

Exhortations to the Church Concerning Leaders

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[0 : 00] There are two verses that are related in topic, so I decided to deal with them together. Hebrews 13, 7 and 17. I'll read them in just a moment.

We've made our way very slowly through the book of Hebrews. It's been several years as we've gone through it, because we don't do it every week. We go through it different times. And we have looked at the doctrine behind the work of Christ.

And the writer of the book of Hebrews has written that doctrine to encourage these people, because they've been going through trials and temptations. Trials and temptations that made them want to say, let's just quit this Christianity and go back to Judaism, because Rome doesn't persecute Jews.

They only persecute Christians at the time that this was written. And so they wanted to turn back. And so the writer of the book of Hebrews wrote all these doctrines, and frankly, I missed going through the doctrines.

I loved going through the doctrines. In the book of Hebrews, they were such a blessing to me. And I'm not disappointed in this, but I sure loved that doctrine. And I'm so thankful for it.

[1 : 09] So I say that to don't forget it. Don't say, oh, we've gotten to the point where he said, do this, do this, do this. I cannot worry about all the things he said. No, go back to the doctrine.

Relish in your position in Christ. Relish in what God has done for you. Relish how good it is in the situation God has put us. So don't throw that off and say, oh, we're glad we're done with that.

Be glad for that and be glad for this. As we've gotten to this point, we want to think about this last chapter. I mentioned last time.

It's a chapter. You can see his heart. He's looking at these people, and he's given them all this doctrine that's such an encouragement. And he's wanting to wrap it up and say, okay, I want you to remember some things that will help you stay in the way.

Keep your eye on the doctrine. Know your foundation. These are some practices that a church needs to do to keep itself going the right way. And we've looked at several things.

[2 : 08] As he's cared for these people and wanted to equip them to make it through their trials, the writer of the book of Hebrews is going through a list of these closing applications to arm them. And so he's encouraged them concerning the need for brotherly love to continue.

He's encouraged the body of Christ to show hospitality even to strangers. He has encouraged his brothers and sisters to remember to serve those who are in prison.

He has also reminded them to hold marriage in honor and to let the marriage bed be undefiled. Last time we talked about how we should be careful concerning our material and financial standing in life.

We need to be people who keep free from the love of money. And we need to be people who are being content with the things that we have. And even as you think about those things, you think how well they position the person in trial to be equipped for that trial.

Remember these things. And so as we come here to these two verses that we're going to deal with, we're coming to two verses that some might say, well, what really are these important?

[3 : 22] And we find, I think, even as all of us have looked back through the whole past year and a quarter or so, and what we've been through, and even as we've heard how things are going for different churches and different prayer requests that they bring to us, these two verses, I think, show that they are also very important in the position of, in the situation of churches being in the position of struggle.

And truly, that's the way churches are through all the ages. Jesus said you're going to face persecution. And so he gives us two things that relate directly to protecting us in a world where trials can tempt us to turn for our faith.

And so today we are looking at a couple of imperatives that instruct us in the church's relationship to its leaders. So let me read Hebrews 13, verses 7 and 17.

Verse 7. Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

And then going down to verse 17. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who have to give an account.

[4 : 40] Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Let's pray together. Father, I thank you that you have loved us enough to give us a book full of doctrine that thrills our souls as we think of the wonder of what God has done for us.

Father, we also thank you that as the writer of the book of Hebrews was carried along by your spirit, you were concerned enough to give us instructions, concluding instructions that are so good for church.

Churches in the midst of trials and tribulations, which is standard fare for believers. Churches in the midst of trials and tribulations, which is standard fare for believers. I pray that you would be with us today, that these imperatives that we look at today would be things that we see as dear, would be things that we see as important, would be things that we would not brush off and say, oh, this is just a man trying to establish his position.

But Lord, rather to get the burden that's behind these things and how it's such an important thing in the church-facing trials.

And pray that you would make the way clear before us and help us to understand your word. And may you be glorified and may we be drawn close to you and may we make full use of those things you've commanded us to use.

[6 : 09] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We'll begin by looking at verse 7. And I've kind of summed up this verse 7 by saying, the church is to benefit from considering the example of its leaders.

Now, I want you to see that as he's written this, he says, remember. He doesn't say, well, you know, it might be a good thing to think about. He gives us a command, remember your leaders.

And so the imperative is that the church is to benefit from considering the example of its leaders. From the context of this verse, as we read through this, we can learn a couple of things.

The leaders spoken of here are those in the church. Some might take these and say it applies to country leaders or county leaders or state leaders.

But this verse is really focusing on the situation of believers in a church and those God has put in that church to lead the church. So it's in the church.

[7 : 14] It says, your leaders. And it says, those who have spoken the word of God to you. So we're not making this broad to all people who are in authority of us. This is the writer to the book of Hebrews having a burden for the people of God in their church or churches, whatever the case may be that he's writing to.

And he has a burden for them to be in right relationship to those who are leading them. And so it's those in their church. These leaders who have lived a life in front of you.

It's a life that you can consider. He's saying, I want you to consider and remember the leaders who are there in front of you. They have a life you can consider.

You've seen them in their life. You've seen them in some of their trials. You've seen them in some of their reactions. You've seen their faith or their lack of faith.

He's saying, I want you to look at these people. Consider them. You've watched them go through these things. And this verse also, one of the things that people struggle with is who, which leaders is it speaking of?

[8 : 28] Because verse 7 seems to be past tense and verse 17 seems to be, is indeed present tense. But I'm going to lay it out this way. These are the leaders who've lived a life in front of you.

They may be leaders of the past. They could be dead or martyred, which would have been a very possible thing for the writing situation of this epistle.

There were many people who died for Christ. Just, oft times, if you read through the New Testament, the leaders of churches were the people who were hauled out and stoned or hauled out and persecuted, hauled out and served some sort of suffering for the church.

And so, this could be addressing the situation as those people whom this book was written to, those Hebrews it was written to, they could be looking around and thinking, yeah, pastor so-and-so is gone.

Yeah, elder so-and-so is gone. Yeah, they were hauled away because our church wasn't liked by the local government or our church wasn't liked by the state. And yeah, they suffered and they ended up dying. It could be these kinds of people that it's addressing.

[9 : 33] I think also it could be the idea of present leaders who have lived their lives in front of you. Long-time leaders. People who have lived there and been their whole life giving and living among you.

And you have the opportunity to look at them and consider their life and evaluate what's gone on and how they reacted and how the word of God had a part in their life.

So, I think these are the people we're considering. He says to them, remember your leaders, those who spoke to you, the word of God.

Leaders are exhorted to be examples to the flock. In 1 Timothy 4, 11 through 16, the word of God says, Command and teach these things.

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

[10 : 34] Until I come, devote yourselves to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Practice these things. Immerse yourself in them so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this.

For by so doing, you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Peter 5, 3 says, Peter is exhorting them, as far as exhorting the elders, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Those who were their leaders were to be examples to the flock. And I just quoted those verses to point out that that's indeed what they were to be. And as we look at this verse, he says, Remember your leaders, particularly speaking about those who spoke the word of God to you, those who preached to you, those who exhorted and encouraged you.

So remember those leaders. The church is commanded to be remembering those leaders and looking to them as examples to the flock.

[11 : 52] So the verses I read talked about how it's a leader's responsibility to be an example. This verse is telling the church to look at those people as examples.

In fact, the church is commanded to look at those people as examples. Look at them as examples to the flock. You and I not only need people to instruct us in the way we should go, but we also need people to illustrate what it looks like for people to walk in the way we should go.

The Bible is full of people meant to show. The Bible has a bunch of people, and all those people are meant to show what it's like to walk in the way. And that can be a huge help to us.

And the church is commanded to look at its leaders and look for people who are examples to them. And of course, you're...

Yeah, this is a tough situation to preach. And I hope you don't see any of the bad things. I hope there are no bad things in my life. But that's what we are to be.

[13 : 04] We're to be examples to the flock. You're to be looking at them as examples. Your leaders are people walking in some of the very same situations you are.

The way of life can be much more... The way of life can be a much more specific example of the way we should walk...

Let me just summarize it this way. The leaders in their church, their way of life can be a much more specific example than say... And I'm not negating the example of this.

But what it's like to live in Hazleton in the area, what they're going through can be a much more specific example to how you should live and walk than our brother David Vaughn in France.

Again, not negating that. He has a different set of circumstances. And the people in the church where he serves, they look to him and those other elders as examples of what it's like to live in Auxen, Provence, France.

[14 : 12] The church... God has commanded the church to look at leaders in your midst as an example of how to live in Hazleton and the surrounding areas.

The same thing is true... Joseph, in the book of Genesis, is a tremendous example of what it is like to live amongst some certain kind of trials and how a person should react.

That's great. But none of us are servants in the king's palace. But we are in Hazleton. And we do know some of the trials that befall Hazleton itself.

And so the church is commanded to look to the local leaders as examples on how to live out the life. The church is encouraged to consider the outcome of the way of life of those who have spoken to you the word of God.

Have they lived in light of the word of God? Have they trusted the promises of God? Was their heart set on the things of God... Was their heart set on the things of God...

[15 : 23] Things that God considers important? If their life... If their way of life was acceptable, then imitate it.

This verse bears out that idea. It's not just a, Oh, live like Dave Thompson or live like so-and-so. It says you evaluate their life. If they live according to the... Consider their life.

If it's according to the way of God, then use that as an example. The writer of the book of Hebrews puts forward a whole chapter of people whose faith was to be imitated.

Just a couple chapters back. Chapter 11. We're to imitate the faith of those who live in the light of God's word and trust his promises. Three verses from that chapter.

Hebrews 11, 7. By faith Noah being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen unseen in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household.

[16 : 19] By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. Now if you know Noah's story, there are some things that Noah did we do not want to imitate.

But Noah can be an example to us of a person who says these are the promises of God. This is what God said he will do. This is what God commanded me to do.

This is what I'm going to do. We can imitate that. We don't imitate his drunkenness and situation in the tent. The same kind of situation goes on here.

We're to have that same kind of mentality. Hebrews 11, verse 8. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance.

And he went out not knowing where he was going. Wow. Imitate that faith. When God says go out, he went out. He didn't say, God, I'm not going until you tell me where I'm going.

[17 : 19] He recognized God says go and I'll show you the way. And he did. Abraham was pretty guilty of lying about his wife, calling her his sister, which was a half-truth, and all kinds of situations.

You discern his life. What's worth following? What's worth setting forth in his example? And what Abraham did that was worthy.

You use that as an example. Hebrews 11, 11. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive even when she was past the age since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Again, Sarah messed up. But where she rightly trusted in the promises of God, let her be an example. The same kind of situation is true in our local church.

If you don't know it, we mess up. Thank you for not going, but those who are your leaders, you're to consider their life.

[18 : 25] And where they point to a faithful life, where they point to living right before Christ, where they show you an example of faith in Christ, imitate that example.

Imitate the faith of those leaders who have lived by faith in the promise that God is enough. Even when suffering, pain, and sorrow seems beyond bearing.

And when things promised seem out of reach. Now, we've spoken of leaders. I'll just take a side moment.

There is the whole concept in Scripture of one anothering. And we are not to be the only examples. You are to be examples to one another. You're to be one anothering, encouraging, and reproving and exhorting and all kinds of things that the Scripture talks about.

But he's talking about this, he's talking to this church and telling them, he's reminding them, you have a responsibility to look to your elders and leaders. I'm considering this elders and deacons in this situation.

[19 : 32] Elders and deacons and those who have been leaders in the church, look to them as examples. Brothers and sisters, there will always be trials and suffering ahead.

We need to be remembering and considering and imitating the faith of our leaders. And I think that's the gist of what the writer to the book of Hebrews is doing in verse 7.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Now jumping to verse 17.

In verse 17, I'm going to sum up the teaching of the verse. The church is to obey and to submit to its leaders.

This verse is in the present tense. It refers to the leaders in the church you are in. This would be, as I mentioned earlier, the elders and deacons, those who have led you.

[20 : 32] Now he says in verse 17, I said, I started doing it without rereading the verse. 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. In this verse, it says obey and submit. What's the difference?

Why does he use these two terms? What's the difference between obey and submit? Obey mainly speaks of receiving the teaching given by the leaders. And so when the word of God has been rightly expounded, you take it as from God and obey it.

Now we have responsibilities as people before God to be Bereans, to look and say, is that indeed what they're saying? Is that indeed what the Bible says? Where it is, that word is from God.

Obey it. It's being willing to be persuaded by the proper interpretation of God's word. When those leading and teaching say, this is what God's word says and it's a proper interpretation of it, then it's right for the church to be willing to be persuaded by that proper interpretation.

[21 : 57] That's the idea of obeying. Submitting speaks of being one who yields to the proper authority established by the church. Let me reread it.

Submitting speaks of being one who yields to the proper authority established by the church. When men of God direct the church according to the principles of God's word, the church is to obey and submit.

In this case, submitting. Submitting is being willing to follow the leadership of the church when they are acting biblically. You're saying, oh, wait a minute.

I'm not just going to follow these men blind. Good. Notice, I've put emphasis on the idea of following the word of God, leading according to the principles of the word of God.

So, the writer of the book of Hebrews is giving us a command to be people who obey our leaders and submit to their leadership. Of course, that obedience and submission is to leaders who are teaching and leading according to the word of God.

[23 : 06] As always, Christ is head of the church. But the church is to obey and submit to those whom Christ has placed in leadership over the church.

Dr. Al Mohler said this. I thought it was a good summation. He said, submission is not necessarily to the teacher but to what is taught.

In so much as leaders teach and lead in accordance with God's word, they are to be obeyed and their teaching is to be taken seriously. Another, this is from John Piper, a little bit of a longer quote here.

He says, the word for submit, I won't pronounce the Greek, occurs only here in the New Testament. It's the more narrow word and means make room for by retiring from a seat or yield to or submit to.

He continues, so with all this background, what I would try to distill as the meaning would be something like this. Hebrews 13, 17, you can almost hear John Piper say this, can't you?

[24 : 22] Hebrews 13, 17 means that a church should have a bent towards trusting its leaders. You should have a disposition to be supportive in your attitudes and actions towards their goals and directions.

You should want to imitate their faith and you should have a happy inclination to comply with their instructions. He goes on, Now you can hear that these are all soft expressions, a bent towards trusting, a disposition to support, a want to imitate, an inclination to comply.

What these phrases are meant to do is capture both sides of the biblical truth, namely, that elders are fallible and should not lord it over the flock and secondly, the flock should follow good leadership.

So, why is the church to obey and submit to its leaders? What was the first reason many parents give for saying to do what they told you to do?

Because I told you so. And so, I think this is appropriate. I think the first answer is because God has told us to do so. Now, he's not given this unqualified.

[25 : 53] He's not thrown it open and said, you must be obedient to every reckless and prideful and power hungry leader. He's not done that at all. But where leaders are leading according to the word of God and are teaching the word of God, we are to be people who obey and submit.

So why is the church to obey and to submit to its leaders? Because God has told her to. But that's not all. Secondly, because leaders are keeping watch over their soul.

They're doing it for a reason. It's their calling. Ephesians 4, 11 through 16 says, and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes, rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

It's their calling to minister, to keep watch over their souls. Acts 20, 28, pay careful attention to yourselves, to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

1 Peter 5, 1 and 2, and verse 8, 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.

[27 : 53] 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.

And this is verse 8, I put this verse against what, these are what the shepherds do because this is the situation. Verse 8 says, be sober minded, be watchful, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Why should the church be submitted to those who are their leaders? because they're watching for your souls. It is their responsibility. Are we perfect?

No. But that is our calling. Do we do it right all the time? Unfortunately not. But that is indeed our calling. We are to watch for our folks' souls.

So third, oh, let me just build on that just a little bit as we are watching for folks' souls. We are, leaders are endeavoring to know and interact with you in ways to watch for your souls.

[29 : 07] To work on a personal basis. To watch for your soul not just because you're a part of a group, you are, but because you're an individual. And those who are leaders are seeking to teach, exhort, rebuke, instruct, and lead so that you are drawn to know Christ more and made more like Christ.

That is why they're there. It's their ministry. And third thing in relation to why a church should obey and submit to its leaders, I hope you see these not from the authority.

I'm very much trying not to look at it as authority, but the need of why God put them there. The third thing is the idea of being true shepherds.

I'm contrasting this against people who you wouldn't want to follow, those who lord it over the flock, those who are out for some sort of financial gain or some sort of pride trip or something like this.

This is the opposite. True shepherds do not shepherd for the sake of power, but rather out of love and desire for people to grow. True shepherds shepherd with a sober realization that they will give an account for their shepherding of your soul.

[30 : 22] That's an amazing, amazing thought. I will stand before God someday and give an account for how I have preached this message, how I have interacted with you through all my stay here.

The people who have come and gone now, obviously I haven't interacted with everyone, but those who I have interacted, have I been a leader who is encouraging, who's building towards Christ's likeness, who's building towards where that person has a better and better relationship with Christ.

We will give an account. That's part of the reason that people are to obey and submit, because these people are doing a job for you, and they will give an account.

True shepherds have no greater joy than to hear that their children walk in truth. It's 3 John 4. True shepherds have a great groaning when those they serve are deceived, straying, or rebellious.

Galatians 4, 16-20, Paul makes this comment, Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much worse of you for no good purpose.

[31 : 42] They want to shut you out, that they may make much of you. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

In another place, 2 Corinthians 2 and verse 4, this is, this is, they had had, among other things, the controversy of who is the greatest, who is the greatest, and they had the whole problem of a man having his father's wife as his wife, and he is in anguish over them for their divisiveness and their falling into these petty things, and even their accepting of false doctrine, and he says in 2 Corinthians 2, 4, for I write to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart, and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

These scriptures and others speak of the great physical and emotional toll of wayward church people take on their shepherds. As verse 17 points out, groaning shepherds are no advantage to you.

I mean, they're going to groan, they're going to plead your cause before God if they're good shepherds, they're going to work with you, but it's a heartache. You could hear the heartache in Paul's, oh, won't you change?

I'm here to see this change, to see this different, and you're going the wrong way. Shepherds are to be obeyed and submitted to, leaders are to be obeyed and submitted to, because they are shepherding you for your good, they're watching for your souls, and true shepherds have great groaning when those they serve are deceived and straying and rebellious.

- [33 : 45] The work of the ministry is bogged down, and the heart and the strength of the leaders are worn down when the church does not obey the word of God through their leaders and fails to submit to their leadership.

In a true shepherd, that is not a pride thing. That's a, you're missing it, you don't know where you're headed, you don't know what you're in for, you don't know how this is going to be a hurt to you, when people aren't willing to submit and aren't willing to follow, not a man's pride, not his ego, but the word of God and the clear principles and teachings of scripture.

In this situation, speaking of the situation the writer of the book of Hebrews writes, in this situation he sees them going through all kinds of trials, and we see it in this kind of day and age as the church goes through trials because of the things, the coronavirus and the world and all the isms and osms and what all, people are starting to say, I'm not listening to anybody, I don't think our pastor's right for making this decision, I don't think our elders are right for making this decision, and we're seeing all kinds of attitudes crawl up and creep up, we're, we're, no, that's, that's, when the church goes through trouble, they're to look and follow the example of those who have lived rightly before God, they're to be in a church where they obey and follow and trust those who are doing things according to the word of God.

The church should obey and submit to its leaders because it will not be good for the disobedient and rebellious in the last day.

How good will it be for you at the last day to stand before Christ and leader, your leaders to be able to stand beside you and commend obedience and submission?

- [35 : 49] How bad will it be for you at the last day to stand before Christ, your leaders to stand opposite you with tears in their eyes, giving account of the times they spoke the word of God to you and you would not listen or be exhorted in the way that you should go, but you would not submit.

Now that's, I'm speaking more there of a person who's claimed to be in church and claims to be a Christian, but you get the gist of the burden of the two situations.

O church, obey and submit to your leaders, not because we desire. A good leader fears his position. A good leader has this overwhelming passion to help people, but is scared because he knows he gives an account for it.

He knows he has the lives of people not in his hands, but yet in a sense in his hands. he is accountable before Christ.

So church people, obey and submit to your leaders that your leaders may have joy and rejoicing over you rather than the groaning which disobedience and rebellion bring.

- [37 : 14] Now maybe you're here and you aren't even to the point where you've thought about being obedient or disobedient to leaders. You're here and you don't even know about the condition of your soul.

Let me point you to Christ. Christ died that he might pay for the sins of his people and he offers that to you. I would encourage you to come to him today.

Let's pray. Father, I thank you for this situation and Lord, I pray that we would not be a people who are Americans and say, I'm not following anybody.

May we be people who are Christians and say, I'm going to be in the position God has placed me in. I'm going to have the attitude that God has given and wants me to have.

I'm going to be in this situation that is for good. I want to be protected in trials. I want to look for people who are good examples of what it's like to go through life and to make decisions based in faith.

[38 : 22] I want to be a person who's trusting and follows that. Lord, help us to be people who say, I may not always agree or understand, but the general direction, the general situation of the church, I'm in support of.

I am in submission to. I want to be moved by the word of God when God's man preaches it. I want to be, Lord, help us to be those kinds of people.

Not for the pastor's sake, not for the elders or deacons sake, but for Christ's sake. For the protection that the body offers, that Christ offers through the body, and I pray that you would be with us in these things.

And Lord, if there are any who don't know you, we plead with you that you would be merciful to draw their hearts to yourself. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.