

Well, we finally made it to the end of this letter to the Hebrews. And what a powerful and instructive letter this has been to a bunch of non-Hebrew believers, because it **1)** connected so much of what occurred in the Old Covenant to the New, **2)** revealed types and shadows cast in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New, **3)** gave great explanation of why the Law is no longer a viable option for those who want to get right with God (and actually never really was- because it was always about faith), and **4)** revealed the perpetual ministry of Jesus as our Great High Priest forever ([Heb. 2:17](#), [3:1](#), [5:5-10](#), [6:20](#), [7:26-28](#), [8:1](#), [9:11](#), & [10:21](#)). And regardless of if you are a Jewish or gentile follower of Jesus, these are universal to us all. So with that, let's jump in.

17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Last week we spoke about the term, “those who rule over you” as it occurs three times in this chapter ([verse 7](#), [17](#), [24](#)). There we noted this is far more accurately translated (as it is in the NASB, the ESV, and the NIV), **those who led or lead you**. Which takes away a misinterpretation that pastors and church leaders are somehow given authority by God to be unapproachable or questioned, severing as dictators over the lives of individual believers.

- This really is an important matter to address. So even though this topic was not what the original intent of this statement was about, because some have used this verse (and others) to abuse the church, we do need to clean this up before going any further. And so last week I gave you five sections of the bible to read through in advance if you wanted to get a jump start on this topic ([Mark 10:42-45](#), [Luke 22:25-26](#), [2 Cor. 1:24](#), [1 Pet. 5:1-4](#), [Rev. 2:15-16](#)).
- Let me just share a few of these in case this is new territory for you. **1)** [Mark 10:42-45](#) “*But Jesus called them (the disciples) to Himself and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (see also [Phil. 2:5-7](#)).”*” **2)** In [2 Cor. 1:24](#) Paul explains “*Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.*” And now **3)** Peter says ([1 Pet. 5:2-4](#)) “*Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*”
- Now if you can come away from verses such as these and believe the elders or pastors of the church are to be unapproachable dictators who get involved in affairs of your life which the bible does not specifically speak about, you have been duped. As a matter of fact, when speaking of Jesus in [Rev. 2:15-16](#) we are told Jesus *hates... the doctrine of the Nicolaitans*, this comes from two words meaning heavy laity. Or what we might rightly identify as heavy-handed leadership. So this isn't a minor thing to Him.

Now that we have that cleared up, we come to two new pieces added to this equation today, which are “*obey*” and “*be submissive*”.

- When you look up a Greek or Hebrew word you also have to look up the way it is used. For example, the word *obey* here is in the present middle/passive imperative (there will not be a test 😊). I'm sharing that with you who are bible study geeks, and even those who are not, because it causes the translation of this word to more accurately be “be persuaded”, “be convinced”, or “trust”. That is also why we try to share other bible verses to back up what we are teaching. But it's your job to dig into the word of God and to be persuaded and convinced that what we are saying to you, you can trust.

- And since we are at it, the phrase *be submissive* is a little closer in rendering. It can also be translated “yield” or “give way”. And if you have done your due diligence to know your bible (and look up the pieces you have quite gotten down yet), then you will realize you are not really being submissive to the pastor as much as you are to the word of God. Pastor **Chuck Smith** said it this way “A teacher should teach us to submit to God, not to Himself”.
- So what is this saying then? Well, **1** if you have someone telling you, you have to get their permission as a spiritual leader, to buy a car, or take a new job, or move to Hawaii, that’s not theirs to determine. It might be good counsel, and we are told to get good counsel from others. **2** But if you want to start a ministry in the church, raise funds through the church for something you’re into, pass out flyers to something on the info table, introduce a new doctrine, or a myriad of other things that affect others or potentially compromise someone’s walk, this is where you are to yield or give way without causing grief to the pastor or stirring conflict among the church. And if the pastor has to address an issue with yourself or others in the church, remember that he is responsible before God for doing so. He will have to give an account for how he did or didn’t watch over your soul. And here He does give a warning that those who do give the pastor a hard time will find it unprofitable for them to do so. I have no idea how that might manifest, but those are God’s words, not mine.

Folks, there is no greater joy for a pastor than to see the church family grow in maturity and unity. And there are few things that grieve them more than division, dissention, and the damage they bring. But also, do know that it is God who ordained leadership in the church bodies ([Acts 14:23](#), [Titus 1:5](#), [Acts 20:17](#) & [28](#)). And in every functioning institution you will find a form of leadership. By necessity it must function this way.

- And as a pastor I can tell you some of the greatest challenges I have had have come from members once in the church. I don’t know who originally said this, but it’s true that sheep have teeth and can bite hard. So both sides can harm one another, to the profit of no one.
- If the pastor loves and cares for the church ([Acts 20:28](#), [1 Thes. 2:7-8](#), [Phil. 1:7-8](#)), and the church respect and honor the pastor ([1 Thes. 5:12-13](#)), then everyone wins and God is glorified.

¹⁸ Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.

¹⁹ But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

We are now going to find a few great ways to close a letter, or for that matter, any conversation of substance. And we begin here with a request for prayer. But let’s not miss that the first piece is not actually the thing he is going to request prayer for, **but rather something he does not need prayer for because he knows it is already supplied through his faith in Jesus**. And that is *a good conscience*.

- He covered this thoroughly in [9:9](#), [9:14](#), [10:2](#), and [10:22](#) (you can go to the website and get the notes or listen to those teachings there if you missed them or want to review). The point was that the Law, or any other way of trying to earn your way into heaven, **could never cleanse the conscience** of the things we have done. Sure, you can do some good works. And maybe even amass numerous and impressive good works. But they cannot blot out your record of wrongs. Bet when you receive what Jesus has done for you in paying your sin debt in full upon the cross ([Col. 2:13-14](#), [1 Pet. 1:18-19](#)), you become a new creation ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)). The past is not just reconciled, it is done away with in your account before God.
- Therefore, the author (and those believers in Jesus who were with him) didn’t have to pray for a good conscience, because they were confident that what Jesus had done for them had already established this reality in their lives permanently. Therefore, I can confidently say this is what they are telling the readers they do not need prayer for. That prayer had once and forever been answered!

- And in case you have forgotten that Hebrews also dealt with the reality that **when you received Jesus, your sins past, present, and future were nailed to that cross also** (Heb. 9:11-10:14). But he doesn't end there, noting (as we all should) that just because Jesus has covered or sin past, present, and future, doesn't mean we are to go on living in sin, as if we have a license to do so (Rom. 6:1-2). Stating that for them they *desired to live honorably in all things*. And in Matt. 5:6 Jesus promised us that "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*" So, it's this second part they are requesting pray for. And I dare say we all need that.

The question is, are you as confident as they were in saying you have no need for that prayer concerning your conscience anymore? If not, why not? Is it because you haven't received Jesus yet, or because you haven't believed the reality of His finished work yet? Either way, you can choose to receive it today and put an end to the exhausting pattern of wrestling with a past that has already been dealt with once and for all. So what are you going to choose?

Additionally, he requests prayer that they could be restored in their face-to-face fellowship sooner rather than later. Which brings up the question as to what was keeping them apart. This letter does not directly disclose the reason, but many believe the author is Paul (as I do) and the cause was imprisonment. And in [verse 23](#) it appears Timothy is also likely being released from some type of incarceration for his faith. But again, we cannot be dogmatic here. What we can say is this sure echoes the call for love of the brothers in [verse 1](#).

I have often said I don't trust anyone who doesn't like my dog. But I say that kind of jokingly (but not completely 😊). I'm a little suspicious of someone who could not love such a cute animal that loves them, in most cases without ever having met them before. But in all seriousness, there is a real biblical problem when someone says they love Jesus but not the church. As a matter of fact, John would say "*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death* (1 John 3:14)". Do you love the brothers and sisters in the faith? Even those you have never met. If so, you are in a good place. But if not, then you are not. It's that simple.

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

As you might have caught, this is a benediction (or "a blessing"). And it gives a strong summary of a few more of the key pieces this letter brought forward. Which is always a great way to conclude any study in the bible. So let's quickly dig those pieces out a little for our own remembrance.

- First, we must remember the root problem being addressed in this letter to do so. These Jewish Christians were thinking of retreating from their faith in Jesus, believing it might somehow restore some of the peace they had with others who had not come to Jesus. And here they are reminded that only being with *the God of peace*, through faith in Jesus, could bring real *peace*! And so, he reminds them of a few **contrasting pieces between works of the Law and the grace of God**.
- **1)** No animal sacrificed could cleanse sin forever, but after Jesus was sacrificed, He was resurrected from the dead, never needing to be sacrificed again. **2)** The Old Covenant had human priests who were also as fallible as the congregations. But when Jesus ascended, He took the place of being our perpetual High priest and *Shepherd* forever, **3)** and because His blood created an *everlasting* (and unconditional) *covenant* (meaning it was all completed on His side only. So our deficiencies do not revoke it), we don't have to wait for something more to save us.

- And all of this leads to another piece covered in this letter, and that is it's the Holy Spirit of God in His people that is bring about our transformation ([Phil. 2:13](#), [Ezek. 36:26-27](#)). It is Him working in you to *make you complete in every good work to do His will* (see also [Phil. 1:6](#)). The Old Covenant could not transform the people ([Heb. 10:1-4](#)). It could reveal their inability to live a perfectly righteous life, but it gave them no real way to remedy that ([Rom. 7:10](#)). But the New Covenant came with the sending of the Holy Spirit to indwell, empower, and bring about the work of transformation and maturity, *working in you* (emphasis added) *what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.* And you can pray that blessing over me as often as you would like!

²² *And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.*
²³ *Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.* ²⁴ *Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.* ²⁵ *Grace be with you all. Amen.*

I love that the author (who I believe is Paul) states that he was written to them *in few words*. Just to be clear, to him that translates to 13 chapters, 303 verses, and in our modern translations just around 7,000 words (or 5,000 in the Greek). And with that, at the conclusion of every sermon I have decided to start saying, “and with these few words, let’s close in prayer” 😊. But like most of you, I honestly wish there was more.

- This letter covered a lot of serious business and foundational theology, *but it didn’t fail to end on a personal note*. And sometimes when there’s a lot of business to cover, I feel like this is an area I can neglect. The Holy Spirit is working on me in this. And He’s not done yet.
- But what really stands out here is *grace*. It’s been such a focal piece of this letter because there is a choice for each of us to make. Will you depend on your works or God’s *grace* to get you into heaven? It seems like a fairly simple choice to arrive at. Yet far too many have chosen works and the old proverbial scales. And no matter how they tip, that won’t get you into heaven.
- I choose *grace* and I hope you have too. If you have been with us through the teaching of this letter, it would make absolutely zero sense to choose anything but grace. Yet God has left it up to you. Choose well. *Your eternity hinges on the choice of what you will do with Jesus.*

CROSS REFERENCES

Heb 2:17 NKJV - Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Heb 3:1 NKJV - Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,

Heb 5:5–10 NKJV - (5) So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." (6) As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek"; (7) who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, (8) though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (9) And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, (10) called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"

Heb 6:20 NKJV - where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Heb 7:26–28 NKJV - (26) For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; (27) who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. (28) For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.

Heb 8:1 NKJV - Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

Heb 9:11 NKJV - But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.

Heb 10:21 NKJV - and having a High Priest over the house of God,

Heb 13:7 NKJV - Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

Heb 13:24 NKJV - Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

Luk 22:25–26 NKJV - (25) And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' (26) "But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.

Rev 2:15–16 NKJV - (15) "Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. (16) "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

Phl 2:5–7 NKJV - (5) Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, (7) but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Act 14:23 NKJV - So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Tit 1:5 NKJV - For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—

Act 20:17 NKJV - From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

Act 20:28 NKJV - "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

1Th 2:7–8 NKJV - (7) But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. (8) So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

Phl 1:7–8 NKJV - (7) just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. (8) For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

1Th 5:12–13 NKJV - (12) And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, (13) and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

Heb 9:9 NKJV - It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—

Heb 9:14 NKJV - how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Heb 10:2 NKJV - For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

Heb 10:22 NKJV - let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Col 2:13–14 NKJV - (13) And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, (14) having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

1Pe 1:18–19 NKJV - (18) knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

2Co 5:17 NKJV - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Rom 6:1–2 NKJV - (1) What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? (2) Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Heb 13:1 NKJV - Let brotherly love continue.

Phl 2:13 NKJV - for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Eze 36:26–27 NKJV - (26) "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Phl 1:6 NKJV - being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

Heb 10:1–4 NKJV - (1) For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. (2) For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. (3) But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. (4) For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

Rom 7:10 NKJV - And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.