



Countercultural Christians-Part 4

Deference Instead of Autonomy

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The sermon's going to be a little weird. I'm not kidding. Yeah, it might be kind of like having your friend call you up just to remind you to buy her a Christmas present. It might feel like that. Or maybe your neighbor coming over and saying, hey, don't forget to be nice to me. I am your neighbor, you know. It may feel like that. It's it. It's just weird being reminded by your friend. And not that it's wrong to be nice to your neighbor, you should be nice to your neighbor. It's just when your neighbor comes over to tell you that, it's just weird.

That's the dilemma that the preachers have always encountered throughout the centuries when they've been preaching through the book of Hebrews and they've run into these middle verses in chapter 13. It's always presented a bit of an awkward reality for them. Because in this text that we're going to look at this morning, preachers who proclaim the Word of God are led to proclaim that people should respect those who proclaim the Word of God. And that just is kind of weird, you know, stand up and tell people, hey, you need to respect me, you need to obey me. That's just, it's an odd, seemingly self-serving kind of passage.

So a lot of preachers have just decided not to preach on it. They just skip it altogether. Other preachers have made it kind of their favorite preaching text and preached on it often, reminding you every week that you should obey them, which is worse than weird. It's indicative of some deeper problems, I suppose. So when I encountered this in study and were trying to move verse by verse through the book of Hebrews, I had to make some decisions on how to deal with it. So I thought a reasonable option would be to address these verses in Hebrews 13 head-on and unabashed and just take the bull by the horns and say, this is what the passage says, but not turn it into a 15-week series. How's that for a compromise?

Now, better than that, I've really taken what should be two different preaching segments in Hebrews 13 and combined them into one because you're going to think, you know, he's preached on this just a few weeks ago. Because verse 7 in Hebrews 13 addresses the issue. But then, 10 verses later in Hebrews 13, verse 17, we get the whole topic over again from a different angle. So I thought, well, let's just deal with them all at once. We'll get this uncomfortable, weird sermon out of the way, and we'll move on to the rest of the book of Hebrews.

Now, as the sermon unfolds, you will undoubtedly be tempted to say, what a self-serving sermon this is for that preacher. Who does he think he is? And I just want to remind you of a couple things. Number one, you need to be reminded that the application of this particular passage holds the blessing of every other passage in the Bible if you do it. James 1.25 says, if you do the Word of God, you'll be blessed. So, it's, you know, I know that the beneficiary is, you're going to say, well, it's about Mike here, and so, well, that's self-serving. But just realize that if we do it, I know that I might be blessed in the process, but so will you. That's what the Bible says. Obey the Word and you'll be blessed.

Secondly, let me point out that I'm not the only one in your life who is a leader who speaks to you the Word of God. If you are just an active part of our church, you've probably got a handful of people that



this passage applies to. Your family certainly does. If you have teenagers, you've got youth pastors laboring hard across the parking lot. They're doing that right now. If you have children in our children's program, they're trying to direct your children's mind to the Scripture. And if you're in our Bible study program, maybe our men's or women's Bible study, there's other people in your life that this applies to. It's not just about me. So maybe that'll soften it just a little bit.

But I suppose I should address this group, and I'm reluctant to do so, but there are some listening to this that are probably sitting here this morning. More likely, the ratio goes up to those listening on the radio. And maybe even more so for those who've gotten the CD or watching on television this morning, they are likely to be a part of a group, a growing group in our culture, of people that have given up on having any spiritual leaders in their lives at all. They've just said, I don't really, I'm not into that. Christ is my pastor and I listen to preachers and all of that, but I don't have spiritual leaders in my life.

And I understand why people do that. And it may be because they've had a really bad experience with a batch of bad church leaders. And I get that. Or it may be that you're really sharp and smart and bright and spiritually mature, and you're looking at the options out there and saying, well, I don't find anybody I can really, you know, kind of put myself under. And I can understand that too. I mean, the options out there, it's not all that impressive in some places.

But the bottom line is, if you don't have any spiritual leaders in your life, I can say unequivocally that you're outside the will of God and that it's not a good place to be and that God would have you change that arrangement in your life because the way God has set things up is for you to have pastors and spiritual leaders in your life. That is God's will for you. Not just in the church, God has made the world that way, and He says that He has set up authorities in just about every arena of life that you are called to submit to and defer to in your life. You've probably got bosses at work. We have city councils in cities. We have governors in states. We have whole governmental structures and nations, and God says you should submit to them and obey your leaders. So that's true outside the church, and it's certainly true in the church, though some look for a respite in the church and hope that maybe we can be just some kind of loosely associated group of self-governed, autonomous believers. That's not how the Bible arranges things.

So we need to, for all of our sakes, defer to the biblical model, which calls the average Christian to recognize that he has a need in his life, whether he feels it or not, to have spiritual leaders who speak the Word of God to them. So with all those preliminaries out of the way, was that uncomfortable enough? That's just the introduction. Maybe we should look at this passage.

Hebrews chapter 13, beginning in verse number 7. That's where the topic of leaders comes up and it says in the text, to remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Be like those guys. Then he gets into some issues that we'll deal with later about the summary of the book. Really, it's the encapsulation of the whole book. And then he returns to the topic in verse 17. Drop down to verse 17, Hebrews 13, verse 17. It 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.



And then he gets real personal. He says, pray for us. He's certainly a leader in this church. He says, we are sure that we have a clear conscience and we desire to live honorably in every way. I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon, perhaps in prison, bereft of his congregation for some reason, but he's got some personal requests. You guys need to pray for us.

Now, this is a series of uncomfortable truths for preachers to preach forthrightly, but I think we should do it out of a deference to preaching the whole counsel of God. So let's look at this and try and take this apart a piece at a time and see what God would have us do in response to it. Verse number 7, it says, remember your leaders, keep them in mind, keep them in your mind. Remember them, not just for the sake of honoring them, but the preachers who speak the word of God to you, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Now, we've already seen a lot about examples in Hebrews, haven't we? Chapter 11 is all about these great heroes of faith, people with sandals and robes from ancient times who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, conquered kingdoms, right? We've even seen from New Testament times, as he says in chapter 2, the apostles who did these miraculous signs and all that's great and we should follow in the virtue of their faith. But now he makes it much more personal. Oh, the guys that you know, not just know about, but the guys that you know who open up the word of God and preach to you. He says those are the guys you need to keep in mind and remember the way that they live, the outcome of their faith, and you need to imitate that kind of faith. That is putting the Christian virtue, Christian truth, and seeing it lived out in real life. Something close.

And that's hard. It's easy to respect people far away. It's even easy to say, I got heroes that are far away and long since dead. It's hard to say, well, I've got some people I patterned my life after now. And if you're afraid that we're going to start selling in the bookstore, what would Mike Fabarez do, bracelets or something like that? We're not going to go that far. But you do recognize that it is a biblical concept, that you should think about what would my pastors do in this situation? Because you know them living in the 21st century, facing the challenges of the current culture and trying to do their best to not only preach God's word, but to live God's word, and you should learn from that.

It's not thoughtless. It's not blind. It's not just this, I'm just blindly following these people. It should be thoughtful, because the assumption in Hebrews is that these leaders that are preaching the word of God are good leaders, and they're accurately preaching the Word of God. There are exceptions, and we'll deal with those throughout the message. But the point is, assuming that you have good leaders who are teaching you the Word of God, number one on your outline, if you found your worksheet, jot this one down. You and I, in a congregation, we have pastors that are leading us and teaching the Word of God. They're good ones, we're assuming here. Then you should, number one, you should thoughtfully follow your leader's example. Thoughtfully follow your leader's example.

Because, yeah, I know about those big heroes of the faith that are thrown into the lion's den, and that's amazing faith. But what about the 21st century when someone who claims to try and live according to the scripture hits real-life crises that we face in our day? What happens when their unborn child is diagnosed with a birth defect? How do they handle that? What do they respond like when bad things happen to them or injustice transverses their life, and now they're oppressed or opposed? How do they respond to that? What's their marriage like? How do they keep priorities intact in the midst of the



challenges and distractions of the 21st century? You should have people in mind that you know who teach you the word of God that you say, what would they do? How do they handle it? That's not man worship. That's not unbiblical honor. That's biblical and it's all over the scripture. And doesn't Paul say it? Follow me as I follow Christ. Isn't that everywhere in scripture?

Look at an example with me in Philippians chapter 3. Philippians chapter 3. Now, one of the first objections I think most people have is they cross their arms and lean back and say, well, these men have feet of clay. Just remember that. They're not perfect. Now, no one said they were. And in Scripture, even the apostolic band made it very clear, we're not saying we're perfect. But neither is your golf instructor, right? Just think about that one. He hits a hole in one on every par three, does he? No, no. But I trust he's a little bit better at applying the mechanics of the golf swing than you are. That's why you go to him for instruction. He teaches you the game. Oh, occasionally he'll hit it into the rough or the sand trap. But one of the great things about having a golf instructor, which I don't have, is that he helps you get out of those with some skill, right? I mean, when you watch him hit it into the trap, he teaches you how to get out of the trap. We're not claiming that we need perfect leaders, but we do understand that in their imperfection, there is something about their leadership that we should follow.

Look at this in Philippians chapter 3. Just to give it some reference point in verse 12, he's talking about these high virtues of this kind of life that we'll experience on the other side. And He says in verse 12, not that I've already obtained all this. Philippians chapter 3, verse 12, are you with me? Or have already been made perfect. Come on, I'm not saying that, but I do press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I don't consider myself yet as to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what's behind and straining toward what's ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has called me heavenward. That's clear.

But look a few verses down, even though he claims I'm not perfect, I'm not saying I am. Look at verse 17. He said, but you guys should join with others in following my example. And how different is that from modern day leadership conferences, right? I mean, most people in this kind of self-imposed false deprecation in my mind, we say, oh, don't watch me. We've got these little trite things. I'm just one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread, right? I mean, you don't hire a golf coach or a batting coach for your kid who's lousy at it, right? I mean, you don't want the wounded healer mentality. I mean, you really want to have somebody who has some competence in this. I mean, that's who your spiritual leaders and Bible teachers should be, people that know what it is to apply these principles. Do they do it perfectly? Didn't say that. But you should have and choose biblical churches and biblical leaders who you say they're living this stuff as well as can be expected in the 21st century, and we're following their example.

And Paul says, hey, no, don't look at me. He doesn't that. He says, no, look at me. Join with others in following my example. And not only that, take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. Because Paul was gone now, and he says, if you see people living like the way I lived, then you need to watch them, and you'll learn to live the Christian life by watching them. I know we can read the Bible stories, and we can see the people from the past, but if you want to know how it's done in Philippi, you need to watch the people who live like I did when I was there.



I know that's tough, but that's the biblical picture, because there are a lot of people yakking about God. That's where he goes in the next verse. Who don't live it? He says, I've often told you before and now say again with tears, many live as enemies of the cross. Well, they talk about it. I mean, this has been a theme in the book so far. Their destiny, though, is destruction. Their God is their stomach and their glory is in their shame. Their minds are set on earthly things. But you haven't seen that in us, Paul says. We're not in it for money. We're not in it for the wrong reasons. He says, you've watched that our citizenship is in heaven as we eagerly await a Savior from there.

Look across the page, chapter 4, Philippians chapter 4. These familiar verses about setting our minds in verse number 8 on what's true and noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable. If it's excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things. And then in verse 9 says, you know, you want to know what that looks like in real life? Those are great abstract virtues, but here's what it looks like in real life. He says, whatever you've learned or received or heard or, underline this phrase, or seen in me, put it into practice. If you've watched me apply the Bible this way, you need to apply the Bible that way. And the God of peace will be with you.

I understand that your pastors aren't perfect. I'm the first to admit that I certainly am not. But I would hope that there would be a pattern in my life that you would see, or the people that preach at the men's Bible study or the women's Bible study, or your small group leader, or the teenagers can look at the youth pastors and say, when I face the challenges of life, I want to respond like that. That's what church is all about. People that are called to be leaders.

As a matter of fact, this word in Hebrews chapter 13 that's translated leaders is literally the word guide. They're showing you how it's done. Walk this way. Let me show you how it works. Guides. And by the way, let me speak for a second to those of you who want to be pastors, want to be Bible teachers, or you want to move up even in the ranks of the church, as it were, in being leaders and teachers in the church. A lot of people want that, but they don't want the fishbowl. I know the pastor's got a fishbowl. Absolutely it does, and it's supposed to. I mean, that's how it's supposed to work. I mean, you should follow me around. Don't follow me around, but if you were to follow me around, you'd see that people are following me around. I mean, that's the thing.

I mean, I can't. We go to restaurants, and they're watching us. We take our kids into Lowe's, and they're watching. I'm in Lowe's on Monday, and this guy's watching me, and I'm lost. You know you get lost in Lowe's for like three hours, right? I'm lost in Lowe's, looking for stuff I can't find, not remembering stuff I should have written down. And this guy finally comes up and says, I know who you are. Right? And I got to think, well, what was I doing for the last hour? Was I frustrated? I looked angry? Was I throwing things? You know, whatever. Because my life's a fishbowl. It is.

Last night, I mean, I go to dinner. I think I had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven people come up and interrupt my dinner. Not that I mind. Oh, there's people interrupting my dinner. But I'm eating dinner with my family, and people are observing. And so those of you that want to be pastors and Bible teachers, the more you teach the scripture, the more your life will be put on display. Accept it and embrace it. Because pastors' conferences today are all about how to try to buffer the people. Try and live many miles from your church and make sure that you have the kinds of phones and emails that can filter all this. The problem is you're going to live in a fishbowl. Just get used to it. That's the reality.



If you want a template for this, really, really quick. 1 Timothy chapter 4, which, by the way, you've got to know, one of the problems and the beefs that Paul had with Timothy was that his, quote-unquote, humility had turned to timidity, and that was sin, see? His humility, quote-unquote, had turned into some kind of timidity, and that was sin. And Paul says, step up, man, step up. You've got to be an example. Look at this. 1 Timothy chapter 4, verse number 12. And he was blaming a lot of things like, well, who am I? I'm young and this and all that. He says, no, because we already know he wasn't so young in this that he wasn't qualified to be a pastor. And Paul says, don't let anybody look down on you because you were young. And I hate to blow it for your teenagers. This is not a verse about being a teenager and kind of being an upstanding teenager. This is about being a pastor.

And in a church, stop it with this, well, don't look at me, and who am I? And I don't really know. No, no, no. You need to set an example for the believers in speech. How do you talk? How do you talk when things are hard? How do you talk about people? How do you respond to issues of difficulty in life? What do your priorities look like? How do you prioritize your relationship with your wife or your kids? How about money? Faith and how you trust God. How about when things are dark, when things don't go your way? When you have trials or health crises, how do you handle that? What does your trust in God look like? And impurity, how do you avoid temptation? Well, we know you're not perfect, but how is it that you battle these problems in your life?

And the Bible says that you need to step up. You're going to teach the Bible. You're going to have to be an example in these things. You have to step up and be an example. Do you have to be perfect to be a pastor? Absolutely not. There are no perfect pastors. The apostles weren't perfect, and they readily admitted it, but they had to serve as a template for the congregation. And the Bible is clear. It is a godly thing for you to say, what would my pastors do right now? I'm hit with an issue at work. What do I do? What would the pastor do? What would the pastor do in this situation? That is a good and godly thing to affirm in your thinking. It's not ungodly. You need to thoughtfully, not blindly, but thoughtfully follow your leader's example. Verse 7 of Hebrews chapter 13.

Now, if you think verse 7 was uncomfortable, here comes verse 17. Are you ready for this one? All right, you know, role models, I'm not real big on that, but okay, I guess I should have a Christian role. Fine, the pastors who preach, okay, great. Now we'll get Jim Jones on you. Are you ready for Jim Jones? Verse 17. Kool-Aid, here it comes. Obey your leaders. Submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them. So their work will be a joy and not a burden. For that would be of no advantage to you. Obey, obey, submit, submit. Right?

Now, I know a lot of people, oh, no. You're not going to do that. I understand the reluctance here. And the Scripture knows there are limits to this. This is not blind, mindless allegiance to doing whatever people say who hold the Bible and call themselves pastors. Okay? There are limits. And so we need to affirm that up front before we can ever even wrestle with what this means for us. We need to know the biblical limits. Because from the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament, all the way through the book of Revelation, the warning is watch out for false teachers. Is that not a theme in the Bible? Watch out for false teachers. They'll come in among you like wolves, but they're dressed in sheep's clothing. But look out for them. You have to look closely and see if you can tell who they really are.



Paul even says to the Ephesian leaders, they're even going to come from among your own number. Watch out, be careful. You gotta filter, you gotta know who to listen to. So just because someone stands up and says, hey I'm a pastor, listen to me, obey obey obey obey, submit, that's ridiculous. You've got to know when and who. That's why, by the way, choosing your church and your pastors is such an important moral decision in your life. Do you understand that? There's nothing more important than that when it comes to your spiritual growth because you're called to submit to the authority and obey your leaders and the choice that you make and who your spiritual leaders are is critically important. You've got to make that decision very carefully.

But in Scripture, it's clear, watch out, not everybody who calls themselves a pastor do you need to obey. As a matter of fact, look at this passage with me in Titus, Titus chapter 1. Now, we could go all over the Bible. Whole books are given to the 2nd Peter, Jude, big themes in Titus and 1st Timothy. But the issue here, I think, is stated so clearly. We need to use this passage to kind of crystallize all of the New Testament teaching on this, and the words here are helpful.

Before we talk about what it means to obey my Bible teachers and follow their examples to the place of obedience, then I need to know the limits. I understand when it's right and when it's wrong. Attitude is a big part of this. Look at verse number 10, and this is a description of these false teachers. Verse 10, Titus 1.10, there are many rebellious people, and you'll find that. They're rebelling against God and His Word, but they're up there talking. They're mere talkers. And one thing you find, if you look deeply enough, is that they're deceivers. They don't tell the truth. There are many rebellious people, mere talkers, deceivers, especially among the circumcision group. And in their historical setting, the problem was this group of what Paul, or we sometimes call the Judaizers, those old translations call it that, who wanted to get people to compromise this clear, clean, biblical, new covenant position to kind of embrace the rituals and the outside forms of old Judaism, and they were trying to get everybody to compromise. And they're constantly pointed out in Scripture, if you look carefully, that they're deceptive and hypocritical liars. That's what they're called in the Bible.

And he says, watch out for those, because they're in that group, constantly trying to pull you away from the purity of the gospel. And he says about this, he doesn't say blindly obey them, because they got a Bible in their hand, and they claim to be pastors. He says, they must be silenced. That's his prayer for those people. Shut them up, because they're ruining whole households. By, now underscore this, teaching things they ought not to teach. You do remember that the assumption in Hebrews 13 is that the teachers he's addressing, or presenting to the congregation, are good teachers, biblical teachers, teachers with integrity. And he says, here, there are people that teach things they ought not to teach. And for the sake of dishonest gain, because you look under the surface in false teachers, and you usually find some twisted self-motivated interests.

Verse 12. Even as one of their own prophets has said, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, and lazy gluttons. And that was a statement probably enlisted by the false teachers because they're always bad-mouthing everybody else. But Paul says to Titus, hey, you know what? It's true in this case. Therefore, rebuke them. They're the ones that are like that, not telling the truth. Rebuke them sharply so that hopefully they'll be sound in the faith. They'll repent and pay no attention, and will pay no attention to Jewish myths, or underline this phrase, or the commands of those who reject the truth.



That's a mouthful, because what it's assuming and implying is that people are standing up in the authority of a position of leadership, telling people what to do. They were commanding people what to do. And Timothy says, you know what? They shouldn't be obeyed if they deny the truth. They shouldn't be obeyed if they're rejecting the truth. So this is not some kind of open-ended, mindless droning of, I just got to obey the pastor, whatever the pastor says. But you do need to choose your pastors wisely. And you need to recognize that when you make that choice to say, this will be my church and those will be my pastors, that's a moral choice that you make. Because we're assuming that you're choosing people whose lives are integrous enough for you to say, hey, he's got a golf swing I'd like to copy. Or he gets out of the rough in a way that I'd like to get out of the rough in my life. And you're saying, I understand as a good Berea in Acts 17, that when he speaks about the word of God, it checks out. I can see that he's speaking the truth, not rejecting the truth.

Now, once you find that, now here comes the command. Back to it, verse 17. Okay? Assuming all that's the case, against the backdrop of the warnings of the rest of the New Testament, obey your leaders and submit to their authority. Okay? Number two on your outline. Let's just codify that in this simple phrase. You need to graciously obey your leaders' directives. Okay? Graciously obey your leaders' directives. Obey them and submit to their authority. Their authority, they will give you guidance. They will give you directives. They will give you things that they want you to do. Biblical counsel, okay? And you need to, not reluctantly, not belligerently, you need to graciously comply with that. Graciously obey it because they're your pastors.

And if you're not going to obey your pastors, then find some pastors that you will obey because they're called, according to this text, to keep watch over you as men who must give an account. But you're called to graciously do what they say. Now, pastors, if they're good-hearted and teaching the truth, they're very careful about what they say that you should do. But you do get directives from them all the time. Have you noticed that? You come here, come to preaching, we open the Bible, and the preacher stands up after studying this text for a long time. He says, here's what we ought to do as a result of this passage. And you get directive after directive after directive. At least two or three a weekend, right? And the Bible says that if they are your pastors, they know how this truth intersects with the 21st century in our case, you need to do what they say. You need to follow that directive.

If you go to the church for biblical counseling, I need help, my marriage needs help, and you come in and a pastor sits you down and gives you biblical counsel, you are to take the counsel. See? If they give you direction, you're to follow the direction. It comes with the authority of the office of leader in this text, of pastor, and you need to do what they say. Again, is this mindless? Is this a drone? No. If your leaders can't be trusted, if your leaders are giving you things that aren't true, go somewhere else. See? It's a choice. It's not about the comforts of, well, I kind of like the building or really cool programs for the kids. It doesn't matter. Find a church where the leaders are doing the right thing, and then you need to obey them and submit to their authority.

And the scripture says you'll have plenty of directives. And let me just stretch this here to the place of recognizing that even the programming structure of the church is not just like filling time during the week. The things that are offered to you, even in the announcements, as a pastor gets up and says, here's what's going on at the church. And I think if you're a part of this thing, you should be a part of that. And if you're at this life stage, you should think about being a part of that. And small groups, you



know, it's important. You need to be a part of that. You need to recognize that God is granting authority to your spiritual leaders to give you directives in your life.

And again, if you say, well, now we're just so far away. This is just so Jim Jones. I can't take it. Remember the implication of the passage. It says that if you obey them, middle of verse 17, their work will be a joy, and that's another sermon, but yeah, it's much better to lead people that are leadable, right? I mean, they're compliant, and they want to do the right thing, and they take your advice and counsel, okay? But if it's a burden, in other words, you don't obey them, and they're always pounding their head against the wall and trying to lead people who don't want to go the direction they're leading, the Bible says that would be of no advantage to you.

Now, let's first of all invert that. If you do make it a joy, and you're compliant to the directives of your pastoral team, here's the deal. It will be an advantage to you. Do you see we're back to the James 1.25 principle? If you do what the pastors tell you to do, from the directives on the overhead on a weekend Bible teaching, to the directives of a pastor about small group leaders at a weeknight Bible study, or to the directives you get for your marriage in biblical counseling, you will be blessed. It will, here's how it's put, be an advantage to you. If you don't do it, it won't be an advantage to you. It is all about the blessing of God that is mediated through the directives of biblical leaders. That is what the Bible is teaching. And you and I just need to embrace that. I will be blessed if I follow the directives of my pastoral team. That's what I should do.

Invert it for just a second. Back to where it is in the text. If you don't do it, it's not an advantage. And I think there's a bit of an implied threat here, is there not? Jot this in the margin if you would. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 8. We looked at the passage last week, but I don't think we read this verse. After all the directives about how they were to conduct their lives, the punchline in that text is this, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man, but rejects God. How often do we see God taking it personally when His people don't respond to God's leaders all the time? Another one to jot down on the margin might be Numbers chapter 14. When the people grumbled against and fought Moses and Aaron in that text, the Bible says that God comes on the scene in Numbers 14 and says, how long will these people complain against me? How long will these people treat me with contempt? Do you see how personally he takes that?

Now, again, it's assuming that you're going to a church where the directives are biblical and the pastoral counsel is wise and the leaders are integrous, and that is a situation where you just need to say, you know what, I need to do it because it's going to be an advantage to me. And if I don't, it will be a detriment to me. And again, if you're thinking, well, that's just too one-sided. It's not one-sided. Look at what we just blew right over in verse 17. They keep watch over you as men. Here it comes. It should scare you, future pastors and current pastors, men who must give an account.

And then what needs to be cleaned up there is what we cleaned up in our eschatology series. When you get to heaven, you're not just going to high-five all the saints and give Jesus a great big hug and say, it's great to be here. And he's going to say, great, here's your keys to your Porsche and your palatial mansion and have a great eternity. You understand you're going to go through this thing called the Bema Seat of Christ.



And the Bible says, here's a good passage for you, James chapter 3, verse 1. Let not many of you become teachers, right? Because we who teach, it says, will incur a stricter judgment. Here's the deal. I mean, your judgment's going to be one thing. Let's just get personal. My judgment's going to be another thing altogether. My judgment is going to be much stricter than your judgment.

And I know I'm the guy throwing up imperatives for you every week and saying, do this, do this, do this, do this. And because that's my role, and because your teenager's youth pastor has that role, we are, as teachers of the Bible, going to incur a stricter judgment. Or in this case, we're going to have to give an account. You remember the Bema Seat judgment lecture we did a couple weeks ago? That will not be a day of just high-fiving everybody. That'll be a day when I have to answer for my leadership.

I have to give an account for the things that I told people to do. I have to give an account for things that I didn't let people do or neglected to tell them. The text says, I'm supposed to be watching out after the congregation entrusted to my care, and every pastor has to recognize you're going to incur a stricter judgment. You want to, on the Bema Seat judgment, have a pretty cool day, don't become a pastor. I mean, let's put it that way, right? It ain't going to be cool for us pastors.

Everybody else is going to be peeking around the corner to watch as all the pastors line up. Because on Judgment Day for the pastors, that's going to be a strict time, a rough time. So it's not a one-sided, you know, the pastor sits with his big, flowing train and his scepter and he just gets to tell everybody what to do. How sweet a job is that? That's not how it's viewed in Scripture. It's that God is going to scrutinize my life a whole lot more closely than He scrutinizes yours. That's the biblical teaching.

So graciously obey your leader's directives. Don't do it blindly. Be a good Berean, but recognize that we will give an account to God for our directives. Biblical counselors opening up a Bible, telling you what to do with your relationships, your marriage, your whatever, they will incur a stricter judgment. Pick your leaders carefully because this is the requirement for you and your church leaders.

Verse 18. Pray for us. That's what the leader who writes this book to the congregation that he's obviously intimately acquainted with and preaching to here, he says. Pray for us. Pray for us. And we're sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. I mean, we're trying to live up to the high calling of the leaders, you know, in Scripture, of a pastor. He says, and I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

Apparently there was some historical circumstance, perhaps imprisonment, perhaps some kind of death threat, I don't know what it was, but the pastor here had some particular issues, and he's saying, pray for me, because I'm facing some hard times, so you guys pray for me.

Well, in the passage so far, we have, well, you should defer to the example of your leaders, you should defer to the directives of your leaders, and thirdly, you should be deferring to the importance of your leader's life to the extent that you're saying, I am giving you more prayer time than I'm giving other people. I'm not like, yeah, bless the pastor. I am being specific. If he has needs and problems and pressures, I'm going to pray specifically for him and every other person in my life, which is probably a small list, but a list of four or five people that teach you the Word of God and lead your spiritual life. Those people you need to be praying for.



Number three on your outline, you need to be ardently praying, not imprecatory psalms, not curses on our heads. You need to be praying for your leader's good. That didn't get a laugh because maybe some of you have prayed those prayers for me. But you need to be praying for my good. That's what He's asking for here.

And here's the deal. What I'm saying to you is that I need prayer. Let's invert it this way. I need prayer more than the next guy. Some of you are going, I probably do. No, I do. I need prayer more than the next guy. I need prayer more than most people in this room because the Scripture says the job that I'm doing is vulnerable to a kind of attack and opposition and pressure and labor that most people's lives aren't subjected to. There is a kind of difficulty about this job.

And I know here, I'm feeling like 2 Corinthians at this point. Here's the very uncomfortable part of the sermon. In 2 Corinthians, Paul has to defend, you know, kind of show people what his life's all about and his ministry. And he says, I'm insane to say this. I know this is crazy. And I'm out of my mind to tell you this. I feel the same exact way. And he's blowing his own horn now. I'm not doing that. I'm just telling you, you need to know that the ministry is hard.

So let's put it in biblical terms. 2 Timothy 2. Paul gives examples of what it is to be a pastor. He paints word pictures and analogies for us that may help you understand that there's something about being a Bible teacher and a leader in a church that brings with it a certain kind of opposition and pressure that is unique to the Christian life. You won't find it anywhere else in the Christian life. It is uniquely difficult.

2 Timothy 2, verse number 1. You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And that is the issue. He has to be strong. Be strong. Things you've heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men. Be qualified to teach others also.

Now, here's the deal. You've got to be strong because you're going to have to, verse 3, endure hardship with us like a good soldier. Because Paul, of course, was a pastor as well. And you're going to have to do it like a soldier. The first picture he paints is the ministry is like being a soldier of Christ Jesus.

Now, I know the analogies often in relationships with each other are familial analogies, right? Brothers and sisters, right? But when it comes to church leadership, notice that the analogies aren't Papa, right? It's not Dad. As a matter of fact, the analogies become military when you shift to leadership in the church. Now, all of a sudden, it's like warfare. That's the picture in Scripture, that you stand in a place that requires a certain kind of endurance of hardship that is like going to battle. That's what it's like. And the Bible equates the ministry to engaging in battle.

And the picture is one that carries with it not only, in verse number 3, hardship, but look at verse number 4, a sacrifice of civilian life. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs. Why? Because he's passionate about, full-time about, pleasing his commanding officer.

Now, you got to understand this. And again, it's not a pity party. It's not a sob story. I'm not looking for sympathy. But I don't have a life like you do. It's completely different. It is completely different.



My life doesn't reflect the normal Orange County life that you have. And I'm not saying you got a plush life. I'm just saying the way you go about your life is different than the way I have to go about my life because of my role as a pastor and a Bible teacher. It is different. There's a different kind of pressure. There's a different kind of opposition. There's a different set of enemies. There's a different kind of stress upon that that does not happen in the normal Christian life.

The next verse points out some other aspects of this. It's like an athlete, rather, verse number 5. He competes as an athlete. If anyone does, he can't get the crown unless he competes according to the, here's a line you can underline, the rules.

Here's the thing about the ministry. You have to be careful about the rules. And let's put it this way. The scrutiny that I will receive about the way I live my life is going to be different than the way you live your life, not only in heaven at the Bema Seat judgment, but in this life now. You do understand, you have freedoms to do things as a Christian I could never get away with. You understand that, right? You should just know that.

Sympathize with just a second and think and extrapolate. My life has to be led differently than yours. I can't, in many cases—we've been through things like this—I can't drive what you drive. I can't live like you live. I can't vacation in some places like you would be able to. I can't ingest or entertain myself with some things that you might even have the license to do it. I can't. The rules as a pastor are different. And anybody who's done it can tell you that the rules are just different. Part of it is the fishbowl.

Thirdly, the farmer—the hardworking farmer. Now, again, in the pastoral epistle, particularly in 2 Timothy, he's concerned about making sure that this lead pastor, Timothy, takes care of the rest of the pastors. So he's going to emphasize he should be the first to receive a share of the crops. So he's going to look at the benefit there. But the attachment to the word farmer helps us: hardworking. The issue for the pastor should be that that is a hardworking job. And it's a demanding job. And it certainly is.

And again, as Paul said, I'm insane to tell you this. But you need to know because a lot of people view the ministry much differently than the reality. Because people say, well, I had a great job. Preach on Sunday. Golf all the rest of the week. What a great job. Yeah, I got to get a job like that, right? Good work if you can get it. What are you talking about? You have any clue what the pastor's life is like? Really, seriously?

Not to mention I can't eat a meal right without, you know, hobnobbing and talking, which is fine, I love it. Come up and say hi to me when I'm eating a meal. But the bottom line is my work schedule, just to run a church of moderate size here, is so much work. You understand that? And it's not because we're understaffed or anything like that. All of our team has to do this.

And again, I'm insane to tell you this. Let me give you a little bit of my week schedule. Are you ready? This is an average week. This is without crises or funerals or weddings or retreats on the docket. Thursday, Friday, Saturday are all 12-hour days for me. That's an average. Sometimes they're 15-hour days. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, every time. I know you're going to think, well, he's a slow worker. He can't get things done. The demand of the work.



I stand on stage and teach anywhere from four to six hours a week, literally just the time of talking on stage, which takes a little prep. I know it looks so simple. He's just yakking on the stage. But the bottom line is that takes a lot of work. There's the administration. I do that Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Sunday, I work eight hours, okay? Eight hours on average on Sunday. I work eight hours on Wednesday, admin day, meetings day, right? And I work on Tuesdays, any given Tuesday, about four to seven hours on Tuesday. That's average. Occasionally, I get a Tuesday off. Monday's the only day off I get a week, on an average week, where I collapse at home, and I'm thinking about a hyperbolic, you know, Michael Jackson chamber or something to get refreshed in, but it's an exhausting day.

And guess what? My house is like yours too, and the toilet doesn't work, and things need to be hung, and it's honey-do day for me. That's my Saturday—Monday. That's the only day I get, okay?

Well, you gotta work less. You know what? If I didn't work as much as I did, or our children's director doesn't work as much as she does, or our youth pastors don't work as much as they do—and they're not far behind me; in some weeks they might exceed my hours—but add them up. What's that, 60 to 65 hours a week? That's an average week. Throw in a funeral, throw in a crisis, throw in some fight, throw in some staff issue, and all of a sudden that's a 70-hour week. That's an average week for me, okay?

Now, Paul said, I'm absurd to tell you this. I'm not trying to blow my own horn. I'm just saying you need to understand the ministry is difficult. It is hard. I've got more enemies than you do. I guarantee it. Unless you're in organized crime or something. I've got more enemies than you do. I have more people that talk about me tonight at dinner and hate me than anybody in this room. I'm sure of it. I have more people—whatever. Read my mail. There's so many things I can tell you.

And everybody, to the extent that they work in the ministry here, open up a Bible and stand up as an example and try to preach this book, they encounter the same kind of thing. It's like being a soldier. It's like being an athlete. It's like being a farmer. It's hard. It's scrutiny. It's pain and opposition. So you need to pray for us. That's exactly what he calls them to do, right? Pray ardently for your leaders.

Let me give you six things to pray for real quick, okay? If this is true—and I'm telling you it is, I'm not lying to you—this is hard, difficult. I can give my life for the church. I can love families and love people, and all it takes is one sermon or one illustration for them to turn their back and say, we don't like you anymore. I mean, that's normal. Talk about the kind of personal pain involved in this work. It's unlike anything else I know.

Five, six things to pray for. If this is all true, you need to pray for my protection. Not just mine, but everybody who is a leader who brings you the Word of God in your life. Pray for their protection. Pray that God would protect them. Satan wants to take us out. He assigns to us to take our lives down. That's the truth of it. We have opponents. We have enemies. We have people that would want nothing more than to gloat over our failure. Okay? Pray for our protection.

Secondly—and the Scripture says that, by the way—here's a passage you might want to write down next to that one. 1 Corinthians chapter 16, verse 9. Wide open door of effective ministry—there are



many who oppose me. And I think that's the principle. The wider the door, the more effective the ministry, the more opposition you face.

Secondly, pray for our attitude. We need a good attitude in this. It is hard. Jot this one down: 2 Corinthians chapter 1. 2 Corinthians 1, verse number 8. It says that Paul, in the course of his ministry, despaired of even life. How transparent should I get right now? You need to know, I don't know any pastor who gives himself for the work of the church that doesn't, at one time or another, think it's not worth living anymore. And it's—and oh, you guys—you need a Xanax, I need therapy or something.

From the beginning—look at the beginning in Scripture—the leaders that God raises up to speak for Him, the people that He calls to leadership, from Elijah straight on down the row, people are constantly despairing of life. Paul says he's suicidal. He doesn't even know he can go on. I wanted to die. I know very few professions where people feel like that as often as they do in the pastorate.

Pray for our attitude. Pray that we don't get discouraged. Pray that we don't get depressed. Pray that we don't get frustrated. I mean, we're fighting that all the time in this work.

2 Timothy 4—Paul, at the end of his life, it's the last book he ever wrote in his ministry—he looks back and he says, I praise God that the Lord stood by my side and gave me strength.

Third thing, pray for our strength. Pray that we would be strong in our minds, in our marriages, in our lives. We need strength from God. We wake up in the mornings and we say, can we do this another day? And it's not just about discouragement. Some days, God, I'd like to do it, but we need the strength to do it. Because the need and the demand of ministry goes on all the time.

I think of Ty this morning. Ty has thrown up about, I don't know, 10 times in the last 24 hours, and we're pushing him out here. Oh, just give him the day off. We wouldn't be having church this morning in a normal way. I'd be playing the banjo if Ty weren't here. Do you understand leaders in this church are constantly needing the strength of God to manage? I wonder why he looks so pale this morning. The guy's sick, and it happens a lot for all of us. We need strength to carry on.

Fourthly, 2 Timothy 2, verses 24 and 25. I think of this verse literally every single week. 2 Timothy 2, verses 24 and 25 says, the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome. Instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him, he must gently instruct in the hope that God would grant them repentance and lead them to the knowledge of the truth.

I put it this way: tact. We need tact and diplomacy. I mean, think about my job for a minute. I speak for a living. I study and speak, right? And how often I have this situation where I'm just thinking of 18 different ways to say something that would just wrestle you to the mat right now, right? I mean, and I need the muzzle of the Lord on my mouth to be careful. Diplomacy, restraint, care, not resentful. Be gentle, be kind, don't be quarrelsome. Boy, I can argue. I got to make sure that I'm careful. I need tact. Every single pastor that you know who stands up to lead God's people needs a great deal of restraint or tact in their speech.



Our text in verse 18, it says, pray for us. We're sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. We're not much good to you if we're not obedient. So can you jot that down? We need to be obedient to the Lord. We're no good if we're a bunch of hypocritical liars. We need integrity. We need obedience. We need holiness in our life. Pray for our lives. Pray for our minds. Pray for our marriages. Pray for our habits and our attitudes. We've got to be obedient to the Lord.

And lastly, Mark 6—I think of this one all the time as well—verse 31. Ministry was hard even in the first century, and Jesus saw the people coming and going, and the disciples were spent. And here was Jesus' response. He says, come away with me by yourself to a quiet place and get some rest. I put it this way: refreshment. We all need refreshment in this work. I mean, the crises don't stop. People keep dying. People keep needing to be married. There's all the problems and issues and challenges of administration and programming and staffing and a volunteer organization. We need refreshment. We gotta have those times off. Even if it's just that respite to have a day or two off, to turn it into a Monday and a Tuesday and a Wednesday, and get away to a quiet place and get refreshment. Everybody needs that. The pressure on your youth pastors, the pressure on your counseling pastor, the pressure on your senior pastor—we need refreshment.

Now, he was praying that he could get restored to them. I just took you to the broader principles. And I know it's a lot of things, and I'm thinking, how can you ever remember those? And I guess I can't imagine that you would unless I came up with some, like, creative acronym or something. You get that? Protection, attitude, strength, tact, obedience, refreshment. Get it now? Pray for your pastors. When you think of your pastor, I want you to pray these six things for us. We need it.

In short, your prayers for our good, I trust, are motivated by the principle in 1 Thessalonians 5, which says you should love us. Again, I'm the neighbor coming over—hey, just remember to love me. It feels weird, but it's the truth. The Bible says you got to love your pastors. It puts it this way, verse 12: we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. That may be hard to do. It says hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

Here's a risky one. Let me just tack this one on the end. Galatians 6:6. And I know, again, this is the height of being accused of self-serving. I'm not looking to get on your Christmas list, okay? But here's the deal. Maybe you've gone in for biblical counseling with our biblical counselor here on staff, okay? When God helps you through that—even if it's a dead end, but you got biblical instruction—here's what Galatians 6:6 says. It says anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

Can you do something tangible, nice, share the blessing of your life with our counseling pastor? If your teens now have been turned on to following Jesus Christ, and you see those guys laboring their weeknights, early mornings, long weekends, where they're not off playing with their families on Saturdays, they're studying the word of God and preparing for services on the weekend, can you put them on your Christmas list and give them a... When you are blessed of God, one of the first people you think of is who in my life, my kids' life, my children's director, whoever it might be—how can I bless them with the blessing of my life? Get specific and share those things.



When someone in your Bible study, you watch them preach the word of God on a women's Bible study this week, and they share with you the labor of their study, and it makes a difference in your life, make sure they're on your Christmas list. Do something. Don't wait for Christmas for this kind of stuff. Share with them something tangible. Express the goodness that God has blessed you with to them. Extend it to them.

Again, we just went all out. It was weird to start with, but it's about the Word of God, isn't it? I mean, it's not about me here. I understand that I'll be blessed if you do what this passage says. I get it. I know I will, but you'll be blessed too. And more than that, let's just say this: God will be honored because the church of Jesus Christ is doing what He told us to do. That would be a good thing. I want God to look down from heaven and say, it's happening properly as it should.

But understand this too, it's not just about us. The great thing about what God is doing through this church is these messages are streamed on the internet. This message is broadcast on television. It goes out to over 300 radio stations. And for the sake of the hundreds, if not thousands of pastors that are represented by people that will hear this message—most of them laboring in out-of-the-way places—they're overworked and underpaid and underappreciated. May the word of the Lord that goes out from the pulpit this morning maybe be a blessing to thousands of pastors out there. Wouldn't that be good news? That because we sat here and preached the word of God, that maybe people across the country would be blessed?

So with that in mind, let's commit our application and all those who hear this message to the Lord. Pray with me, please.

God, that was weird. Awkward, but I know it was right. I know it's important for us to understand what your word has to say, to recognize that pastors should be examples to us in the real world of how to live the Christian life. I understand also that the word of God is clear that people who have chosen a church and chosen their church leaders should obey them and submit to their authority.

And God, also, I recognize that as we see so often at the end of these New Testament epistles, it is so important that congregants pray for their pastors. And I pray that this congregation would not only pray for me and others in the church that preach the word of God to them, but as I said just a second ago, I pray that the kinds of pastors that are laboring and difficult—some are despairing even of life—because people hear this sermon, that they would be encouraged, that gifts would come to them, that encouragement would come to them, that the lie of the enemy that is trying to take pastors down and discourage them would not infiltrate the ears of those who hear this sermon.

Lies like we need to keep our pastor humble, we need to keep our pastor poor, relying on God—all the nonsense that goes out there that does nothing but play right into the hands of demons so that pastors will be discouraged, frustrated, underappreciated, under loved, underpaid. God, I pray that wouldn't happen. Please, because of this text that is often avoided by pastors because they're afraid it'll be seen as self-serving, I pray that the proclamation of this text would make a difference in many people's lives.



And God, ultimately, I know as we started this morning, it'll be a blessing if we just do what your word says. It may feel like we're taking a risk in loving someone we're not even sure we know that well or obeying someone that we're not intimately acquainted with. But I pray, God, as Bereans, as we give our allegiance and our commitment to a congregation, that we would recognize the great joy that comes from following the template of your word.

We want to be faithful to do that, not just here, but everyone who hears this sermon. I pray that would be a reality for us. So God, we thank you for this clear reminder, awkward though it was. I pray it would be a kind of reminder that would linger in our minds and make a difference for many people. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.