

Title: **Obedience, Submission and Prayer**

Text: **Hebrews 13:17-19**

**17 “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.**

**18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.**

**19 I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.”**

Prayer: Oh God, Open our eyes that we might see the glorious gems of your word and that we would treasure your word above all that this world has to offer so that it is well known who it is that we love supremely!

Before we dive deeply into these three verses, I am compelled to point out what I think is quite obvious...

**Verse 17** is not a verse that deals with general leadership such as government leadership or kingship....

We know this because of what was previously said earlier in **chapter 13:7**... "**Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God.**"

The leader spoken of in our text is the same type of leader that is referenced in **verse 7**...

In **verse 7**, it is the leader who spoke the word of God to them...

In **verse 17**, it is the Leader who watches over their Souls...

These are references of a specific type of leadership of which we must carefully look at this afternoon!

This is where the Awkwardness comes in...

Here I am, a leader in this particular church assembly, who has the responsibility to preach a text that commands you to obey and to submit to your leader!

This is awkward because it seems to have a strong taste of a self-serving opportunities!

In fact, if we had someone visiting our assembly today for the first time, they too might think that I cherry-picked this verse to conveniently preach on a topic that best serves my interest!

But those of you who have been with us know, when it comes to the preaching of the Word of God, we simply are a book by book and verse by verse church and today we have landed on these three verses...

Now, when it comes to preaching, Pastor Ryan and I are committed to preaching through the text of scripture no matter how difficult, no matter what the topic may be and no matter how awkward or even uncomfortable the text may make us feel...

This is the strong commitment we maintain in this pulpit for the Glory of God and for the Good of His people!

So this morning we come to one of those passages that makes any reasonable Shepherd feel very

uncomfortable because it seems to have a tone of being self-serving...

But I must approach this text in the same way I approach any other text... and how do we do that?

Well, we apply reasonable principles in our study that support accurate methods of interpreting Scripture... This is called Hermeneutics!

Biblical hermeneutics is the method of interpreting Scripture so we can bridge the gaps between modern-day readers of the Bible, its original audiences, and God as its ultimate author.

One principle we use in Biblical Hermeneutics is the Rule of Concentric Circles...

Concentric Circles are circles that all share the same midpoint...

A good example of this would be if you throw a rock into a pond, there would be several circles that would come forth from the impact of that same rock...

Each of those circles are "concentric" in that they all share the same midpoint...

So when it comes to preaching scripture, we must first look at...

1. The Word that is being used,
2. The Phrase in which that word is used
3. The Complete Verse is what we look at next
4. The Whole Chapter is then looked upon
5. The Content of the Book must be considered
6. The Entire Bible must also be considered

I want to read four verses that underscore what I just said...

### **Ecclesiastes 8:1**

**1 “Who is like the wise? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed.”**

Knowing the proper interpretation of scripture can produce significant change in a life that has been hardened by the world!

### **1st Peter 1:20-21**

**20 “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own**

**interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."**

If we truly believe that the Bible is the Word of God (and we do!) then we must have our ears attuned to all God has said without misunderstanding!

**2nd Timothy 2:15**

**15 "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth."**

This Phrase "**rightly handling the Word of Truth**" actually means "to cut straight"...

The idea is best understood if we think of a surgeon who takes a scalpel and cuts a straight line so that he can lay open the flesh to reveal the details of the chest cavity...

This is what we would like to do with the three verses given to us in our text today in Hebrews chapter 13...

We simply want to "Cut it Straight" and lay it open so that we all can see the treasure of truth hidden beyond the surface!

Now I trust that you understand that I, as a preacher of the Word of God, have the responsibility to preach exactly what the text says... Amen?

And I am quite aware that there are many of you who are good students of the Word of God and you will be quite aware if I "Cut it crooked" instead of "Cutting it straight"....so I better "cut it straight!" Amen???

But let me also be straight with you that hanging in the balance, when it comes to this text, is my own personal Joy!

Do you see it in the text? If not, do not worry...I will point it out in just a few minutes!

But my personal Joy is not the only thing at stake from this text...

I also hope you will see, from this text, the incredible importance of how you should relate to your Elders...

Ephesians 4:11 tells us that Christ has given to His Church Pastors to equip, unify and mature the saints...

So when it comes to obedience and submission to Church leadership, you should know what kind of leadership you are actually obeying and submitting to... is it biblical or not?

Yes, Ryan and I have a desire to be joyful in our accounting of you before the Lord...But you also are accountable to place yourself and your family under good biblical leadership... and you should know what that looks like!

Now look carefully at **verse 17... “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”**

As we said earlier, we know that this passage is speaking about Biblical leadership in the local church Assembly...

But before we can understand the Role and the Boundaries of that leadership as an authority we are



to "Obey and Submit" to... we must first look at the broader context of Biblical Authority...

**In Mathew 28:18** Jesus said that "**All authority in heaven and earth is given to me...**"

This means that when it comes to Authority, there is absolutely no higher authority than Christ Himself!

He is Sovereign, He rules and reigns and commands as He desires and no one can usurp His Authority or even make a reasonable claim to have Authority above Him or even like Him!

According to passages like Romans 13:1; Daniel 2:21 and 1st Peter 2:13-15, God sets up government authorities and gives them their Roles and their Boundaries...

And it is to the welfare of God's people that they in proper obedience to the Authority of Governments ordained by God that do not cause the people to violate God's Word...

God has also set up the Authority in the Home that is clearly seen from Creation and in the Both the Old and the New Testament...

And Because of the parental Authority that has been ordained by God, we would think it to be ridiculous for a young child to be ordering or commanding their parents to be obedient to them!

Talk about Chaos and disfunction!!!

Well there is much Chaos and Disfunction in the modern Church mainly because people have not been properly taught the Biblical Role of the Pastor...

How is it even possible for the membership to have a good healthy relationship with their Elders if they don't have a biblical explanation of what their Elders are responsible for AND, if members are not made aware of their responsibility to imitate, obey and submit to their elders...

Now, before we go any further, I want to talk about the white elephant in the room when it comes to the subject of Obedience and Submission...

Our text says for us to Obey and Submit to our leaders and we can easily see that this leadership is in the Local Church primarily meaning Elders...

But we live in an Americanized culture whose spirit is in direct opposition of that...

This becomes a difficult task for the Pastor who stays true to the Word and now has the job of confronting members who have been influenced by the Spirit of the age that opposes what the verse actually says...

Today we live in a culture that gives premium value to self-determination and is contempt toward the idea of submission...

In fact, when it comes to marriage ceremonies, I have been asked by a few couples to change actually leave off the part of the vow that would require the Bride to promise obedience and submission to the Groom as her Husband...

Of course this is something I would never agree to do...

But it is indicative of the fact that our culture holds as a highest virtue individual liberty, but anything that limits my ability to do as I please is bad!

This same spirit that is in our American culture has also infiltrated the Church and makes this particular text culturally outrageous and for some unacceptable...some would even leave the Faith over it!

We also have to be truthful that there have been many Church leaders who have given people good reason not to trust their leadership...

The pages of church history is filled with men who have betrayed their Lord's command to be Sound in Doctrine and Exemplary in Conduct and Truthful in their Word...

This is why when it comes to true Biblical Leadership in the Church, servanthood must be the greater factor...

The true Biblical Leader must be a servant who does not Lord over others...

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians 1:24 "Not that we Lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy..."

The kind of Elder you should desire is the kind that does not Lord over you... but instead, comes along your side to lift you up, to serve you and to work for your joy...

In **1st Peter 5:1-3**, Peter writes...

**1“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as**

**well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:**

**2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;**

**3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”**

There are so many things to unpack here so that we can know what kind of Elders we are to obey and to submit to and also to pray for!

First, These Elders shepherd the flock....

This means that as their highest priority, they give nourishment and protection to those in their care...

Elders must see to it that their flock has a steady diet of spiritual nourishment...

God has provided the Word and Sacraments so that His people might grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ...

Good Shepherds will see to it that the flock in his care has a steady diet of the Word and Sacraments!

What I mean by that is Good Shepherds make certain their flock routinely comes together to read scripture and partake of the Lord's table....

This is where more faith is created in the heart of a believer and the means of Grace are fully enjoyed...

Do not place yourself or your family under Shepherds who do not encourage the weekly assembly of the saints and that those saints come often to the Lord's table...

Also, be aware that you should not place yourself or your family under the leadership of disqualified Elders!

In **Acts 20:30**, the Apostle Paul says the following to a group of Elders who met with him just before he was arrested in Jerusalem...Paul said "**From among your own selves will rise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them...**"

Paul is warning the flock to not submit to disqualified Elders that could lead them to destruction...

Also in **1st Timothy 5:19-20**, Paul tells Timothy exactly what to do if an Elder is found to be in sin...

Paul writes that an Elder found to be in sin should be disciplined and publicly removed from that office...

Look again at **1st Peter 5:1-3**...Peter writes in **vs 2**...  
**2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you,**

First we saw that the highest priority of Good Leadership or a Good Shepherd is to Nourish the flock with the Word and Sacraments and to protect them from wolves in sheep clothing!

The second thing we see in this passage is that the responsibility of a Good Shepherd is to Shepherd that which is "among them"... in other words he is to Shepherd a "local assembly..."

One of the things we have created in Americanized Churchianity are celebrity Shepherds!

We often put them on Conference Circuits that results in the spiritual malnourishment of their own local assembly...

I believe that this was one of the factors that lead to the downfall of Steve Lawson...

Celebrity Pastoring with no accountability, endless book writing and conference preaching will often be

done at the expense of a local church of which that man is responsible for!

Now I am not saying that conferences and book writing and speaking at other churches is wrong in itself...

But I think we should definitely make a big deal of the Shepherd whose passion is to preach and teach his local church as his highest priority!

The Third thing we see in **1st Peter 5:2** is the character of Good Shepherding... here it is in verse 2...

**...exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;**

"Exercising oversight" means to look carefully into or to inspect and oversee, to look after and to care for...

This cannot be done if you are constantly on a conference circuit or writing a book while on a sabbatical...

Exercising oversight requires an Elder to be "over the site", not constantly away from the site!



**Verse 2** also tells us that this must be done willingly and not done because of being forced, whether by command or through guilt!

If God would have you to Shepherd, He would also have you equipped for the work!

But you must never be motivated by any kind of earthly gain such as power, fame or fortune...

God simply requires an eager heart in the matter of Shepherding...

Then Peter says in verse 3...

**3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."**

Not domineering simply means that the office of an Elder, Overseer, Pastor, Shepherd or Bishop is not a position of Lordship or Dictatorship but rather a position of opportunity!

Elders have the opportunity to model true Christianity in front of the flock God has called them to lead...

And what I hope you realize by now, the term Elder and Pastor and Shepherd are use interchangeably

in scripture and so do we here at Awakening Church...

But technically the word "Elder" is the leadership position held in the Church and Pastoring or Shepherding is simply what he does...

The Elder is the title of the office... and the Elder is responsible to Pastor or Shepherd the flock in his care!

This is the kind of leadership that is to be obeyed and submitted to in our text back in Hebrews 13...

Now since it is God who created the Office of Elder, it is God who dictates with ultimate Authority what exactly the person who holds that office is responsible to do while holding that office...

BTW, that office can only be held by a man according to 1st Timothy chapter 3... and we know that the world hates this truth!

But wouldn't you agree that the world has lost all credibility when it comes to gender identity these days???

Besides, no one gets to define the office in detail except the one who created the office in the first place!

Let me give you a few of the responsibilities a man has if he is to hold the office of an Elder and then we will just go back into our text in Hebrews 13:17-19...

We know that an Elder is supposed to be a man of Prayer (Acts 6:4)

We know that an Elder is to minister in the Word (Acts 6:4)

We know that an Elder is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11)

I don't think most of us realize how utterly impactful the Americanized Gospel and the Americanized Church has been in a negative way concerning modern Churchianity...

Most people view the church congregation being responsible to hold up the professional Minister so that he can do his Job!

Nothing can be further from the truth. It is exactly the opposite!

God has ordained that the servant leadership actually equips the saints for the work of their particular ministry and it is that servant leadership, specifically the Elders, show the saints, by example, how to live out their Christian testimony before a hell-bent world for the Glory of God and the good of His people!

We have it upside down! All this time we have been sinking to the bottom of a well thinking we've been climbing to the top of a mountain!

In the Americanized Church, We've been knocking on the gates of Hell thinking we are heaven bound!

Because of this, we plead with the flock each Sunday...Get familiar with the Scriptures! Learn of Him! Know your King and what he has said... get to know your Bible!

Here are a couple of more things Elders are responsible for...

We also know that an Elder (who is a man of God) should "hold fast to" and "teach" sound doctrine.  
**(Titus 1:9; & 2:1; 2nd Timothy 1:13)**

We know that an Elder is responsible to evangelize, disciple and to teach proper behavior in the Church.  
**(1st Timothy 3:15-16)**

Time does not allow us to cover all the responsibilities of an Elder... But there is one more responsibility that is mentioned in Titus 1:9 that we cannot quickly Pass over...

**Titus 1:9** says

**“He (the elder) must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”**

Yes, the Elder holds firm to all he has been taught and he must give instruction in Sound Doctrine... But notice that there is one more responsibility He has according to that verse...

He must also rebuke those who contradict Sound Doctrine...

False Doctrine must be confronted by a Christ and people loving Elder...

Not only does an Elder have the responsibility to confront False Doctrine, he also has the Authority to confront sinful conduct as well...

I'm talking about an Elder who loves God supremely and if he loves God supremely, He will love people biblically and correct a wayward saint who may be caught up in sin!

And if he loves people Biblically, he will lead them in the word and in the sacraments... the result will be their growth in faith, in grace and in the knowledge of Christ and a biblical hatred of sin!

This kind of Elder is what the Author says is worthy to be Obeyed and to be Submitted to...

The Word "obedience" and "submission" in Greek actually means.... Obedience and Submission!

Even though our culture hates to hear these words, there is no other way to slice it!

But in its truest context, We can understand exactly what we are commanded to do by bathing it in our relationship with our Lord and our knowledge of Him!

We will have no issue with obedience and submission to Christ when we remember that the Lord loves us, He knows what is best for us and He guides us accordingly!

It is this same context that we are told to Obey and Submit to our Leaders (or) our Elders because we know that if they are biblically sound, then we can be assured they love us and they desire our spiritual best and they will endeavor to give counsel accordingly.

Now I want to be clear that the Obedience and Submission commanded in the text is limited to the Elder's Authority...

What exactly guides us in our understanding of the Elder's Authority?

Let me make it as simple as I can make it...

If it is in the scriptures, your Elder can encourage, exhort, and even command so long as it is in scripture...

Someone might say, "Well Pastor, I would like to date someone who is not a believer"... Don't do it! What fellowship does light have with darkness?"

Or Someone might say "Pastor, I've fallen out of love with my spouse and I am considering getting a divorce."... Don't Do It! Don't you know that God hates Divorce?!?!

If it is in the scriptures, Elders have every right and all authority to speak to it and to expect biblical obedience and scriptural compliance and submission from true followers of Christ!

When you look at these two words, "Obey" and "Submit", please know that these same words are used when speaking of our Heavenly Father...

We are to obey Him and we are to submit to him...

But what I am trying to make clear is that when it comes to obeying and submitting to Elders, their authority for your obedience and submission is tethered to what the scriptures say!

When an Elder says... "thus says the Lord" from the text of scripture in it's proper context, then I believe that Elder should expect obedience and submission to the Word from the saint he is addressing!

So this verse in **Hebrews 13:17** is not an offense to us at all if we have Biblical Elders...



Again, Verse 13 says...

**“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”**

There is a watching over your soul and there is an accounting for your soul that is implied in the text...

The Biblical Elder is not distant or absent from His flock so much that he cannot often see them or meet with them...

The Greek word that is translated "keeping watch" Comes from the word "A-group-neh-O" which means to be sleepless; to stay awake or to stay alert; to be attentive; to be ready....

The word "Soul" comes from the Greek word "Sue-hey" which means the seat of feelings, desires, and affections...

The Idea is that the Elder will one day give an account to the Lord for the conduct of the Saint in His flock...

This is a real good argument for membership in a local church...

An Elder simply cannot properly and consistently give an account for a sheep who is not a part of his local flock...

Now when it comes to giving an account to God for members of the flock, there are only two possibilities...

First there could be an accounting that is joyful!

This is described as a glad telling of conduct that brings joy to both the teller and the receiver of such news!

Then there is the accounting that is described as "Groaning" according to the text...

This is where the news is grievous and filled with a sort of sighing...

In the context of this passage, then Elder knows his flock, has walked with and cultivated a relationship with his flock, And has been watchful to deal lovingly as well as firmly at the appropriate times...

The Elders have nourished and protected the flock by feeding them the Word and participating in the sacraments...

And, the Elders have not forgotten to offer correction when necessary...

When the response from the flock is obedience and submission, then result is that the Elder experiences a Joyful accounting to the Lord concerning those that are in His care...

But when there is a stubborn stiff-neck sinful disposition, the result is a groaning and grievous accounting before the Lord by the Elder...

Now, we are not given any specifics concerning what this means, but when it comes to your Elder giving a groaning a grievous account concerning you, the text says "this is not profitable for you!"

All I can say is two things concerning this...

1. It is my desire to give a Joyful accounting to the Lord concerning every single member of Awakening Church... this is one of the things that motivates me to encourage you to know and to live by the scriptures!

2. When the Bible says that it is not profitable for you concerning anything...take it for what it says and repent and seek a Joyful accounting instead of something unprofitable for your soul and serve no advantage to you whatsoever!

Now we come to verse 18 and 19 which points us to the value of intercessory Prayer...

The Author writes...

**18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.**

I like what Spurgeon writes about this verse...

The movements of God's servants may be controlled by prayer. You cannot tell how much blessing will come to your own souls through the ministry, if you are in the habit of praying about it. The man who comes up to God's house having prayed for God to bless the preacher is not likely to go away unprofited.

Isn't that true.... the person who spends a time in prayer that His Elder to be blessed with wisdom, insight and clear delivery will never walk away from a sermon untouched!

**19 I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.”**

Concerning this verse, again I turn you to the writings of the great Prince of Preachers who said...

We may, indeed, even with tears appeal to you who are our brothers in Christ, and entreat you to be earnest in your supplications to God on our behalf. What can we do without your prayers? They link us with the omnipotence of God. Like the lightning rod, they pierce the clouds and bring down the mighty and mysterious power from on high.

I believe I can speak for both of your Elders here at Awakening Church when I say...

Oh how we covet your prayers on our behalf...

We have targets on us because of this ministry! All hell is against us because we are so very focused on the equipping you with His Word!

I would never use this pulpit to tell you of the hardships the world and Satan has railed upon us because of the ministry...

My wife knows and so does my Lord because he is the one who has sustained us from every evil day Satan has cast upon us....

All I can say is that I am so very grateful for those of you who keep us in your prayers!

My promise to you is that I will not sin against you by failing to pray for you as well!