



LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNITY

Hebrews 13:17

After you greeted the folks around you, let me invite you to find your seats, and if you have your Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Hebrews 13. Hebrews 13. I bring you greetings tonight from your brothers and sisters in Cuba, a country that has, obviously, been closed off to us in a variety of different ways because of the relationships between the United States and Cuba, but this last week, I had the opportunity to see, first hand, a picture of a thriving church in Cuba. Churches being planted, the gospel being multiplied all across that island in incredible ways.

We were in one particular church, just a small...just a couple of nights ago, a small, poor Cuban church in an impoverished area, and this one church had planted 60 other churches. Then, we went to one of the other churches that they had planted, and that church had planted 25 other churches. The multiplication goes on and on as a result of the situation they find themselves in. They do not have the resources and/or the ability, really, to grow an empire from the ground up, so instead, they just multiply the gospel by sending people out, and we have a lot to learn about how to do church from them, because we have created a whole picture that is built on kingdoms from the ground up, as opposed to multiplying the gospel...spreading out my multiplying.

I look forward in the days to come to some of the opportunities that I will have to share with you what God has taught me over the last week as a pastor, but we have a lot to learn about how to make disciples and plant churches for the glory of Christ. However, tonight though, we are diving into the next to the last week, in this three or four months we have been looking at our church covenant, and we are coming near the end. We are going to have our time together tonight, one more week next week, and then celebrate the following Sunday together.

So, what we're going to look at tonight is the sentence at the bottom. I have included the whole covenant. We're not going to read through it, but the whole covenant, all that we've studied through to get to this point, the sentence at the bottom there. If I can be honest, I'm guessing this sentence will raise some eyebrows and cause us to wonder what that means, so go ahead to the bottom there, and you will see this sentence, and I hope, before we look at it, I hope we've seen that this church covenant is based thoroughly in Scripture, and we've wanted to be as close to Scripture as possible with even the wording of our church covenant. I hope you'll see that reflected even in this sentence right here.

"We will submit to the leadership of elders who have been entrusted by God to serve and to care for this body by teaching the Word of Christ to us and modeling the character of Christ before us, and we will affirm deacons as leading servants in the church." Then, you see those Scriptures listed. The primary one that we are going to look at tonight, Hebrews 13:17. What I want us to do is I want us to look at a picture of a leadership in the covenant community of faith according to the New Testament, and I think this is an important picture to us as a faith family to understand.

Now, I realize there might be some who are here tonight who are visiting from another church. You are from out of town or, maybe, from in town, and if that's the case, I hope that you will be encouraged. I hope that you will be edified as you think about your relationship to the leaders in your church, your relationship to the pastors in your church. Maybe you are here tonight, and you don't even have a relationship with Christ at this point. Maybe you are here tonight, and you are not a Christian.

So, as we talk about, as a Brook Hills faith family, leadership in the church, my prayer for you, if you're not a Christian, is that tonight...I'm guessing that if you are not a believer that you have probably seen, either in public or in our culture or maybe even in churches that you have interacted with along the way, a negative picture of church leadership. Amidst financial impropriety and prideful egotism, sex scandals that have penetrated our church culture, in particular, leaders in our church culture, there has been a very negative picture of church leadership, and I hope that you will see tonight a beautiful picture of Christ in church leadership, and a picture of leadership in the church that will draw you to Christ and will increase your desire to know more about Christ. That's my prayer for you as we as a faith family kind of come aside here at Brook Hills and say, "What does the leadership look like in the church?"

So, that's what we're going to dive into. Hebrews 13:17. We're going to look in a couple other places here in Hebrews 13, but we are going to camp out mostly in this verse right here. So, follow along; let's read it together. Hebrews 13:17 says, *"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy and not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."*

Now, this right here is one of three different times that leaders are mentioned in Hebrews 13. You might circle them. Go back up to Hebrews 13:7; let's read that verse. First mention of leaders in the book of Hebrews, in particular here, in Hebrews 13. *"Remember your leaders..."* Circle the word there, "leaders". *"...who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."* There's verse 7, *"Remember your leaders..."* Verse 17, *"Obey your leaders..."* Then, you get to the end of the chapter, verse 24, *"Greet all your leaders..."* Do you have this picture?

Remembering leaders, greeting leaders, obeying leaders, submitting to leaders, these are strong words and let's just go ahead and get this out on the table. This word "submit" is probably not the most comfortable word for all of us. When we hear the word "submit", all kinds of images come into our minds, especially when it comes to submission to leadership in the church. Because the reality is, I know that there are a variety of different experiences that you have had when it comes to leaders in the church.

Some of you have had very positive experiences with leadership in the church. Some of you have had negative experiences. Some of you have seen church leadership as an abuse of power, as a power struggle. Some of you have seen a lot of different negative facets of church leadership. Our challenge tonight is with all of our diversity of experiences represented around this room, to put aside, as best we can, those subjective experiences and to look at the objective truth of what Scripture is teaching about church leadership, and then consider, "Okay, how does that affect my life as a follower of Christ? How does that affect this church, and how can we put Hebrews 13:17 into practice in this faith family?"

Leaders in the Church ...

So, we are going to start at the top of your notes there with just an overall picture. We are going to fly through this right here because this is stuff that we've talked about before at Brook Hills. I wanted to put it in here as a reminder. If you want to dive in deeper into this, I think the last time we talked about this was last year, August 3. If you want to go back and listen, there was some teaching then on the gospel and church leadership. We talked about the two primary offices or positions of leadership that are identified in the New Testament.

Elders, who are servant leaders.

The first is elders, who are servant leaders. This is Acts 20. Really, different places in Acts, but Acts 20, Titus 1, 1 Timothy 3, 1 Peter 5, all talk about how the church is led or the church is overseen by elders. Sometimes the term is "pastors"; sometimes the term is "overseer". These are interchangeable terms in the New Testament: "elder", "pastor", "overseer". However, the picture is, in the New Testament, in the churches that are being planted, there is a designated defined group of men who have responsibility for overall leadership in the church. Elder, pastor, overseer who are servant leaders.

What we have studied before is there are four primary functions that we see of elders in the church. Elders lead under the authority of Christ. This is why we talk about servant leaders, because elders are servants of Christ and servants of the church. Elders care for the body of Christ. That's the whole picture of a pastor. The pastor is a shepherd who cares for the body of Christ. Elders teach the Word of Christ, as we're going to see in a minute. That's the primary function...one of the primary functions of an elder is to teach. It is one of the primary qualifications. If a man is not able to teach the Word, then he cannot be an elder. He must be able to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2. Then, elders model the character of Christ. You look at 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and you see a picture of the character of qualifications for an elder.

Deacons, who are leading servants.

Now, right after that in 1 Timothy 3, you see the second position of leadership, the second office in New Testament church leadership, and that is deacons. Elders, who are servant leaders, then deacons, who are leading servants. The difference here is deacons do not provide overall leadership in the church like elders do. Instead, deacons...and this is really a picture for us in Acts 6 when the church appoints leaders to help address certain needs. Deacons meet needs according to the Word. Deacons look at God's Word, look at needs in the church and fill in the gaps for how to fill in those needs according to God's Word.

Deacons support the ministry of the Word. The whole picture there in Acts 6 is they do this so that the elders can devote themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word; so the apostles could do that in Acts 6. Then, deacons unite the body around the Word. Deacons are a unifying body in the church based on a mission mindset in them. The Christ-like character that 1 Timothy 3:8-13 talks about. So, you've got these two pictures: Elders and deacons.

So, when you come to Hebrews 13:17, it doesn't say, "Obey your elders." It doesn't say, "Obey your deacons." It says, "Obey your leaders." So, the picture is, overall church leadership. Now, I think the primary implication of Hebrews 13:17 is for elders, because when it says, "*They keep watch over you as men who must give an account*", that's really the picture we have of elders in Acts 20, 1 Peter 5. It's men who give an account for the people that God has entrusted to them.

Submission According to the Culture ...

Absolute obedience to authoritarian leadership.

So, what I want us to do is I want us to dive in and see how this picture of obedience and submission to leaders in the church, and particularly, elders in the church, what does that mean? We've already said that word "submission" is...brings a little discomfort in us. I think there is a variety of reasons behind that. I've put some in your notes. When we think about submission in our culture, all kinds of thoughts come into our mind. In some senses, we think about submission as absolute obedience to authoritarian leadership. The key there being "absolute". You've got an authoritarian, almost totalitarian leader who says, "This is what you do. Now, do it because I said so, because this is the way it is, so do it." That's, maybe, what we have as a picture of leadership in the church. Submission is implied in that.

The result of abuse in power.

It's what I saw in Cuba this last week. Obviously, a totalitarian regime that has said, "This is the way it is, and you operate under this, for better or for worse." You are stuck doing that. Sometimes, when we think of submission, that might be what comes to our mind. We might think of submission as the result of an abuse in power. We oftentimes think of submission as a bad thing. It has negative connotations, and we think that for good reason in our culture. We have seen abuse of power and abuse of authority in our culture. We've seen abuse of authority in the church. It's no surprise that we would have some discomfort when it comes to submitting to leaders.

Some say the church has taken a fatal hit because of all the sex scandals and financial impropriety and prideful egotism that has marked church leadership. One pastor said, "Preaching on Hebrews 13:17 in this culture is like standing up the Sunday after 60 million people have watched police beat up Rodney King and preaching on submission to your law enforcement officers." So, there's a challenge when we think about submission in church leadership in our culture today. So, some think abuse of power.

Acknowledgement of inequality.

Others, when we think of the word "submission", we think of an acknowledgement of inequality. The way we think, submission implies inequality. That if you are submitting to someone, that means that you are not on equal plain with them. That's why, when you come to Ephesians 5, and Paul talks about, "*Wives submit to your husbands*", many people in our culture walk away from that and say, "Well, the Bible teaches that women and men are not equal, that women are subservient to men and less than men", and that's what we think sometimes when we think of submission. "Well, does that make...that means that one person is inferior and one person is superior to the others."

So, this is yet another place in Scripture where we have our thinking that is dictated and affected in many ways by our culture, and we come to Scripture, and Scripture challenges us to think completely differently. We are self-made men and women who live in an individualistic culture, and the thought of accountability to others, much less authority under others, that seems completely foreign to us.

Submission According to Christ ...

So, when we come to this picture of submission in Scripture, we've got to really think through, "How do our minds need to be reprogrammed by God's Word?" The picture we have here...because submission according to Christ, submission in Scripture is an extremely good thing. It is a great thing. It is not these thoughts that we have listed here, submission according to our culture. We see...in Scripture, we see submission in the very nature and person of God. We see the Son...in the Trinity, we see the Son submissive to the Father. That strikes right there, undercuts this whole idea that this is an acknowledgement of inequality. The Son is equal to the Father, yet the Son submits to the Father. The Spirit, sent by the Son...Father, Son, and Spirit working. There's a picture of submission there.

That's why, when you get to the picture of the family...we talked about this last year...the gospel and our families. Ephesians 5 and 6, "Wives submit to your husbands", and the picture is a good thing. The same way Ephesians 6 says, "Children submit to and obey your parents." Parents, is submission...is a child's submission to you and your authority, is that a good thing? Yes. I've only been a parent for a couple of years, but I know the answer to that one. Like, that's a good thing. Maybe we're hesitant to answer that one because, maybe, it's not always as common a thing as we would like for it to be, but the reality is, a parent who loves a child and is disciplining a child, it is good for that child to learn to submit to that parent's love for them.

So, when we come to submission in Scripture, it is an extremely good thing, and I hope that tonight, we will see an incredible picture of submission in the church when it comes to leadership. Something that undercuts all of our false, culturally-created assumptions about submission and just redefines this word for us according to Scripture. What I want us to do is I want us to see two truths; two fundamental, basic, simple, incredible truths that come together to help us understand submission in the church. We are going to look at one truth from the perspective of leaders in the church, and then another truth from the perspective of members in the church, in the body of Christ.

Leaders serve the body.

So, we'll start with the first one: Perspective of leaders. You've got this in your notes. Truth number one: Leaders serve the body; leaders serve the body. This is submission in the church according to Christ. Here's the reality: In the Gospels, Jesus modeled and mandated servant leadership. He defined leadership by service. We don't have time to turn to all these places, but Matthew 23:10-12, *"Nor are you to be called teachers, for there is only one Teacher, the Lord, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your..."* What? *"The greatest among you must be your servant."* Mark 9:35, *"If anyone wants to be the first, he must be the..."* What? *"...he must be the last."* He's redefining this picture. Mark 10:42-45, *"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant..."* He said, *"This is what I came to do. I came not to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many."*

Leadership in the kingdom of God, authority in the kingdom of God, is a servant authority. It's why in 1 Peter 5, when leaders and elders in the church are addressed, Peter says, "Do not lord your leadership, your authority over the church. That does not bring honor to Christ. That goes against the picture we have in Christ." Leaders do not lord themselves over people because there is one Lord, to use Jesus' words from Matthew 23. There is one Lord to whom leadership points.

Now, this is key right here. When it comes to leadership in the church, I want you to see two foundational realities that must be present in any leader in the church, particularly in an elder in a church, a pastor in the church. First...hang with me here, because this is foundational in thinking about submission...first, their authority...a leader's authority is conditional; their authority is conditional. This is contrary to absolute authority, unconditional authority. A leader's authority in the church is not absolute. It is not unconditional. Jesus' authority...now Jesus' authority in the church is absolute. Jesus' authority in the church is unconditional. If we have a problem with submission, then we need to check our relationship with Christ, because the Christian life is entirely about submission to Him as Lord and King, and He has absolute, determinative authority over our lives...unconditional, but not so with the pastor/leader in the church.

Instead, the leader in the church has authority that is conditioned on two factors. Number one, they must teach the Word accurately. This is so key. Conditioned on two factors: They must teach the Word accurately. Look back up at Hebrews 13:7. Listen to what the author said there, how he started this introduction the picture of leaders here in Hebrews 13. He said, *"Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you."* Who spoke the Word of God to you. This is what we see all throughout the New Testament.

This is why an elder must be able to teach, because a leader in the church has authority only in so much as that leader is teaching the Word of Christ. If a leader is teaching his own ideas, his own thoughts, his own opinions, he has no authority to stand on in the church...none. A leader's authority in the church is tied to the Word. This is why Paul, in Acts 20, when he was talking to the Ephesian elders, "There is some that are among you that will arise from among you that will teach other things and pull people away from Christ." He said, "Guard against them because the reality is your leadership in the church is based completely on teaching the Word of Christ accurately."

So, a leader must teach the Word accurately, and second, they must live the Word faithfully. *"Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you."* Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Now, this is the same picture like we hear Paul saying in 1 Corinthians 11:1, when he says, "Follow me as I follow Christ. Imitate me as I am imitating Christ." The picture is a leader...we must hear the Word from a leader's mouth, and we must see the Word in a leader's life.

This is why 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, the character qualifications of a leader, an elder in the church, are high, and they must be high, and they must not be compromised because the church is intended to look at a leader and see faith and life that is worthy of imitation. This is why, when a leader falls, there is a process in Scripture, there is a picture in Scripture of how that leader, an elder is to be rebuked publicly, because the picture of Christ in that leader's life is extremely important. This is why the church must be extremely cautious when restoring a man to leadership in the church, after he has fallen, because this is so huge.

Now, I want you to catch this. You put this picture of conditional authority, teaching the Word accurately, living the Word faithfully, and think about how this affects how we understand submission. "Submit to leaders, what's that about?" Well, here's the deal: If a leader is teaching the Word of Christ, then submitting to what that leader is teaching is ultimately submitting to whom? Christ. So, now we begin to see that submission in the church is not ultimately to a leader, it's ultimately to Christ, and God has put leaders in the church to point us to Christ, to point us to submission to Christ.

In the same way that following a leader, imitating their faith...if a man's faith is focused on

Christ, and his life is pursuing Christ, then in following that leader, you are following who? You are following Christ. So, it's not about the authority of a man or the life of a man. It's about the authority of Christ, and the life of Christ that you are following and submitting yourselves to; that's the picture in the church. Does that make sense?

Now, this starts to come alive here. The whole point of the book of Hebrews up to this point is the author spends ten chapters telling us that we don't need somebody else to get to God. Christ has already made a way for us. Every follower of Christ in this room has direct, unlimited access to God through Jesus Christ. We do not need a priest or other church leader to help us get there. Christ has taken care of that. So, then, why do we need another leader? Well, what God is doing is He's giving leaders to the church to point them to Christ. Consider your leaders, remember them who spoke the Word to you, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

So, authority in church leadership is conditioned upon teaching the Word and living the Word. Their authority is conditional, and, second, their accountability is serious. Come back down to verse 17, and it says, "*They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.*" This is where fear, and I hope...I don't think it's an ungodly fear, but a reverent awe. An overwhelming weight, in a sense, rises up in me when I read Hebrews 13:17 as a pastor, as a leader in a church, because the reality is there is coming a day, according to Hebrews 13:17, when I will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and will give an account. "How did you shepherd the souls entrusted to you at The Church at Brook Hills? How did you teach them my Word? How did you care for them? Provide for them? Serve them? Lead them to my glory?" I and the elders in this church must give an account. Talk about serious business.

They must serve carefully, keep watch. They keep watch over you. The word is, literally, "stay awake". The picture here, notice the imagery. The imagery that Scripture is giving us in submission is not a totalitarian dictator; it's a sheep and shepherd, and sheep following after a shepherd. Now, sheep don't follow a shepherd because they read a document on how they are supposed to submit to shepherds and do what they say. Sheep follow a shepherd, why? Because they know that a shepherd loves them and cares for them and serves them and is willing to lay down his life for them to protect them. That's what causes sheep to follow a shepherd. The picture here is...it's not a blind absolute, "Okay, whatever you say, we will do." One writer put it this way: "Sheep do not blindly follow and check their own minds in the process. If the shepherd decides in a moment of despondency to leap off from a cliff, the sheep may look at one another in startled bewilderment, but they are unlikely to plunge after the shepherd."

The picture here is there's a picture who is looking after sheep, and in the way he looks after the sheep, he leads the sheep and guides the sheep and cares for the sheep. They must serve carefully. They serve responsibly as men who will give an account for the responsibility for the people that God has entrusted to them, and they serve joyfully, which we will talk about more in a minute.

However, I want to pause for a second here. This first truth...and I want you to think about this. When I first looked at preaching Hebrews 13:7, I thought, "How do I preach that verse as a leader in the church? How do I preach that verse and not seem totally self-serving? 'Obey me. Submit to my authority, it's what the Bible says, now do it.' It just doesn't seem to go well. It doesn't seem right. So how do you..." That's what I was asking, "How will I do this?" Then, it didn't take long studying this verse to realize that this verse is most humbling, and it is most penetrating, not for members in the church, but for leaders in the church, because the weight here, so to speak...by the grace of Christ, He takes the weight, but the

weight here, so to speak, is on leaders who have a conditional authority, who need to be reminded at every moment that their authority is not based on anything they bring to the table, but based on the Word of Christ and the life of Christ in them.

The accountability is serious that has eternal ramifications, and now, it makes sense to me why, in verse 18, the author says...after this verse, he says, "Pray for us." So, that's what I would ask of you, that you would pray for me, and you would pray for other leaders in this church, because the emphasis here is really on the responsibility of leadership. Leaders serve the body.

The body submits to leaders.

Second truth: The body submits to leaders. Now, think about this. Now, it begins to make sense. When the leaders are teaching the Word of Christ and living out the character of Christ, when they are accountable and know that and treat it with seriousness, and there is shepherding and caring for and serving and laying their lives down for people, then submission is not forced; it's natural.

It makes sense, in the same way, when we looked at the gospel and families last year, and we talked about this in Ephesians 5. I have never met a wife whose husband loved her and served her and cared for her and laid down his life for her on a moment by moment basis...I have never met a wife whose husband loved her like that who was not gladly willing to submit to her husband's leadership. It just makes sense. That's not a forced submission. That's a glad submission.

I think about this last week in Cuba. We were doing baptism in this one small church, and it was just this hole in the ground they had dug out, and I was down in the water. I was helping baptize. There was this lady who was going to be baptized, a little bit of an older lady, and she was going to be baptized, but she was scared as can be of the water; just didn't want to get anywhere near it. So, she would come up, and she would like reach down into the water and touch it, and then kind of step back, and we were thinking, "Okay, this is going to be interesting." I can't really encourage her very well because I don't speak her language, and so, she stepped in one time, and she jumped back out, and she walked away. I was like, "Well, what are we going to do?" She got in about to her knees and she got back out. They were just like, "Give her a few moments." I was like, "Okay."

So, finally...finally, she comes down, and she is nervous as can be. She is shaking there in the water. I'm trying to communicate to her through the translator, but it's just a bit comical, but it came to the point where, "Okay, it's time to be baptized." I take her arm and begin to push her back into the water, and she is not moving. Like, she is not going at all. I start to try and push a little harder and harder, and she is not budging at all. All of a sudden, I find myself...this is less like baptism; this is more like when you're a little kid, and you are trying to dunk your big brother in the pool. This is like, "Come on; here we go." Like, trying to make this thing happen.

Finally, like, just with all the force I could...you know, that sounds horrible, but that's all we could do to get her partially under the water. She didn't make it all the way under; she was pretty close, as best as we could. She was like, "Did that count?" "It's okay. Yes, just go on, yes." This is the picture when we do baptism over here. There is a difference between forced submission and glad submission in baptism. Most often, it's glad submission. In fact, if we ever had a time here where we needed to dunk somebody, then...the picture of, "Yes, okay, I'm going back in the water, yes, that's okay, but forced submission, "Just do it", that's not at all what this picture of submission is. The body submits to leaders when leaders are serving the body. It's a glad submission.

So, what does that submission mean? It means exactly what we just talked about. Then...then the body obeys the Word that leaders teach. The body submits to leaders in the church by obeying the Word of Christ. Here's the reality, to the extent with which I am...speaking as a pastor in this church...to the extent that I am speaking the Word of Christ, you have a responsibility to submit to that teaching and to obey that teaching. This is where we realize, "Yes, there is a huge picture on the leaders in this church, but there's also an authority and accountability picture in the church, because the body is under the authority of Christ."

Let me remind us tonight, as great as democracy is in the United States of America, the church is not a democracy. The church does not operate based on the will of the people; the church operates based on the will of Christ. Christ determines the direction of the church, not majority rule. This is why Paul said, "There will be all kinds of men who will want to hear all kinds of stuff, what their tickling ears want to hear. You preach the Word. You give them the word of Christ," 2 Timothy 4:1-5. So, the body is under the authority of Christ.

Then, the body is ultimately accountable to Christ. This is what we've seen over the past few months. Remember some of the situations where we've seen the accountability in the church? We have seen that the church is accountable to Christ in matters of dispute, Acts 6:1-5. When there was dispute and disunity in the church, the apostles provided leadership there, but it was the church that was accountable for appointing leaders to address those needs and to resolve that dispute.

Dispute in matters of doctrine. Galatians 1:8-9, when the gospel is not being preached in the church, who's accountable? Yes, in one sense the leader is, but Galatians 1 says if the gospel is not being preached in the church, the church is accountable if we are not rising up and addressing that. You are accountable. If I am not teaching that which is the Word of Christ, then you are accountable for addressing that according to Scripture in matters of dispute, doctrine, and in matters of discipline. That's what we've studied for three weeks on church discipline. Final step: Tell it to the elders? No. Tell it to a small group of leaders? No. Tell it to the what? To the church. 1 Corinthians 5, it is the church that is responsible for removing that brother, an unrepentant brother, from membership. It's the church that is accountable for all of those things. So the body obeys the Word that leaders teach. That's what submission means in Hebrews 13:17.

Second, the body imitates the faith that leaders have. Imitate their faith. It's a command there in verse 7. It's just so humbling. I know I have so far to go. I want my faith...and I speak on behalf of other elders...I want my faith, my life, my faith to be worthy of imitation, but that's the picture. Then, the body maximizes the joy that leaders experience. This is the end of Hebrews 13:17, "*Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*" I love this picture, when you look at some of Paul's letters, like his letter to the Philippians, when he says, "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for you, I always pray with joy." Then, you get to Philippians 4:1, and he says, "You are the ones that I love, and I long for. You are my joy and my crown." It's the way he writes to the Thessalonians. He says the same thing, "You are my joy." Then, he says at one point in 1 Thessalonians 3, he says, "My heart overflows. I thank God because my heart overflows with joy whenever I think about you."

This is another one of those parts of this verse that I thought, "Well, how...how do I preach that? 'You're commanded to make me happy. If you say anything to me that does not put a smile on my face, then you are disobedient, so don't even get close to it.'" Is that what this is saying? I don't think it is.

Today marks three years for me, by God's grace, as leading this church as pastor. I've got a lot to learn about pastoring and a long way to go, but this I have learned: I have learned that a pastor's joy is found in people's obedience to Christ. My greatest joy as a pastor is not really in kind things that some would say to me. Sometimes that just fuels my flesh and my ego, which is not a good thing. However, what gives me the greatest joy to pastor is when I see or hear or have a conversation or receive an email about how the Word is being carried out in your lives. When I hear how you have led someone to Christ at work, that joy just rises up. When I see hunger for the Word, joy just rises up; when I see individuals in small groups all across this faith family who are in the inner city and in their neighborhoods doing all kinds of creative ministries to the glory of God.

When I have a meeting with a family a couple of weeks ago, who...wife and husband with kids...who are packing their bags, and they are moving overseas, because they want to make the glory of Christ known in all nations. When you take radical risks to follow the Word of God to the glory of God, this is great joy and, obviously...obviously, you do not do those things to make me happy or to increase my joy. You do these things because you are submissive to Christ, but that's where joy in the pastorate is found.

So, I want to thank you for the joy that you bring to me. Thank you, thank you, thank you for contributing, maximizing the joy that I experience by your obedience to Christ. Thank you for that.

When leaders serve the body and the body submits to leaders ...

This is a beautiful picture. When leaders serve the body, and the body submits to leaders, when Hebrews 13:17 is happening, there are two effects. First, the church is edified. This is what he said at the end, *"that would be of no advantage to you."* Church leadership is designed to be of advantage.

Think about it. Is it an advantage? Is it an advantage for the people of God to have leaders who are speaking the Word of Christ, who are showing what the life of Christ looks like in action while they care for, provide for, lay their lives down in service for you? Is that a good thing in the community of faith? Absolutely. It's a great thing. Now, obviously, there are potential abuses along the way we have to guard against. We try to even build in some guards in the context of this faith family against those abuses. We don't have just one elder, pastor, overseer, leader that everything is contingent on. We've got a plurality of leadership, multiple elders and have a God...I hope...a God-honoring accountability built into the very leadership structure of the church, so that other men balance out one another's weaknesses and spur one another on toward Christ, and the Holy Spirit uses plurality of leadership in that picture.

We have a rotation picture even among many of our elders, so that we are constantly encouraging growth in leadership and new leadership in the body of Christ, which is a great thing. However, the reality is...and the Scripture talks about it...there are times when elders fall. God forbid that it would happen here. An elder falls, but the reality is, Scripture teaches, "Here's what to do when this happens", and it implies it may happen. However, the picture is when it does happen, Scripture says, "Address it this way." However, we must be careful, if that happens, not to throw out the picture of church leadership altogether, but to say, "We need to address this like Scripture does, and then, we need to work to honor the picture of church leadership that is here, because it is a good thing, and it is for our edification, and when this happens..." I realize this kind of relationship, leaders serving the body and the body submitting to leaders, that doesn't happen overnight; there's a trust that takes time and doesn't just happen automatically. However, when that happens, when it doesn't happen, when it's not there, a church cannot move forward because the whole

picture we've seen in the leadership in the church, submission to leadership, is ultimately submission to Christ. So, when there's not submission to leadership, this healthy picture, there's a lack of submission to Christ in the church.

The church cannot move forward without these two truths coming together, but when they come together, the sky is the limit. The church following His authority through leaders who are trusting and linked with His authority, that kind of church can shake the nations for the glory of Christ. That kind of church is edified, and Christ is glorified, and this is the ultimate goal of leadership in the church: That submission to leaders would be a picture, ultimately, to submission to Christ.

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