

So this will be our final teaching in the book of Hebrews and we finish one day shy of a year from when we first started this study. There is so much we have learned; yet, at the same time, there is so much that we have not yet learned to live. I would encourage you, therefore, to go back and listen and reabsorb and truly understand what the Lord spoke to us through this study. He does not want us to just close the final page on this book and walk away. He wants every bit of it to be living and active within our souls. I also know that many of you were not here when we started this study; you should definitely go back and listen from the beginning so you have the full and complete message abiding in your heart.

Now, I have to start with a disclaimer in terms of **Hebrews 13:17**; the Holy Spirit included this verse; so we have to deal with it even though it might make you cringe and squirm around in your seats.

Hebrews 13:17

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.

Ok, I can see some of you cringing already. But don't shut down on me; the Spirit thought it was important that you receive this instruction. So let's dive in and understand what He said and why He said it. I know that some of you have been subject to abuses in what has been loosely called "spiritual" authority, but that does not mean you can throw the baby out with the bath water. I know it might be very hard for you to emotionally work around those horrific experiences

but the Spirit wants you to process what He said without interference from what man has done with what He has said.

If you read carefully, you will find that there are a couple of suppositions in this passage upon, I believe, which hinge your duty to “obey” and “submit.” These suppositions are critical as they frame for us the context of our passage and the context of our duty. Therefore, I will first address what is implied in this text regarding the spiritual leaders and then we will wrap back around to the command that you obey and submit.

Accordingly, I believe this passage hinges upon the assumption that your leaders are indeed spiritual men and women who are doing the work of watching over your souls. The word “watch” is in the present active indicative tense which indicates that your duty is subject to their actually doing the “work” real time in your life.

If your leaders are lazy, if they expect others to do the work, if they are indifferent as to what happens in your life, if they are first and foremost caring for themselves, if they are about power and authority, then your duty, I believe, is abrogated. You see, obedience and submission are not to be given away indiscriminately. You must first know that the person to whom you are willing to subject yourself is one who is doing the “work.”

And what is the work they are to do? It says here that they are to watch over your souls. Notice it does not say that their work is to command or direct your souls, as that is the work of the Holy Spirit and not man. It also does not say they are to control your souls, as this passage is not to be understood as approval for some type of totalitarian position of authority over your lives. The spiritual leader

has a unique job as a watchman to keep watch over your souls in the same way that a shepherd keeps watch over his sheep.

Your leaders are to ensure your spiritual safety, protection, and health; for, as this passage implies, without their leadership you would not do a very good job of taking care of those things on your own. I know it is sometimes hard for you to see it; but you need them, which is why God raises up leaders in the first place.

Now I am sure there are many discourses that have been written or could be written about what it means for a leader to do the “work;” but I think it is best if we get a feel for what the “work” might be by drawing from the text of the book of *Hebrews*, since that is the window through which we are to understand this instruction. So pulling from our text (beginning in Chapter 1 and throughout), we can easily identify some ways that a leader is to keep watch over your souls.

1. They are to ensure that you have the proper instruction on: who Jesus is and who you are to Jesus; Jesus as God; Jesus as our Messenger; Jesus as Man; Jesus as our Mediator; Jesus as our Advocate; Jesus as our Great High Priest who comes from the highest priestly order; Jesus as the one and only sin offering; Jesus as our way to the Father; and Jesus as our Judge.
2. They are to warn you about drifting away into wrong belief and unbelief and run interference for you if they see that you might be starting to drift.

3. They are to exhort you to listen to the Lord's voice and not harden your hearts against Him as Israel did when they rebelled provoking the judgment of God.
4. They are to encourage you to warn each other every day, as long as it's called today, so that none will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.
5. They are to encourage you to walk down the pathway to the Lord's peace and rest, which as we know is the pathway of war. You cannot have peace until you have gone to war against all the enemies of God which dwell in your soul.
6. They are to tremble in fear that some of you might fail to get there—that is to the place of peace and rest (which is also referred to as our Good News).
7. They are to teach you why you can believe that Jesus is your I Am and how to believe it (practically speaking), for only those who believe can enter His place of rest.
8. They are to encourage you to do your best to enter that place of rest. For anyone who disobeys God with wrong belief and unbelief, as the people of Israel did, will fall.
9. They are to bring to you the Word of God that is full of living power, that is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into your innermost thoughts and desires, exposing you for who you really are as nothing can hide from Him, as everything is naked and exposed before His eyes.

10. They are to encourage you to come boldly into the throne of God without shame and without guilt knowing that your' High Priest who intercedes and mediates for you understands your weaknesses for He faced all of the same temptations you do, yet He did not sin.
11. They are to encourage you to cling to Jesus and never stop trusting Him knowing that in Jesus' presence you will receive His mercy and find the grace to help you when you need it.
12. They are to transition you who are mature from living off of spiritual milk to solid food; as solid food is for those who have trained themselves to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then actually choose to do what is right.
13. They are to let you know that there are real consequences to not listening to the voice of God as He will let you remain in the desert and He will swear in His wrath that you will not enter His peace and rest; and for your lack of faith—your refusal to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land—there will be no repentance.
14. They are to encourage you to keep on loving others so you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent but follow the examples of those who inherit God's promises because of their faith and patience.
15. They are to remind you that God has given you both His promise and His oath, both of which are unchangeable (as it is impossible for God to lie); therefore, your confidence in His promise should be to you like a strong anchor for your soul as His promise leads you through the curtain of

- heaven into God's inner sanctuary where Jesus has gone before you, having taken His own blood, and with it secured your salvation forever.
16. They are to teach how Jesus as our High Priest guarantees the effectiveness of the new covenant as the law made nothing perfect whereas the new covenant purifies our hearts from deeds that lead to death so we can worship the living God.
 17. Through their lives, they are to give you an example of one who knows the Lord, let's God be their God, and holds tightly to their hope, without wavering, knowing that God can be trusted to keep His promises.
 18. They are to ensure that you know that you have been made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus and that He has perfected you forever even though for now He is making you practically holy through the crushing of your *Old Sinful Nature*.
 19. They are to have patience endure and confident trust in the Lord continuing to do His will in the midst of suffering and persecution.
 20. They are to live by faith and encourage you to live by faith and be willing to go to war against your flesh and every area of your life where you trust yourself instead of trusting God.
 21. They are to strip off every weight that slows them down, especially the sin that hinders their progress, and they do this by keeping their eyes on Jesus so that when it is said and done they can take a new grip with their tired hands, stand firm on shaky legs, and mark a straight path for their feet, so you who follow them will not stumble and fall but become strong.

22. They are to pursue the elimination of all barriers and obstacles in your life that separate you from experiencing God and which keep you from being possessed by the Holy Spirit of God.
23. They are to diligently look after you so you will not miss out on the grace of God so that no root of bitter unbelief springs up in your life and corrupts others.
24. They are to watch out for you lest you trade away the grace of God for temporary relief and satisfaction in this world; especially that “relief” which is so often found in the world of religion—the world of “what you can do for God so you can get what you want from God.”
25. They are to fight for you until you can confidently say, the Lord is my helper, I will not fear; what can man do to me for the Lord will never leave me nor forsake me.

So that was just 25 things from the book of Hebrews that I believe would be a part of doing the “work,” and I am sure there is a lot more than could be added. I believe it is safe to say that you can use this as a guideline for determining whether or not your leader is one to obey. A true leader, one who is presently and actively doing this work, is a person who knows that they will have to give an account for their faithfulness to this task and so they approach it full-on as if your life is dependent upon it (because it is).

Do you know that it is not an easy thing being a leader, especially if you are called to teach? In **James 3:1**, the Lord says that those who teach will face a stricter judgment; so it is a difficult calling. I have faced a very strict judgment in

terms of the Lord's correction, loving discipline, and punishment. In fact, I have had to learn what I am going to teach long before the Lord lets me teach it. It seems He always makes me go to war against my wrong belief and unbelief and live the Word of God so that I might teach from every fiber in my body and not just from my knowledge about the Word of God. I have to know it, live it, and then teach it.

If all I have to give you is knowledge of the Word of God then that is what you will walk away with, knowledge. You may sound smart, but in you there will be no real life or power and God's agape love will most likely not be produced from your life. But if I have life to give you—life which springs forth from the Word of God—then you will walk away with life and I believe you will know how to love. That is what God has raised me up to do in this body, lead you in life, power, and love.

So if the work is being done, and I truly believe it is, there is a required reciprocation on your part and that is to obey and submit. Remember, these are not the words of man but the words of the Spirit of God, so you must understand them and not disregard them merely because you do not like the sound of them or how they have been used in the past. You must set aside your emotion and choose to let the Word of God be authoritative over your life; and I mean authoritative in the most practical sense of the word.

The words "obey" and "submit" cut deep against the enemies of pride, self-sufficiency (a one man/woman island mentality), as well as the sins of envy, jealousy, and your own desire to rule and be your own wisdom for your life. Therefore, if your leader is busy doing the work and you feel that resistance well up inside of you, then it is a pretty good sign that you have some serious war to

do within your soul for those are enemies that are trying to prevent you from being led in truth.

Now what's interesting is that both "obey" and "submit" are imperatives; they are commands from the Lord. Yet, they are also fundamentally different in nature. "Obey" is in the present passive tense; the passive meaning that the Spirit will be the one to give you the power to obey and the present meaning that He gives it to you in your now so you are able to fully obey your leaders. However "submit" is in the present active tense which means that even though the Spirit has both commanded you and enabled you to obey, you will still have to choose to submit your will and choose to relent of your pride.

This passage is so classic in terms of drawing our attention toward the great dichotomy in the Bible regarding election (or calling) and choice. The Lord calls you to obey, and even enables you to obey, but you, and only you, are going to have to be the one who chooses to submit to your leaders who are doing the work. God will not force your will; it is a choice.

This one is yours and you are expected to relent and give up and let them lead you. What is implied in this passage is that God has sent them to you for your protection and for your assistance to lead you down paths of which you would not otherwise even be aware. Therefore, why would you reject or resist the good gifts which God has given to you?

I know you may not always agree with what they are saying, you may not like the methods they use, you may wish they were gentler or harder and more intense, but whatever. The issue is not them; it is you. You are commanded by

God to let them lead you and let them do their job in your life in the ways in which God has gifted them to lead.

Besides, when you think that they have to give an account for all that they have been called to do, give them a break; don't fight and resist so much. Take it easy on them. It can be a miserable job being a leader when you buck, fight, and argue with every word that is spoken. Please, please, take it easy.

Notice it says that you are to let them lead you with joy; you are not to be the cause for their grief. So this whole "leader/being led" thing is to be something that creates goodness in the life of the leader. I for one have experienced the joy of leading you when you let Jesus work through me in your life and you appreciate the fact that I work very hard at what I do. I love those times and they are so fulfilling. They even give me the strength to continue on.

But I have also experienced the deep, deep grief that happens when I walk away from a meeting not knowing if you are ever going to speak to me again (and I have had plenty of those). I hate those meetings. I know Sarah, Ian, Lesley, Jessica, Alek and others hate them as well. It is horrible and it so deeply troubles my soul and messes up my day. And I can say that those encounters occur when you have decided that your wisdom for your life is better and you don't need what the Lord has asked me (or someone else) to give you.

I know that sometimes the fight is necessary, especially when you are first starting out and your soul is overrun with the enemies of God. I understand that; we have to first kill off a few enemies and provide some room for the Spirit of God. And those first enemies really don't want to die and they put up quite a fight.

But for those of you who have been here for a while, are experienced at war, and know what it is like to let the Spirit of God possess territory within your soul, it always messes me up (or whoever is working in your life at that moment) when you still fight, resist, get angry, and emotionally kind of walk away not accepting how the Lord is using me or others in your life. It fills me with grief and usually I just want to go to bed and sleep for a very long time. I don't like the grief; I like joy. And it should be encouraging to you to know that you can be a source of joy. Please let it happen.

Reciprocation; it is a powerful relational concept. I am supposed to be a diligent worker and like Joshua lead you to rest and peace in the Lord and you are supposed to let me lead you welcoming my leadership in your life knowing that this leadership comes from God. It's a good and fair exchange. Thus, if you resist this leadership, it is truly unprofitable for you and your progress in this war toward peace and rest will be hindered.

I know in your pride you often think you know better, but the Lord is clearly saying that you don't. It is unprofitable for you when you refuse to both obey and submit to the care and protection that He wants to bring into your life through me and the others that He has raised up to lead you.

Keep in mind, if you knew how to fight your enemies or even how to find your enemies on your own, you would not need leaders. But you need leaders because your enemies, especially pride, ensures that you are the last person to really know what is going on in your life and the last person to really get in touch with your *flesh* or your *Old Sinful Nature*. You are so used to it; you have been so deceived by it, and you are so enthralled and enraptured with it that you are simply not

able to war against it without the help of the leadership God places in your life. I'm not trying to hurt your feelings, this is just the way it is and how dark your *flesh* (and my *flesh*) really is.

I find it incredible that in this body we have so many who have been called to lead. It's as if God brings you into this body all broken and busted up to be led and cared for until your weak legs are strengthened and you can stand on your own. Then when you have finally carved out a straight path for your feet, He sends others who are busted up and broken to follow you; and now it's your turn, you get to lead. In this body, when you get even semi-healthy you don't get to sit, you don't get to just follow, you don't get to hide and become complacent; rather, you get to lead.

When I think about what God has done here I am blown away; it is truly amazing. We have this whole interconnected web of people whom are empowered by the Spirit of God to lead and help out in this process of both going to war on behalf of others and bringing healing to the wounds that are created from that war (even though those who lead may still have their own areas of brokenness).

God is truly building us into a body that works together, wars together, and loves together. As we were told in that vision He gave Aubrea, we are like a trauma unit that is outfitted with doctors and nurses that are themselves in the midst of healing walking around doing the work with one arm while the other one is sling in a cast.

As a final comment about this point; you should let those who lead you do so with joy because one day the tables will be turned. There will be a time when you

start to lead others and believe you me, you will want to be able to lead them in joy and not in grief.

Hebrews 13:18-19

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

This sets forth another responsibility for those who are being led and that is to pray for their leaders. The author is saying that he or she deserves such prayer because he/she is doing the work. The author has a clear conscience in terms of being a faithful leader (and since “we are sure” is in the present passive tense, it is the Lord who has made it clear that his/her work and the work of those with the author has been approved). Besides, they desire to act honorably in all things; which is awesome; their hearts are in alignment with Jesus’ heart. And so the author asks for prayer that they may be together again.

I think we need to keep this concept near and dear to our hearts. We must continue to pray for our leaders, and pray earnestly and without ceasing. In other words, night and day it needs to occupy our prayers and we need to plead with the Lord on their behalf.

Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,

the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Now just to ensure there is reciprocation in this relationship, the author ends in prayer for them right after he/she asked them for prayer. It is a prayer of blessing which speaks some powerful truths into our lives. We will look at this prayer phrase by phrase.

The God of peace. Consider this. He is our peace, He brings us peace, and He makes peace through war. This also means that, if you crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land, He will not stop and will not relent from waging war over your lives until you dwell in His peace, as that is His aim—having nothing that separates you from Him.

Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus. Every part of our life is dependent upon the resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead and in so doing put an end to the power of sin and death over our lives. Our ability to do anything which He might lead us in (in terms of His will) is because Jesus rose from the dead. And, as we have studied, we are to follow Jesus' example in all things; as such, we are to live as those who have risen from the dead. We are to be living breathing miracles for everyone to see that it is possible to live in this world not controlled by either the things of this world or by our *Old Sinful Nature*.

The Great Shepherd of the sheep. He is our true pastor; He is the one who knows what is best for our lives. He leads us in His wisdom. He knows all the

necessary pathways that we must travel to find green pasture. He knows who is necessary to be in our lives. He has the wisdom to do it all for every one of us, as He is great. We need to trust in this and let Him lead our lives and even let Him appoint those whom He desires to be our leaders so we may be led in His ways.

By the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will. The new covenant is eternal; the old covenant has passed away and is no longer; thus, the grace of God brought to us under this new covenant cannot be mixed with the law or with anything else that comes from our own efforts. On our own, we cannot do the will of God; there is simply no way possible.

In fact, **only God is good**; therefore, only what comes from God can equip or literally in the Greek “perfect” you to do good. On your own you cannot do a thing that is considered by God to be “good,” regardless of how hard you try and how religious your deeds may seem; it is still not good. His blood is what perfects you to do good; it is what allows you in the first place to be filled with the ***new nature*** or the ***New Creation***. He gives you this nature which is righteous, holy and true; or, by definition, good. He births this perfection within you and it stands in stark contrast to all that is not good, all that is found in your *flesh* or your *Old Sinful Nature*.

In addition, the Lord’s will is only found in that which is good, acceptable, and perfect—or that which derives from Him. Remember, the so called “good” deed is not what is important to God; it is the source of that deed. If your’ “good” deed derives from the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, then by definition it is good; otherwise it is not! And, if not, it is so not good; it is actually evil!

But we will know His will and we will do His will when we allow ourselves to be covered with the blood of the new covenant; or said another way, when we allow ourselves to let grace cover everything we do. And, said still another way, when we live as if we are needy for Jesus to do everything in and through us in every part of our lives.

Working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ. This is amazing. The blood of the eternal covenant works in us that which is pleasing in His sight. As we know, according to **Hebrews 11:6**, without faith it is impossible to please God. So Jesus, through the indwelling presence of His Spirit in our lives, works faith in us and through us. He is not satisfied by anything else which comes from our lives and this is why He wars. This is why He judges us. This is why He disciplines, corrects, and punishes us. He wants us to choose to believe all that He has said about Himself and then live according to that choice in every decision and every area of our lives, bar none. He wants us to walk by faith and not by sight.

To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. As is fitting, when it is all said and done, we can offer up a sacrifice of praise to God as He is the only one worthy of such eternal glory. This is a sacrifice which can be continually offered up because forever and ever is a very long time. Besides, our God is so big, our God is so gigundus, and our God is so amazing, that through Him we should honor Him and offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of our lips which give thanks to His name.

Hebrews 13:22-25

I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you.

And I appeal to you to please bear with my word of exhortation that has not been so brief, but has lasted for one year. Actually, to me it does not seem that long and I am already sad that we are bringing our study to a close. But we do know how this story ended. God faithfully protected the believers in Jerusalem and Judea and they lived and survived the fire storm of God's judgment. In fact, He led them to safety and they found their rest and peace. And I am convinced that He will do the same with you if you are willing to heed the instruction found in this book.

In closing I want to repeat what I said at the beginning. Don't just say goodbye to this book because we have finished our study; go back and start listening to it again from the beginning and let it sink into your soul so you will be equipped with the Word of God to know His will and to do His will and by chance obtain the resurrection from the dead and practically (in your everyday life) experience His promise of peace and rest.

Let's pray.