

OBEY YOUR PASTOR! (Hebrews 13:17)

INTRODUCTION: October is my *favorite* month of the year—bar none! I love the cooler weather...and the leaves changing colors...and the sunshine...and working outside. On top of that, it's the month of my wife's birthday...and our anniversary...and Pastor Appreciation Month! And I've enjoyed *this year* more than most; possibly because the weather has been exceptionally nice—and possibly because we had a missionary speaker last Sunday, so I had a little more free-time the week before last! And so I was riding this kind of emotional “high”—*until Thursday!*

What happened Thursday? Thursday is the day I really began to “buckle down” and get going on Sunday's sermon! And as I did that, my emotional “high” came crashing down to earth as I considered the *heaviness*—the seriousness—of the verse I was preaching from.

What's the verse? Hebrews 13:17! Let's turn there so you can see it for yourself. Notice what it says. Why preach from this verse now—right in the middle of a series on “The Parables of Jesus?”

Because about a month ago—maybe longer—I decided that I was going to preach on some “hard to swallow” verses during Pastor Appreciation Month. Why? Because as Jim J once famously said, “You're the Pastor so people won't stay mad at you for too long!” And my thought was that you'll be even less mad at me if I preach a sermon entitled “Obey Your Pastor” during Pastor Appreciation Month!

Some of you might be thinking, “Pastor, do you really *think* that way?” To which I reply, “Yep!”

But I think you'd also agree that obeying the preaching and teaching that I give you from God's Word goes hand in hand with the “Parable of the Sower.” **How?** Because the good soil represents a heart that hears—and whole-heartedly welcomes and grips tightly and obeys—the Word of God!

I want to go back to what I said earlier about my emotional “high” crashing back to earth. **What**—in this verse—would bring a *soberness* to the heart of a pastor? The reminder that I *must give an account*—to the Great Shepherd of the sheep—of what kind of pastor I have been! So *who* has the “tougher task”—you obeying and submitting to me—or me giving an account to Christ? I'll let you answer the question for yourself as we dig into this verse.

First, **1. The mandate to obey your Pastor**

--A mandate, of course, is an order—a command—to do something.

--What are you *commanded* to do? “**Obey** them that have the rule over you, and **submit** yourselves...”

--**How** do we know it's a *command*?

--Because the verbs “obey” and “submit” are both in the *imperative* mood—meaning they are *commands*—and both in the *present* tense—meaning something that is to be done *continually*—not just once in a while!

--How do *we know* that the ones that “have the rule over you” *are pastors*?

Because of verse 7! Notice what it says: “Remember them which have the rule over you (same phrase in English, same word in Greek), who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (meaning, manner of life). I think you'd agree that this points to pastors—not politicians!

--And let's not forget, *God the Holy Spirit* is the One who wrote this—not a power-hungry pastor!

So there you have it: *Obey your Pastor!*

But I think you'd agree that needs some *clarification*, doesn't it?

So next, let's consider... **2. The meaning of the mandate to obey your Pastor**

--What does it mean to “obey and submit” to your Pastor?

A. Obey means obey

The Greek word that “obey” comes from is “pay-tho” which appears 53 times in the Greek New Testament. It can mean “have confidence in”—and the NIV translates it that way. However, the vast majority of English translations have “obey”—which means “to listen to, to yield to, to comply with.” In other words, **doing** what you are **asked to do!**

B. Submit means submit

The Greek word that “submit” comes from is used **only once** in the Greek NT—here in Hebrews 13:17. It means “to resist no longer, but to give way” and “yield to authority.” Notice the definition I have for you from **Biblehub.com**: “It focuses less on blind obedience and more on a **willing, inward readiness to defer** when godly authority is exercised for the **believer’s** good. Whereas other New Testament words for “submit” (such as hupotassō) stress ordered arrangement, this verb highlights the **personal, voluntary posture of compliance** that springs from trust.”

So **obey** means obey—and **submit** means submit—but... C. Rule over **does not mean** rule over!

We see the English word “rule” in vs 7...and here in verse 17...and again in verse 24—and they all come from the same Greek word. It doesn’t mean “rule” in the sense that “I am the King—and this is my castle—and you are all dirty rascals!” In other words, the emphasis is not on **authority**—it is on “leading the way.” It refers to one who **provides leadership** in the local church and who **carries influence** because of the responsibility God has given him.

The Bible is unmistakably clear—the Pastor is **not to be a dictator** that “lords it over” God’s people!

I Peter 5:2-3 “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre (meaning money), but of a ready mind; ³ **Neither as being lords over** God’s heritage, but **being examples** to the flock.”

--“Feed” in verse 2 means more than giving food! It means to **shepherd**—to tend to—to guide.

--So I am to be out front **guiding** you and **leading** you and being an example to you—not behind you **driving you** with whips like cattle!

First, the **mandate**—Obey your pastor!

Second, the **meaning**—follow your pastor’s lead and do what he says!

But even though we just looked at **the meaning**, we still need to consider...

3. The manner in which you are to obey your Pastor

How—**in a practical sense**—are you to carry out this command? I think you’d agree that there are at least **three** major objections—and/or challenges—when it comes to obeying pastors.

--**One** is that there are pastors who are **false teachers**—they are wolves in sheep’s clothing—who in reality are following Satan—and leading **people to hell** instead of heaven! Am I being dramatic? Not at all! **Matthew 23:15** “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the **child of hell** than yourselves.”

--A **second** challenge is this: pastors **are human** and can sometimes make “dumb”—but not Biblically wrong—decisions. What will obedience look like in those situations?

--**Third**, we as Americans value our independence, don’t we? We don’t want to be “sheeple” that wear a mask just because the **health department** says we should! “My body; my choice” isn’t just the mindset of women who want to murder their unborn children! How many of you want to be told by someone else **what to eat**...and what **to drink**...and what **to wear**? On top of our desire as Americans to have freedom, we also are **born with a sin nature** that operates under the motto: “Ain’t nobody going to tell me what to do!”

--How then—in light of these three realities—do we carry out this command to obey a less-than-perfect pastor? Here are **three principles** that I believe can help.

A. Obey Biblically—not blindly! According to this verse, are you supposed to obey **all** pastors? No; you are to obey **your** pastor—the one that leads **you!** So without spelling it out, this verse implies **two** things.

What two things? That you **have a pastor**—and that you **attend church regularly enough** to consider him your pastor! Is **that true** of all Christians? Sadly, it's not, is it? Far too many so-called Christians never darken the door of a church—so they don't have a pastor that encourages, guides, teaches, or warns them.

--But for those of you who have **me** as your Pastor, to what extent are you to obey **me**? You are to obey **Biblically**—not blindly! What does that mean? It means you should obey **Biblical commands**—if they are indeed Biblical commands! Here are a couple of examples.

--**Example 1.** "Dave, I am **commanding you** to sell me your two four-wheelers for \$100 each—and you have to obey me because Hebrews 13:17 says you have to." An absurd example, but the point is this: obedience to what I say is relegated to **spiritual things**—as long as they are Biblical! And commanding someone to sell me something at a ridiculously low price isn't **spiritual or Biblical!**

--**Example 2** is **not that absurd**—but is even more disturbing! Someone my wife and I know quite well shared a video of a so-called pastor preaching and saying to the women of the church: "I'm not saying that your husband should slap you down, but if he slaps you down—and you call the cops—you are evil."

Then—**after mocking** a pastor's wife for her saying that physical abuse should be reported to the authorities—he said, "That is unbiblical trash!"

He then **defends his position** by reading Matthew 5:39 "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." He follows up his Matthew 5:39 quote with, "I can't think of anything more evil than calling the cops on your husband."

He **concludes his rant** by saying, "If you don't like this, feel free to come to me after the service with a chapter and verse." The whole congregation should have been in line with their Bibles open to Ephesians 5:25!

--The point, of course, is this: You **do not**—and should not—obey **unbiblical** teaching! We are to obey **God**—not men (Acts 5:29)! Paul said in I Corinthians 11:1 "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

--Paul also taught that pastors who sin should be **rebuked**—not obeyed (I Timothy 5:19-20)!

But in order for you to know if **I'm teaching Biblically**, you need to be studying the Bible **for yourself!** The Bereans were commended for doing that very thing when Paul and Silas came to town and taught in the synagogue. **Acts 17:11** "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." The Bereans serve as excellent examples in **two** ways.

--First, they **"received the word** with all readiness of mind"—meaning with **great eagerness**. They wanted to hear the word of God because it was the word of God!

--Second, they **searched the Scriptures daily**—not just once in a while. Why? Because they wanted to make sure what they were being taught was Biblical!

And I would urge you to do the same! If I say something you disagree with because you feel I'm teaching **it wrongly**, please come talk to me about it. I strive to be approachable—and hopefully I am!

So in this area of obeying what I say, it needs to be Biblical obedience—not blind obedience.

B. Be gracious—not graceless

What do I mean by that? Simply this: Treat me the way you want to be treated! I'm human—just like you! I have bad days—just like you! Sometimes when you talk to me, I might not seem to be listening as attentively as I should. Maybe I don't say "hi" to you—or "goodbye" to you. Hopefully not too often, but I'm sure there are times I might even act annoyed—or impatient!

So be gracious...be longsuffering... "put up" with me as a fellow human—just like I try to do with you! And please—if I do something that annoys...or bothers...or offends you, **come talk to me!** I know that might be hard, but if it bothers you enough **to talk about it**—I should be the first one you talk to, not the **last one!**

And if it's hard to do that, grab one of the deacons to come with you!

C. Be supportive in "neutral" matters—not sabotaging

What do I mean by that? There are non-Biblical things that really don't matter—but they can cause division in the church! Churches have split over the color of carpet...or siding...or the color of the pastor's socks!

--Here's a couple of examples that are ***closer to home***.

--**Example 1—our furnace.** Is it annoying—and frustrating—to not know if we are going to have heat when you come into the building? It is, isn't it—and it is more bothersome to some than others!

Should you be able to vent your frustrations—and give your “two cents worth”? Yes, but you should also be patient...and supportive...and trusting. We do our best to be wise stewards of the Lord's money. That means we do what we can to fix things—and ask God for wisdom in making decisions when we can't. And we're in the middle of doing just that! We had one furnace company here this past Wednesday—and have another coming this Friday.

--**Example 2—the recycling container.** Is having a recycling container next to the garbage can a ***Biblical*** issue? Obviously not! Is it a ***dumb*** idea? To some, I'm sure it is! “Hey Pastor, don't you know that at some point all the recycling stuff gets mixed in with the garbage?” To which I reply, “Yes; I'm fairly certain that that is indeed what happens.” So ***why*** have a recycling container? Here's why.

--I take my garbage (from home) to the Juneau County landfill—and sometimes I bring the garbage home from church. The landfill requires that items that can be recycled should be separated from the regular garbage. I'd much rather have the sorting take place ***before it goes*** into garbage bags, not after! The same is true for Art and Don when they bring the church's garbage home.

--Here's another reason. We have visitor's that come to our church—praise the Lord! Do all of them have the ***same view*** that you do on recycling? ***Probably not!*** Could some be ***avid recyclers*** that would be ***bothered*** if we threw recyclables in with the garbage? ***Possibly!*** And since this is a non-biblical issue, take the extra 2 seconds—literally—to drop your water bottle in one container—and your garbage in the other!

That's called being supportive—not sabotaging!

Lastly—and most importantly—let's consider... ***4. The motive for obeying your Pastor***

Why should you obey what I say—besides the fact that God ***commands*** you to? Here are ***three*** reasons.

A. Because I watch for your soul

--What does “watch for your soul” mean? Does it mean I stand at the door—or look around the room—***checking to see*** if you have a soul or not? ***No***; it obviously doesn't mean that because ***you all have a soul***—an ***immaterial part*** of you—and I can't “watch for it” because it is ***invisible*** to the physical eye!

--The word “***watch***” here means much more than “to ***look for***.” It literally means “to be sleepless...to stay alert, to remain vigilant and fully aware of threatening peril” (BADG; quoted in Preceptaustin.com)—like a shepherd watches over his sheep.

--“Soul” here refers to your ***spiritual life***. Although this quote is a bit long, it is an excellent explanation of what is meant by “watch for your souls.” (From Preceptaustin.com; Hebrews 13:17)

Pastors are not merely caretakers of physical bodies (“counting nickels and noses”), schedules, or church programs. They are called to ***watch over souls***, that precious, immortal, God-created core of a person that will live forever. In short, pastoral work deals with matters of life and death, heaven and hell, spiritual growth or spiritual ruin. The leaders are not guarding buildings, reputations, or organizations but are tasked with ***guarding eternal beings*** made in the image of God (Ge 1:27), whose destiny is everlasting joy...or everlasting loss.... Pastors are to be “sleepless sentinels” standing guard over ***the most precious treasure Christ has on earth, the souls of His people***.

Why should you obey what I teach you from the word of God? Because I am doing what I can to prepare you for eternity!

Reason #1 to obey what I teach you? Because I guard and guide and look out for your spiritual well-being.

Reason #2? B. Because we all must give an account. The last half of this verse is not easy to understand—and commentators are not in agreement as to what it exactly means.

--What's not difficult to understand, though—as already mentioned—is that I must give an account to the Chief Shepherd of how I took care of the sheep!

--But what does “that they may do it with joy, and not with grief” mean?

--Does it mean that part of my "giving account" will involve me either **joyfully** pointing out your obedience—or **sadly** pointing out your disobedience? It certainly **could mean** that but if it does, it is the only place I know of in the Bible where pastors are said to be involved in you being judged!

--Others suggest it means that my **watching over your souls** is joyful because you are hungry and humble and **want to** listen and learn and obey what God says—instead of being hard-hearted and hard-headed and causing grief and heart-ache because you **refuse to obey**.

But even though there are some **uncertainties** in this verse, we do know this: **Every believer** will give an account of themselves to God! **II Corinthians 5:10** "For we **must all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that **every one** may receive the things done in his body, according to that **he hath done**, whether it be good or bad."

Reason #1 to obey what I teach you? Because I guard and guide and look out for your spiritual well-being.

Reason #2? Because we will all give an account of ourselves to God.

Reason #3? C. Because it is profitable to you!

--Notice the end of verse 17: "...for that is **unprofitable** for you." If **not** obeying and **not** submitting is **unprofitable** for you, then obeying and submitting is obviously **profitable!** But how? How is it profitable—how is it a benefit to you—to obey what I say? Because God **rewards us for obedience** to His Word!

--I Corinthians 3:8 "...every man **shall receive his own reward**, according to his own labor."

--I Cor 3:13-15 "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire **shall try every man's work** of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, **he shall receive a reward**. ¹⁵ If any man's work shall be burned, **he shall suffer loss**: but **he himself shall be saved**; yet so as by fire."

What happens if you are faithful and obedient and do what God says? You will be rewarded and hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" But if you don't? You won't lose **your salvation**—but you will lose what you could have had in the way of a reward!

So there you have it! If you want to show your Pastor appreciation, receive the Word of God as the Word of God—and do what it says! And Hebrews 13:17 isn't the only place in the Bible that says this! Notice Paul's words to the Philippians in **Philippians 4:9** "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, **do**: and the God of peace shall be with you."

So what would God have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First, what is your mindset—what is your attitude—**before** the sermon even begins each Sunday morning? Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye **received the word of God** which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

--Not everyone had that mindset when Paul spoke, though. Some said, "What will this babbler say?"

--So I ask again, do you view the Word of God as the Word of God?

2. Second—and along the same lines—how do you handle me saying something from God's Word that "rubs you the wrong way?" Do you just dismiss it—"that's just Pastor's opinion"—or do you study it out?

3. Do you have a heart that wants to obey God? I'm not going to say, "Why call ye me **Pastor** and do not what I say?" But I will say this: "Why call Jesus, **Lord**, and **do not what He says?**"

4. Last—but most importantly—are you saved, are you born-again? If you have no desire to obey God, the Holy Spirit is not in you. And if the HS is not in you, you are not born-again—and you are not going to heaven!