

## The Church & Its Leadership

Hebrews 13:7,17

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, July 23, 2023

Well, I want to say we did survive the golf tournament yesterday. I think the men had a good time. I actually had several people come up to me this morning and say, "Pastor Jeremy, are you okay?" I said, "How old do you think I am?" It's not that hot out there; we did fine. It was good spiritual fellowship and bad golf, and that's the way it's supposed to be. Mark Twain once said that golf is a good way to spoil a nice walk outside. And I don't know that it was that bad, but we had a wonderful time. Thanks for all those who set that up. It was good fellowship. And we'll try to do some of those things again, just to get our men together so we can spend time together and talk about the things of the Lord.

Before I begin our sermon this morning, I do want to tell you, I want to have a short introduction, because we have a lot to talk about in this text. But I want to ask you the question, it's an interesting question, I think. It might probe some thoughts here. But why do churches fight so much? You ever wondered about that? I think if you've been a Christian for any length of time, it's probably something that's crossed your mind before. But why do they have so much trouble getting along? I've pastored in several parts of North America, most of them have been religious communities. And I will say the more churches, the more turmoil. Well, why is that? I told you last time it's our job to love one another in the church. It's what God has called us to do. We need to be sweet and pleasant and nice to each other and, and tender and gracious and kind in the body of Christ. That's the calling. But if we're honest about it, most of us, instead of being kind, we're rude. Right? Instead of being gentle, we're rough. Instead of being nice, we often bite and devour one another, as Galatians talks about; and what's prompting that? And there's a lot of ways to answer that question. You can't just answer it with one thing. But I think in light of the text we're going to look at, one answer could be this. A lot of churches fight because they don't trust their leaders. They split and scrap and squabble because they don't have faith in the men that are guiding them. It's not because of the music, it's because they don't trust those who are choosing the music. And it's not because of the color of the carpet, let me tell you something, nobody cares that much about the carpet. It's not that big of a deal. It's because they're suspicious of those who are selecting it. It kind of goes back to that one thing. Now again, there's other ways to answer that. But this is what our text is about this morning.

So if you would open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews. It's the book we're in this morning. And we're in Hebrews chapter 13, which talks about the subject of the relationship between the people and leaders. And it deals with the issue of how we're to relate to one another in the body of Christ on this level. And it says in Hebrews 13, we'll start reading in verse one. It says,

Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. Marriage *is to*

*be held* in honour among all, and the *marriage bed is to be* undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. *Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” so that we confidently say,

“The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.

What will man do to me?”

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the <sup>[a]</sup>result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

And then if you look down in verse 17 Going along with that text it says,

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Now as you read that, you might be wondering, why are we skipped over all this stuff in the middle? And the reason is because many believe that the author of Hebrews broke up his train of thought somewhere in the center of this text because he starts talking about leaders in verse seven. And he doesn't do it again until verse 17. Do you see that there? When he mentions that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever in verse eight, that kind of leads him off in a certain direction, it takes him off and kind of a tangent, a sanctified tangent, if we will. And he doesn't come back to the original thought until later on. So that's kind of how we're going to divide it up. today. We'll look at verse seven and verse 17 together, and we're gonna save the rest until next time because in verse seven, it mentions those who lead you; and in verse 17, it mentions leaders. That's the same group, it's the same category here. Because this is how the church is led. It's led by leaders, plural, not one leader, singular. It's not led by one guy who does the work himself like a Pope or a king or a dictator. It's supposed to be guided by a team of elders, who are qualified for the job. They keep watch over your souls, it says here in the in the passage, because that's the focus of their ministry. It's souls; they're not in it for money, they're in it for souls. They're not doing this for popularity; they're doing it for your inner man, so you will be grown into the image of Christ. But we can be honest and say it's a hard job at times because it can be so distracting. And the work of shepherding souls can be difficult because there's days when you get sidetracked by things like the color of the carpet. Every elder will tell you that he's had that dilemma at times. That's where a lot of the problems come in at. And the passage reminds you though, that when they do, there's a way to fix the issue, and that is to go back to the principles that are found in this text.

This passage describes a relationship that exists between church and leaders, shepherds and flock, and the relationship is simple. The Lord wants the leaders to lead; He wants the people to follow. He wants the shepherds to shepherd and guide and care for the people graciously tenderly, with a gentle hand. And he wants the church to respond in a similar fashion.

It's an interesting passage to look at that we have today because you see a lot of books being written about the church today, they've been written for years. Go to any Christian bookstore, you can find podcasts about them online. And they talk about all sorts of things like church growth and church health and church strategy. They'll tell you about church leadership, church order, church government, some will tell you how to build a church of your dreams and get the staff of your dreams. And to get the building you always wanted this type of stuff. But the truth is, you don't have to get into all that stuff to understand church life, it's not necessary. You just need to open up the Bible, you need to turn to passages like this one and see what they say because it tells you what you need to know about church. There's other texts as well, this is not the only one, but this is one where it gives you a lot of good sound information about what the body of Christ is to look at.

Saying that, I want to get into the main part of the text this morning. I just told you we're going to have a short introduction because we're gonna dive right into this. And we're gonna look at five things in this passage that need to happen between the church and its leaders to make it a healthy place of worship. So if you're taking notes, this is our outline this morning. And Hebrews 13:7 and 17, we're gonna look at five things that need to take place between the church and leadership to make it a healthy place of worship. And before I do, I do want to have a word of prayer. And then we'll look at our first point together. So let's go to the Lord in prayer before we dive into this.

Heavenly Father, we are excited about this text this morning because we all need to learn about church life. When we think of the need to love one another and care for one another as Adam prayed earlier, it's a high calling. And it's something that we all want to strive to do better. And so I pray for that this morning in the life of your church. Father, thank You for the people that we have and the way they respond to leaders. So many times so many of our people do these things so well. And we're very grateful for that. Lord, would You just open our eyes to places in this text where our church can improve and open our eyes to things in this text to the things that we're already doing in a way that pleases You that we would be encouraged by that. Father, thank You for the church for the body of Christ. Lord, it's, it's Your body. This is Your church, and we want to approach it with reverent hands, remembering that we do all these things for you. Help us as we study this, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, five things that need to take place between the church and its leadership, here's the first one. These are all coming straight from these verses. The church needs to remember its leaders who spoke the word of God to them. So if you're taking notes, here's the first thing that needs to take place between the church and its leaders to make it a healthy place, the church needs to remember its leaders who spoke the word of God to them. Which means that we need to remember those who preach to us not just in the present, but in the past as well.

And if you look in verses one through seven, one thing you're going to see here is that it reads like a bunch of quick points. It's almost like a list of commandments being fired out of a gun because it says, "Let love of the brethren continue" kind of like bang, and then "do not neglect to show hospitality,"

there's another one, remember the prisoners, there's another one marriage is to be held and honour among all there's another one. The reason he's writing like this is because this is the application of the book of Hebrews, he's getting into the part of the book where he's going to take the message of Christ and Him crucified, and drive it home to our lives and say, "This is how you are live now." And he does it in verse seven by saying, remember those who lead you that's the next point in the list here.

And the word "remember," it comes from a Greek word, *mnēmoneuō* from which we get the word mnemonic. It doesn't refer to remembering something just so you won't forget, it really refers to remembering something in a way that it becomes part of you. It's intertwined with your life now. If you were in school, you know there's a big difference between cramming for a test and just shoving things in your brain and you forget it a few days later and studying as a form of meditation. This refers to the latter, so that when someone asked you about it, you remember it, that's the idea here. The same word is used in verse three in order to say remember the prisoners. And that doesn't mean that you want to remember the prisoners by saying, "Oh, yeah, I know there's guys in prison." But you want to remember them in such a way that their name sticks with you for life; you don't ever ignore the fact that your brothers are in jail. This word is being used that way. The writer of Hebrews wants you to remember your leaders like that. You wouldn't be the person you are today, if it wasn't for the men who brought the Word of God into your life. And you wouldn't be the man of God or the woman of God if the Lord didn't send you godly shepherds in the past. And so you want to keep them in mind.

When he says to remember them here, this is worded in such a way that it sounds like some of the leaders of this congregation were no longer with them. They had to remember them because they're not in the church anymore. And we don't know why that was per se, but if you read between the lines, it could have been due to persecution. At this time, in the first century, the church was under threat of being attacked by the governing authorities on a consistent basis. And oftentimes, the pastors were the first ones to die. And so the idea is that these men probably sealed their testimony with their blood, they paid the ultimate price for their ministry, and the writer is telling them to hold them in high esteem because of that. And to be honest, when it's mentioned, "those who lead you," we don't know who that's referring to. The text doesn't say, doesn't give their names anyway, but it's probably referring to their pastors and shepherds and elders they had at one time. It's talking about the preachers and teachers and ministers that they had on staff or serving in a voluntary way because it says they spoke the word of God to you. That means that they preached the Bible or taught it in an official capacity in the church. These men knew what their job was. God was not calling them to preach their opinions. And He wasn't telling them to come up here and write a hobbyhorse and exegete the newspaper and talk about something on the television. He was telling them to preach the Word that was it. He called these men to give the Bible to you, that's all and that's what they did.

So now the passage is telling the congregation, remember the things they taught you. Remember the things they said. Remember the truths they showed you as they stood in the pulpit and open the Word of God and revealed it. Remember their beliefs and their convictions and principles. Remember their love

and humility and grace. Remember their patience and persistence and long sufferings. Because leaders can be forgotten at times, right? They can be treated pretty rough. You want to be careful not to do that.

After serving in one church for 40 years, one Baptist pastor said he didn't think his people would remember him at all. He thought when he died at his funeral, they would throw dirt on his face on his casket and go inside and eat pie. Now, in my experience, most churches aren't that bad. You guys aren't that bad, you will not eat pie, you will eat cake at my funeral, but I guess some people can be like that. They can give their preachers a black eye. And the worst thing about that is it can be ungrateful. I mean, if a man led you for 40 years, the least you can do is just say thanks. Because you didn't spring up from the ground as a Christian. You didn't fall from the sky, somebody taught you. And if it was that guy, you'd want to acknowledge it's a very special thing. I've talked to some Christians who said they've never had a pastor for 40 years. They don't know what that's like.

And in fact, I would say this text would probably be an easy one for us to apply here at Grace. I mean, when I think about our congregation, I don't think this would be too hard. Because for most of you, this is not the first church you've come to. And for many of you, I'm not the first pastor you've had. You've had many men speak the Word of God into your life, so there's lots of ones you can remember. It should be easy. So in order to apply what this is saying, I mean all you have to do this week is go home and pick up the phone and call them. And to practice this kind of thing, what you have to do is find out where they live and go pay him a visit. They don't mind. Pastors like to visit; they'll talk to you all day long. And tell them how the Lord used them in your life. And give them a list of all the things he taught you through their ministry. I promise you, most of those guys have no idea.

I had a guy call me up on the phone, this has been years ago, that I washed windows with. And he told me, he said, "I didn't tell you this at the time, but the Lord use you to help preserve my marriage because we were talking to each other on a ladder one day and I was telling you I was thinking about leaving my wife, and you told me I shouldn't do that. And I didn't." I didn't know. Those guys may have no idea what they did in your life through the word of the gospel.

You know, when I first came to Grace Fellowship, I went out to lunch with another pastor in this area. And I asked him to tell me who are some of the men who made an impact in your life for Christ. And he just started listing them out. And I didn't know who any of them were. I hadn't heard any of those names before. And then he asked me the same question well, who disciplined you? And I listed names to him, and he hadn't heard of any of them either. Men who deposited the truth of God into my hands. I told him about, and you won't know these names, men like Joel Echols from Texas, Brian Davidson from Kentucky, Kurt Gebharch, from California, Dave Stevenson from Georgia, Gary Gilley from Illinois, you don't know who they are, but you know what? I do. They never spoke at conferences, they never wrote books, they're not the kind of guys that preached to thousands and packed-out stadiums and had their names on a billboard, but they impacted my life for eternity. They made a difference in me. And

what this text is saying is I have a duty now to remember that, to honour that, to do anything I can to encourage them for what they did.

Brings you to another thing that needs to take place between a church and its leaders here, and that is that the church needs to imitate their leaders as they live a godly life. The first one is you want to remember your leaders as they spoke the word of God to you. But another one here, as we're going through this, is the church needs to imitate their leaders as they live a godly life, which means that you need to emulate them and do what they do as long as it coincides with Scripture. Now, obviously, you don't emulate your leaders if they don't do that. And it's not telling you to follow your leaders if they go into sin. But you need to follow them if they're the kind of person they're supposed to be and that's a godly man. If they're not the kind of person they're supposed to be, they shouldn't be your leaders anyway.

But if you read on in this text here, this is what it says. It says, "Remember those who led you. Who spoke the word of God to you, and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." There's a couple of words to point out here, but one is this word "consider." It means to consider something carefully and give it a lot of thought. That's what you should do with your former leaders. This is how you honour their memory. And that's by thinking about one thing and one thing only, in the verse, and that is their character. You don't want to think about their clothes, but their conduct. You don't show respect for them by remembering their smile, or their hair, or their appearance, you need to reflect on the manner of their life. Some of those men didn't have any hair, did they? Some of them didn't wear clothes that were flashy anyway, you wouldn't remember that. But if they conducted their lives in a way that was worthy of the gospel, and they finished well, so that they heard "Well done, my good and faithful servant," the author's encouraging you to reflect on that. That's what made the impact on you.

So when you think of your former leaders, you need to think about what was this man like with his family? And what was he like with his friends? How did he interact with his children, and how did he interact with his wife? What was he like with his neighbors? What was he like with his buddies at work? How did he get along with people in the church? When there was conflict how do they reconcile it? And when two people were doing this, how did he step in and make peace? Most of us when we think of pastors, we just want to know, what did he preach like? How many people were in the pews when he spoke? How full was the parking lot? What was his presence like on YouTube? That's not what you see here. This is a character-based thing. I'll tell you something, preaching is hard. Making peace is often harder. And standing in front of folks and bringing the Word of God is difficult, but stepping into a family, when the husband and wife are breaking up, and try to hold it together, that's something else. That's the kind of thing he's encouraging you to meditate on.

In order to be successful in the Christian life, we all need to find people who have gone before us so we can follow their footsteps and learn from their example. And that's why the Lord has given you godly men in your life. I mean, the command here, if you look at the end of the verse, is to imitate their faith.

And that word is a Greek term from which we get the word “mime.” It's referring to someone who appeared on a stage to look at an audience and see what they're doing and mime it, copy and duplicate it, replicate it. This passage is telling you to do that with your former leaders. So the way it works is if you're struggling with something like patience, you can reflect on the story of the way one of these men in the past, dealt with that, struggled with that; and it can be an encouragement to you. Or if you're struggling with something like forgiveness, you can look back on their testimony and realize there's times when they had a hard time forgiving someone. There are days when someone did them wrong, and you can see that it's not too hard for you to imitate that. If you're struggling with something like discouragement, you can call them on the phone, ask them how they dealt with it. I promise you, they'll have something to say. But the point is that this is part of a leader's calling, and that is to be a godly role model. Yes, he speaks the word in the first part of this verse. Yes, he needs to be able to teach and preach and expose it. That's very important. But he also needs to be godly as well.

The book of 1 Timothy 3, which we read earlier, uses the word “blameless.” That doesn't mean he's supposed to be sinless, nobody sinless. We've had a lot of guys read through that list of elder qualifications and say, “I don't do any of that perfectly.” Well, that's not what it's telling you to do. It means that there should be no blame attached to your character, and someone should not look to anything in that list and say, “That's the kind of man you are not.” Because the idea here is a man can't lead you closer to God if he's not walking closely with God. And he can't show you how to honour Him with your life if he's not doing it with his. So that's what it's referring to here.

And to be honest, I know this passage, it's hard to relate to in some churches because some churches are so big that people don't know who their pastors are. There's some people in the congregation that don't have any access to them. They don't have their phone number. They don't know where they live. They don't have their email. In a church like ours, I pray it's better than that for you. I think our leaders try to be as approachable as we can. This is one of the purposes of ministries like care groups, we want to invite you over to our home, so you can see what we're like behind the scenes. That's why we do men's Bible study, leadership training, coffee with the Cagle's, we're just trying to find a way for you to be able to talk to us. And this is also why, I don't know if you've thought about this, but we have a time at our annual meeting, where we have an opportunity for you to give a vote of confidence towards your elders of the church. And that's not because we're a democracy here. We're not. We are an elder lead form of government. But we do this because we want to provide a chance for you to express concerns you have, so we can resolve them and work through that together. Because we want you to have confidence in the men who are leading you. But a leader has to lead by example. I mean, if you want to sum up what he's saying here. He doesn't just preach and teach and talk, he also does more.

And that brings you to another thing that needs to take place between a church and its leadership, and that is that the church needs to obey and submit to their leaders. A third thing that needs to take place between the church and its leadership is that the church needs to obey and submit to their leaders in all the ways that we're describing, which takes this to another level. I mean, before the church is supposed

to remember and imitate their leaders, but now they're told to submit, which is harder than this, I think. The command is more difficult. And this is where we go down to verse 17 in your Bibles. Again, the author starts talking about leadership in verse seven. And then he goes to talk about something else for a while before getting back to it in verse 17. So let's follow his train of thought; we can put this together. And if you look in verse 17, it starts off by saying, "Obey your leaders, and submit to them."

And quite frankly, I'll be honest, those are two terms I would not have put in this passage if it was up to me. I think most people don't like to be told to obey and submit in the 21st century, I don't like being told that. But it is saying this here, so we want to explain it a little bit. And we could do it by saying that these two words are actually nothing new in the Bible. You see them all over the place, "obey" and "submit." Because in order to be saved, in the beginning, this is what you have to do. You do have to obey and submit to someone and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. And in order to go down the narrow road and enter the narrow way and make it to Heaven itself, you have to bow the knee to a person, and that is Him. That's where it begins. No one is saved by doing what they want. You're saved by doing what He wants. And you don't go to heaven by telling yourself "My will be done." You have to tell yourself, "Thy will be done." And this has been set in context to that or in relation to that. The idea here is you don't come to church by saying, "I will follow my leaders first." You come to church by saying, "I follow Christ first." Amen? Can I say amen to that? You don't come by saying, "I obey them unconditionally." There's nothing in the Bible that says that.

Some of you come from churches where you were told that you were supposed to follow your leaders when it came to things like hair, and makeup, and clothes, and the kind of car you drive, and just on and on and on and on. That's not in the Bible. This is not a mechanical kind of obedience; it's not robotic. You don't follow your leaders like that. You follow Christ, and this is an overflow of that because you believe He is sovereign. And you know, He puts the men in church exactly the way He wants them to be. And so you come in that context. In fact, if you're wondering what this looks like practically, it's pretty simple. If your leaders are teaching the Word of God to you, like verse seven says, then you need to follow them and obey and submit in that instead of being any kind of trouble or hindrance. And if they're leading you through something that's not found in the Word of God, but it's sort of a preference kind of thing or subjective thing like the color of the carpet, you just want to show a lot of grace. They need to show grace; you need to show grace. They need to be patient with you; you be patient with them because we're all seeking the lowest place in the church. And we're all coming here with a mindset of worship to Christ. But it all goes back to the principle of putting Him on top of all of it. You don't come here for the preacher ultimately. If you do that, the preacher will disappoint you. And you don't show up in place just for the elders, it's no different for them. Some elders struggle with different things; they all have flaws. We come here, first and foremost for Christ. If you lose sight of that there will be trouble.

If you understand what this is saying here, when it says, "obey your leaders," there's no exemptions for this. That means everyone, every single person in the church, every single person who follows Christ, and does everything from Hebrews 1 through 12, and in these first verses in chapter 13, this applies to



them. And when it says, “submit to them,” there's no really limitations there either. It's an all-encompassing thing. It's not as if some do this while some don't. And if you flesh that out a little bit, that means in order to do this, there needs to be someone in your life that you submit to. And there needs to be some man or team of men, godly men that you turn to and say, “Those are my shepherds. Those are my elders. Those are my pastors.” Obedience speaks of action; submission speaks of attitude. Obedience relates to the practice; submission relates to the posture of your life. Obedience refers to what you do; submission refers to how you do it.

But I think we all understand you can't do any of these things if there's not someone you're following in the first place. And that's a big deal because there are a lot of people who aren't following anybody, but they profess the name of Christ in Canada right now. And there's lots of professing Christians who don't have anyone they can identify to and point to and say, “Those are my elders.” They just do it by themselves. They stay at home and watch the sermon on Sunday, where they get a few people together for Bible study, and they call that a church. But there's no structure to it. There's no order. There's no accountability. Because they think that as long as I read the Bible, and pray, and listen to sound theology, that's it. That's all God wants me to do. But in this text, it's actually more than that.

This is something that hits home with me because when I went to seminary, I did it for this reason, because I couldn't find a church in my community that taught the Word of God to me. There were churches in every corner, and there might have been one that was faithful to the scriptures, but I couldn't find them. So I packed up everything I had, and I drove 2,000 miles away. A lot of people in my town thought I was crazy, but I realized that this kind of thing is something you can't do online. It's got to be personal. I say that because maybe some of you need to hear that today. Or I know some folks who will listen to this online later on, and I don't know where everyone's at on this issue, but I would encourage you that if you can't find a solid church in your area, you might want to consider relocating. Even though it's hard, even though it's just difficult, you want to find somewhere where you can put this into practice. If you can't do it in your town, find another town. And that may sound extreme, but I had to do it. Some of you had to do it. Some of you told me you move for this reason.

Brings you to another thing here that needs to take place between a church and its leadership. And we're just going through these one by one so we can get the flow of the passage, but the church needs to obey their leaders for they keep watch over their souls. Another thing that needs to take place between a church and its leadership is that the church needs to obey their leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over their souls, and this is going back to the responsibility of the leaders. They have an obligation to look out for you and guard your soul. It's another reason why you want to follow them.

And if you look in verse 17, you see this when he uses the word “for.” The author uses that little word there in the middle of the sentence to tell you what you follow your leaders for, and that is because they keep watch over your souls. That means the leadership they provide, it's not any kind of leadership, it's spiritual leadership. And the kind of shepherding they offer you is not any kind of shepherding, it's soul

shepherding. It's your soul that motivates them. It's your soul that drives them. It's your soul that keeps them going because most of these men don't get paid. I mean, in our church, I'm the only one that receives a salary. Everybody else's is volunteer work. But they do it out of a profound desire to see you follow the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a spiritual thing. They're not ultimately interested in how much money you're making at work. They're not interested in the physical kind of stuff; they want to know how you're doing on the inside and your walk with God.

I've learned to ask this question with people when I'm playing golf, when I'm going to lunch: "How are things between you and the Lord?" That's what I'm here for. That's my job. Some people may say that's too personal. Sorry, that's what you hired me for. That's the role.

When it says, "For they keep watch over you" that means they keep vigilant watch like a soldier on duty or a century on patrol. They hover over you like a hawk is kind of the idea. The word actually refers to someone who watches over you so intensely that it keeps them up at night. They sleep with one eye open. That they told us in seminary that if you do it right, ministry is supposed to be 24 hours a day, seven day a week sort of thing because the office never closes. There's always someone you need to counsel, there's always someone who needs help, there's always someone who needs prayer. I can't tell you how many days on a Sunday, I talk to our church from 8:30 in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon, and I drive home thinking about people I didn't get to talk to. It's always that way. That's what this is referring to.

The idea of watching over souls, it has a positive and negative aspect to it. Positively, it means your leaders do this by instructing you and teaching you and praying and discipling you and encouraging you to keep going. "Don't quit, stay close to Christ, stay close to His word, don't deviate." And negatively it means they do this by warning you. And telling you "Don't do this, don't go that way. Knock it off, stay away from that sin, stay away from that temptation. Go don't go near that place that's causing you to struggle." John Calvin used to say leaders have two voices, they have one for the sheep, one for the wolves. And they know how to speak gently to the sheep when they need it, and graciously and tenderly; and they know how to speak sternly to the wolves in order to put the fear of God into them. We all need someone to do that. There are times when all of us need somebody to step into our lives and put the fear of God in there and tell you to snap out of it. That's what elders do. I'll tell you, it makes them some pretty unpopular times. There are days when you feel like nobody likes you. But that's okay. You don't get into ministry to win popularity contests. This is to help people.

In fact, the next part of this verse, it shows you how serious God is about this, when it says that He will hold them accountable for what they do. "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account." Who will they give an account to? They'll give an account to God. Who will these men answer to at the end of the day for how they shepherded you and cared for you? They'll answer to Him. Which means if some of you have had bad shepherds and you think, "Will anybody ever deal with that?" Yes, God will deal with that on Judgment Day. And if you

come from a place where there were bad pastors and bad leaders and bad elders, they're gonna be responsible to Him. It's His Church, His body, His people. He's the one who will hold them responsible for their actions when the books are open, and the records are revealed, and everything is brought to light under His penetrating eye. He will call them to a higher standard than everyone else. James 3. If you want another verse that talks about this gives kind of a visual image of it, in Ezekiel 33, the Lord told Ezekiel He said, "Now as for you, Son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for the house of Israel. So you will hear a message from My mouth and give them a warning from Me." And just to summarize it here, He says, "If you give it, you'll be fine. You'll save your life. If you give the message Ezekiel and they don't listen, you're okay. You told them. And if you preach and warn them to return from their sin, and they don't turn, on Judgment Day, I'm not gonna go after you for that." But then He said this. "If you don't tell them, I will require their blood from your hands." In other words, this is a life-or-death issue for you Ezekiel. It's do or die. I'm not messing around. I'm not playing games. If you don't repeat My message and give it faithfully to these people, there will be blood to pay. This is how serious God is about this. He's serious enough to threaten one of His prophets that way.

It's said that the British pastor G. Campbell, Morgan, was in his office every day at 6 a.m. because he had these words ringing in his ears. And he couldn't sleep at night thinking about how God was going to hold Him accountable. George Mueller, the man who started the orphanages in England, would start his day at 4:30, and he read through his Bible 200 times before most people came to breakfast. Jonathan Edwards studied an average of 11 hours a day, John Calvin did the same. And John Owen was so diligent in his early years that he had almost had a physical breakdown and wrecked his health. Because the thought of facing the Lord scared them to death. They worked themselves to the bone over that, and I would say would to God that He would bring Canada some men like that. It would be His mercy to start putting pastors like this in the churches. It would bring revival; it would turn this country upside down. It would clear a lot of the churches out too, by the way. Some of them would be, I hate to say it this way, but some of them would be like rats jumping off a sinking ship, to have a man step into their lives and preach the word like that. A lot of people say they want Jonathan Edwards in their church, Jonathan Edward's church threw him out after 20 years of ministry because he was so diligent.

Brings you to one more thing to talk about in this passage here. Just to review these other ones, if you're writing these down, the first thing that needs to happen between the church and its leaders is the church needs to remember their leaders who spoke the word of God to them. They need to remember the man who preached the Bible, brought it to bear upon their lives. Because there's two sides to the relationship. On the one hand, you have the leaders who have the responsibility to teach. On the other hand, the people have the responsibility to hear that and take it to heart. A second thing that needs to happen is that the church also needs to imitate their leaders who live a godly life in front of them because you're not just coming to church to hear sermons. And you don't just show up here week after week for a Bible study, you're doing it to figure out how to live your life in a God honouring way. And the Lord gave you these men, so you could follow them in that. Another area that we talked about is that the church needs to obey their leaders and submit, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account.

Which is a very, I think, a very frightening text because while the people have to follow leaders, you look at what the leaders have to do. They have to answer to God. The Lord is very serious about His church. And it brings you to one more thing that needs to happen in this relationship and the passage. And that is that the church needs to let them do their work with joy and not with grief.

The fifth and final thing that needs to happen between the church and its leadership in order to make it a healthy place for worship is that the church needs to let them do their work with joy and not with grief. Now, this is a command for the people here. When you read the text you find there, the audience has been addressed, but I don't think we should stop there. I think we can relate this to leadership too. I think both of us need to work hard at making our work a joy in the relationship, but if you look in verse 17, it goes on to say this, it says, "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Now, the second sentence here begins with the word "let," which implies that the writer is writing this in order to tell you to let the men do the work of the ministry, free them up in a sense, so there's nothing standing in their way. When I read this, I kind of get the image of a man who is chomping at the bit to minister, he's pulling up the reins to serve because he can't help it. There's something inside compelling him to do this. But at the same time, there's something in the church holding him back and discouraging him. The author says make sure you don't do that. Don't make it hard for men to shepherd you. Shepherding is hard enough on its own, so let him do the work. Because if you don't, the verse says it will be unprofitable for you. And that could be translated, "It will be harmful to you." Because remember, these men are trying to watch over your souls, and they're trying to help you in the spiritual department. But if you prevent them, for some reason, it will cause damage to everybody. You don't want to be a stumbling block to them.

The way it's worded here, kind of also makes it sound like the author has the picture in his mind of a leader approaching someone to help them and saying, "Can I help you?" And the person saying, "No, I don't want that. I don't need that. I just came here to sit in the pew." Or the pastor or elder or shepherd trying to step into their lives and encourage them and they put their hand in his face and say, "Mind your own business." The passage says that nobody wins when you do that. It's unprofitable for everybody.

And even though this part of the passage doesn't mention the leaders' responsibility, specifically here, I think it's safe to say I think it's the job of a leader to make sure he doesn't exasperate the people either. I mean, some men do this in the ministry, because their favorite word is "No." Every time somebody approaches them in the church, they say, "No." "Can I sing in the church?" "No." "Can I do a Bible study, Pastor Jeremy?" "No." "Can I serve in the nursery?" "No." "What can I do?" "Well just sit there and be quiet." I mean nobody wants to follow a man like that. That's the wrong approach as well. So we want to avoid both of these kinds of attitudes in the church.

And I know I've covered this point quickly, but I did this for a reason because we're almost out of time here, and I want to save some minutes to explain how to apply this part of the text because it seems a little ambiguous at first glance.

When you look at this, you might be wondering, "What does it mean to bring our leaders joy, Pastor Jeremy? Am I responsible for your mood swings?" The answer is yes. No, no, that's not what this is. It's much more simple than that. Some simple ways to apply this. I mean, one way is just to work hard at not complaining. Work hard not to complain every time something happens that doesn't affect you in a good way. You don't want to see a leader select music and say it's wrong. Teach a Bible study, it's wrong. Do a men's conference and say, "wrong," I'd rather do something else. The leaders should not say no to everything you say. And you should not say wrong to everything they say. Because that's hard to lead as well. It's hard to shepherd someone with that kind of mindset, so you want to avoid that kind of behavior.

You can also make a leader's job more joyful if you avoid having an unteachable heart. You want to be very teachable in the church to the Word of God. Don't be teachable to their preferences and opinions; that's a neutral thing but be teachable to the things they show you in Scripture. You want to have open ears and open hearts to the things of the Word of God. When you hear some things in the Scriptures that are taught up here, you may feel like you already know those things. And you may say to yourself, "I already heard that before." And the truth is probably you did. If you grew up in a church and you've read the Bible before, there's nothing I'm gonna say that's new to you, but you might need to hear it again. You might need to be told a second time. That's the way the Bible is by the way, it repeats certain themes.

And not to belabor this point, but I could add you, you can make someone's leadership difficult if you gossip and instead of taking concerns to the leaders, you take them to someone else. So that when you disagree with something, instead of going to your pastors, you go to your friends and say, "You know, why did Brother so and so do this? What were they thinking?" And the reason that's troublesome is because if it's a leader's decision, you need to go to that person. You don't want to take someone who's very happy in the congregation and make them unhappy with a problem they can't fix anyway. That can spread strife. The point this passage is making here is all these kinds of things can take away joy from leadership.

On the flip side, instead of complaining, you can encourage them; and you guys do a great job of that. Instead of being stubborn, you can be teachable. Instead of gossiping, you can go to them with things that concern you. Which again, I think the vast majority of our people do very well.

And to be honest, like I said, this is a verse that's directed toward members of the church, but I think we could step back for a moment and balance this out and talk about leaders as well. Because when you come to the end of verse 17, you might want to know, well, how can leaders do this? How can the

pastors and elders and shepherds help the people do their work with joy and not with grief? And there's several ways leaders can do this, they can be approachable. So it's easy for you to come to them with your problems. We don't want to tell you wrong all the time, either. Instead, we want to listen, put our hands on our mouths and be quiet when you speak. I've never counted up how many hours I spend doing this. But I pray if I did, I would discover that I spend more time listening to you than talking to you. There's no way to shepherd people if you don't do that. You've got to be willing to find out what's going on in their hearts, what's going on in their lives, ask them good questions, fish the stuff out of them. Otherwise, it's gonna frustrate you. How many of you want to follow a man that doesn't listen to you?

Leaders can also make their people's work a blessing by agreeing not to gossip about them. So that if we disagree with something you say we don't go to each other and say, "Why do you think brother so and so said this?" Listen, if gossip destroys churches, gossip from the leadership burns it to the ground. Nobody wants to follow a shepherd who stabs you behind the back. So we have to be careful not to do that.

And I would also say leaders can help their people if they're patient and gentle with them instead of being so quick to jump down their throat when they make a mistake. And I can tell you on this last point, we are trying to work on that. You may not have seen this, but we haven't had too many church discipline cases here at Grace that we brought to your attention. And I will tell you, that's not because we're not dealing with sin in people's lives; we are. We probably deal with sin in someone's life, just about every single week of the life of the church. But the reason that it hasn't been publicly brought to your attention is because we are trying to do our best to be patient with people as we address this, and give them time to repent, time for the Spirit to work, time for God to do something in their lives and bring about conviction. It's not always easy. But that's part of, I think, the work of ministry.

And the idea here, if we want to put this whole passage together at the end, is that this is what God is calling the church to do. He wants us to serve each other instead of looking out for our own interests. And He wants to build each other up as pastors and people instead of tearing each other down by fighting each other all the time and saying, "Me first. Me first."

This is important because the relationship between the church and its leaders has often been described as a little bit of heaven and a little bit of hell and not much in between because there's so much conflict at times. So when the relationship is good likes being described here in Hebrews 13, it's one of the sweetest things known to man because it feels like a piece of heaven. Where the leaders are blessing the flock, and the flock is blessing them because they respond gently to each other with grace and love and kindness. But when it's bad, it feels like a piece of hell. It brings out the very worst in people. When the leaders lord it over the flock and bully them around and abuse them, and the flock responds with bitterness to the whole to the point of the whole thing does this and it becomes a battleground with bombs going off and bullets flying and body parts lying scattered in the pew.

What the author is telling us here is that in times like that, you don't have to want to quit and throw in the towel. There's a solution to this. There's something you can do to bring peace to the church, and that is to go back to these principles. If you want the fighting to stop, then the leaders need to speak the Word of God to the people. We need to do our best to keep our opinion out of it. My opinion does not mean a hill of beans in this church. The only thing that matters is the Bible. And we need to keep watch over the people like a shepherd would, and care for them and love them. And the people need to remember that and encourage leadership in that and follow the work and make it a joy. Everything you need to know about the basic layout of the church is found within these pages.

In fact, next week, like I mentioned earlier, we're going to look at the next part of this passage because the author starts talking about this leadership in verse seven, picks it up again in verse 17, but there's all this stuff in the middle. And the stuff in the center of the passage, it starts off in verse eight by saying "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." And the connection in the mind of the author is that if your leaders fail you, Christ won't. And if they let you down, it will never happen with Him. He's eternal, immutable, and changeless. So that there's one thing that's going to hold the church together at the end of the day, and that's Him. There is no leader that's going to hold the church together. And there's no man that's that good of a pastor that's going to keep it from tearing apart, the only person that can do that is the One we've been bragging on throughout the whole book of Hebrews, and that is Christ. You need to keep your eyes fixed on Him. You need to look at Him with a laser focus and 2020 vision. And that's what we're going to talk about the next time we're together.

Some of you have asked the question, "When are we going to be finished with the book of Hebrews?" The answer is never. Just kidding. We're getting there. We're almost to that point. But we're going to look at Christ one more time in these verses and see some wonderful things about Him next time. But before we do, let's have a word of prayer, and ask the Lord to bless our hearts for the things that we studied this morning.

Heavenly Father, Lord, thank You for the work of Christ and building His church. And we know the gates of Hades will not overcome it. There's no force of evil or death or hell that can ever defeat the body of Christ. But the reason is because the body of Christ stands on His shoulders. We all come here for Christ. We don't come here just for the relationships. We don't come here just for the preaching or teaching. We don't come here for the doctrine, as important as that is. We do it so we can learn about Him. He's the one who saved us. He's the one who bought us with His blood. He's the one who died for our sins, rose from the grave, ascended into heaven to take us into Heaven with Him. Lord, we worship Him for that.

As we consider the things we've heard this morning, Lord, we pray, You would drive them home to our hearts. We want our church to be a healthy place for worship, to be a place that honours You, that that edifies You, and that other people can look to and say, "That's a place where they love each other." They

may have differences and disagreements, but it's a place where they practice the fruit of the Spirit and the one and others. We ask You to help us to grow in this.

And, Lord, as we go out from this place, we do need to live our lives now. Church is not just about what happens on a Sunday morning, but it's about what we do when we go from this place. And as we go from this place, Lord, help us to remember those men of God who poured into our lives. Some of us had many of them; some of us had a few, but we all had someone who brought the Word of God to bear in our hearts. May we remember them for that? May our lives be better for the leaders that we've had. May Christ be glorified in that as well for He is the one who sends men into the church. We always want to remember that. Go with us now Lord. Be glorified in what we do from this place. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.