

# You & The Stewards of Christ's House

Hebrews 13:17

*Halifax: 11 August 2024*

## **Introduction:**

Today we will continue our sermon series in Hebrews.

- In chapter 12, we saw that as Christians, we are pilgrims, going to God, destined to live in His house forever and ever!
  - We carry on by looking to Jesus, the Son of God, our great high priest whose saving work was gloriously set forth in the first ten chapters of this epistle.
- Now in chapter 13, we are given instructions about how we are to conduct ourselves as we go forward together with our fellow believers.
  - First there were basic instructions about loving one another.
  - Now we are looking at the worship we are to engage in.
    - It no longer centers around an altar made with human hands officiated at by robed priests offering sacrifices and burning incense.
    - No, Christ was offered before the throne of God in glory. He is the sacrifice on our altar. His benefits are set forth in the preaching of gospel—the good news of His saving work, and the benefits are received by faith.
  - Rather than having many rituals and ceremonies we bring come trusting in Christ with the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name, and doing good and sharing.
    - This is the whole of pure religion: we trust Christ and His work to atone for our sins and give us life, and then we adore our God with praise and thanks, and we pour out our lives for each other like He did.
  - And today, we see that we are to go forward in harmonious fellowship with the stewards of God's house that He has appointed to watch for our souls.
    - Our text is Hebrews 13:17. I will read from verse 12.

Here is the word of God.

**Heb 13:12-17: Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. <sup>13</sup> Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. <sup>14</sup> For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. <sup>15</sup> Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving**

**thanks to His name. <sup>16</sup> But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. <sup>17</sup> 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.**

Thanks be to God for His precious word.

Again, our text is verse 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 want to begin in a different way than I often do—

- I want to begin by showing you an assumption that is made by this text.

- It is an assumption that needs to be pointed out in our day because if you wrote to a bunch of Christians today, it would not be something that you could rightly assume.

Do you know what it is?

**I. The assumption here is that if you are a Christian, you have “those that rule over you” in the church.**

A. It is simply assumed that every Christian has such people to obey.

1. Clearly, they are specific people that each believer knows about and can identify.
  - And these ruling ones—they also know those who are ruled by them—which people they are.
  - And there is a personal knowledge that these leaders have because they are said to be those who “watch out for the souls” of those under their care.
  - And they are also shown to be appointed by God to do this because it says they must give an account to God for these souls, just as a manager at MacDonalds would have to give an account for those who work under his watch.
2. This assumption cannot be made today because there are many Christians who could not tell you of any such people.
  - They might mention a parent or something, but they have no such people in the church that they answer to and that answer to God for them.
  - There simply were no such people, except those in extraordinary circumstances like the Ethiopian eunuch or someone who was in a church in a remote place whose elders had just died...
    - But even these would know that those who had brought the gospel to them and established their church would be looking in on them soon.

B. The reason it was assumed that believers would have those in their assembly who ruled over them is because this is how the church that Jesus established had been set up.

1. There was a government in which there were distinct assemblies, each with their own elders (mature men) who served as bishops (overseers) of those in their assembly.
2. This is the kind of government that we also find in the Old Testament with only one difference.
  - In the Old Testament the body of elders included priests and teachers (scribes) together with those who simply ruled but were not involved in official teaching or priestly service...
  - And in the New Testament, the priests are replaced by ministers of the word and sacrament who work with ruling elders.
    - Now, instead of having one who offers sacrifices and ministers at the altar, we have those whose task it is to proclaim Christ and set forth salvation in Him to the people in their worship.
  - But in the Old Testament, rule by a body of elders in every local assembly was the established pattern instituted by God through Moses when He appointed the weekly assembly in all their dwellings.

- It is here that oversight was given, that new converts were examined and received by circumcision when they professed faith, and that people who broke God's covenant and did not repent were admonished, rebuked, suspended from partaking of the sacrifices, and cut off from the body if they would not be reclaimed.
3. Jesus showed that He expected this same government to be continued in the NT.
- For example, in Matthew 18, He said that those who sinned were to be confronted privately first by those that knew of their sin, then by one or two others, and then, if they would not hear, brought before the church—the ecclesia—the assembly.
  - This assembly had always been the assembly of the elders, and there is absolutely no reason to think it was anything else when Jesus spoke of it.
    - He referred to it as two or three gathered in His name to make a decision about the person and what was to be done and declared that they would be speaking for heaven—assuming, of course, that they followed His Word.
    - He assumed the same structure that He had established for His people under the Old Testament with elders that watch for the souls of those in the assembly of which they were a part.
4. If this is still uncertain to anyone, we might close the case by looking at the fact that the apostles carefully established churches with elders to rule in each one.
- For example, in Acts 14, Paul's standard practice in establishing churches is described—and it is described as a model for us to follow...
    - Paul and his fellow apostles were charged with doing everything according to what Christ had commanded them.
  - So what did Paul do in Acts 14?
    - He had gone through preaching the gospel and people had been converted.
    - Normally they had to go outside the camp—they were removed from the synagogue. Often many of those who believed were already elders or priests and some were given the special gift of prophecy which was very much needed before the scriptures were written.
  - But Paul returned to these churches and made sure that each one had designated elders to lead them.
    - Here is Acts 14:21-23: **And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."** 23 **So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.**
      - Do you see that? They appointed elders in every church.
  - There is an occasion mentioned in Titus where Paul departed before he had been able to appoint elders in every hamlet where disciples had been gathered.
    - Did Paul consider this to be of no great concern? No. He made sure that it would be done.
    - The churches were not established until they had elders to watch over the congregation as bishops (or overseers).

- In Titus 1:5, Paul says: **For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—**
  - This might seem like a huge task to us, but remember the two things I mentioned before—many who received Christ had served as elders in the synagogue and now received the Messiah. They could serve now in the fledgling congregations that they were a part of.
- C. So we conclude from the assumption that all the believers addressed in Hebrews 13:17 had those who ruled over them that this ought to be true of all believers today.
1. This is the reason that in most reformed churches, we don't allow those who are not members of a faithful church to come to the communion table.
    - They are people that are without the oversight that Jesus Christ appointed for His disciples to have.
    - They are to be committed to a local assembly with elders that they answer to who provide them with spiritual care and oversight.
  2. Some claim that they bypass all of the middle men and answer directly to Christ.
    - All of us are taught to go directly to Christ and have dealings in our souls with Him, but if we go to Him, we cannot just make up whatever we want about Him.
    - And if He is the one you are talking about that you go to and answer to, then He is the Christ who established His church with elders.
      - We are even given descriptions of the qualifications of these elders, and we are often told to honour them or obey them and they are charged to be faithful in their shepherding.
      - So if it is the Jesus who came here and died on the cross that you are talking about, He is the Jesus that established a church with those who rule and those who are ruled.
        - You had better listen to that Jesus because He is the real Jesus.
  3. This arrangement with those who rule looking out for us is a wonderful and wise arrangement that is conducive to spiritual growth.
    - First, it drives the elders to be diligent in learning what the will of God is because of their responsibility to lead—they have people depending on them.
    - And it gets these elders praying for the people and stirring up others to pray for them as leaders because of the pressure they feel.
      - And so it gets them and others looking to Jesus.
    - And because the people aren't perfect and the elders are not perfect, both the ruled and the rulers have to learn patience.
      - And it has the potential to cultivate a lot more love and appreciation within the body because one is caring for the other, one is thanking the other, one is helping the other, one is serving the other—in both directions.
    - If we could all just get fed by a direct pipeline to Jesus, there wouldn't be much body life, would there?
      - The joy of being used and needed would not be the case.

- One of our Lord's desires is to bring us together in sacrificial love for one another.
- This is to trickle into every relationship and certainly into our homes.

TRANS> But I must move on...

- But let me say, if you are a Christian and you are not a member of a church, you need to rectify that. And if you are not Christian, you should rectify that—believe on Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin and for new life by Him—He will receive you.

**II. In this passage, you are admonished to obey those who rule over you and to submit to them.**

- These words *obey* and *submit* are quite instructive.
- A. The word translated *obey* (παίθω) means to let yourself be persuaded by them.
  1. You see, the obedience here is not the kind of obedience that a slave has so that he won't be whipped—or an employee so that he won't be fired.
    - This relationship is one where you have a Saviour that you love and want to please, and you have an elder who wants to help you to do what pleases Him.
    - It's one where you are saying,
      - "Tell me more about Jesus." And the elder wants to show you wonderful things about Him and His promises and His ways.
      - And you are saying, "Show me how He wants me to live. I want to know His will." And the elder wants to help you.
    - And so this is essentially saying, be eager to learn from your elders how you may please the Lord.
      - Be eager to learn how Christ wants you to live and what He wants you to believe and how you can do better and be more useful in His service—how you can glorify Him and enjoy Him and learn of Him to adore Him more.
  2. This desire to obey will be evident by your behaviour.
    - a. You will attend all the stated meetings of the church.
      - The elders seek to provide you with spiritual nourishment from the word.
      - In the morning, we often have more preaching and in the afternoon more teaching (though this is not as much the case right now).
    - b. You can also demonstrate an eagerness in how you listen, not selecting what you want to learn, not tuning out when you don't like what is being said, but readily hearing and implementing.
      - You will be attentive, and come well rested—maybe even regulating your diet to be at your peak.
        - You will be eager to hear the word of God that you might do it.
        - You won't be like the fellow that James talks about who is a forgetful hearer—he learns something but as soon as he walks away, he has forgotten it.
      - You will go over the material, you will talk about it, you will pray about it, you will tell others about how you are practicing it (or trying to).

- You will ask for help to implement things and accountability to keep them up.
- c. You will also be willing to work to learn things.
  - Some things take more effort to understand, but if it is important to you, you will put in the effort. You won't just say, "It's over my head." Not if it's important to you.
- d. Proverbs says that God's word is be desired more than treasures like gold and silver.
  - I bet we would have very good attendance if instead of giving out the word, we were giving out gold and silver at our services.
  - Furthermore, if people had to solve complicated puzzles to get an ounce or two, I bet we'd have a packed house of alert attentive people that were fully engaged and applying themselves.
  - It's something to think about.
- 3. Finally, remember that you are a member of *this* church. You are to obey *your* elders.
  - There may be more exciting ministers in Texas or California. It is fine to listen to them, but your duty is to attend your own church.
  - The preacher in Texas is not there to observe you—you can pick and choose what you want. You can run here and there and tickle your soul, but you need accountability.
  - God has instituted the local church where you have to work things out.
    - You don't have to work things out or answer to a preacher on your app, but you have to do that with your own pastor.
    - Not only that, but when sermons are prepared, the preacher has his people in mind. It is vexing when there is something he believes will be helpful to them and they are not in attendance or are half asleep.
- B. The second word is to submit (ὑπέεικο).
- 1. It is different because it is suggestive of a more raw obedience.
  - It means to surrender to someone else's will—it is even used of surrender at war.
  - You don't have to agree. You just need to obey, whether you are persuaded or not.
- 2. This is certainly not to say that you are to do that with what you believe about God.
  - It is not talking about doctrine. It is talking about things that the elders do that are judgment calls.
    - For example, if they impose church censures on your friend and you think they were too hard on him—you can talk to them about it, but if you don't agree, you need to submit. You are not in charge of that—they are.
  - And if they summon you to answer to charges.
    - You should go and answer to them.

- Keep in mind that if in such things you say, “you can’t tell me what to do,” you are essentially saying that to Jesus.
- This also pertains to things like service times. You might think it is better to only have one service or to start at a different time.
  - You can talk to them and you can state your reasons, but in the end, God has appointed them to make the decision and you are to cheerfully submit to them.
- 3. Submitting to correction is another thing.
  - I remember a young lady at our church that Dave corrected for cutting up during the Lord’s Supper—she was with her friends.
    - Afterward, she came to him and thanked him and said, “Please tell me when you see things like that because I want to be holy.”
    - Wow! What a beautiful attitude!
- 4. This is a difficult thing for people today.
  - We live in times of anti-authority.
    - Such times actually drive people apart. When wives and children don’t submit to the head of the home, you end up with a bunch of individuals doing their own thing instead of a family functioning as one.
  - Churches can be like that too.
    - Everyone does what is right in their own eyes.
    - That is not what our Lord wants.
      - He wants us to learn to function together as a body, as a harmonious beautiful household, full of love and mutual appreciation where those under authority appreciate those who bear responsibility and honour them and where those leading lead with an eye to benefitting the congregation as much as possible.
    - We have a long way to go, but we have go looking unto Jesus.

**III. And now we need to look at the motive we are given to obey and submit to those who rule over us.**

A. It is because they watch for your souls that you are to do this!

1. Wow. See the love of Christ here.
  - Nothing is more important than the preservation of your soul in fellowship with the Lord.
  - He has organised His church so that there are person whose task it is to watch for your souls.
    - They are to watch to make sure that you are not slipping away from the Lord and if you are, they are earnestly call you back.
2. What appreciation you ought to have for such a ministry—provided for you by Jesus Christ.
  - You should be like that young woman I mentioned who thanked an elder for rebuking her.
  - You can also go to an elder when you are struggling with sin.

- Instead of hiding it, make it known to those who are charged with watching over your soul. Ask for their help and their prayers.
3. Most of the time when you do that, you draw out ministry from them.
    - As soon as they see that you want help and are looking for soul care, they will be eager to provide it because so often they get rebuffed when they try to help.
    - This is God's provision for you. Make use of it.
- B. A second motive is that they must give an account to God concerning you.
1. What do you want their prayers to be concerning you?
    - a. Lord, please do what you have to do to wake Billy up. He simply will not listen. He only comes to church occasionally and when he does, he is half asleep.
      - I spoke to Suzie about her relationships, but she continues to be foolish. Help her to smarten up.
      - Lord, where is Tom? He hasn't been to church for three weeks.
        - What is he doing?
    - b. Or this: Lord, thank you so much for Paul.
      - He is growing so much. Help him to continue to have a hunger for your word and to find avenues of ministry at work.
        - Thank you for how he encourages me with his loving gracious spirit. Help me to learn from him.
      - Thank you for Janice.
        - What a kind servant she is. Help her to be a tremendous encouragement to those seniors she is helping and help her to find a husband who is worthy of her.
  2. Notice that he says to see that the elders can give an account of you with joy.
    - You don't know how vexing it is when you are pulling away from the Lord and refusing to listen.
      - It leads to sleepless nights for us elders to see you in such danger.
    - But like John says, there is no greater joy than see you walking in the truth.
  3. It is very profitable for you when this is the case...
    - It means that you have the blessing of a good conscience. That makes you bold and willing to suffer for Christ and to sacrifice for others.
    - It means that you are much more useful in the kingdom of God—you are reaching out, you are setting an example, you are helping others—that is good for you.
    - It means that you are growing in your walk with God, your fellowship with Him, your pleasure in Him, your service to Him.
    - It means that you are laying up for yourself a great reward.
    - It means that you are encouraging the elders and drawing out more ministry from them. When people are eager to hear the word, they benefit from it, but



they also benefit the preacher and those who counsel them—it makes us more eager to communicate when there are willing consistent hearers.

- It means that you are glorifying God—and that delights Him and you and all who love Him.

**Conclusion:** What a wise, kind, gracious, loving Saviour He is to arrange His church in this way that is so suited to us to help us grow in grace, in love, in mutual care, in dependence on Him that instead of making us less capable and responsible makes us more capable and responsible.