

# Obey Your Leaders

by Tim Conway

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*You should obey your leaders and submit to them because they are watching over your souls and are accountable to God for their care of you.*

**Duration:** 52:26

**Scripture:** Proverbs 5:11, Romans 13:1, Ephesians 5:22, Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 2:8, Hebrews 12:1, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5, 2 Peter 2:9

**Topics:** "Church Authority", "Spiritual Leadership"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of obeying and submitting to church leaders, highlighting the responsibility and accountability leaders have in watching over souls. It addresses the challenges of anti-authoritarianism, pride, democratic mindsets, internet influences, church hopping, and defiance against authority. The sermon stresses the need to be persuaded by the teaching of leaders focused on Christ to prevent drifting away from the faith and to ultimately make it to the end.

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## Transcript

Okay brethren, once again please open your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 13. Hebrews 13 verse 17. This is the text that I would like us to focus on this morning.

Hebrews 13 verse 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. On our recent trip to Nicaragua, the Lord allowed us the privilege.

There's a city called Messiah. It's spelled M-A-S-A-Y-A. Does that have anything to do with the Messiah? I didn't think so.

Okay. It's easy to remember that way though. It's spelled different.

In that city, we had the opportunity of going to a coffee cafe. And meeting with men and one woman from the pastor's association there. I know we don't advocate women being pastors, but you take what you get, right? But we had that privilege.

And I spoke to them about the tremendous responsibility of being a pastor. And this text right here was the one that I opened with. It's kind of the launching text.

I took them around to a number of different places. But I wanted to stress to them the high responsibility of being a pastor. And the accountability that we have to God for our care for His people.

And I think you can all see from this verse that it definitely has words that, if you're in leadership, are pretty sobering. We have to give an account. Fearful, even.

Fearful words for anybody who is in leadership or anybody who wants to be in leadership. But as good and as useful as this verse might be to admonishing pastors, I want you all to look at the text. Look at verse 17.

I want you to notice that the author of Hebrews is not primarily addressing pastors, is he? The fact is, he's specifically addressing those who are not leaders. Who ought to be obeying and submitting to their leaders. And I've simply entitled my sermon, Obey Your Leaders.

I have six points. The first one is this. Here's the first point.

You need to obey your leaders. Look at the text. Obey your leaders and submit to them.

I mean, who is he addressing? He's addressing you. Those of you who belong to this church who are not leaders. He's addressing you.

And how is he addressing you? You need to obey your leaders. You need to obey John Sytsma. See him over here.

You need to obey David Butterbaugh. I'm doing this in age. You need to obey Tim Conway.

You need to obey Tawfiq Cotman-El. You need to obey James Jennings. You need to obey your leaders.

And if you're checking out our church as a possible church home, obeying the leaders of this church and submitting to them is what will be expected of you. You like that? Now, my dear brothers and sisters, I want to ask you a question. When I say that you need to obey us, and when I confront you with my authority and with your submission to my authority, what comes to your mind? I mean, I want you to be honest.

Were you just thinking, those are very pleasant words to my ears? Is that how you were responding? Do you welcome this as a good thing? Was it pleasant and peaceful and wonderful to you to just be admonished that you need to obey your leaders? Or did you perhaps, and be honest, did you perhaps begin to bristle and to put up some walls and even begin to reason why there are occasions you shouldn't have to obey your leaders? And I suspect if some of you are honest, that's probably what was happening. And why? Well, the truth is, we live in an anti-authoritarian age. And it's in the church.

That's just a reality. We live in a day and an age where Hebrews 13.17 and the teaching here is not generally going to be well received. There is a spirit of anti-authoritarianism.

And it's fed by several factors. Let me just hit on some of the factors. One, just un-mortified pride.

I mean, that's one of the things. And especially, and Scripture deals with this, young men. Young men typically think they have it figured out.

They don't even need to be told what to do. They've figured out life. They've figured out theology.

They've got it figured. That's why Scripture does seem to look at young men. Listen to this.

In Proverbs 5.11, it says this, At the end of your life you groan when your flesh and body are consumed. And you say, how I hated discipline and my heart despised reproof. Listen to this.

I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. I'm at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation. And you see, Peter comes along in 1 Peter 5. And doesn't he say this? To the younger people, he says this, You who are younger, be subject to the elders.

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. So that's one thing. That's one of the factors that tends to resist this idea of obedience to authority.

Unmortified pride. But how about another one? How about the democratic mindset that tends to pervade the church? More than once, I've had people come to me and say, are we going to have a church vote about that? Brethren, the Bible does not set forth democratic church governing where every single person has an equal say. Now it's true, there are some matters that we as a church vote on.

But you can look at Scripture and you can see that overseers, elder rule, it is the form of church government that's established in Scripture. Now, there are times we can find like in Acts 6 where the leaders, they have a need brought to them and they recognize, okay, we need some men set over this. And so they say to the church, church, look out among yourselves.

And as leaders, there is wisdom to look out to the brethren and to get feedback and in some things, to have your opinions expressed. Certainly there is. I see no wisdom in the church to force you to submit to men that you're not willing to recognize as having proper gifts and qualifications.

But, the democratic mindset, the congregational voting, everybody having an equal vote, you're not going to find that model for church governing in Scripture. How about a third thing? We're in the age of the Internet. You know, we were just down in Nicaragua and there was a young man that Nadelka was telling me about who he didn't have much respect for his own elder.

You know why? He listens to these preachers on the Internet and they're the authority. And so, in his eyes, his own pastor, what's he compared to these guys? That attitude can reign. You guys get on the Internet, you listen to this.

Well, who are these guys to stand up in our church and say this when John MacArthur doesn't agree with them? It's that kind of mindset. We're in the day of the Internet. Popular preachers and pastors tend to hold sway over the local pastors.

How about a fourth reason? A fourth factor that tends to resist this is just a multitude of churches. We've got churches all over the place. In the early days, it wasn't like that.

You were in Ephesus, you went to the church at Ephesus. Today, there's lots of choices. And you know what happens today? If you don't like something, don't submit.

Just move on to the other church. We've got lots of church hoppers today. Why? Because ultimately, a lot of people that move around... I mean, you look at somebody that basically has moved around to a lot of churches, a lot of times, it's back to the first one.

It's just un-mortified pride. They don't want to submit anywhere. They don't want to commit anywhere.

How about a fifth one? We're just coming off the 4th of July. Some of you might bristle at this one. But brethren, basically just a defiant national spirit.

Do you know that our country was founded on rebellion against authority? You might not want to admit that, but it was. Brethren, did Jesus teach that if you don't want to pay your taxes, rebel against the king? What page is that on? It's not there. Taxation without representation might have sounded good in our forefathers, and I'm talking about the U.S. of A. But that's not really Scriptural.

We do. We have a nation. You know what's very interesting? You go back and look at Sam Waldron's book on Baptist roots in America.

Do you know what he finds out? He unpacks. Is that in the days of the Revolutionary War, prior to that, Calvinistic Baptist churches were more prevalent than Armenian. But after the revolution, not so.

You know why? People threw off the king. Last thing they wanted was a sovereign god on top of that. Everybody's talking freedom.

We want freedom of the will. We want freedom, freedom, freedom! And Calvinism was not so highly desirable then. Kind of the spirit of the age in this country.

And I'm not saying that there weren't some good things about the way the forefathers set up our country. Even having checks and balances. Understanding how to preserve us from man's depravity to some degree.

And how about this? A sixth one. Just the fall of spiritual leaders. You know, we've got people that are running around that, well, I've been hurt by church leaders.

I've been misled by church leaders. I can't trust anyone. But you see, against all these factors and against all these influences, we have the Word of God.

Right here. Hebrews 13, 17. Obey your leaders and submit to them.

So that's my first point. There's a lot of factors. There's a lot of influences.

But the fact is, God wants you submitting to the leaders. Now here's the second point. The second point is this.

The advantage in submitting to your leaders is your own. Leaders are not supposed to serve and lead for their own benefit, but for your benefit. And they have to give an account for how well they did benefit you.

Notice the text. Obey your leaders and submit to them for they're keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Now notice this.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you. Do you see that the author of Hebrews is concerned about what is to your advantage? That would be of no advantage to

you. He's primarily concerned about what? Your welfare in this.

That's the idea. He's not primarily concerned that the leaders are getting the respect they deserve. Now that's dealt with in other places, but right here in Hebrews, the primary concern is not respect for the leaders.

The primary concern is whether you're being advantaged by submitting to these leaders. He's chiefly concerned with what is going to be for your good. And I want to make sure that you all see this.

God did not design leadership in the church in order to make you miserable and to make life hard for you. To provide you tyrants who can manipulate you and push you around. He did it for your advantage.

Now I want you to think about this. When we go to Scripture, you find various levels of authority and submission. You find it in society.

You find it in family. You find it in the church. You just think about some of these.

Romans 13, what do you have? You have the fact in Romans 13 that you should submit yourself to the governing authorities. Right? You come over to Ephesians 5, and what do you find there? Women, you are told to submit in all things to your husbands. Children, you go over to Ephesians 6, and what do we have there? We have the fact that children should obey their parents and the Lord for this is right.

If you think about in the church, we have our text right before us. Hebrews 13, 17. In the church, you're to obey and submit to those that have the lead over you.

I mean, we find this structure everywhere. But listen, do you know if you move forward in Scripture from every one of the texts that I was just referencing, do you know the kind of thing that you find? Consider Romans 13. If you move forward to Romans 13, verse 5, what are we told? We are told that the governing authority is for your good.

Are we not told that? Do you know what we're told right after the Ephesians 5 passage is about women submitting in all things? Right after that, husbands are to love their wives like Christ loved the church. Do you know what you find after children are told to submit themselves to their parents? You find this, that it may go well with you. Do you know what you find here when you're told to submit yourself to the church leaders? Because they're watching over your souls.

Isn't it amazing in every single one of those? It's for the purpose of love. It's for the purpose of protection. That's what God has designed authority for.

Not to be against you. Not to somehow mess your life up. But to be protective.

To provide for you. To be a blessing for you. I mean, God establishes governing authorities.

Why? So that law-abiding citizens... I mean, when the government's working right, so that law-abiding citizens, they're protected by the sword of the government. Those wrongdoers are dealt with. Those who would seek to attack our country are repelled.

So that we can live in safety. We can live in peace. I mean, wives that submit to husbands that are striving to love their wives like Christ loved the church and making all the sacrifices, what does that look like? I mean, does that look like hell on earth? It doesn't.

Children. Children that submit to their parents. But it may go well.

Why? Because God sees that as a protective blanket. Parents are wives. Parents have been through that.

And in the church, it's the same thing. It's the same thing. God has designed pastors.

He's designed them in the church so that you might be protected. It's for your good in the church. They exercise their authority as God has designed.

And your own soul gets watched over. I mean, think with me, brethren. Do we not read in Ephesians 4 that it says that Christ ascended? He led a host of captives.

And what did He do? He gave gifts to men. And what did He give? He gave apostles and prophets and evangelists, pastors or shepherds and teachers to equip the saints. Think about this.

Jesus Christ Himself has given. You see, one of the things you have to come to recognize is if somebody is truly recognized in a right way and they're gifted, these are men that Jesus Christ Himself has given as a gift to the church. You have men that have been given for the purpose of watching over your souls.

Equipping you. Watching you. They've been graced.

They've been blessed to safeguard the church. You don't want to despise that. Jesus Himself is giving that to the church.

They feed you with the Word of God. They shepherd your souls. They protect you from spiritual wolves.

And yes, they address you when they see sin in your life. But that's good. It may not feel good at the time, but it is good.

And if you stand back objectively and look at it, to have somebody that's making sure that you don't just run off in sin, that's good. That's very good. Brethren, God did not put leaders in the church to hinder you or to hurt you.

We're not here to lord our authority over you and use it for our own selfish purposes. We're here to watch over your souls. Don't chafe at that.

We see the leaders in the early church. What were they supposed to give themselves to? They said, we're not going to serve tables. We're going to give ourselves to the Word and to prayer.

And Christ giving men to the church that are in the Word and praying for you, interceding for you. You may not recognize that this happens. Brethren, we have the leaders of the church.

We have lists. Not only of those who are members, but those who visit the church on a regular basis. We get your names.

We put them in this list. We're thinking through the faces and the names of the people here. We're praying.

We get together and we talk about who's struggling, who needs help. We're thinking about you. That's why we're here.

You don't want to chafe at obeying men who Christ has raised up to love you. That's the idea here. Don't chafe at obeying men who aren't going to let you rest easy in your sin.

So that's my second point. It's to your advantage. How about a third point? The third point is this, God is the ultimate authority.

I mean, each leader referred to in Hebrews 13.17, what does he have to do in the end? He has to give an account. Look at the text. Hebrews 13.17 Obey your leaders and submit to them for they're keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account.

You know what this means? You are not looking at the ultimate authority. When you see Tawfiq in Sunday school, and you look over and you see me and John talking together in the back, you're not looking at the ultimate authorities. God is the ultimate authority and we are accountable to Him.

We will answer to Him. You know, this is another thing we just came across in Nicaragua, and I know it's not particular to Nicaragua. We got to the first place there when we got to Managua, and these guys are talking about problems in churches.

And they're saying, okay, if we're in a church and there's bad doctrine, if we're in a church and the leadership isn't right, there's sin there or something, how are we supposed to deal with that? And I said, well, there are ways that Scripture gives us to deal with heresy. To deal with sin when it's in the church. And they said, yeah, but the leaders say that they're the Lord's anointed.

And how is anybody guiltless if they extend their hand out and touch the anointed of the Lord? Have you heard that kind of thing before? That is not foreign to our country as well. Men who put themselves in an untouchable position when they obtained the leadership. Well, the Lord's anointed.

Do you know where that language comes from? It comes from 1 Samuel. And who primarily used that terminology? Do you know? It was David. David would talk about Saul that way.

The Lord's anointed. Because he truly was. He was chosen out by God.

God had Samuel anoint him. He was the Lord's anointed. He was the Lord's chosen.

And so, time and again, when David had opportunity to kill Saul, David would step back. And say, nope, God put him in that position and I'm going to let God take him out. But it had to do with killing him.

It did not have to do with censoring him, rebuking him, admonishing him if something was wrong. Samuel definitely rebuked Saul. Jonathan confronted his father.

David, in very meek fashion, said truth to him. Look, for one thing, let me tell you this. No pastor is ever called the Lord's anointed in Scripture.

At all. And even Saul, who may have had that title, was not beyond censor and rebuke and being confronted over his sin. Not ever.

And so, it was about putting his hand out and touching him was about killing him. And so we get leaders in churches who like to use texts like this to protect themselves from ever being confronted. Well, that's just... Brethren, you know who that sounds like? You know, as I think about that, there's a man in Scripture that that sounds like to me.

And his name was Diotrephes. Do you remember him? Third John. He was a man that the Apostle John said, he does not regard our authority.

You know who our is? The Apostles. The Apostles' authority, the Apostles' doctrine is akin to the Word of God. Diotrephes would not subject himself to that.

Listen, there's no leader in this church or in any church that has a higher authority than the Word of God, than the voice of the Apostles. Diotrephes. Yeah, there's men that run around like this.

John said, I've written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. There's not a single leader in this church above the authority of the Apostles, the Apostles' doctrine, which in our case amounts to the Word of God. Do you know what the Word of God says? It says, now look, it's true, if an elder like myself, if I'm not right, you don't just stand up and make an accusation.

You do it on the testimony of two or three. But I'll tell you what Scripture says. If an elder persists, there's a place for calling him out publicly.

No man is above the Word of God. No man is above censor. Look, even Paul himself, Paul didn't say, how dare you Bereans! You're going to go actually check the Scriptures and search if these things are so? Don't you know who I am? He counted it an honorable thing.

A noble thing. Let me tell you, by obeying your leaders, that is not a call for you to abandon the nobility of the Bereans at all. Keep your teachers on their toes.

Examine the Scriptures. If you hear something that sounds questionable, come talk to those that are preaching. Every man must bow to God's Word.

Every man. So that was the third point. None of us are the ultimate authority.

Fourth point. Leaders. Notice that.

Leaders. Obey your leaders. It's plural.

You know when you go into the New Testament and you begin to look at the leadership structure for churches, you find elders or overseers in the plural. You see when they appointed elders in the churches in Acts 14? It was plural. You find that when Paul went and addressed the Ephesian elders, it was plural.

What is that about? Acts 20. When you look at the first verse in Philippians, the overseers and deacons. Overseers is plural.

When Titus was told in Titus 1 to go and decree and appoint. Again, it's plural. You find the plurality.

A plurality of leaders is obviously the preferable model. It's the one that we ought to be striving for. Clearly when a church is young, clearly some of those churches when they were first planted by Paul, they did not have a plurality.

That should be where churches are moving. That should be what we're striving after, what we're praying for. You think about this.

You have a plurality of elders. I'm asking you that have to submit to that elder rule. Think about this.

You have men. A multiplicity. A plurality of men who the church has looked out among themselves and said we think they're godly men.

We think they possess certain gifts and the moral caliber and the existing leadership affirms that likewise. And these men are brought in to a plurality of leadership. And they get together.

And they seek to come to consensus on things together. Not one man by himself, but together. They seek to search Scripture.

They seek to talk. They seek to pray through things. Make decisions together.

They're holding one another accountable. They come and they make a consensus on something. Are they infallible? But don't you think that that's a safe system that God has created? Not infallible.

Not perfect. But it's God's design for the church. And I think you can see that it's safe.

God has designed the leadership structure in the church so that it's the safest form of leadership for each of you to submit to. And I can tell you this, rogue leaders find it very difficult to operate where there are a plurality of leaders to submit to. So that was my fourth point.

Leaders here is plural. How about a fifth point? Brethren, the fifth point... Look, I don't say this as one who is a young man converted 25 years of age. I probably fell into a number of these things.

I can remember my first pastor. Did I give more credibility to John MacArthur than to my first pastor? I did. Did I have some confrontations with my pastor down at Community Baptist Church? I did.

We butted heads. And that's not a good thing for me to say because he was the leader. I mean, that's just an evidence of my own pride at that time.

And looking back now, I recognize there were times when there were probably numerous times when I spoke things I shouldn't have spoke. When I did things I should not have done. And you know, when you go to Scripture, the resisting of authority is not seen as a small thing.

People can speak so freely in slanderous, gossipful ways about church leaders. But you know, 2 Peter 2 v. 9, you find this, the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment. Now notice this, "...and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority." King James Version says government.

But the word is more of a generic idea of dominion or power. It's those who despise authority. What we find Peter saying, they are especially notorious.

We want to be really careful. I mean, if you go on with the reasoning in both Jude and in 2 Peter, it's almost like the angels themselves won't even bring accusation against the devil. Why? Because he's one of these principalities and powers.

He's a ruler. And it may be in darkness, but they are careful how they speak even there. And we need to learn from that before we too freely speak about Obama or more the way you speak about church leaders.

Disobeying authority is likely more especially wicked than we realize. That was my fifth point. Now, I come to the last point.

And it's this. What's at stake here? I mean, okay, we're reading, obey your leaders, submit to them, they're 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.

You know what we need to really consider? The broader context. This is not in a vacuum. This is in a book where the superiority of Christ is what's at stake.

Where staying in the race is at stake. Staying true to the truth is at stake. When we look at this... Okay, let me just point something out to you.

You see the first word, obey? Now in the Greek, there is another word that has to do with hearkening to a command. Typically when we think obey, we think in the same lines of the next word, submit. That word submit, yes, it means just what it sounds like it means.

Yielding to authority. But this word obey is not the Greek word that simply means obey my commandment. It is not that word.

There is a word for that, but this word means to be persuaded. It's actually a word that means to trust or to be confident in. Its meaning has to do with our teaching.

Being persuaded by what we teach you. Being confident of what we are laying before you as we open up God's Word. That's the idea here.

Not so much that you're submitting to our commandments, although the word submission deals with yielding to authority. This word has to do with the idea of being persuaded by the teaching that is coming from your leaders as they stand and they preach and they teach to the assembly. Being properly convinced.

Look, you need to remember the greater context of Hebrews here. I mean, just think. Remember with me, brethren.

Remember, this book is about keeping people on track. If you just go back to Hebrews 2. Just jump back there. It's back at the beginning of the book.

I mean, let's just refresh our memories here. I mean, go back to Hebrews 1. Hebrews 1 is all about Christ's superiority. I mean, He is superior to the prophets.

In times past, God spoke by the prophets. But in these last days, He's spoken to us by a Son. And you see in verse 4, having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

This is all about the superiority of Christ. And why is it being emphasized? Because we're dealing with some people who are considering going back to Judaism. They were considering giving up Christ and going back to the Jewish way of worship.

Back to the types and shadows. Abandoning the reality for the shadow. That's what they're tempted with.

Life is hard. Their family is undoubtedly disowning them. Losing work.

Their stuff was pillaged. We saw that in Hebrews 10. They are going through hard times following Christ.

There is a real temptation to drop out of this race. And what our author does is he comes along and he says, if you've got any ideas of abandoning Christ, let me remind you of His absolute supremacy and glory. That's what Hebrews 1 is all about.

It's about the fact He is superior to prophets and superior to angels, and the fact that He is God Himself. I mean, He speaks to them, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. That's speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And He's setting Him forth this way. And when you get over to Hebrews 2, therefore, therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it. Why? Because Christianity is so absolutely glorious.

Because our Savior is so glorious. Don't abandon it. This is altogether absolutely glorious.

It is this salvation that is so great in verse 3 of chapter 2. But here's the issue. 2.1. We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it. You see, that's the danger.

Don't let your ideas about perseverance of the saints cause you to come to conclusions the Bible never comes to. Perseverance of the saints is not something to be assumed ahead of time as though whether I persevere to the end and make it all the way to the end is irrelevant to whether I'm truly saved. Look, if God truly saves you, you're going to make it to the end because God's salvation saves to the uttermost.

But the thing is, you've got men and women running all around making the assumption that their salvation is truly of the Lord when the Lord Himself said, look, if you endure to the end, you'll be saved. That's the way Hebrews talks to us all the way through. We have responsibility running with our eyes on Christ.

Faith in Him. Not in our own strength. But going on in faith.

Being confident in Him all the way to the end. And not drifting. Why do people drift? Why do they drift away from Christ? Something else is pulling them away.

It's pulling them away. And what the author is saying, you've got teachers that are standing up there in the pulpit and they're proclaiming Christ to you. You obey that.

You be persuaded by that. Why? Because it's of advantage to you. The advantage in Hebrews is not the kind of advantage where, well, if you don't submit to them, then they groan and they don't pray as much for you.

The advantage all through Hebrews is about making it to the end or not. It's whether you get there. It's yielding to their authority and teaching as they stand up and they bring the Word of God to you.

Remember what Hebrews is all about. You come over to Hebrews 3. Therefore, verse 7, as the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. He's saying don't be like them.

They rebelled. They fell. They perished.

Don't be like them. Look at verse 12 of chapter 3. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living Christ. I mean, what is this all about? This is all about following your leader's teaching on Christ rather than reverting back to some erroneous way of

thinking that is going to lead to your destruction.

What is advantageous for you is that you make it. That God give leaders to the church who will stand up in the pulpit and not let you drift away from Christ. That's what it's all about.

Do you hear the sounds that come out of the book of Colossians? Paul says don't be misled. Don't be distracted by that which is not Christ. Being separated from the head.

And he talks about all manner of things. He talks about philosophy. In another place in Scripture, so-called science.

Back to Colossians, he deals with asceticism. He deals with crazy things. Visions and worship of angels.

People get into mysticism. He's dealing with people who are cruel to their bodies and they go through ascetic practices. He deals with all manner of things.

He deals with legalism. Galatians is all about that. You go drift off into anything that is not Christ and it's destructive.

You need leadership with one message. With one goal. Do you remember how Paul talked to the Colossians? He said with every bit of energy that Christ gives me, I strive, I strain, I struggle to see the people that he's ministering to locked into Christ.

Living on Christ. Feeding on Christ. That's what this book is all about.

You do not want to read this verse extracted from that context. That's what this is about. This is not just, well, if you rebel against us, we're going to be discouraged and so we're not going to be so minded to pray for you or won't it be advantage some way.

We'll be upset with you. That's not the bigger picture here. When weighed by the whole book of Hebrews, this is a verse that says something else.

I mean, you look at Hebrews 4, if you're still moving through, we see in the last verse of Hebrews 3, so we see that they are unable to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, while the promise of entering is rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. You go down to 4.11, let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

You know what the problem with these people were? They were drifting. They were struggling. They were beginning to grow lazy.

They were persecuted. They were thinking about falling out of the race. Brethren, that's what we're faced with.

We're faced with people, like Hebrews 6 says, who they come to a place where it's impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared of the Holy Spirit. They've tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come and then fallen away to restore them again to repentance. You say, that doesn't work with my doctrine of once saved, always saved.

Then you need to correct that doctrine. I'm not saying God's salvation ever fails. But I'm saying from the human perspective, we have to persevere.

And people make shipwreck all the time. That is not just a theory in Scripture. Paul gave exact names of people who made shipwreck.

And we know people who have not made it. The real issue is, as these men stand up and they proclaim Christ to you, being persuaded, even though we may do it in different styles, we may do it in different amounts of gift, but you've got men who are praying and they are going to the Word of God and they are standing up with an agenda. Look to Christ.

Look to Christ. That's the idea. Not to be distracted.

Brethren, that's our calling. When you talk about watching over your souls, if there's one thing above all things that we have to watch for, it's that Christ remains precious to you. It's that Christ is all in all to you.

It's that He is what you're living for. He is who you're willing to die for. You are following Him.

You are keeping your steps in His steps. Yes, you imitate us as we imitate Him. And we are seeking to keep our footsteps in His footsteps so that you can follow us and we can all go on.

This is about making it to the end. This is about enduring in this race. This is about what you find in Hebrews 12 where you find these words.

Since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight. Why? For Christ. Lay aside the sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

And here it is looking to Jesus. That's what it's about. Running this race.

Our agenda is to keep your eyes there. Because everything that is not Christ, it will destroy you. Just listen.

You don't have to turn here with me. But listen to how Paul says this. This needs to sink into our ears.

He says, See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy. It's the love of worldly wisdom. Empty deceit according to human tradition.

Men love to invent religion according to the elemental spirits of the world and not according to Christ. That's always the issue. That's the issue with everything.

Everything that so much sounds good, it's according to human traditions. Oh well, we've done it for a long time. But it's not according to Christ.

Brethren, that's what we call you to do. We're calling you to follow us. Look, our Lord tells us through the Apostle Peter, We're not to lord our authority over you.

We're to be gentle in our leadership. We're to lead you by example. But we call you to follow us.

Because as much as I know the elders in this church, we want to get you there. I mean, the Apostle Paul, he's one of these spiritual leaders. And he spoke this way to the Philippians.

He said concerning you, holding fast to the word of life. Holding fast to the gospel. Holding fast so that in the day of Christ, when he has to give an account, so that in the day of Christ, I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

You see what the advantage is for them is whether they make it or not. The issue is we have to give an account. Did they make it? Did they make it or not? That's what Paul's hitting on.

Did I run in vain? Did I labor in vain? When I poured myself out for you, and I lifted you up before the Lord, did you go on and make shipwreck? So all my effort for you was in vain. Brethren, I know the five elders of this church are not perfect. And if anybody knows well about one not being perfect, I know I'm not.

But brethren, as much as I know, we want to get you to the end. I know the joy of my anticipation of being there on that day and seeing many of you glorified and made it to the end. Brethren, may God give you grace.

Humble yourselves. God resists the proud. I'm not saying that us elders perfectly figured out how to obey the authorities God put in our life.

But one thing for certain is when you get into the leadership, all those times you failed, He brings back to your memory because He puts you in the very same situations. I mean, sometimes I'm dealing with young men and I see myself, and they think of Brother Pat and how I responded. Brethren, I'll tell you this.

There was a time when I seriously was considering leaving Community Baptist Church. And I'll tell you, primarily it had to do with Brother Pat. He was a pastor there.

And what happened that brought me to the place where I obeyed like this and I submitted was because I really started thinking about his faith and about what he believed and about what he taught. And stepping back and looking at the bigger picture and recognizing he has flaws. But you know what? God's hand is on that man.

I really believe he is out for my good. I believe that this man has a passion for souls. I believe that this man is ready to make sacrifices for the sake of the Gospel.

He has convictions like I do with regards to baptism. He has convictions like I do with regards to the sovereignty of God. He has convictions like I do for the spread of the Gospel and going after souls.

And you think, what are these things over here in light of that bigger picture? And I just thank the Lord for opening my eyes and not letting me do something that would have been foolish. Oh, may God help us all. Father, we pray that the realities of this verse would be graciously expressed on us.

In Christ's name I pray, Amen.

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