



The unfolding of your words gives light.

## Follow Your Leaders

### Hebrews 13:7-19

<sup>7</sup>Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you<sup>a</sup>; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith<sup>b</sup>. <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever<sup>c</sup>. <sup>9</sup>Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. <sup>10</sup>We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup>For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest *as an offering* for sin, are burned outside the camp. <sup>12</sup>Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. <sup>13</sup>So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. <sup>14</sup>For here we do not have a lasting city<sup>d</sup>, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come. <sup>15</sup>Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. <sup>16</sup>And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

<sup>17</sup>Obey your leaders and submit<sup>e</sup> to them, for they keep watch over your souls<sup>f</sup> as those who will give an account<sup>a</sup>. Let them do this with joy and not with grief<sup>b</sup>, for this would be unprofitable for you<sup>c,d</sup>.

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<sup>a</sup> 13:7 **Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you.** To “remember” is the simple word for calling things to mind. But its biblical uses call to mind emotionally charged statements from history like, “Remember the Alamo.” Jesus used the word in Luke 17:32 to urge those escaping judgment to “remember Lot’s wife.” Paul actually used the word twice in his farewell to the Ephesian elders, calling them to remember his faithfulness in ministry at Ephesus (Acts 20:31) and to remember Jesus’ words about giving to the weak (Acts 20:35). In that same message he used his own example to call the pastors to feed the sheep publically and privately.

The context here seems to be setting a contrast between priestly leadership under the temple system and elder leadership under the new covenant. The temple was about to be destroyed. Would there be any order left for the people of God?

<sup>b</sup> 13:7 **considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.** This may be a reference to their deaths or simply the fruit of a life well lived. The point is that the lives of faithful elders are worthy of imitation. This is why Paul told Bishop Timothy to be an example to the flock:

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. 1 Timothy 4:12

The word “consider” means *to look again*, to review what you remember about the way they lived. With that picture in your mind, the author says, live that way yourself.

<sup>c</sup> 13:8 **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.** This phrase fits well here because the model for life never changes. Christianity does not need to change its message or its standards with the culture. This does not always make it counter-cultural but it does make it trans-cultural.

<sup>d</sup> 13:14 **For here we do not have a lasting city.** This looks like a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in A.D. 70. But this letter was written to us as well.

<sup>e</sup> 13:17 **Obey your leaders and submit.** The word “obey” means *to be persuaded* and the word “submit” means *to surrender*. These are hard words for free and well-educated people. That is not because knowledge and freedom are bad. It is because pride in your knowledge and freedom are bad. When you connect this verse to verse seven, you see that this obedience relates to the authority of God’s word coming through church leaders. In other words, it is not their position that gives them authority but the word of God. Surrender your opinions to the authority of God’s word as your elders give it to you publically and privately.

<sup>f</sup> 13:17 **for they keep watch over your souls.** This helps you see the immense responsibility of the shepherd. The word means *to not sleep*. It is used in other places:

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Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. Mark 13:33

But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man. Luke 21:36

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18

See the same idea using a different word in Paul's solemn charge to the Ephesian elders:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28

There is more to the job than making ministry decisions or telling people what to do. The delivery of God's word is part of God's means for the salvation of your soul. Before you young men ever consider spiritual leadership you need to consider the responsibilities that go with it:

- Elders must pray (Acts 6:4).
- Elders must teach publically and privately (Acts 6:4; 20:20; 1 Timothy 1:3, 10; 3:2; 4:6, 13, 14, 16; 5:17; 2 Timothy 1:6, 8, 13; 2:2; Titus 1:9; 2:1).
- Elders must contend for the faith (1 Timothy 1:18; Jude 3; Titus 1:9-16).
- Elders must guard their people from sin (Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Timothy 4:16).
- Elders must use public and private exhortation (Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 4:2).
- Elders must rule (1 Peter 5:1-2; 1 Timothy 5:17).
- Elders must live an exemplary life (1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:3).

When you listen carefully to the teaching of God's word here and seek to put it into practice you will make the life of your pastors and your own life much easier. It is not meddling when an elder questions you about your spiritual life. You would be thankful if a dermatologist pulled you aside and warned you of a dangerous-looking mole on your forehead. How much more matters of the soul?

<sup>a</sup> 13:17 **as those who will give an account.** James 3:1 warns would-be teachers in the church that there is a greater level of accountability for those who are in a position to bring great harm to souls.

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

This is why Jesus spoke so harshly of those who lead vulnerable ones astray:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." Matthew 18:1-6

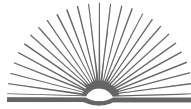
<sup>b</sup> 13:17 **Let them do this with joy and not with grief.** This word "grief" can also be translated "groaning." It is used in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2 of the groaning we do inside our frail earthly bodies. The writer says, "Don't make your elders groan."

A good question to ask here is to identify what he means by "this." Is he saying that there are things you can do now that will make judgment day a delight for your elders? Or is he saying that you should want to make ministry a delight to your elders? The language in the verse itself is not conclusive.

In support of a judgment seat of Christ view of this accounting, the writer did talk in verse seven about leaders of the past who may have died. He talks about things outside this world in this chapter. There is a warning here with eschatological implications.

The simple and more likely interpretation, though, is that the work of ministry should be a joy as the elders lead flocks that follow. Like John said he had no greater joy than for his children to walk in the truth (3 John 4). He says, "Lighten their load by following their leadership."

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<sup>a</sup> 13:17 **this would be unprofitable for you.** The word “unprofitable” means “not to your advantage.” It is not to your advantage to be the prodigal sheep. You may even show yourself an outsider if you are a rebel.

This idea is explained further in 1 Timothy 4:13-16:

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

<sup>b</sup> 13:7, 17 Here is how you make the load of your elders easier:

1. Live like they do. This is not to say that they are sinless or always right in their decisions, but it is to say that the elders are the pattern for character and behavior in the church. If they are not they should not be in the office.
2. Follow them. It is not cultic control over the flock that God’s under-shepherds have.
3. Listen to them The elders are in a position to give you messages from God. Are you listening? Are you doing what God says?
4. Order your life around hearing from God. This means, among other things, that the assembly of the saints is an essential part of your weekly schedule. That is what Hebrews 10:25 commands.

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