

**Text:** Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24

**Title:** The Responsibilities of Godly Church Members Toward Their Pastors

**Truth:** Persevering faith will emulate the faith of our past spiritual leaders and follow the leadership of our present pastors.

**Date/Location:** Sunday February 19, 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...

Last time we studied these three verses, we learned that the spiritual leaders are what today we would simply call pastors of our churches. They must faithfully carry out six responsibilities:

1. Lead the church.
2. Teach the Word of God, including the gospel “proper” and the whole counsel of God.
3. Live a model life of faith and conduct.
4. Watch out for souls.
5. Give an account to God.
6. Carry out these tasks whether they are joyful or, at times, grievous.

We will **assume** for this message that the pastor(s) of your church did in the past and are presently doing a decent job in these areas. They may not be doing a perfect job, but even if they are not, this does not excuse the church member from responsibility in this area.

So now we turn to the related responsibilities of the church members.

## I. Remember and Emulate the Faith of Past Spiritual Leaders, v. 7

These spiritual leaders seem to have recently died because the text says they *spoke* (past tense) and their lives had an *outcome* that was something the readers could evaluate.

A. Remember them means to keep them in mind or think of them.

They spoke the Word. They were evangelists and teachers. They *brought* the word of God to the Hebrews, and *continued* to teach it. They preached and taught the gospel and the whole counsel of God.

To the extent that they had exemplary faith and conduct, they are worthy of keeping in mind. Notice that God enjoined the Hebrews to keep

*people*—His instruments—in mind. There is value in the actual people that God has used in your life. When they “retire” or die, we are not called to simply discard them with a cavalier attitude like “we worship God, and those who brought us the gospel don’t matter a whit.” God used them; God put them into your life; you ought to thank God for them! Don’t de-personalize the whole Christian life!

#### B. Consider the outcome of their way of life.

Their lives were ended, perhaps by martyrdom, or perhaps by peaceful death. There had been some persecution against the Hebrews in the recent past (10:32-34) and this may have been a factor in their leaders’ departure.

But by their persevering faith in Jesus Christ, these former pastors became, in effect, additions to the hall of faith in chapter 11. They are not as famous, but they shared the same faith that the OT patriarchs did. They just lived it out more recently and more anonymously.

#### C. Follow their faith

The Hebrew believers were not to copy their lives in an idolatrous way. It was their faith, their God that the Christians were to follow.

Included in the remembering of these Christian leaders is recalling what they taught and following it.

#### D. Application

If this kind of remembrance was helpful for the Hebrews, there is no reason that we would want to ignore the instruction as it applies to us.

So consider what your former pastor taught you. For FBC, that was Pastor Saxe. He’s still with us in this life, but off doing other things. I remember the pastor of Saline Baptist only vaguely. I also recall my pastor at Immanuel Bible Church for 15 years or so. Those are the ones that I have known as pastor. These folks are still living, as far as I know, but they are out of my life now. I still appreciate what they did and the examples they left. How about you?

One practical difficulty following this teaching might be that you had a bad experience with a former pastor. That doesn’t nullify all of this passage. If you can get past the bad experience you can see some good. It might be difficult to get a silk purse out of the whole experience, but hopefully there is something of value there!

There is some profit in thinking on and reading about former Christian leaders. We can learn a lot from their strengths and weaknesses, and particularly what God did in and through them. Obviously God and His

Son Jesus Christ are by *far* the main issue, but God does use people and we can give honor to those due honor.

However, as I have said before, if you do not have time to read your Bible, you do not have time to read anything else, so do not replace the Bible with biographies and histories, etc.

**Transition:** Now we move to verse 17. Some of its thoughts are similar, but instead of dead pastors, now we are talking about pastors that are alive and ministering. The instructions that follow offer their own set of difficulties since we actually have to “live with” the pastor God has given us, imperfect as he is.

## II. Follow Your Present Pastor, v. 17

### A. Obey them.

Obeying “them” means to obey their Biblical teaching.

We are talking about obedience and submission to what they say from the Word of God.

We are not talking about the pastor having a bunch of personal slaves. He does not have inherent authority in himself that is somehow beyond evaluation or question. What he has is a derived authority from the word of God. The shepherd is given responsibilities like the ones we discussed in our previous message; or see 1 Peter 5:1-4. These include teaching the Word, leading, protecting, and caring for the spiritual needs of the people (John 21:15ff). When he steps outside of Biblical bounds, he gives up his authority.

Of course, in this sin-cursed world you will find a spectrum—from no leadership to overbearing leadership and everything in between.

### B. Be submissive to them.

The real test is whether you would be obedient even when it is against your thinking—that is when submission comes into play.

In the home, this happens when the wife does not totally agree with the husband on something, yet she follows his leadership.

Something similar happens at times in the church. You might not agree 100% with what the pastor said, or maybe how he is applying a teaching of Scripture. Your disagreement does not trump your responsibility. Remember, we are assuming in this message that the pastor is generally a good one and doing what he is supposed to.

You do this because the leaders are watching out for your soul. They are going to give account for that watch. No one else is called to give an

account but them, so they understandably are concerned for your spiritual life and well-being.

Note that your spiritual well-being is more important than your physical well-being. You should not be going to the doctor more than you go to church!

It is a good thing to follow their Biblical teaching, not a bad thing!

C. Help them do their job with joy.

This is not a command for the shepherd—although he should strive to be an example of genuine joy in his ministry and entire life.

This is a command for the sheep in the church.

By the church people's obedience to the teaching, they are bringing joy to the godly shepherd.

If you are stubborn and disobedient and don't care about the pastor's leadership role, then his job will be difficult.

Cooperation is the name of the game. Your present situation and the teaching that is offered require a cooperative spirit instead of a difficult spirit. With cooperation, the shepherd can have as much joy as possible.

There are enough grief-filled parts of ministry: stubborn adults; rebellious children; unbelievers who refuse to hear the gospel; funerals; and the general spiritual declension in society. The pastor doesn't need any more sources of grief! See 2 Cor. 11:28.

The unprofitableness of the grief-kind of ministry is thorough-going:

- i. The ministry is more difficult for the pastor.
- ii. If you are the cause of the grief, you ought to worry about your own soul in terms of the stiff warnings that are offered in the book to those who do not have a persevering faith in Jesus.
- iii. The pastor might have to give a bad report later as he accounts for his ministry before God.

Taken together, all of these mean that a grief-filled relationship between pastor and sheep is just not as helpful as it could be. It is *bad* for you!

## Conclusion

In the Christian life, God has given us gifted men who are spiritual leaders and examples. These are real-life models for us to follow as we grow in grace and persevere in our faith. Whether they are now dead and gone, or still living and teaching us the Word, we have a responsibility toward them to follow their faith and teaching from the Bible. It will genuinely help us if we do so.

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