

The text:

- *Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. (Hebrews 13:17)*

The following elements of this text are discussed separately:

- Have confidence
- your leaders
- submit (to their authority),
- because they keep watch over you,
- as those who must give an account.
- Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

Have confidence:

This appears to be a clear instruction, but it is often interpreted incorrectly.

'Have confidence' is the translation of the verb **'peitho'**, from which the noun **'pistis'** is derived, which is generally translated as **'faith'**.

The OLB translates **'peitho'** as:

- to persuade, i.e. to induce one by words to believe
- to make friends of, to win one's favour, gain one's good will, or to seek to win one
- be persuaded
- to believe
- to listen to, obey, yield to, comply with
- trust, have confidence, be confident

'Peitho' appears in 53 verses of the Bible.

A few examples:

- *Pray for us. We **are sure** that we have a clear conscience, ... (Hebrews 13:18 !!!)*
- *But the chief priests and the elders **persuaded** the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. (Matthew 27:20)*
- *He **trusts** in God. Let God rescue him now ... (Matthew 27:43)*
- *To some who were **confident** of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable ... (Luke 18:9)*
- *His speech **persuaded** them ... (Acts 5:40)*
- *He (Herod) had been quarrelling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After **securing the support** of Blastus ... (Acts 12:20)*
- *Some of the Jews were **persuaded** and joined Paul and Silas ... (Acts 17:4)*

In the 53 verses in which this word appears, **'peitho'** is usually translated as:

- to trust, to trust someone
- to persuade, to allow oneself to be persuaded
- to be confident

According to the explanation in the OLB, **'peitho'** is conjugated in the present tense in Hebrews 13:17, as a **'medium'** and in the imperative mood.

The medium indicates that the subject applies the act **to himself** (repetitive act) or in his own interest, as, for example, the verb 'to wash' is conjugated as: "The boy **washes himself**".

Alternative translation of the text:

In this verse of the Bible **'have confidence'** would be better translated as:

- *Entrust yourselves to ...*
- *Be persuaded ...*
- *Be convinced ...*

Your leaders:

In the study 'Leaders'¹ it is explained that what is meant by this are the **leaders** in the church, or, more generally, **'those who are held in honour'**.

Alternative translation of the text:

- *Entrust yourselves to the leaders in the church ...*
- *Entrust yourselves to those who are honoured in the church ...*

Submit to their authority:

To their authority does not appear in the Greek text. Those words were added to the original text in order to render the meaning more comprehensible.

In the text we are discussing here there is a strong possibility that by adding **to their authority** to the text, the interpretation of the text is directed in a certain direction and would therefore be better omitted.

'Submit' reminds us of the Bible text:

- **Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.** (James 4:7)

'Submit' here is the translation of **'hupotasso'**, which is used in 32 verses of the Bible, when submission to authority that is placed higher is what is meant.

Nevertheless, the leaders in the church, those who are held in honour, do not exercise any authority because they lead.

They lead because the church members ascribe the necessary authority to them.

The church members accept this voluntarily.

In the text being discussed here **'submit'** is actually the translation of **'hupeiko'**.

¹ Study: Leaders.

This word is only used in this text, so there are no comparable translations.

According to the OLB, **'hupeiko'** is the combination of two words:

- **'hupo'**: by, under
- **'eiko'**: to give way, to be 'weak'

Translated literally thus as: **'by giving way', 'by being weak'**.

The OLB translates **'hupeiko'** as:

- no longer resisting, but giving in,
- accepting authority and admonition, making oneself subordinate

The Greek/Dutch dictionary translates it as:

- to resist no longer, but to give way, yield (of combatants)
- metaph. to yield to authority and admonition, to submit

Alternative translation of the text:

- *Entrust yourselves to the leaders, to those who are honoured in the church, and making yourself subordinate ...*

Practically:

The implication of these translations is clear.

This is referring to 'obedience', 'being compliant', 'withdrawing voluntarily', stopping continuing with something about which those 'who are held in honour in the church' think differently.

This appears to be the practice of what Paul says in Romans 12:18

- *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:18)*

Or, what Ephesians 4:3 says

- *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.. (Ephesians 4:1-6)*

Nevertheless, if fundamental Biblical truths are involved, truth will have to have priority over unity, whereby maintaining peace must always be the goal 'as far as it depends on you'.

Seeking the truth in Jesus Christ together is the basis for unity in the church.

Think of Paul's words in this respect:

- *I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions (also: disunity) among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought (also: judgement, conclusion). (1 Corinthians 1:10)*

And on the other hand:

- *No doubt there have to be differences (also: taking sides) among you to show which of you have God's approval. (1 Corinthians 11:19)*

Because they keep watch over you:

A more literal translation is:

- ... *for they remain awake (guard) on behalf of (for the good of) your souls, ...*

This means that the leaders, those who are honoured, remain awake, are vigilant. As 'souls' is plural, this is a service to the whole church.

Being vigilant means that they will always be alert and keep an eye on the spiritual well-being of the church. It is their responsibility to ensure that the church is taught in the truth of God's Word, and that the members of the church live in accordance with it, and that no wrong views arise or enter in from outside.

Alternative translation of the text:

- *Entrust yourselves to the leaders, to those who are honoured in the church, and making yourself subordinate, for they are vigilant for the good of your souls ...*

As those who must give an account:

Giving account:

The Greek text says '**logos apodidomi**', to be translated literally as:

- to give words (back)
- to pay words back

In the five Bible texts in the New Testament in which these two words are found together they are always translated as:

- rendering account, giving account.

In the Gospel of Luke we read:

- *So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? **Give an account** of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'* (Luke 16:2)

Or, as Peter writes in his first letter:

- *But they will have **to give account** to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.* (1 Peter 4:5)

Only in Hebrews 13:17 is the verb '**apodidomi**' conjugated in the future tense, as a participle.

This indicates that the leaders, those who are held in honour in the church, must **continually** give account of their words and of the way in which they lead the church.

This is not only to God on the day of judgement, but also day by day to the church, as is stated earlier in this chapter:

- *Remember your leaders (those who are honoured in the church), who spoke the word of God to you. **Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*** (Hebrews 13:7)

From this background it is to be expected that the leaders, those who are held in honour in the church, guard over the spiritual well-being of the church members in a good manner, because they are conscious of the fact that they will be judged **more strictly**, as James writes:

- *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that **we who teach will be judged more strictly.*** (James 3:1)

Alternative translation of the text:

- *Entrust yourselves to the leaders, to those who are honoured in the church, and making yourself subordinate, for they are vigilant for the good of your souls, because they will have to give account.*

Do this so that their work will be a joy:

The complete sentence:

- *Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.*

If the leaders, those who are held in honour in the church, are able to carry out their duties with joy, the whole of the church will benefit.

As far as the church members are concerned this means that they will give the leaders of the church their trust and behave compliantly.

As far as the leadership is concerned this requires a high level of spiritual mindset, so that they will also be worthy of the trust of their church members.

Leaders must be conscious of the fact that this trust cannot be coerced or commanded, but that it has to be earned.

They have not obtained the authority they receive in the church from above, so that they can reign on the basis of that authority. They have received the authority they possess from the church members, who pay them respect voluntarily, on the basis of their spiritual life.

Alternative translation of Hebrews 13:17:

- *Entrust yourselves to the leaders, to those who are honoured in the church, and making yourself subordinate, for they are vigilant for the good of your souls, because they will have to give account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.*

See also the study: James 3:3 - ... to make them obey us.²

² Study: James 3:3 - ... to make them obey us.