

Text: Heb. 13:17-19

Title: "How to have a good pastor"

Time: 9/25/2017 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - I was always blessed with a good pastor. I grew up at Bible Community Church of Mentor under the ministry of John Ashbrook. Pastor Ashbrook served that church for over 40 years. He was a gifted teacher and godly example.

After my school years my young family attended The Baptist Church of Danbury, where I found my ministry mentor, Dr. Dave Reinhardt. He has served faithfully in spite of years of poor health as a juvenile diabetic. He is caring for two elderly mothers now who are suffering from dementia. He has been in Danbury for about as long as Ashbrook was in Mentor. He is the host pastor of our conference in October.

When we moved to Texas, we were under the ministry of Pastor Bob Wallace, who, at a time in his life when most men are enjoying retirement, was driving a funeral car for \$7 an hour in order to help make ends meet as he had taken on a church-recovery ministry. He still ministers there faithfully.

And then when we went back to school in South Carolina, we were privileged to sit under the ministry of Pastor Mike Gray. I think he probably is getting close to 30 years of faithfulness by now at Colonial Hills Baptist Church. A younger man than the other pastors I have had, he loved the old paths and embraced godly fundamental convictions faithfully.

I remember hearing from a teacher that he had once asked Pastor Ashbrook whether he ever felt like quitting after all those years of faithfulness. Pastor's reply was "only on Mondays." While we smile at that, I am sure that there were some Mondays when Pastor did not smile about that.

I could spend some time here this morning parroting statistics available on the internet about pastor burnout, but I do not feel like I need those to know that there is a real need in this area of Christian local-church ministry. We pray for churches here in New England who have lost pastors recently and need new ones. Some of those situations have not been times of celebration for those men or their churches. I will be meeting this Friday evening, Lord willing, with a family who needs some help who attends a church where their pastor is on an extended leave of absence. On Tuesday I am going to have lunch with a co-laborer who often seems discouraged about how difficult ministry in his church is.

The passage before us this morning indicates that there is something that we can do to help with this need. I have titled the message, "How to have a good pastor," and I want us to notice three points from the text about this.

I. You will have a good pastor when you respond well to his leadership (v. 17).

III: I have mentioned four men who were blessings to my life as good pastors. But as I look back on their ministries, I know that not everyone they pastored thought that they were good pastors. Why the difference? Well, whether we have a good pastor sometimes has more to do with us than it does with the pastor. That is the point of the verse before us.

Appl: In order to respond well to a pastor's leadership, we need to understand what God's desire is for the nature of that leadership, the nature of our response to it, and the reasons for this response.

1. The nature of the leadership. We mentioned this two weeks ago when we were in verse 7, but I think that our KJV translators might give us the wrong idea about the nature of pastoral leadership when they translate this Greek word as *them that have the rule over you*. I mentioned then that this word often means *to convince*, and so it has the idea of someone whose responsibility it is to lead someone else to the right conclusion. God's Word has the rule over each one of us, so the nature of this leadership is the teaching of God's Word by precept and example (v. 7).

2. The nature of the response. This is the real focus of our verses this morning. How we are to respond to leadership that is faithful to the teaching and exempling of the Word of God may be summarized by two words: *obey* and *submit*.

a. The idea of *submit* is *to yield to someone over you*.

Ill: We have road signs that tell us to yield to oncoming traffic. Part of this word is the word that would be on such a sign in first century Greece. When you yield, you allow someone else to go first. You fit your plans for your car in with what they are planning to do with their car. The other part of this word is the preposition meaning *under*. So we voluntarily yield while recognizing that we are under someone's authority.

So when we hear the teaching of the Word of God from a pastor, we are to yield under that authority. We are to allow that teaching to have its way with us first, and we are

to fit everything else we want to do around the accommodation of that teaching. This is the only example of the usage of this word in the NT, but we learn an important lesson about yielding to spiritual leadership from a close synonym meaning simply *to yield* (Gal. 2:4-5). – Here Paul refuses to yield to false brethren.

When a pastor or a brother in Christ tells us something that is in conflict with God’s Word, we are not to yield. As I read that verse this week, I thought of how often it seems that people fail to yield to the true teaching of their pastor because they have decided instead to yield to the false teaching of a false brother.

b. The idea of *obey* is *to be persuaded* by someone. The Lord’s command here to each of us is to be persuaded by the faithful teaching of our leaders from the Word of God. The translation *obey* is a good one, because this persuasion has not happened until the teaching is obeyed. It is the same word used to describe how a believer is to obey the Word of God (Rom. 2:8, “But unto them that are contentious, and do not *obey* the truth, but *obey* unrighteousness, indignation and wrath”; Gal. 5:7, “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not *obey* the truth?”). So leaders are to be obeyed because they are teaching the truth of God.

Ill: Another usage of this word helps us understand the true nature of its response to truth (Jam. 3:3). What is it about a horse that makes it obey the bit that is put into its mouth? What is it about a horse that lets you put a bit in its mouth in the first place? Well, the spirit of the horse has been broken to trust and obey its master, the owner of the horse and of the bit.

Appl: You see, pastors are just like that bit. If a horse refuses to obey the bit, it is not that the bit is doing anything wrong.

It is rather that the horse has a problem with the owner who has sent the bit. If our hearts are right with the Great Shepherd of the Sheep (v. 20), we will welcome and respond to in a sensitive and teachable way the under-shepherd pastor's teaching of the Word of God.

Can you say you do that? Are you motivated to hear that teaching so that you can obey that teaching because your spirit is yielded to our Owner and Master? Do you ask your pastor questions about how to obey better God's Word? You know, there are few things as majestic and as useful as a horse who is sensitive to its owner's bit. There are few things as heart-warming and as useful in the work of the Lord as a congregation that is thankful and teachable in their relationship to their pastor.

3. The reasons for the response (v. 17b). Respond with obedience and yielding to your pastor's teaching from God's Word because your pastor watches for your soul as one who shall give an account. *To watch* for someone's soul is *to stay on the alert, to stay awake*, and to do so especially in prayer. Eph. 6:18 uses this word in a context of prayer, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and *watching* thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Pastors watch for the souls of their people by praying for them in addition to teaching them, and they do that as those who will have to give an account for whether or not they have faithfully prayed for God's people.

So how does this concern those for whom the pastor prays? Answer: "that they may do it [the watching through prayer] with joy and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you." I know from experience that when a pastor prays for a believer, he does so with either joy or with grief, or with some mixture of the two.

The grief here is simply the opposite of joy, and it can take on many forms (depression, sorrow, discouragement, frustration, disappointment, hurt, you name it). So the question we need to ask this morning is “How does praying for me make my pastor feel?” You ever ask yourself that? You should, and the reason why is that it is unprofitable for you if your pastor feels great grief when he prays for you. That means you are likely in need of the Lord’s chastening, and it means that you are likely a source of discouragement to a very human servant of God who needs joy and not grief to minister effectively in Christ.

I believe that if more church members asked and answered this question honestly, there would be less pastoral burnout in the church of Jesus Christ. You will have a good Pastor when you respond well to his leadership.

II. You will have a good pastor when you pray for him (v. 18).

Appl: We have spoken of the way that a pastor prays for God’s people. This verse is about the way those people should pray for their pastor. The verse gives us a reason for those prayers: the job is demanding – “a good conscience; in everything behaving well.” A pastor’s ministry is sunk if he lacks a good conscience and fails in anything to behave well. So they need our prayers.

Do you pray for me? I know that for many here the answer is *yes* because I have heard those prayers again this week. Mark and Bryan prayed for me on Tuesday morning. At a Bible study later that same day, Tony prayed for me. The assembly prayed for me Wednesday evening as Betty led our prayers. I got an email from a family not attending our church that said they are praying for me.

As I have heard those many prayers for me, I have learned what topics need to be covered when you pray for your pastor: (1) thankfulness for him; (2) confession and repentance for unfaithfulness in the flock and the need for revival; (3) wisdom and strength for his ministry; and (4) the well-being of his family. You will have a good pastor when you pray for him, because a good pastor is not a work of man – especially not the pastor – but a work of God’s wonderful grace in the life. I need to hear your prayers for me.

III. You will have a good pastor when you truly miss him (v. 19).

Appl: For some reason, our author had been absent from his Hebrew friends. In my view, the physician Luke was still in Rome because Timothy had been imprisoned by the authorities when he responded to Paul’s letter to come, and Luke had remained there to tend to his needs as a physician. Now that Timothy was released, plans were in the works to return to Palestine (v. 23). It was Luke’s hope that these believers missed him, that they wanted to see him, and that they would pray to that end.

Does that describe your relationship to your pastor? Do you miss him? Do you feel that you would rather avoid him? Does he need to be restored to you? Are you in danger of losing your relationship with him?

Conclusion: It is a wonderful thing to look back on the pastors that have been a blessing to my life and know that I really have not lost any of them. One has gone home to glory, but his picture still looks down on me in my office where I worked on this sermon this week. The others are still good albeit distant friends. What is your relationship to your pastor? Does he pray for you with joy or with grief? I

know the answer to that question; do you? Do you pray for him? You know the answer to that question better than I. Do you miss him? Our church needs a good pastor, and you have everything to do with meeting that need.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*