today: Part V

Well here it is the end of the month and we are almost ready to draw our sermon series on righteous living to a close. Its been titled Today because with each Sunday we have heard how we are to live. The writer to the Hebrews tell us, "God has set aside a day and called it today...Today if you hear His voice do not harden your heart." Or in other words if you hear that scripture tells you to go to church, to pray continually, to speak kindly and reverently, to care for others and to study your Bible the day to start is today. Last week we saw how important it is to follow those scriptural mandates again the writer to the Hebrews tells us that if we hear the truth, which is God's word, and then ignore it and continue to do what we want then there is no forgiveness for us and only the prospect of God's wrath and judgment.

Today our journey takes us to a very specific destination and that destination deals with our use and responsibility to spiritual authority. Hebrews 13:17 tells us to, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." Being an Elder or Deacon is a high calling. It also is a position of accountability. This is why James says, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." What does James mean when he says teacher? The key comes later in the verse when he says, "we who teach will be judged more strictly." When he says we that includes him. What was James? James was an Elder. Elders and Deacons are to be teachers of God's word together with the pastor.

Paul makes it even more clear in Titus 1:9. To set the stage, Paul has just given the qualifications of an Elder and then he says, "He (the Elder) must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught." Now what is that trustworthy message? That's the Bible. How is it taught? That would be Bible study. He then continues, "so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." You see an Elder is to be well versed in scripture so that he can encourage or teach others in Gods' will and God's way and openly and actively refute anyone who refuses to listen to or uphold scripture. Paul then warns that there are many rebellious people many deceptive people many gossipers who "must be silenced." He says, "Rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith." You see the Elders are supposed to make sure that every person is sound in their faith. Now, there is a way to lessen the chances that this rebuking will need to be done. How? Well when we look to Titus chapter 2 Paul continues with that wonderful teach. He says teach sound doctrine, teach older men, teach older women, teach younger women, teach younger men, teach slaves. What are Elders and Deacon to do? They are to teach which gets us back to where we started with Elders and Deacons.

Why did James say they would be judged more strictly? Because what they teach will lead others to eternal salvation or to eternal condemnation and that is a heavy burden to bear. That is what every Elder and Deacon needs to realize they are called to do. I'll tell you right now I do not step into the pulpit as a proud pastor. I step in with shaking legs, sweaty palms and a racing heart. My words must be correct or my words could lead someone astray. I pray so hard as I prepare a sermon and I pray before I get in this pulpit and I pray when I get out of it and when I do walk out of this pulpit its with shaking legs, sweaty palms and racing heart. You might say oh Matt you're done no I'm not because my actions how I live as pastor are a witness to where my heart is and either they back up what I'm teaching or they don't. My actions could lead someone astray.

People are more than willing these days to look for excuses for why they shouldn't live the type of lives we have been talking about the last couple of weeks and one of the easiest excuses is to look at those who are leaders who are called to teach through word and deed to look at a pastor, an Elder or a Deacon and say they don't do that why should I? Believe me I have heard that so many times in my

25 years of ministry that I cant count them all. I've heard it from congregational members, parents of students and confirmands, from youth in youth groups; I've heard it from children in the classroom. People who look at Elders, Deacons and pastors they point a finger and say they don't do that, they don't go to church, they don't read their Bible, they're not active in prayer, they don't support the weak, they don't tithe, they don't and the minute an Elder or Deacon is not living up to that standard and, I must throw the pastor in there too, we have just undercut the veracity of the Gospel message.

I've heard people question some of our standards here at Zion for an Elder especially that an Elder should be in Bible study. I've heard people question whether it's right to expect Deacons to go to church. Personally I don't see how we can do anything else. They are teachers and leaders whom the Bible commands us to respect. They are not to be respected because of the title Elder or Deacon but because of what they live. They live the word of God. They live as an Elder they live as a Deacon and I have to take a moment here because I must commend many of our Elders and Deacons especially here recently Bud, Judy, Don thank you for leading the Truth Projects you are teaching you are doing what the Bible calls us to do. Marylou thank-you for leading prayer groups. Brian and Keith I know it wasn't easy but thank you for leading the worship service while I was on vacation. We have many Elders and Deacons who have come a long way and are really starting to step up to the plate but we have a long way to go. And this is where the congregation comes in.

What does the writer of Hebrews tell us to do? Obey, submit, and don't make the job of a Deacon or an Elder burdensome. That title alone of Elder or Deacon is enough of a burden to live up to so don't make their life rough. But the writer doesn't stop there he continues and says very simply, "Pray for us." Do you pray for the leaders of your church every day? I know and I thank many of you who pray for me daily I thank you from the bottom of my heart now please add your Elders and your Deacons to your prayers. Elders and Deacons that same verse continues after pray for us, "we are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way." Do you?

I gave all the members a challenge last month to think back to their baptismal on their confirmation vows and they asked themselves am I fulfilling that vow? If you are you have a clear conscience and

you are living honorably. And I hope that all of us have done that as pastor, Elders and Deacons. Perhaps it is time for all of us, every member, to revisit those vows. At my confirmation I was asked do you believe in God the Father almighty as the creator of this world? Do you believe that God sent His Son Jesus Christ to be the Savior he died, rose and is coming back to take us to be with Him? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit is alive and active in your heart working faith and bringing the power of God to your life? And as a result of this faith will you devote your life to Him? Will you be faithful in the study of His word? Will you be faithful in worship? You know if you've been confirmed or if you were baptized you said yes to every one of those. Are you doing it? Next week we're going to take a look at that devotion that we have vowed to live. We will look at our devotion and our lives of service.

In our Savior's name, Amen.