

Hebrews 13:1-16

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[0 : 00] I do turn to Hebrews 13, page 1009. Can I just say thank you to all those who have been helping on Sunday nights,! Just getting ready for the little stars, particularly the young people and the children.

This is the last in our series on elders.

Next week, a good friend of mine, David Horrocks, is going to be preaching in the evening. Then we'll get into a new series the following week. Whatever that might be. Reuben?

If you could think of something, that would help me. Hebrews 13. We're going to finish off this series by looking at our responsibility to our elders. So look at 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.

[1 : 11] Let them do this with joy and not with grumbling or groaning. For that would be of no advantage to you. And so there's two commands on there. I'm going to start. And they summarize a great part of our responsibility to elders.

Those two commands. They're really popular words, aren't they? They're words that people really love. Obey and submit. It would be very difficult to find two more popular words in our culture than that.

And the word obeys repeated in the verse. Obey your leaders. Obey them. Submit to their authority. Then they're words that are very easy to understand.

They're not difficult words. It means that we have to do what our leaders tell us to do. Where to accept their instruction.

Where to listen to their counsel. Where to respect their authority and submit to them. Really easy to understand.

[2 : 16] Not so easy to do. And these are not popular words, are they, for any of us today. And so when we hear the word submit, immediately our hackles rise when we hear that.

Our antenna starts to send signals to our brain. If you're kind of my age, you think of wrestling with your father or older brothers.

And you'd be pinned to the ground until one of you said, submit in great pain. That's the vision that we might have. There's a natural rebelliousness, isn't there, to us as human beings.

And we don't like obeying anyone. We don't like submitting to anyone. Many Christian wives have a real struggle with that commandment in the word of God to submit to the authority of their husbands.

And they know that it's something that they should do. They know that it's something that pleases God. And yet there's times when it's really difficult to do. You find that in your work, don't you? You are called as a Christian to respect those who are your employers, your masters.

[3 : 29] To submit to their authority. But because our hearts are naturally rebellious, we find that hard to do. It's hard for a second reason.

And the second reason is because of those we have to obey. Those whom scripture is calling you to obey, they are themselves sinful and imperfect.

Your leaders make mistakes sometimes. Sometimes our advice is not the wisest. Sometimes our example is not the best.

You might think it would be easy to obey a perfect person. I'm not sure it would be, but maybe we think that. It would be easy to submit to a perfect person. But when you see the flaws in someone, it does rather go against the grain, doesn't it, to have to obey them?

Particularly if you think, well, actually I could do a better job than they're doing. And I think it's hard for a third reason. We live in an individualistic age.

[4 : 36] That's the air that we breathe. Where everyone does what's right for them and what's true for them. And let no one tell you what to do.

You decide what's right and what's wrong. And church life gets infected by that. We like to make up our own minds.

To do our own thing. To please ourselves. That's the great law, isn't it? Be true to yourself. It's a great lie. And we are really reluctant to think of there being an authority in the church that's got an impact on our lives.

That an authority in the church will affect what we do and how we behave. We resent that. And yet it's a command from God.

And Hebrews 13 verse 17 is just as much as a command from God as the ten commandments that we read every Sunday morning.

[5 : 38] And God says to the church in, well we don't know where the church, to the Hebrew church, he says, isn't he? Obey your leaders, not perfect leaders, not sinless leaders.

But obey the leaders that I have given you. In all their inadequacy. In all their inadequacy. And in all their imperfection. These leaders, these elders.

And just as we wouldn't break one of the ten commandments with an easy conscience, neither should we break this one. And so can you see the responsibility to our elders is to obey them and to submit to their authority.

And it would be fine, wouldn't it? It would be quite enough if God had simply said to you and I, just do that and not say anything more. But because God is gracious, because God is God and we are his people and we are bound to obey him in God's grace and love and wisdom.

He gives you four reasons tonight. Four points. To make our obedience to our elders easier. To help us. To make their discharging, their duties, not a burden but a delight.

[6 : 55] Four reasons to make us want to obey and submit. That will show you, actually, it's in your interest to do it. It's good for you. It's a blessing. It's something that will help us to yield that obedience to our elders.

So here are the four reasons. Number one, can you see? It says because of their work. Look what it says. Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls.

They keep watch. The word used, there is also used of sleeplessness. They are sleepless over your souls. They stay awake on behalf of your souls.

And so here we have, don't we, the work of the elders identified. What's their responsibility? Their great responsibility. It is the spiritual well-being of the people. The elders' priority is your relationship to God.

It is your spiritual progress. You're growing in the likeness of Christ. That is their great concern. And they're not to treat this lightly.

[8 : 11] It's to be a matter of emotion and concern. It's a picture of prayer, perhaps. That's why the elders are sleepless in praying for you.

And so think tonight. And so think tonight. How many people are there that pray for you? You children who are here. Who prays for you? Who is concerned about your soul?

Well, certainly your family. Maybe some of your friends. A few people. But your elders are concerned for your soul. How many people are there that are really motivated in helping you become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ?

That's the task of an elder. And surely the picture here is of keeping watch, isn't it? Of a watchman. Of a sentry on the walls of a city. And when everyone else is sleeping, he is watching.

He's sleepless. He's awake. He's alert. He's looking for the danger and the approach of the enemy. And let's suppose he sees an enemy approaching.

[9 : 17] What's his task? His task is to call out to the people, isn't he, in the city. And he cries out, there's an enemy. There's an enemy coming. There's an enemy approaching. And it would be a really foolish thing if you were living in that city.

And you call up to the wall and you say, well, why should we listen to you? Why should we obey you? Who do you think you are to tell us what to do? And they roll over and go back to sleep.

How foolish it is to ignore someone whose job it is to watch in your interest. And all the influence of the elder which you are required to obey is in the interest of your souls.

To heed the warnings. To listen to the instruction. They watch because they are wakeful for your souls. And surely when we think of it like that, it's only common sense, isn't it, to listen to them.

It's only reasonable to listen to them. It's for your own good. It's for your own good. The second reason is their responsibility. That's the second reason why you should obey and submit to your elders.

[10:27] Because of their responsibility. So can you see what it says? It says they are keeping watch over yourselves as those who must give an account. As men who must give an account.

In our assurance of pardon this morning. Do you remember that? In the assurance of pardon we said there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is no condemnation. But there is an accounting. There is a judgment. And I think that's something never to be forgotten, I hope, by those of us who are elders.

In all our duties, there is a day coming when we will have to give an account to God. When we will stand before God and be judged as to how we've served as elders.

God will say, did you care for my people? Did you keep watch over my flock? Did you set them a good example? Did you teach them?

[11:29] Because I've entrusted them to you. Those people for whom my son died. For whom he shed his blood. I gave my church into your hands.

To look after it on my behalf. I gave you my elect to care for them. I gave you my sheep. How have you looked after them? Men who must give an account. That is a heavy burden.

A heavy burden on responsibility. I think there is, in a healthy church life, there are those often who wish that they were elders.

I think that's healthy in church life. And you go to different churches and people maybe wonder, well, should I be an elder? I wish I was an elder. And they haven't been chosen or put forward by the congregation or ordained to office.

And that's a real disappointment to them. And I think one helpful way in thinking about that is this. That if you've not been made an elder, you've been spared a heavy responsibility.

[12:37] I don't think you should be annoyed or disappointed. God in his providence has decided at this time the responsibility is not for you. Maybe it will be given to you in the future. Maybe it will never be given to you.

Like you, I'm sure, some of the most godly and honorable and exemplary of men have never been called to serve as elders. And being an elder is not a popularity contest.

It's not a verdict on the love that we have for you in the congregation. Some people are not suited to the eldership. We've got different gifts for me. But when those men who become elders, they have a burden put on their shoulders.

And it is a burden as men who must give an account. And if God spares you that burden, be thankful. The responsibility, men who must give an account.

Third reason that you should obey your leaders and submit to them is their love. Look what it says. Obey your leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your soul as those who will have to give an account.

[13:41] Let them do this with joy. And not with groaning. For that would be of no advantage to you. In other words, there's the picture there in that verse of elders emotionally involved in their work.

Emotionally involved with their people. That when the people are flourishing and fruitful and prospering, the elder is glad. He's filled with joy.

He's filled with happiness at seeing people become more and more like the Lord Jesus. Of defeating the sin which would ruin them in their lives. And when people have problems, the elder sighs and he groans.

That's what this word burden really means. It's sighing and groaning. When the people are rebellious and disobedient, the elder's heart is sore. He cannot sleep. He is grieved.

Because he cares for the people. In other words, the eldership, they are not made up of cold professionals. This is family.

[14:50] The church is a family. And the elders care for their people. They experience joy and they experience grief. They really care for you. And when you prosper, they are happy.

When you are ill, when you are grieved, when you're facing difficulties, when you're in spiritual difficulties, they groan, they share your grief. And surely it's easier, isn't it?

It's far easier to submit to authority of those who care for us. Who really care for us. Who are involved. We can see the tears in the eyes of our elders when we're suffering.

We see the concern on their faces as they come to your home. As the elder puts his hand on your shoulder after a Sunday service and says, How are you doing? That he's interested in my family, my children.

He loves me. It's one of the things, isn't it, about church growth. I don't think there is a right number in church life.

[15:51] Some people are adamant we have to have small churches. I don't think that's right. I think what you have to have is, I think you have to have a ratio of elders to people. And so that you are known and you know.

And that you are cared for. And that can be done as effectively in a small church as a larger church. If there is a good ratio of elders. It's one of the reasons why we need to make as a denomination a priority of training elders.

There should be a good ratio. You go to a school and the ratio is what? One parent, one teacher to 35 children.

You don't send your kids there. But you go to school and there's kind of a ratio of one teacher to 20 children. You think, well, it's a great place. They'll be cared for. They'll be known. And the same is a church.

And so when you go to move on from healing and wherever you'll end up living. Hopefully not many of you will move on from healing. But when you go to the church, ask how many elders are there? Look at the ratios of people to eldership.

[16:59] Because knowing and being known is essential to church life. Of experiencing joy together. Of having an elder who shares your joys and your sorrows.

And so you are not called to submit to someone who does not care about you. You are not called. You are called to submit to somebody who would be like a father to you.

Or like a big brother to you. And so I can assure you, if you don't know it already. Whatever the fault and weaknesses of our present elders. And they would be the first to admit.

They have them. Every single one of them cares very deeply. For all the members of this congregation. They're emotionally involved. And so we have reasons to submit to our elders.

Their work. They're keeping watch over your souls. Their responsibility. That they are men who must give an account. Their love. So that their work will be a joy.

[18:00] And so lastly, obey your leaders because of your salvation. Look at verse 17 again. The writer says, obey your leaders and submit to them.

For they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning. For that would be of no advantage to you. That would be unprofitable to you.

And so if you reject their authority and you reject their help and their counsel, who are you hurting? Who are you hurting? You're hurting yourself.

That if you've got godly men appointed by God to watch for your souls. A man who knows he's going to have to give an account for how he cares for you and loves you.

If you don't listen to him, you are the loser. It would be of no advantage to you, the writer of Hebrews says. The devil's lie is that we achieve fulfillment and happiness by going our way.

[19:09] Going our own way. But God has provided us with men. And the only thing they want for us is our spiritual good. That's their motive. That's their purpose.

To help you as a Christian play your role and to be as fruitful as you can be. There's no other agenda. It's nothing we want to get out of you. We don't want to manipulate you.

We're not wanting to exercise an unbiblical authority over you. If as elders we're true to our calling, our only purpose is your spiritual well-being and the growth of Christ's church.

Your spiritual well-being and the growth of Christ's church. And so I think one good test of a church family is have you got leaders like that?

Is to ask how do they handle authority? It's one of the reasons why I'm adamant about being a Presbyterian. And I believe it's biblical. Because we are under authority.

[20:14] And if you have elders that don't submit to anyone. And that they are the highest authority. And there is no one. There's no decisions that are made that sometimes they have to submit to.

Then I think you've got problems. And so ask yourself, well how does the elders of this church submit to the authority over them? How does Paul Levy cope when he loses another vote in

Presbytery this week?

The writer says to you, if God gives you such men, listen to them. Obey them.

Submit to them. Don't make this work a burden. Don't break their hearts. Don't discourage them and dishearten them and disappoint them.

Don't frustrate them. For that will be of no advantage to you. And so let us live as a church family in obedience to God's word.

[21 : 18] That those who have responsibility over us will be filled with joy. Let's pray together.

Amen.