

Hebrews 13-7-8, 17-19
Church leaders!!!

Preamble: sitting up front...

Sermon introduction:

Not long ago I was in my doctor's office for a checkup. I chatted with the nurse while she got some equipment ready. Eventually she asked what I did for a living. I told her I was a pastor. This was met with an awkward pause that seemed to last forever. After a short prayer for courage, I said, "Do you have a church background?" She said, "Well, yes, I was raised in the church, but I have not been for over twenty years. I left when my pastor did some really bad things to me and my family." I could tell that she was deeply wounded. I did not know what to say, so I prayed some more while I sat there in silence. Eventually I said, "I'm terribly sorry that you were hurt by your pastor. Unfortunately churches are led by sinners."

Sadly, many people have been wounded by church leaders. Maybe you have been lied to, abused, controlled, or manipulated by a pastor?

My doctoral advisor was a pastor, seminary leader, scholar, and an outstanding preacher. He had huge portions of the Bible memorized. I greatly respected him. I enrolled in the program because I wanted to learn specifically from him. Eight months into my program, the seminary told all the students that our advisor and professor had been fired for sexual misconduct. I was shocked and disappointed.

If you live long enough a church leader will disappoint you.

Last week I disappointed some of you when I made some careless, unscripted, and insensitive comments during my sermon. I feel awful, I would like to ask for your forgiveness.

Every church leader is flawed, including this one. This makes it hard for us to trust them.

In light of this...

Hebrews 13 makes an astonishing claim. The author claims that church leadership is a good thing.

When I say church leadership, I'm referring to elders and pastors. The Bible uses these terms interchangeably. Hebrews 13 implies that elders and pastors are a good thing.

This raises the question. *How should we relate to church leaders?* The author of Hebrews gives us a few suggestions.

We remember our past leaders
We honor our present leaders
We trust our perfect leader

First, we remember our past leaders

What do we remember?

We remember their conduct!

Hebrews 13:7 (ESV) — 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

The word remember in verse 7 suggests that these leaders are dead and gone, possibly martyred for their faith.

These were probably the leaders who led the original audience to Christ, since they were the ones, “who spoke the word of God to them.”

Let me read the verse again, “Remember your leaders... Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

The author says, remember how your past leaders lived their lives. If their lives were marked by Godliness, then imitate their faith.

It is not enough to remember the teaching of your past leaders; we are encouraged to remember their way of life as well.

Illustration:

Can you remember the conduct of your past spiritual leaders? What can you imitate from their way of life?

I remember pastor Sonny (my pastor when I was in high school). He was a humble man who loved people. He was always full of joy. He always had a smile on his face, and he always made people feel loved and welcomed. Plus, he was an excellent father. All of his kids are walking with God today.

I remember pastor Todd (the leader of the campus ministry I was involved in). He was a courageous evangelist. I watched him effectively share the gospel with complete strangers' numerous times. He loved people.

I remember pastor Ed (one of my pastors in Seattle) He and his wife Stephanie were incredibly hospitable and generous. They were always opening up their home to college students and singles. Plus, they loved to give stuff away. He loved his wife, he loved the local church, and he loved orphans. They eventually adopted two little girls.

I remember pastor Michael (another pastor in Seattle) He loved grace. He is the one who taught me about gospel centrality.

The conduct of these men is worthy of imitation.

Because pastoral scandals make the news, we lose sight of all the pastors who have Godly conduct and are worthy of imitation.

I was recently talking with a young man I know well. He said, “Dave, honestly, I’m having a hard time trusting pastors. In the last 15 years of my life two of my pastors have had moral failures and disqualified themselves from ministry.” I said to him, “I don’t blame you, but, but, but, the vast majority of pastors I know (and I know a lot) are very Godly. They love their wives, love their kids, flee sexual sin, and are trying to pursue humility. Satan wants us to forget about all the ordinary pastors out there who are very godly.

Application:

Take some time this week to remember the pastors who made a difference in your life. Think specifically about their conduct and imitate what you can.

BTW... This is why the qualifications for an elder are almost exclusively character related. The Bible says nothing about formal theological training, although I think it can be helpful. Church leaders are supposed to be examples of Godliness.

How do we relate to our church leaders?

First, *we remember our past leaders.*

Second, we honor our present leaders

How do we honor our present leaders/pastors? By submitting to them!

Hebrews 13:17 (ESV) — 17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

It is hard to think of a more offensive word in our culture, than the word submission. We live in a culture that despises authority/submission structures. Furthermore, our culture is fiercely independent. Many of us exemplify the rugged American individualist. We don't want anyone telling us what to do. Do we???

But this is not how God sees things. Submission is at the very heart of God. God is a triune God. He exists as one God in three persons. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three members of the trinity are equal in value and worth. They are all equally God. Yet the Son submits to the father and the Spirit submits to the Father and the Son. Submission does not imply inferiority, if it did, Jesus would be inferior to the father, which is heresy.

If we want to imitate Jesus, we will joyfully submit to others.

Every Christian is called to a lifestyle of submission.

We are all called to submit to the civil authorities (Romans 13)

Wives are called to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5)

We are all called to submit to our employers (Eph. 6)

Children are called to submit to their parents (Eph. 6)

We are all called to submit to the elders (individual elders are not exempt from this).

This is hard for me at times. I sometimes lose the vote on the elder board, and when I do, I need to submit to the majority and trust God.

Submission to the elders is not a call to blind obedience. In other words, please don't associate submission to leaders with the Jim Jones incident in 1978. Do you remember the Jim Jones story? Jim Jones was a totally nuts religious cult leader. In the Jungles of Guyana, He order 900 of his followers to drink poisoned Kool aid. Sadly, they all submitted and died within a few seconds.

We don't have to submit to pastors in every detail of our lives. I have been in contexts where the pastors expected the members to consult them before they dated someone, took a new job, or moved out of town. This made me nervous. The only authority the elders have is the word of God. If the elders can't proof text what they are asking you to do, then you don't have to submit to it.

If a pastor says to you, "You need to buy me some new tennis racquets." You need to say, "where does the Bible say that?" The elders only authority is the word of God.

Plus, elders need to heed the warnings of 1 Peter 5.

1 Peter 5:1–3 (ESV) — **1** So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: **2** shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; **3** not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

One commentator sums it up like this,

“When a servant of God is in the will of God, teaching the Word of God, the people of God should submit and obey.” (Wiersbe)

Application:

Some of you have been very wounded by pastors. Let me say this, “I’m terribly sorry, and very sad.” I hope and pray that over time God can help you forgive the pastors who have sinned against you and, By God’s grace, learn to trust pastors again. Pastors, that is Godly pastors, are a gift to the church.

Furthermore, if you think the elders of this church have sinned against you, please come talk to us. We make mistakes. We don’t always see things clearly. We welcome your input.

Whenever a Christian says to me, “Well I don’t think I need to go to church, or commit to any particular church. I’m a member of the universal church.” I usually say, “That is interesting. Can I ask you a question? How are you obeying Heb. 13:17 right now? In other words, which elders are you submitting to?” If you are perpetually hopping around from church to church, and you never land anywhere, it is impossible for you to obey this command.

The elders need to know who you are, and you need to know who they are, and you need to let them know that you plan on submitting to them by becoming a member of their church.

How do we honor pastors? We submit to them!

Why do we honor pastors? They will give an account!

Hebrews 13:17 (ESV) — **17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Every church leader (elder/pastor) will give an account to Jesus Christ for how they shepherded his sheep on the day of final judgment. They are not the chief shepherds, they are merely the under-shepherds.

This is a very sobering for all pastors, especially those who have failed miserably. These are Jesus sheep and he cares greatly for them.

Every Christian will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Christians will not be condemned on that day (Rom. 8:1, Eph. 2:8-9). But the works of Christians will surely be judged.

2 Cor. 5:10

Romans 14:12

Our good works will be reward and our bad works will be forgiven. If a pastor does not shepherd well, he will lose his rewards.

1 Corinthians 3:12–15 (ESV) — **12** Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— **13** each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. **14** If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Application:

How should pastors apply this?

Christian leaders must work hard to care for souls (praying, exhorting, challenging, preaching, counseling, and bringing hope). Why? They will give an account on the day of judgment for every soul in their care.

The larger a church grows the more difficult it is for the pastors to give an account for the sheep. Small groups really help. Explain home group structure.

Every member is in a small group.

Every elder oversees 2-3 small groups.

This way every member knows an elder and every member is known by at least one elder.

How should non pastors apply this?

Become a member of a local church!!!

What? What does this have to do with our text? Everything...

Without church membership, how in the world are pastors supposed to know who they will give an account for? Is it the person who shows up for a few weeks, a few months, or who comes six times a year, but never commits? I don't think so. The pastors have no assurance that these people will be around next week. The pastors will give an account for those who have become members of GCF.

Our next membership class is in April.

How should we honor pastors? We submit to them!

Why should we honor pastors? They will give an account!

How else should we honor pastors? Through prayer!

Hebrews 13:18–19 (ESV) — **18** Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. **19** I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

The author wants people to pray for him. His conscience is clear (probably in regard to how he has pastored them), but he still wants prayer.

Pastors need prayer...

Pastors are prone to discouragement.

Pastors have a huge target on their back.
Satan hates what pastors do.
Pastors face all the temptations to you face.
The work of the pastor is supernatural work.
Pastors can't do their jobs without prayer, it is impossible.

Spurgeon's people praying below the tabernacle...

We need prayer.

The greatest hindrance to my ministry is me... This is not false humility; it is just the truth.

Eventually every pastor will fail you, except for one.

This brings us to the last point.

We remember our past leaders.

We honor our present leaders.

Third, we trust our perfect leader

Hebrews 13:7–8 (ESV) — 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Why does the author of Hebrews include verse 8? He could have just written verse 7. He includes verse 8, because he knows that every human pastor will fail you. Your previous pastors probably failed you, your present pastor will fail you, and your future pastor will fail you. But there is one pastor who will never fail you.

Jesus Christ is the great shepherd and he will never fail you. He is the lead pastor of GCF. All the other elders/pastors are merely His under-shepherds.

Jesus will never fail us because Jesus will never change. Verse 8 proclaims that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Theologians refer to the unchangeableness of God as the immutability of God.

Immutability is a really good thing. If God could change, who is to say he would change for the better. Maybe he would change for the worse. And if he changed for the better that would imply that something was lacking in his character that needed to change.

Illustration:

Everything around us will change.

The weather changes

Our relationships change

Countries change

Forests change

Our health changes over time

Animals change

Our locations change

Science changes

Philosophy changes
The practice of medicine changes

But, Jesus never changes!!!

Because Jesus will not change.

We know that he will always be full of compassion ten years from now (like he was when he healed the leper, raised the dead, and gave sight to the blind).

We know that he will always be merciful.

We know that he will always be just.

We know that he will always be willing to forgive.

We know that he will always be working our trials for good.

We know that he will never become less loving.

We know that he will never become less powerful.

Jesus will never change. Because he will never change, we can count on him, even when our earthly shepherds change....

Application:

Does this mean we don't need pastors? No!!! Pastors are under-shepherds. Christ gives them to the church because he loves the church (Eph. 4:11-12)

But this does imply that Godly Christian leaders should build people into Christ. (Eph. 4:11-14)

Don't depend too much on earthly shepherds.

Illustration:

One pastor writes,

"After I had announced my resignation from a church I had been pastoring for several years, one of the members said to me, "I don't see how I'm going to make it without you! I depend so much on you for my spiritual help!" My reply shocked him. "Then the sooner I leave, the sooner you can start depending on the Lord. Never build your life on any servant of God. Build your life on Jesus Christ. He never changes." (Wiersbe)

We must depend on the great shepherd.

Do you know him?

Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV) — 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Bring him your cares, concerns, and burdens. Bring him your sins. He is ready and willing to be your shepherd.

Conclusion:

God has given us church leaders to help us persevere. How do we relate to them?

We remember our past leaders.
We honor our present leaders.
We trust our perfect leader.

Lets pray.