

# Accountability Before God

HVFC

June 7, 2026

Jesus is Better Series

Hebrews 13:17-19

Good morning.

It was good to hear from our Missionaries to Wales last week, Pastor Jeff and Colleen. As most of you know, they pastored this wonderful church for 24 years before transitioning the church to myself and Autumn. They have one year remaining in Wales, and are praying for God to raise up or bring a pastor they can leave as they come back home. Be praying for both the pastor for there, and for what God has for them when they return. My hope is that they stay a bit closer, but as anyone in ministry knows, God's will trumps what we want every time.

The last time I preached I told you I was going home to smoke a brisket for Memorial Day.

I think I was excited because I woke up at 5 am, and immediately began to wonder if I should get up and get the fire going and get the brisket to smoking.

Well I didn't jump up right then, but the smoker was hot and brisket on the grill before 6:15 am. I don't have those fancy Traeger things, so I spent the whole day about 20 feet from my smoker, checking the charcoal and apple wood for 11 hours. And it was amazing, and it was fork, fall apart tender. And I am looking forward to doing it again.

As we focus now on our sermon, we will be finishing up Hebrews next week I believe.

I would usually give you a run down of my last sermon, but in the spirit of changing things up I am going to give a quick summary of the whole chapter bringing us to verse 17.

Please open your bibles to Hebrews 13, starting in verse 17 and we will read today's passage.

Hebrews 13:17-18

17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

18 Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.

NKJV

Well, this should be fun.

Let's pray.

If you are just joining us or maybe have missed a few of the sermons leading up to this passage today, or just have trouble with authority, this scripture this morning could seem like a punch to the nose you weren't expecting.

Verse 17 can seem like a sudden command and power grab for pastors/leaders regarding church authority. And I am sure there are those who have taken this passage out of context to do just that.

With that, I would like to give quick review of the chapter and take our passage today in context. Because this passage has nothing to do with a power grab over the lives of church congregations.

Here is a simple overview of chapter 13.

We are to love the family of God. Verses 1-3.

We are to live holy and content lives. Verse 4-6.

We are to follow faith examples of those who have finished their race. Verses 7-9.

We are to Identify with Christ. Verses 10-14.

We are to offer praise and service as sacrifices to God. Verses 15-16.

If we are doing all of these in obedience to Jesus Christ our savior, then this naturally leads us to cooperate with godly leadership that is helping you mature in Christ. Verses 17-19.

I view these as characteristics of those who are a part of the unshakable kingdom that we are receiving from God in chapter 12. A section of scripture that starts off with, see that you do not refuse Him who speaks.

If we accept Him who speaks and obey Jesus, we will love the family of God, live holy and content lives, follow faithful examples, identify with Christ, offer praise and service, and cooperate with godly leadership in the church God has planted us.

In our passage today I see four things the writer gives us as a characteristic of a believer and of a leader.

As believers we are to obey and submit.

As leaders we are to guard and are accountable.

A passage about joy and grief and profitability.

Prayer is our final characteristic this morning.

Let's look at our passage and work through it.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

The scripture opens with obey those who rule over you and be submissive...

Obey and submit.

Two concepts we kick against and war with our whole lives.

If we were to boil this down a little more, it is dealing with authority.

Now as I begin this, I want to quote John MacArthur, a pastor who has gone to be with the Lord, who pastored a very large church in California. I would assume most of you know of him.

He was asked during a Q&A segment this question.

How much authority does a pastor have in and over the lives of his congregants?

Here was his answer, and I won't read the whole quote.

No authority. I have no authority. My experience, knowledge, education, position, or title does not give me any authority. I have no authority beyond what scripture says. Only God's word has authority and I can not exceed what is written.

Now this may seem at odds with what verse 17 is saying, but I don't believe it is.

Here is how I see it. I don't have any authority to make you do anything. I can't make you come to church, I can't make you give an offering, I can't make you read your bible, I can't make you obey scripture, I can't make you accept Jesus. I don't have the authority to make you do anything. So what authority do I have?

Pastoral authority is not about controlling people. It is about truthfully preaching God's word, protecting the flock and calling us to a mature walk with Christ.

As a senior pastor, I do have authority to fulfill the calling God has given me in the roll he has placed me.

Ephesians teaches us that he placed the leadership ministries in the church for a reason, and it is for those reasons we are called to obey and submit.

Ephesians 4:7-16

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore He says:

"When He ascended on high,

He led captivity captive,

And gave gifts to men."

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

NKJV

We obey and submit to our leaders so that we can mature into the men and women God is calling us to be for the kingdom work he has for us to do. Church leaders are tasked with the welfare of the congregation to promote the spiritual prosperity of each person.

If it is done right, as the pastor I hear the word of the Lord, and speak that to you, whether through sermons, counsel, or advice, and in turn you choose to obey and submit to the sermons, counsel, or advice in obedience to Jesus.

Am I perfect, absolutely not, but before your head swells, neither are you!

As believers we are called to obey and submit to godly human church leadership because God has given them responsibility to guide and care for the church. This submission is not blind obedience, but a willing cooperation with leadership as they seek to follow Scripture, protect the church, and promote its unity, order, and spiritual growth.

God has ordained a system of order (obey and submit) for a reason, and he has built into it a system of checks and balances (responsibility and accountability).

Hebrews 13:17

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

I wish I could express and let you feel the unbearable weight that comes with the calling to be a senior pastor in the church.

I know I have probably shared this story, for 7 days before the transition service in April of 2023, I underwent a burdening from God for this church. It was the most solemn experience I have ever had. Coming face to face with the understanding that from that day forward I would carry the eternal weight of the souls God gave me to pastor. As I write this, tears are rolling down my eyes.

There is a reason why the congregation is called to obey and submit to Godly leadership.

As a pastor, I will be called to give account for your souls before the God of the universe.

I must admit, it isn't fair that leaders carry the weight of those who they have no authority to make them do anything.

And you may say well why do you have to give account for my life?

Because it is the nature of the calling, and it is to keep me honest and following Jesus.

In Ephesians those offices mentioned are basically watchmen on the wall. And God has very specific rules for those he calls as watchmen.

I want to read the responsibility that God lays on every minister found in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 33:7-9

7 "So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore, you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way,

and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

NKJV

As a watchman, it is my duty and responsibility to be proclaiming, preaching and announcing what God is saying. If I should choose to ignore or disobey, I bear responsibility in God's eyes for that. God will require that blood at my hand. I don't know how that would work, but that adds to the extreme weight of being called into the ministry.

And why I can't shy away from the difficult portions of scripture and why I preach whole books from chapter 1 verse 1 to the final period.

Which means I will preach and speak things that you may not like. Now as I pray before each sermon, my hope is that the Holy Spirit will use what God has given me in the sermon to say to convict your heart and make us more like Jesus. But I get to be the mouth piece. And I get the duty to call out sin, point out areas that are lacking, calling you to be more like Jesus, and if I refuse to call out the warnings, I get to bear that guilt.

Nathan the prophet found himself in this very precarious place. 2 Samuel 12  
Could you imagine God telling you that you must go to a person who has the authority to kill you, and tell him he has acted wickedly and sinned before God. It wasn't kind, fun, easy words. It was blunt, sharp, hard words.

In a sermon I was reading I saw this quote from Pastor May, I didn't catch his first name.

As David learned, and as we will learn, it isn't the comforting and soothing words that will bring the greatest freedom, protection and deliverance from our rebellion. It

is those hard words: those words that cut to the heart and separate truth from deception that will be necessary to bring us to the realization of the truth.

Nathan loved God and obeyed and he loved David enough to confront him.

I will tell you a truth. The difficulty of obedience and submission is way easier than the burden of caring for the souls of those we must give an account for.

And if you have leaders that are submitted to the Lordship of Jesus and ministering for all the right reasons, it is easier to obey and submit to them. Knowing they have your best interest at heart.

And that is the burden Autumn and I carry for this church.

This is another truth. I am not here to fleece you. I have one goal, that is to see you equipped with scripture so that you can go and do the work of the ministry in a world that is dead in their sin and needs the Jesus we have. A world where you and I are called to go out and share our testimony and make disciples of all nations.

There is a reason James says that not many of you should become teachers, as watchmen will be judged with greater strictness.

Those called, bear a burden that is unnatural to carry, and if it were not for Jesus, it would be impossible. Actually no one would do it.

Historically in the church at large the pay is awful, the benefits non-existent, the stress extremely high, and it is hard work. That is why the ministry chews people up and spits them out.

So, the writer continues with this next bit of advice.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

NKJV

I won't go deep into this one, but we all know what it is like working with people. It can be very difficult, and that is multiplied within the church.

The word grief can be translated as groanings. Which we have all had those people in our life that when we see them coming towards us, we immediately groan because we know whatever it is, it is not going to be a joyful experience.

Paul says in Romans 12, don't be that kind of person. He specifically says if it is possible as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

And I stared at the unprofitable for you portion for a long time. And ultimately it boils down to this.

When a church consistently resists, criticizes, fights, and refuses shepherding, nobody wins. Leaders become discouraged, the church loses unity, and people miss opportunity to mature and grow spiritually. An exact opposite of what the church is called to be.

And I will pick back up on this last thought next week, because at the end of the day this only works when we are in prayer for our leaders and our church body.

In closing this morning, we have covered some deep territory.

We opened up looking at obedience and submission.

I mentioned that this is something we will fight against our whole life. We don't like to humble ourselves to authority. We like to rule over it and conquer it. It is our patriotic spirit in a way as Americans.

When I was in Bible college, I kicked against the goads of authority. And after my freshman year with one of my professors, I told God I was never taking another of his classes. God convicted me so bad about how I behaved and my lack of willing obedience and complete noncompliant submission. I ended up signing up my Sophomore year, the whole year with two classes, which involved some traveling, so above and beyond.

Even Jesus learned obedience by submitting to the cross. Hebrews 5:8. How much more do you and I need to learn obedience and submission.

And for those who are called to the ministry, what a heavy burden that is. We are tasked with watching for the souls of men, and to give an account for them to God almighty. It means we have to say the hard words, words that may cost us friendships and fellowship. However, as a watchman I must call out the warning, or be held responsible for the blood of those whom I refused to tell.

Each of us are accountable before God to what He is called us too.

If we are a part of the body, to hear the word of the Lord and obey and submit to the authority God has place over the church.

As leaders we are to be watchful for the souls of those God has asked us to serve, for we will give an account one day.

And we are to let them do this with joy.

Ultimately Hebrews 13:17 is not calling us to put our trust in our leaders. It is calling us to trust Christ, who has given us leaders to care for His church. As the leaders faithfully follow Him and believers willingly respond to Him, the whole body grows and matures into the fullness of Christ.

Let's pray.