

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Hebrews 13:7-8, 17, 24 “Relating Well to Your New Pastor”

Intro. This morning I began a four-part series of messages entitled, “Relating Well to Your New Pastor.” I am retiring soon and I want to prepare you to be a good and supportive congregation for your new pastor. It is going to be a difficult task following a pastor who has been the leader of the church for a long time.

While the core biblical and spiritual commitments of the next pastor should be the same as mine, he will likely have a different personality, a different leadership style, and some different spiritual gifts. He will probably have a different vision for the church going forward. Such differences should be good and helpful to the church. Furthermore, I have ministry strengths but also weaknesses. I would expect that God will send someone to pastor our church who will be stronger in the areas of my weaknesses.

I want to challenge you to work patiently with your new pastor and be as supportive as possible. As we shall see in our text today, your spiritual well-being and the well-being of the church is tied to the well-being of the pastor. If he succeeds and makes progress, it is more likely that you will make spiritual progress as well. On the other hand, if he is burdened with multiple problems and expectations, as well as resistance from the congregation, that could adversely affect you and the church.

The text of Scripture I have chosen for my first message is a primary text of Scripture regarding the congregation’s relationship with their pastors. Three times in this text the author of Hebrews refers to those who have the “rule” over his readers. Look at v.7, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow....” Then v.17 says, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls....” Finally, he says in v.24, “Greet all those who rule over you....”

So I want to share with you some basic responsibilities that you have toward me, Drew, and whoever God leads to become the next senior pastor:

I. REMEMBER THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF YOUR PASTOR

Our author says in v.7, “Remember those who rule over you....” You may think that the word “remember” (*mnemoneuo*) suggests that these leaders were dead, perhaps martyred, and should not be forgotten. How easy it is to forget the courageous Christians of the past whose labors and sacrifice make it possible for us to minister today. Can you think of a pastor in your past who has had a major impact upon your life? You *should* remember them. In Chapter 11, the faith of men and women of earlier generations are presented for emulation.

Soon, I will no longer be the Senior Pastor of this church. I will retire in June. I wonder how quickly I will be forgotten after I leave? I hope you will remember my teaching and the example of my life for years to come. The pastor that impacted me the most was Dr. Jerry Vines, pastor of my home church. My life was transformed during his ministry. I was called to preach under his ministry. I have always remembered him, and followed his example. Yet even though leaders come and go, v.8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Christ remains the one constant. He is always there for you. He never changes.

However, the verb “rule” is a present participle, so he is probably referring to their present leaders. Our author gives some reasons why we should remember them, and what we should do as we remember them. So regarding your next pastor, our text calls upon us to:

A. Remember His Teachings – Notice that he says, “who have spoken unto you the Word of God.” So you should listen to his teaching, and keep God’s Word in your hearts and do it. Don’t quickly forget what your pastor preaches and teaches.

Chris Lee listened to me for over 31 years. He was a good listener. I understand that he would quote me from time to time in his S.S. class. He obeyed this teaching of Scripture!

B. Imitate His Life and Faith – Our author goes on to say in v.7, “whose faith follow...” “Follow” is from a word (*mimnisko*) from which we get our English word mimic. It means to imitate. You are to observe the way your pastor lives. You are to watch him as he walks with God so that his life can serve as a pattern for your own walk with the Lord. Take advantage of opportunities to spend time with your pastor in church, in joint ministry opportunities, as well as socially. You are to remember his life and teaching so that you can imitate him. The duty of the real preacher is to show his followers Christ in his own life. We are to practice what we preach.

Three times Paul told his readers, “be imitators of me” (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Php. 3:17). Paul knew that he lived an exemplary life that could be followed by other believers.

Your pastor will be quite pleased if he sees the impact of his teaching manifested in your life. The apostle John said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 Jn. 4). One of my greatest joys is seeing people heed the Word of God that I teach.

C. Consider the Outcome His Life - Here our author is seeking to motivate us. He says in the last of v.7, “considering the outcome of their conduct.” “Considering” might better be translated “examining carefully” (*anathaoreo*; Gk. is intensive). This is given as a reason for remembering their leaders and imitating them. When a pastor follows God faithfully, you can usually see a positive outcome from such faith and commitment. Observe the transformative character that God can produce. God will bless their ministry and their lives. Think of all the people that have been saved, transformed and helped by their ministry. Think of the ultimate outcome of their conduct, their heavenly reward. Many pastors will hear the Master say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In 1 Peter 5:4 Peter wrote to pastors saying, “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”

So if you follow the life and teaching of your pastor, you can experience a similar outcome in your own life. *You* can live a godly life, full of love, joy and peace. You can have a ministry that impacts others. You can experience the blessing of God upon your life and family. You can receive an eternal reward. So observe his life. Listen and heed his teaching.

The next responsibility you have toward your new pastor is this:

II. SUBMIT TO YOUR PASTOR’S LEADERSHIP

He says in v.17, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive...” The word translated “rule” (*hegeomai*) in all three cases of our text may be a bit strong, for it is based on the word (*ago*) that simply means “to lead.” So the word actually means “to lead” or “to guide.”

Leadership in the Lord’s church is very important. The Church is a living organism, but any *organism* that is not *organized* will either be dysfunctional, or dead. That is why, in every

church Paul started, he appointed overseers (pastors) to provide leadership for the church (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5).

So which leaders does our author have in mind? From v.7 we see that he had in mind those who have spoken the Word of God to you. That is certainly the role of a pastor. V.17 talks about those who “watch out for your souls,” which fits the role of a pastor as well. In fact, the more common title for a pastor in the New Testament is “overseer.” So when he is talking about those who have the rule over you in the church, he is talking, at least primarily, about pastors. These are not self-appointed men who teach their own ideas, traditions, and man-made dogma. Our author is speaking of God-called men of God, who should be anointed by the Holy Spirit. In fact, the word translated “rule” could be in the passive voice (or middle). If so, their leadership is not a self-assertive leadership, but they understand they are under shepherds, carrying out the will of the chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). They lead by following Christ.

This fact is reinforced by the titles given to pastors. They are called pastors or shepherds, who lead the flock. That fits the word picture used here. They are called overseers, which has a leadership function. They are also called “elders,” and leadership has always tended to fall on the elders, especially in the biblical context.

God has established authority within the church. It is the responsibility of such men, under God and in meekness and humility, to determine the direction of the church, to preside over it, to teach the Word, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort (Tit. 2:15). But Luke 22:26 implies that such leadership should involve service, not ruling for selfish reasons. For believers, God’s most important rule is through Spirit-controlled men. Church leaders are not to be tyrants, because they do not rule for themselves but for God. I Pet. 5:2-3 says that such leaders are to “exercise oversight... (not) as lording it over those allotted to their charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.” We are to be servant-leaders.

So what is the congregation’s role in regard to such leaders? Two words describe your responsibility to your leaders. The first is the command to “obey those who rule over you.” Does this mean that I can command you to go buy me a hamburger and bring it to me, and you have to obey? No. “Obey” is from a word (*peitho*) which literally means, “be persuaded,” which fits leadership primarily through teaching and preaching God’s word. Don’t throw up your defenses. Allow yourself to be persuaded, especially as we lead or teach in accordance with God’s Word. When a servant of God is in the will of God, teaching the Word of God, the people of God should obey the teaching of the Word of God, and the application of that teaching. When pastors preach the word of God and you obey them you are actually obeying Christ.

The second command given to the congregation is, “Be submissive.” This particular word (*hupеiko*) is only used here in the Greek New Testament. The word means, “to yield to authority and admonition, to submit.” Is the opposite of being rebellious. The more common verb for submission (*hupotasso*) is found 32 times in the New Testament. So it is an important concept. When we submit to authority, we are much more likely to stay within the will of God, and stay on the right track. In Luke 2:51 we read of the fact that Jesus Himself, as a boy, was subject to the authority of His parents. Yet He was the Son of God, the Lord of the universe!

So the main point is that if your pastor is leading in accordance with the word of God, you should not rebel against that teaching and leadership, but be persuaded and yield with a submissive attitude. And always remember that God has ordained pastors to be the primary spiritual leaders of the church. In fact, note with me this picture of a shepherd leading his sheep. Who is the leader of the sheep? Is it this one? Or is it this one? No, it is the shepherd, the literal meaning of the word “pastor.”

However, such obedience and submission is not absolute. There have been some bad pastors and false prophets who have tried to lead in the wrong way. In fact, he says in v.9, “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines....” So when a pastor, preacher, or teacher seeks to lead you astray, Peter rightly said that we are to obey God rather than men. Our Baptist and Anabaptist forefathers refused to follow the leadership of the established Church when they became convinced that the leadership was contrary to God’s Word. But when a servant of God is in the will of God, teaching the Word of God, the people of God should be persuaded by the teaching of the Word of God, and submit.

He gives several reasons why they should obey:

A. Because of His Responsibility – Again, v.17 says that pastors, “must give account.” Pastors are accountable to Christ, and therefore, most will obey the Lord and do the right thing. So such accountability motivates us to do the right thing. Furthermore, they care for each person and the church as a whole as a shepherd. Our author says, “they watch out for your souls....” Pastors are to search for those who are going astray and admonish them to return to the fellowship of God and His church.

Since most pastors understand their accountability to Christ, they will seek to do the right thing. If you think he is not following Christ and His Word as he should, then feel free to remind him of his accountability!

Furthermore, you should follow the leadership of your pastor:

B. For His Sake – In the last of v.17 he says, “Let them do so with joy and not with grief....” Pastoring God’s people is a heavy responsibility, but it should also be a joy, and you have a responsibility to make it so! Paul could say to the Philippian Christians, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (1:3). Paul said of the church in Thessalonica, “You are our glory and joy” (1 Th. 2:19-20).

One way to bring joy to your pastor is to submit willingly rather than grudgingly or out of a feeling of compulsion. Again, the apostle John said, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” One of my greatest joys is seeing people heed the Word of God that I teach. Willing submission to a pastor’s leadership is indeed a joy. But when a congregation stubbornly refuses to follow the pastor, they rob him of the joy God intends. In fact, it becomes a source of grief. That word (*stenazo*) means an inner, deep groaning. In James 5:9 it is translated “grumble.” It is a grief often known only to the pastor, his family, and to God. There are thousands of pastors leaving the ministry every year, and churches are languishing without good leadership. Make sure you are not one who contributes to the problem.

Moses experience grief as His people rebelled against His leadership, as he was simply following the Lord. Jeremiah was called “the weeping prophet.” He knew the grief caused by rebellious, stiff-necked people (See 9:1). Even Jesus was not spared grief. After He was disappointed by His disciples, Jesus said in Mt. 17:17, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?” (cf. Lk. 13:34). In Lk. 13:34 Jesus said, “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!” One reason Jesus was a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” was the fact that He was met with rebellion in the hearts of most of the leaders and even people of Israel. The greatest sorrow of any Christian leader is to see those whom he leads rebel against God and fail to trust God.

So being a pastor can be a pleasure or it can be a pain. Being a pastor can be a happy experience or it can be a heartache experience. Which will you make it?

C. For Your Sake - In the last of v.17 he says, “Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” Our author says that failing to obey your pastor’s teaching would not only grieve your pastor, but it will also be unprofitable for the congregation. To cause our leaders grief is harmful to us as well as to them and to the church as a whole. A church is better off with a joyful pastor. Wouldn’t you agree? I can tell you that I will be a better pastor and preacher if most of the time I serve with joy. The well-being of a church is tied to the well-being of the pastor. Furthermore, if more people would pay attention to God’s preachers who faithfully preach the Bible in the pulpit, they would have less problems in their own lives. Because Israel rebelled against Moses’ leadership, they spent 38 years of wandering in the wilderness! I would also point out that submission to authority promotes peace, unity, and order among any group of people. This is true of a family, a church, or any organization in human life, including human government.

If you were to do a study of the great and dynamic churches in the world, you would likely find a church with a respected and loved pastor, who is followed by the membership. The people recognize that God’s hand is upon him, and they recognize him as God’s man for the church.

I would also add that a failure to submit to a pastor’s biblical leadership will also be unprofitable on the day of judgment. I wonder how many lay believers will lose their reward for this very reason?

So when the church calls the next Senior Pastor, recognize his God-ordained responsibility to lead, especially by proclaiming the Word of God, and have a submissive attitude toward his leadership, and encourage others to do so as well.

How there is one more responsibility toward your pastor that is found in our text of Scripture:

III. GREET YOUR PASTOR

In v.24 he says, “Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints.” *Many* times Christians are told to greet one another, excluding none (Php. 4:21). Strong’s concordance says, “a salutation was made not merely by a slight gesture and a few words, but generally by embracing¹ and kissing.” Indeed, New Testament believers often greeted one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Th. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). In other words, we are to greet one another in the church with the kind of warm affection that is found in a healthy family relationship, for we are the family of God! Most Americans do not generally greet others with a kiss, except their closest family members. A hug or a handshake is a more common means of greeting in our culture. Yet sadly, greetings have been largely interrupted due to the pandemic for over a year. No more handshakes or hugs. In most places we don’t even greet with a smile because a mask is covering our faces! While it is remotely possible you could become infected by means of a brief greeting, you should also consider the adverse effect on your spiritual, psychological and physical well-being if you refrain from greeting others. In fact, hugs can boost your immunity, reduce stress, and brighten your day, including if you are battling depression.² So

¹ In fact, several times the word translated “greet” is translated “embrace” (Acts 20:1; Hebrews 11:13).

² See <https://www.thehealthy.com/mental-health/benefits-of-hugging/>.

where there is mutual agreement, I say it is time to resume obeying this Scriptural command more fully.

Yet while most Scriptures speak of Christians greeting one another, this is the only verse that specifically commands believers to greet the *leaders* of the church. Every Christian should be on speaking terms with his pastor. There have been a few times in my ministry when someone became upset at me, and refused to greet me. That is in direct disobedience to this Scripture. You should never allow any “root of bitterness” to grow up in your hearts (Heb. 12:15), because it will only poison you and hurt the whole church.

One traditional opportunity to greet your pastor is at the end of the service as you exit the main door where I stand. Yet if you do not greet me there, what can I say? When I was a boy, the minister would stand at the exit. It was at least 6 feet wide. I was young and shy, so I would slip on by the far side of the exit without saying a word!

As you greet your pastors, there may be times when you should also give a word of encouragement. It is unusual for me to be emotionally down. However, I have had times when I have been burdened with the weight of responsibilities that I bear, or burdened with family concerns. In such times I sure could have used a word of positive encouragement from various members of the congregation, and at times some certainly gave it.

Conclusion: So are you fulfilling your responsibility to your pastor, and other leaders of this church? Do you remember them, and their teaching? Do you submit to Scriptural leadership? Do you greet us? If you are lacking in any of these areas, I hope you will renew your commitment to follow this teaching of the Word of God.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary, The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964); Alan Carr, www.sermonnotebook.org (a sermon on Heb. 13:7); Oliver B. Greene, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 3/27/02); Warren W. Wiersbe, *“Be” Series: New Testament Volumes 1 & 2, John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2, Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). McGee read, but not used.

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