

Text: Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24

Title: The Responsibilities of the Godly Shepherd

Truth: The godly pastor is to lead and feed the church with faithful, exemplary conduct, knowing he too will give account to God.

Date/Location: Sunday February 12, 2012 at FBC

Introduction

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.

17 – Obey your leaders, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them [watch] with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

24 – Greet all your leaders and all the saints...

The point of the passage has to do with the believer's responsibility toward their spiritual leaders. The main verbs (remember, obey, be submissive, let them do so...) are imperatives directed to the body of believers, not to the pastors. But we will first set the table for that responsibility by examining what kind of leaders the Bible is talking about. There are some implied qualifications: God's people are not to subject themselves to false teachers, whether that "falseness" comes in doctrine or practice.

The Identity of the Leaders

- A. The KJV and NKJV have the translation "who [have the] rule over you" which sounds domineering. In fact, the alternate translation offered by the NKJV is better: those who "lead." In each of verses 7, 17, and 24, the word comes from a participial form of the verb *hegeomai*, which refers to men who are in a supervisory capacity and who lead and guide the Christian congregation.
- B. In short, these are pastors. I am comfortable expanding this to other men who have leadership roles in the assembly but who are not "the" pastor.
- C. We should note that there are several terms which are used interchangeably in Scripture to refer to the pastor. They are: Elder (Acts 20:17), overseer (Acts 20:28), shepherd (Acts 20:28). The terms are also used interchangeably in 1 Peter 5:1-2. *Pastor* is another translation of the same term for *shepherd*. *Bishop* is another translation for the word *overseer*. In short, these terms do not describe different offices or a hierarchy of offices; rather they are descriptive of various facets or aspects of a single office, that of the pastor.
- D. A good case can be made that some of their Christian leaders had already died. These past leaders who spoke the word of God (past tense, v. 7) were still to be examples for the believers. Others, obviously, were still alive and how they were treated was important (verse 17).

E. Sheep can tend to wander if they are “leading” themselves. But if they do not know where they are going, that kind of self-leading is dangerous. So, God has provided some gifted men to the church to lead it. The Hebrew believers are to note the men who carry out this leading and treat them a certain way. The exhortation also reminds the *leaders* what they should be doing.

Responsibility #1: Lead

- A. The same word is used three times in the three verses, referring to someone who is supervising or overseeing, administering, out in front.
- B. This is a person who, if gone, would leave a leadership hole or vacuum. This is a person that other people would look to and ask “what should we do?” When that person is no longer available, the people might say, “We used to ask so-and-so what we should do...now he’s gone.”
 - i. I am not talking about a self-promoter who says, “I’m in charge here.”
 - ii. A church should not remain in the leaderless state for long.
- C. God does establish hierarchical relationships wherein some people lead and others follow. The laity vs. clergy terminology is not a great way to distinguish different people in a church, but it works to a certain extent. There are those leading and those not leading. We should strive to obediently carry out our part, whichever that is.
- D. Potential objection: Matthew 20:25-28 tells us not to be like the Gentiles in their infatuation with authority structure (// Mark 10:42-45, similar Luke 22:24-27 right around the time when the Lord washed their feet).
 - i. There does exist a necessary order for a society, a group of people such as a church, a home, a government, a military, etc. to function. There is something about one and many that requires this in human affairs.
 - ii. The ant seems to be an exception to the rule (Prov. 6:7).
 - iii. There is a balancing point to avoid an outright contradiction, and I think it is this: leadership does not push top down, but is received from the lower level to the higher. Leadership does not lord it over those led, but leads by example of service (1 Peter 5:3).

Responsibility #2: Teach the Word of God

- A. Among the qualifications of a pastor is that he *must* be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2). This is not optional. A non-teaching elder is a Biblical oxymoron. Sometimes such elders are known as “ruling elders.”
- B. Not only are they *able* to teach, but that they must in fact do so. It is not a proper carrying out of pastoral duty to be *able* to teach the Bible, but then to digress to all manner of story-telling, humor, moralizing, and such.

C. This is why we do a program of basically expositional preaching from books of the Bible, through the entire book. I have preached and taught through the NT books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, John, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, James, Ephesians, Revelation, 1 Peter, Hebrews, Philippians, as well as selected passages from Genesis and Proverbs, and the book of Daniel. I've recently started Acts. I've done lots of other preaching on other Bible passages and topics (such as marriage). That leaves somewhat over half of the New Testament books to go and a lot of the Old Testament.

Responsibility #3: Live a model life of faith and conduct

- A. What the leader teaches, he must do, unlike the hypocritical Pharisees (Matthew 23:3). Yes, he does live in a glass house to a certain extent. If there is something in the life of a pastor (or pastor-in-training) that is not worthy of emulation by all the saints, then that characteristic needs to be removed.
- B. All the way to the end. The *outcome* that is mentioned is the end, that is, the death, of the person. So, the former pastors of the congregation provided an example of persevering to the end, as Hebrews 3:14 exhorted. These pastors became recent-in-time examples of what we learned about in chapter 11, that those who are marked by faith in God get a good report card; they have a good testimony. They modeled faith and died in faith.

Responsibility #4: Watch out for souls

- A. The word means to be alertly concerned about, to look after or care for.
- B. It can be watching out for a situation of danger such as false teaching; or one of spiritual laziness; or one of neglect of Christian duty; or one of a bad decision or impending bad decision; or just general lack of progress in the faith. As many ways as there are to go wrong in life, the watch-care of a shepherd may come into action. The shepherd, like Paul, wants to present every man mature before Christ at the judgment (Col. 1:28).
- C. It involves prayer for the saints. The same Greek verb for *to watch* is used in Ephesians 6:18 regarding petitionary prayer for the believers.

Responsibility #5: Give account to God at the end of your ministry

- A. This aspect of pastoral ministry ranks right up there with James 3:1 as a difficult thing for me personally. I have enough trouble keeping myself in the face of future judgment. No one is sufficient for the calling of a pastor in this regard, so we must cast ourselves on God in faith that He will help us do a proper job each day so we will be rewarded instead of lose reward.
- B. I will be judged for how I watch out for the souls of all the people in the church. This extends to those who are members and "common-law members" since those non-members have no other pastor watching out for

them. I believe that relationship ceases when you properly leave the church and are joined to another one.

Responsibility #6: Carry out this task whether it is joyful or grievous

- A. The response of the sheep makes the pastor's job harder or easier.
- B. The pastor is to continue his ministry in spite of the sins of the people he leads that cause him grief. After all, the sheep probably have found a few imperfections in the pastor!
- C. I am drawing out of this a note of perseverance. Do not easily be convinced to throw in the towel in times of grief-filled leadership.

What If the Pastor is Not Doing These Things?

The passage does not teach particularly on how the leaders are to do their leading. But that they do it, and do it well, is to be assumed in arguing for the believers to respond appropriately to the commands here.

When leaders are not doing their job properly, then things get sticky, and a lot of care is required in handling the situation. So what happens if the sheep have to separate from their shepherd and find another shepherd, a faithful one? They have to ask, and ask counsel, as to whether the pastor is doing his job outlined in the sections above. If not, he is not really a Biblical leader and the sheep need to find one.

Conclusion

The pastor is responsible for feeding and leading the flock, as well as protecting and caring for it. He has other responsibilities not mentioned in this passage, such as not lording it over the sheep, watching out for his own soul's care, doing the work of an evangelist, stopping the mouths of false teachers, etc.

No pastor carries out all of these perfectly (I know firsthand!). But this is a universal condition due to sin, and forms no excuse a) for not continuing to strive for the Biblical standard of pastoral conduct; and b) for not following a good pastor even if he is not perfect.

Next time we will see that the godly believer is supposed to gladly follow the faith and instruction of his pastor so as to get the most profit from the relationship.

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