

Remembering Your Leaders (Hebrews 13:7)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (2/25/2018)

Introduction

1. Verses 7–19 answer the immediate condition of the Hebrew recipients of this epistle (the temptation to depart from Christ due to persecution; 6:1–12; 10:25; 32–39).
 - a. It serves as the remedy for a third unspoken evil that blocks one’s ability to offer acceptable sacrificial service to God (12:28)—withdrawing or apostasy. This withdrawal was due to the pressures of and the fear of persecution and its consequences.
 - b. This remedy is based on the promise of verse five: “*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*” This is a powerful antidote to fear. The apostle supports the promise by quoting Psalm 118:6: “*The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?*”
 - c. “*The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe*” (Proverbs 29:25).
 - d. We must remember that we are in an all-out war in the spiritual realm with an enemy who knows no bounds. However, we have an omnipotent Helper, but our Helper is invisible to our senses. Thus, the apostle points us to realities that we can observe: “*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.*”
2. The following verses (7–19) serve as encouragement to struggling saints like that of chapter 11, however, the leaders referenced are gone (v. 7; current leaders are addressed in verse 17).
 - a. That this verse refers to past leaders is evident by the use of *remember*, the *past tense* of their speaking, and the *final outcome* of their way of life.
 - b. The leaders that Paul had in mind were the other apostles and servants of Christ, many of whom suffered greatly under the Jewish and Roman efforts to extinguish the church. He is exhorting his wavering readers to look to the example of those who remained faithful to the very end.

I. Remember Your Leaders

- A. Take courage by holding in memory the example of past leaders of the church (Ephesians 4:11, 12). The word translated *remember* means to be mindful or to hold something in memory—memorialize.
 1. The emphasis here is not so much on their example (which is referenced in the last phrase of verse 7) but on their *mission*—“to go before” that is, to lead, having authority to rule over others—biblical eldership—preparing the saints to serve Christ in every circumstance.
 - a. These men were not *legislators* of church policy, inventing new laws and rules for the saints. There have been too many ecclesiastical despots in the church (Revelation 2:6, 15; 3 John 9, 10).
 - b. Rather, these leaders were *administrators* of the King’s policies, ordering the household through proper discipline (see verse 17).
 2. These elders are qualified as “*those who spoke to you the word of God.*” (See John 3:34.) This is the criterion we are to use to test all leaders (1 John 4:1; Romans 16:17; 2 John 10).
- B. God’s pattern for the church is that of the shepherd and his sheep. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and He has chosen men through whom He can lead His sheep (John 21:15–17).
 1. The sheep (the saints) are under *pastors* (*poimen*) or *shepherds* (1 Peter 5:1–5).
 2. The task of these shepherd-leaders is (1) to feed the sheep (Acts 20:28); (2) to watch for enemies and defend the sheep; (3) to doctor the wounded and sick sheep; (4) to seek out and rescue the straying sheep; and (5) to love the sheep by giving their lives and so earning their trust.

II. Mimic Their Fidelity

A. Faith is used in various ways in Scripture:

1. Faith can mean *trust*, whereby the heart is turned to God, and to rest on His Word and promise (Proverb 3:5; Ephesians 2:8).
2. Faith is used of a body of truth that is to be believed—*doctrine* or teaching (Acts 14:22).
3. Faith is used of its effects, the *fruit* or works that spring from faith's root (1 Thessalonians 3:6; James 2:18).
4. Faith is used of *fidelity* or faithfulness, demonstrating faith's endurance and consistency (Galatians 5:22; Romans 3:3). That is how I believe it is used here.

B. This exhortation demands that believers remain *loyal* to Jesus Christ in spite of the temptation to fall away. Failure to remain loyal betrays a false faith. True faith endures to the end.

1. The elder-pastors to whom they were to look for leadership demonstrated this facet of faith—remained loyal to Christ to the very end of their trials.
2. The term that is translated *imitate* is the Greek word from which we get the term *mimic*.
3. This is a work of the Spirit also. Informed by the Word and enabled by the Spirit, we are to “*walk by the Spirit*” and so bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 22).

III. Observe Their End

A. The apostle points to how these faithful leaders graduated to glory.

1. The Greek term used here is not the normal word for *end* (*telos*) but one that means “a way out” (*ekbais*, used only here and 1 Corinthians 10, 13, where it is translated “*a way of escape*”), referring not only to end of their physical life but the manner in which they closed their life of faithfully following Jesus.
2. John Owen describes this end: “It is not therefore merely an end that is intended . . . but an end accomplished with a deliverance from, and so a conquest over, such difficulties and dangers as men were before exposed unto.”

B. Paul testifies to this kind of exit in 2 Timothy 4:6–8.

What can we take away?

1. Many pastors ponder, “Is my ministry accomplishing anything worthwhile for the glory of God?” “Do my messages help those who hear them?” Paul qualifies the servant of God as one “*who spoke to you the word of God.*” It is the work of the Spirit to use that as He wills.
2. Do you esteem your elders because of their work (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13)?
 - a. Are you faithful and diligent in both attendance and attention to the Word preached in order to benefit from the labors of your elders?
 - b. Are you careful to apply and carry out in your daily walk the principles of the Word that have been taught to you?
 - c. Are you tempted to compromise the truth for convenience or worldly pursuit?

Hebrews 3:14 (KJV): “*For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end*”