

Covenant Membership – Week 2

Teaching: Covenant Membership & Elders

Main Text: **Hebrews 13:17**

INTRODUCTION

“All right, we are continuing our three-week study on covenant membership.”

Last week, we compared modern church membership (as it has existed over the last 50–80 years) with the biblical and historical concept of **covenant membership**. Because **God is a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God**, membership is not just about joining a church — it is about how believers **relate to one another** in covenant faithfulness.

This week:

How covenant membership relates to the first office of church leadership — the elders.

Primary verse for the night: **Hebrews 13:17**

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account...

We will reference several other passages as we go.

1. WHAT IS A BIBLICAL COVENANT?

Patrick reminded us of last week's foundation:

A **biblical covenant** is:

- A solemn, binding agreement between God and people
- Marked by God making promises
- Marked by humanity responding with faith and obedience
- Initiated, enabled, and sustained by God

“God does all the work in enabling the covenant. We respond to that in faith and obedience.”

Our response of **love** also leads to **obedience**.
Just as Jesus taught: our obedience flows from our love for God.

2. GOD IS A GOD OF ORDER

“Nothing God does is chaotic or a knee-jerk reaction.”

In creation, God created **the means to sustain everything before creating the things themselves**. Structure, function, and order are woven into every part of His design.

In the New Testament, this order appears in the concept of **koinonia** — the deep fellowship we share with God and each other.

John emphasized this in 1 John: fellowship with God is part of the assurance of salvation.

Koinonia means:

- Deep, intimate, communal participation
- Walking together as one people
- Being united with God and with one another in Christ

From this flows **Ephesians 5:21** —

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Patrick noted the human tendency to jockey for position (examples: Genesis 3, Cain and Abel, James and John asking Jesus for seats of honor). But Jesus taught His disciples:

“The Gentiles lord their authority over people... but it shall not be so among you.”

Instead:

- We serve one another
- We submit to one another
- We imitate Christ’s humility

Mutual submission is part of church life.

3. MUTUAL SUBMISSION DOES NOT REMOVE GOD-ORDAINED AUTHORITY

Patrick emphasized a needed balance:

“Koinonia does not replace nor negate submission to leadership.”

Why?

Because God designed **ordered relationships**.

A. The Trinity

Even within the Godhead:

- The Son submits to the Father
- The Spirit submits to the Son and Father
Yet they remain equal in essence and nature.

This shows **functional hierarchy within perfect unity**.

B. God Orders Other Spheres Too

- **Family**
- **Government**
- **Society**
- **And the Church**

So we submit to one another, yes — but God still ordains **leaders**, and this leadership reflects His order.

4. OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS OF COVENANT LEADERSHIP

Covenant leadership begins in the OT with Moses and Israel.

At Sinai:

- God establishes the **Sinai Covenant**
- He sets apart **Aaron and his sons** as priests
- He gives them the responsibility of spiritual leadership

In Numbers 3–4 and 8:

- God **gives the Levites as a gift** to the priests
- Their job is to assist, serve, and shoulder the workload
- Responsibilities included:
 - Setup and teardown of the tabernacle
 - Maintaining the holy space
 - Swapping the bread of the Presence
 - Keeping the lampstand lit
 - Tending incense
 - Preparing sacrifices
 - Guarding the holiness of worship

Patrick said:

“There was a lot of work that went into it.”

“The Levites were given as a gift because the work was too much for one group alone.”

This **foreshadows elders and deacons**:

- Priests → elders
- Levites → deacons

Both roles serve the covenant community.

5. NEW TESTAMENT CONTINUITY

Jesus establishes the **new covenant in His blood** (Luke 22:20), a covenant that is:

- Completed
- Sufficient
- Effective
- Accepted by God

Patrick stressed that Christ's whole obedient life mattered, not only His death.

At Pentecost (Acts 2):

- The Spirit comes
- The church is born
- Thousands believe
- Teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer characterize church life

God remains consistent:

He ordains ongoing ordered leadership — elders and deacons.

Elders parallel priests in spiritual oversight.

Deacons parallel Levites in service and support.

6. UNDERSTANDING HEBREWS 13:17

Patrick focused on **three key words**:

A. OBEY

The Greek conveys:

- Listen to
- Yield to
- Comply with
- Pay attention

Patrick said:

“Obedience begins with listening. You can’t follow if you don’t listen.”

“Most problems between members and elders come from simple miscommunication.”

B. SUBMIT

The Greek here means:

- A **willing inward readiness** to defer
- Submission when **godly authority** is exercised

- Not blind obedience
- A posture rooted in **trust**

Key point:

“The only time elders exercise true authority is when they stand on the Word of God.”

Elders derive zero authority from personal opinion — only from Scripture.

He also noted this pairing (“obey and submit”) appears **only here** in the entire Bible.

Patrick openly shared past moments where he had to correct his own teaching, showing humility and accountability.

He emphasized:

- Disagreement is not rebellion
- Members should come and discuss concerns
- Both sides submit to the Word

And this reminder:

“You are not the ones who will give an account for the teaching and decisions. The elders will.”

This is meant to bring comfort and perspective.

C. KEEPING WATCH

This phrase describes:

- A watchman on a city wall
- Active, alert, disciplined attentiveness
- Guarding against spiritual danger
- Staying mentally, spiritually, and emotionally sharp

Elders must:

- Stay ahead in study
- Recognize error

- Sense danger
- Protect doctrine
- Care for souls

Patrick connected this to Acts 6 — elders must devote themselves to **prayer and the Word**, while deacons help carry the practical load.

He summarized:

“The elders are the first line of defense for the church.”

7. THE ELDER COVENANT

Patrick read the covenant elders make each year.

Key commitments include:

- Living under the authority of the Word
- Meeting and continuing to meet biblical qualifications
- Preaching, teaching, and leading according to Scripture
- Encouraging sanctification
- Shepherding with love
- Submitting to examination
- Stepping down if qualifications are not met

He clarified:

“Qualifications are not a one-time thing. They must be continually met.”

8. Concluding the Elder Covenant Section

After reading through the Elder Covenant, Patrick concluded:

“This is the covenant the elders will make and renew every year with the church body. It communicates covenant responsibilities: our responsibility to you, your responsibility to

us. It reflects what we see in Hebrews 13:17 — it's not about anyone advancing themselves, but about seeking God's glory and your good."

Patrick emphasized again:

- Elders exist to **build up and equip**
- Elders guard the church from **apostasy**
- Elders operate in **mutual submission, humility, and love**
- The structure serves **God's glory and the good of His people**

Closing Prayer

Patrick asked if anyone wanted to dismiss in prayer.

Ron volunteered and prayed:

"Father, thank You for this time together tonight. Thank You that You are a God of order and that You've established the church with that order in mind. Help us to be obedient to that and always remember that it is Jesus who is in charge and that You've given us Your Word. Help us to be obedient to all of it. We pray for the names mentioned tonight, for those dealing with sickness or hardship — draw them closer to You. Help us to leave this place loving one another like Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen."