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Sermon Notes

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Following Godly Leadership

Hebrews 13:7-9, 17-19

I. The Importance of Spiritual Leadership

A. What Makes a Godly Spiritual Leader?

1. Personality? Position? Talents? Charisma? Eloquence? Physical Strength? Confidence?

B. What is the Ideal Model for Spiritual Leadership?

1. Is it a corporate CEO? John Maxwell has made a living plundering secular models for leadership and doing conferences for Pastors

I listened some years ago to his talks on “Senior Pastor Profile: How to be a Successful Senior Pastor”... the advice was nauseatingly secular:

- Charismatic (in personality and style): “No one wants a friend that makes them feel bad about themselves; the moment you can get people to think more about themselves than you, you have developed charisma” “A senior pastor needs to have showmanship without showing off; an item needs to be done in a way that is above average, unique, special, memorable, classy... a senior pastor needs to be a ‘Pied Piper’ of people—a person people enjoy following because of his charisma, charm, and personal magnetism; the Senior Pastor needs a winning smile, a sense of humor, and a charming personality; ideally, a Senior Pastor will present himself well physically... he should be attractive”
- Confident: “When you begin to have a true, real confidence about yourself, the people will begin to have confidence in you. In other words, confidence breeds confidence.” A Senior Pastor should develop some area of high achievement and base his confidence on that
- Communicative: “A senior pastor needs to have a good media presence; he must be a salesman. He must be able to sell ‘snowballs to Eskimos’... he needs to be able to close the deal, to cause the crowd to march... he must be able to move people emotionally from where they are to where the pastor wants them to be”

2. One book on church leadership analyzed the entrepreneurial, management, and administrative techniques of such wildly successful companies as Google.com, Amazon.com, Starbucks, Ben and Jerrys, Dell Computers, General Foods and several other prestigious secular corporations... asking “What does a **successful** leader look like? And how should those principles be transferred into church leadership?”
- C. Many Great Passage in the Bible Address the Questions of What Makes a Godly Leader and How Godly Leaders Should Carry Themselves and the Importance of Godly Role Models

1. Jesus’ instructions on Spiritual Leadership given to His Twelve Apostles:

Matthew 20:25-28 You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

For Jesus... the centerpiece of true spiritual leadership was sacrifice and servanthood... but in the end, leadership is about GODLY INFLUENCE... the ability to move people to obey God

This is ABSOLUTELY VITAL in the church... because every member of the church is fighting a fierce battle with the world, the flesh and the devil... and we need to be equipped for that fight; and because the specific callings of a local church are hard to discern... and because the people of God are frequently portrayed as sheep needing a shepherd...

WE MUST HAVE GODLY SPIRITUAL LEADERS

- D. This Passage: Not so much about identifying godly leaders as learning how to **FOLLOW THEM**... and how to get the most out of the gifts god is giving the church through them

II. Remembering and Imitating Past Leaders (vs. 7)

Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

- A. Who Are these “Leaders”?

1. Based on the verb tenses in this verse, I think this refers to PAST leaders, especially those who have gone on to be with the Lord
2. They SPOKE the word of God in the past... they are not doing so now
3. Their way of life is now completed... their departure has come (Greek word is “escape” from their lives of suffering; more in a moment)

B. Starting with the Mind: Remember them, Consider them

1. The Author wants the Hebrew Christians to REMEMBER these leaders... not to allow their example to slip into the dustbins of forgotten history
2. Christians must not lead THOUGHTLESS lives; so much of the battle in the Christian life is a battle for the MIND
3. The example of past leaders is a big part of God's training for the church
4. To remember these leaders means to keep mindful of the details of their lives, the stories of their trials and sufferings and victories; it means to ESTEEM them reverently
5. BUT the author would have been SHOCKED by and would have opposed the CULT OF SAINTS that arose in the middle ages in the Roman Catholic church
 - a. Two-tiered system of "saints and sinners": the "saints" voted on by the College of Cardinal; the rest had to go to purgatory
 - b. Prayers offered to the saints; patron saints of this or that: Wikipedia lists patron saints in three categories: saints of ailments/illnesses/dangers; saints of occupations; saints of locations; so, St. Abhai is the patron saint of poisonous reptile bites and St. Anthony of Padua the patron saint of missing people and missing items; St. Ferdinand III the patron saint of engineers; St. Cuthbert the patron saint of Durham, England. Most famous perhaps is St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes
 - c. The specificity of these illness, occupations and locations shows very little difference between the cult of saints and polytheism in which each deity has his/her own area of jurisdiction
 - d. It got beyond this even to worship of the saints: bones, relics, shrines and long pilgrimages made; feast days established in a calendar of devotion to these saints; people bowing down in front of glass boxes containing supposedly to skull of John the Baptist or the finger of Saint Botolph; thinking that if they prayed to these saints, the saints would intercede with God for them
 - e. THIS IS NOT what the author had in mind
6. Rather, it is a healthy understanding of church history: both your own local church, the leaders who spoke into your life in the past... and those who were great leaders and writers, martyrs and missionaries, etc. Remember them... think about what they did, what they said, how they suffered

C. Four-fold Focus of the Thinking

1. The leaders themselves

- a. Remember who they were... who poured into your life, who came and planted this church; who was instrumental in building it up; first century: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers
- b. For us today, the glorious golden chain of church history: of the church fathers, martyrs during the Roman era like Polycarp; courageous missionaries like Columba, who took the gospel to the warlike Picts in northern Scotland; Augustine, whose writings and teachings shaped the understanding of the church and defended it against the Pelagians and Roman pagans;

2. Their faith

- a. This means their commitment to sound doctrine AND to faith-filled courageous actions lived out
- b. Their FAITHFULNESS to run the Christian race right to the end

3. Their way of life

- a. The Greek word has to do to everyday life... manner of living... daily lifestyle under the gospel

4. Their final end

- a. Again, Greek word means “escape” ...

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way of escape so that you can stand up under it.

Consider how God brought them safely through all of their trials and came at last into heaven where they will never again be troubled by temptations!!

- b. Perhaps “outcome” ... you saw the good that came from their life of sacrifice; the fruit the Lord brought out of it

D. From Thinking to Imitation

- 1. The author desires the Hebrews not only to remember and admire them, but to IMITATE them
- 2. Greek word = mimeomai... mimeograph... mimic
- 3. This is the true object of this focus... to shape our lives by these good examples

4. These leaders are in heaven... they have “fought the good fight and finished the race and kept the faith”... they have come into a far greater reward than any accolades living people can give them; such baubles of earthly praise would mean literally NOTHING to these departed and glorified leaders; they have received the highest commendation from God:

John 12:26 My Father will honor the one who serves me.

5. NO!! The purpose of this remembering is IMITATION... this was the whole purpose of Hebrews 11, the grand, glorious “Hall of Faith”... not to have these leaders stand up at a podium at their enshrinement and give a teary-eyes speech thanking family and friends and all the “little people” who made this day possible! Not at all... the author gave us the Great Cloud of witnesses so that we also would run our race with endurance right to the end... that the readers of Hebrews would IMITATE their faith and run their own race of service to Christ right to the end
6. Imitation is the CENTRAL ISSUE in leadership
- a. Pattern of doctrine
 - b. Pattern of lifestyle
7. Therefore many verses speak of the need for godly men and women to live conspicuous lives of holiness and obedience and courage and faith so that those that follow may have a clear example to follow

1 Corinthians 11:1 ¶ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Philippians 3:17 ¶ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

Philippians 4:9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

8. Some aspects of the Christian life MUST be lived out... Christianity is BOTH taught AND caught... the teaching comes first, always, because the word is primary... but the how to LIVE in space and time, how to live out faith’s principles
- a. How to begin a conversation with a lost person... how to gently and firmly guide the conversation step by step through twists and turns to the cross
 - b. How to be patient when wronged... what your face looks like, what gentle answers you should give when insulted; how to suffer for Christ, perhaps even to the point of bodily persecution... in the case of these first century Christians, it might even involve confiscation of property and

imprisonment and perhaps torture and death; younger Christians learn by WATCHING how it is done... like Paul said to Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:10-11 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings-- what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

- c. How to be a godly husband to a wife... what Christ-like, servant leadership looks like by a man to his wife
- d. OR how to be a submissive wife to a husband... what face, what demeanor, what tone of voice... how a wife can give good counsel and help to her husband and still be submissive to his headship; here godly women can and must be EXAMPLES of faith to younger women... women can and must lead other women in this
- e. How to manage a household of growing kids... how to train them up in the Lord, to shape their experiences so they hear and understand the gospel plainly and see it lived out in the home
- f. How to be a faithful steward of your resources: how to spend money and how to save and how to give to the Lord and the poor
- g. How to pray, to intercede for the saints and for the spread of the gospel
- h. On and on it goes... the church is YEARNING for godly leaders; but if the Lord graciously gives such leaders, it is the church's responsibility to FOLLOW FAITHFULLY their example

E. Application

1. Are you seeking to remember your godly leaders who went before and to IMITATE their faith?
2. Are you mindful of YOUR OWN spiritual heritage that you inherited? And are you seeking to leave a godly heritage to those who come after you?

III. Understanding the Only Unchangeable Leader: Jesus Christ (vs. 8)

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

A. Why is this statement HERE??

1. Challenge: how do we follow the thread of the writer's thinking?
2. This statement could be taken as a stand-alone... a single verse that asserts an independent, timeless truth

3. BUT it is always best to understand something first in the context in which it was written

B. The Eternal Deity of Christ is True, but Not In View Here

1. Jesus Christ IS God... as God, He never changes
2. The immutability of God is a central attribute of His essential nature, and greatly differentiates Him from the rest of creation
3. Everything else in creation is mutable, improvable or corruptible...
4. But the Almighty Creator of the universe NEVER CHANGES
5. Since Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, He also NEVER CHANGES in His essential being, His essential nature
6. BUT this doctrine is not really in view here

C. Still Less Can this Be Used the Way Charismatics Use It

1. I have heard those in the charismatic movement use this verse to prove that the sign gifts—miracles, speaking in tongues, prophecies, healings—are all still every bit as much a part of Christ's plan now as they were in His lifetime and during the time of the apostles
2. The argument works like this: Jesus Christ sent the apostles out to heal the sick and raise the dead, drive out demons and perform miracles in His name; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever; therefore, we can do the exact same signs now that they did then
3. BUT the verse doesn't teach that! I am not a cessationist in this sense, that verses can be found in the NT that prove that miracles, speaking in tongues, prophecies, healings have definitely CEASED; but simple bible interpretation teaches you that Jesus Christ HIMSELF can still be the same, but He may COMMAND different things of different servants at different times

D. Why is it Here, Then?

1. Connected between the faithful leaders of verse 7 and the heretical, false doctrines of verse 9 is this strong assertion about the true, unchanging leader of the church: Jesus Christ
2. Jesus is the HEAD of the Church, the CHIEF SHEPHERD... all who follow are merely building on the foundation He laid, or are shepherding the sheep He bought with His own blood

1 Peter 5:2 [to the elders of the church] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers

1 Peter 5:4 When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

3. All godly leaders and elders and teachers in the church do so UNDER THE CHIEF SHEPHERD, Jesus Christ
4. And while those human leaders will all change and die away, the Lord will never change, never die away, continue to shepherd His flock from generation to generation
5. This verse makes me think of the vision the elderly Apostle John had on the Isle of Patmos of the resurrected and glorified Christ:

Revelation 1:13-16 among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

E. Application

1. Thank Jesus daily for His shepherding work in the church; thank Him that His patient, tender leadership of the church never changes
2. Elders: understand your secondary leadership of the church of Jesus Christ; He alone has been here at FBC through all of its history... since 1845, He has been shepherding this same church, this same flock, through all of its twists and turns
3. Marvel at the security of this UNCHANGING NATURE of Christ's leadership; His doctrine never changes, His love for the church can never grow hotter, His zeal for the holiness of His people cannot increase and never decreases
4. Rest secured in the image of this unchanging GOOD SHEPHERD tending His flock all around the world; human leaders come and go... Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

5. Rest secured also in Christ unchanging love for you personally!! He will never leave you nor forsake you; He will always love you—into eternity—with the same love with which He loves you right now

IV. Understanding the Threat of False Leaders (vs. 9)

Hebrews 13:9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.

A. The Constant Threat of False Doctrine

1. The church is to be the pillar and foundation of the TRUTH
2. In every generation, however, false teachers come along and try to move the church from its secure position
3. The danger here is of FALSE DOCTRINE... which the writer calls “strange teachings”
 - a. “diverse and foreign” doctrines
 - b. “diverse” = varied, mixed... in effect, there is ONE DOCTRINE that is called “the faith”... it is perfect, consistent, unified, integrated... a perfect UNITY; but false doctrines are VARIED and ALIEN
 - c. “alien” = coming from a different source than the mind of Christ
 - i) John 10: Jesus the Good Shepherd; the thief comes in by some other way
 - ii) The sheep follow the voice of the Good Shepherd
 - iii) BUT the sheep will NEVER follow the voice of the other man, the thief; they run away from the thief because they do not recognize the thief’s voice
4. The DANGER: being CARRIED AWAY by this false doctrine; like being kidnapped by a powerful band of raiders; or moved away by the ebb and flow of the changing tide

Ephesians 4:14 infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

5. The true church is to be STABLE, STEADFAST doctrinally, not looking for doctrinal innovation

B. Consistent Warnings to the Church About this

Acts 20:29-31 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.... So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

2 Peter 2:1-2 there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them-- bringing swift destruction on themselves. ² Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

2 Peter 3:17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

2 John 1:9-10 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him.

C. The Strengthening Power of the Doctrines of Grace

Vs. 9 It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.

1. The false doctrine that the Author has in mind is Jewish Legalism; the so-called Judaizers who mingled the doctrine of the free grace of God in Christ with Jewish works of the law; requiring circumcision for all Gentile converts and making salvation totally dependent on human effort and Old Covenant laws
2. True Strength comes from the gospel of Grace:
 - a. Grace is the sovereign determination of God to do eternal good to people who deserve His eternal wrath
 - b. Grace is a FORCE INSIDE GOD that results in a river of actions that conquer sin on our behalf and safely bring us to heaven
 - c. This true gospel of God's GRACE has power to STRENGTHEN our hearts... to give us determination and perseverance to the end of our Christian lives; legalism only weakens us
 - d. Ceremonial foods = food coming from the Old Covenant sacrificial system; meats offered by the Levitical priests; delicious to the taste buds, but having no strengthening value on our hearts

3. The “Doctrines of Grace”

- a. Grace is contrasted with human effort in salvation... by grace vs. by works

Romans 11:6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

- b. Tracing grace back to its source, it is the determination of God concerning His elect... a determination which unleashes all the actions needed to save us from sin and bring us to heaven in glory

- i) By grace (NOT WORKS) we were elected, predestined by God before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight
- ii) By grace (NOT WORKS), God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place, satisfying the justice and wrath of God for our sins
- iii) By grace (NOT WORKS), God raised Jesus from the dead for our justification and life
- iv) By grace (NOT WORKS), God sent out the gospel message to the ends of the earth
- v) By grace (NOT WORKS), God drew His elect out of darkness into the light of Christ; He gave them repentance and faith as acts of His sovereign grace
- vi) By grace (NOT WORKS), God keeps the elect believing in Him to the end of their lives
- vii) By grace (NOT WORKS), God will glorify each of the elect, raising them from the dead in resurrection bodies conformed to Christ

- c. This is the GRACE which strengthens our hearts; ceremonial foods and a message of Jewish legalism has no such power

D. Applications

1. Be on constant guard about false teachers, who seek to introduce destructive doctrines... various and alien doctrines
2. Test what you hear by the word of God; delight in the good teachers you have and learn from them; just because they stretch you and challenge you in your views doesn't make them false teachers; but if they are not preaching Christ—incarnate, crucified as our substitute, resurrected, ascended and

reigning with God as God—if they are preaching human works and legalism or license, if they cannot back up their doctrines by Scripture, then expose them and weed them out

3. When I and the other elders are done here, if the Lord hasn't returned, be sure that this unchanging message from Scripture after Scripture continues to be taught here; the CHURCH IS RESPONSIBLE for our successors!!!
4. Be on your guard against false doctrine, false teachers
5. Swim in the doctrines of grace!! Be strengthened by the doctrines of unconditional election, predestination to glory, the grace of Christ in dying for the elect; the sovereign grace from God to regenerate the souls of spiritually dead people, the sovereign grace of gifts like repentance and faith; the guaranteed success of the gospel among the elect, and the guaranteed finishing of the race by the elect so that not one of them will be lost

V. Submitting to Godly Leaders (vs. 17)

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

A. Straightforward Command: Obey and Submit

1. Two Greek words make it plain what God has in mind here
2. “Obey” = do what is commanded
3. “Submit to authority” = submit to the general pattern of leadership; be submissive under; array yourselves under the authority

B. Who Are these Leaders?

1. Verse 7 are departed leaders; verse 17 are present leaders... the ones you have NOW
2. These are NOT government leaders (Romans 13); there, we are told to submit to them because they have the power of the sword; the sword keeps criminals in check; this is not in view here
3. These are SPIRITUAL leaders, shepherds of souls; it says these are men who are keeping watch over your souls and who must give an account on Judgment Day for your souls, for your spiritual health
4. They are established in spiritual authority by Jesus Christ Himself; Christ raises up these men, and they are men, to lead His church UNDER HIS OVERALL AUTHORITY (as we mentioned a moment ago)

5. As we understand church government, these leaders are the men who are set apart as ELDERS in the church, given the dual responsibility of teaching and leading/administering the ministries of the church
6. They are MEN, not women because Paul commanded plainly in 1 Timothy 2

1 Timothy 2:12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

7. Set apart by the command of God, meeting the criteria for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1; acknowledged and established in office by the will of the church
8. These are those who must teach and preach the word of God and manage the affairs of the church—make decisions for the successful growth of the church numerically and in spiritual maturity

C. What is the Nature of this Obedience and Submission?

1. NOT blind, implicit obedience, such as demanded by tyrants
 - a. Such blind and total submission to the authority of a man in church office characterized the abuses of the popes in Roman Catholicism
 - b. Such blind and total obedience to the commands of a spiritual leader are characteristic of cults... like Jim Jones, who commanded the people in the People's Temple in Guyana to drink the purple Kool-Aid, resulting in their deaths
 - c. Rather, this obedience is to be reasonable, based on the truth of God's word
 - d. Even the Apostle Paul was delighted to have the noble-hearted Bereans search the Scriptures every day to see if the things Paul was teaching were true
2. NOT obedience in areas that have nothing to do with the office of elder; false teachers frequently overreach their authority and begin to bind the conscience of the people in areas in which they have no jurisdiction; so the medieval Catholic leaders gave commands to kings and princes and judges, binding them to full obedience in SECULAR matters
3. Submission and obedience is in line with the command of Jesus Christ in the Great Commission:

“make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING I HAVE COMMANDED YOU”

- a. So, the teaching ministry of the leaders goes hand in hand with their authority
 - b. They are explaining and proving from the Scriptures the things that Jesus is commanding the people to do
 - c. Thus the leadership of the elders is all completely under the Lordship of Christ
 - d. Submission to the elders should be plainly seen to be submission to Christ as He has revealed it in the word; not apart from it
 - e. Thus the authority of elders is a TEACHING and EXPLAINING authority all based on the Bible... as the passages are explained, the elder is proving to the people that this is something Christ wants them to do
4. Servant leadership, not lording it over those entrusted
- a. 1 Peter 5 teaches this plainly
 - b. So also the clear teaching of Jesus about the rulers of the Gentiles:

Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

5. Servant leadership that is HUMBLE and free from the trappings of authority and worldly wealth and honor

Matthew 23:6-7 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷ they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

6. Obedience and Submission in the context of congregational church government
- a. Baptist churches are CONGREGATIONAL in polity; that means there is no human church authority higher than the local church
 - b. No bishop assigns a Baptist church its elders; they are raised up and voted upon and established in office by the will of the people
 - c. The church must assess each candidate by the biblical criteria of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and if they meet those criteria, the church is to vote and establish them in office

- d. The church also has the power to remove an elder because of sin: false teaching or unholy living
 - e. BUT... as long as the elder has been duly established and has not sinned and is carrying out his ministry faithfully, it is the church's responsibility to follow the collective leadership of the elders
 - f. NO "Personnel Committee" to which the paid elders must report!
7. Submitting to everything that is OBVIOUSLY or even PLAUSIBLY biblical
- a. Having established these men in office, and passively observing to be sure they are teaching faithfully and living in a godly manner, the church MUST SUBMIT AND OBEY... or else Hebrews 13:17 is violated
 - b. In some matters, it is obvious what the word of God says: everyone knows that gossip and slander are sins and that we must not do them; arguing and conflicts and unforgiveness are sins about which no one disagrees; the need to reach the lost with the gospel, to be active in prayer and witnessing everyone agrees; SUBMIT and OBEY in these matters comes in the form of willingly taking part in the outreaches the elders organize; willingly yielding to a word of gentle correction that comes from an elder if he should mention gossip or slander and urge you to repent; not harboring bitterness in your heart
 - i) In counseling, a married couple should listen to the counsel of the elder and follow it as though Christ were giving it
 - ii) If he is a godly elder, he will support his counsel with clear biblical teaching; passages of scripture that speak to the issue at hand
 - iii) The couple should take that counsel very seriously and obey it
 - c. In other matters, the issue is more debatable: take worship style for example; you may be delighted with the changes the elders have sought to institute in corporate worship; you may be neutral; you may disagree vigorously; but it is important to realize you MAY BE WRONG... you should be humble and yield to the leadership of the church; it is when you don't agree that Hebrews 13:17 means the most; if the elders are leading in a PLAUSIBLY BIBLICAL direction, you can ask for clarification, you can go discuss your views, you can make your case; but once the elders have heard it and prayed through it and decided to go a different direction, Hebrews 13:17 kicks in; fomenting revolt, a quiet back-room whispering campaign... this is ruled out

VI. Understanding the Burdens of Godly Leadership (vs. 17)

^{ESV} Hebrews 13:17 ¶ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

A. Keeping Watch Over Your Souls

1. This is the shepherding function of the elders
2. The Greek word = to lose sleep over your souls
3. The image is of a shepherd awake all night because the wolves come then to drag off the strays
4. Practically, it implies such a high level of concern over your spiritual welfare that they can't sleep at night
5. They have to get up and pray; or they go out in the middle of the night to the Emergency room at the hospital to be with you in a time of severe trial
6. The implication is that these undershepherds are part of God's plan to protect the sheep from the ravenous wolves of false teachers and the prowling lion who is Satan
7. HOW INCREDIBLY VALUABLE IS THAT?????
8. Good elders know the spiritual condition of the people: the state of their walks with Christ; the sins they struggle with; the state of their marriages and family life; their discouragements and successes; in general how they are doing financially and if materialism is gripping their lifestyles

B. Those Who Will Have to Give an Account

1. Very sober warning for all elders; someday, I will stand before Jesus and give Him an account of my shepherding of FBC
2. He will ask close questions about my life and my doctrine; He will ask me about sins of omission: things I should have done to make the church healthier
3. All nine elders of FBC will have to bear that same level of scrutiny from the Lord and will have to give an accurate reason for everything we did and didn't do
4. That is a very serious matter!!

C. Let Them Do It With Joy, Not With Groaning

1. The watching over your souls should be a JOY, not a BURDEN
2. The delight comes from the spiritual progress the elders should see in your lives
3. It should be from your glad, willing obedience to the biblical commands the elders give as they help you navigate the dangerous waters of a Christian walk in this sinful generation
4. It should be from your consistent attendance at church so they don't have to go track you down and wonder where you are and why you've been missing church so much
5. It should be a JOY to hear of your witnessing efforts, or the way you've grown in your prayer life, or the fact that you've begun to memorize a book of the bible, or you finally got up the nerve to ask a neighbor to church
6. The SPIRITUAL HEALTH of the church and its individual members is what makes this a joy
7. The burden comes from the LACK of SPIRITUAL HEALTH
 - a. Church members who willingly following sins and the ways of this world
 - b. Church members who are argumentative and complaining, who fight the elders and oppose them and slander them and talk against their decisions
 - c. Church members who are lazy and who frequently miss church to follow personal pursuits; or who don't challenge themselves to grow
 - d. Church members who increasingly drift away from Christ as seen in their marriages, their conversations, their spending habits
8. Simply put: ELDERS WHO ENJOY their ministry are a great blessing to the church; the joy of the elders in leading a unified and growing church is a powerful thing
9. BUT...if it becomes a BURDEN:

D. For That Would Be of No Advantage to You

1. Once the shepherding becomes an overwhelming burden, there starts to increase pressure on the elders to QUIT
2. That is what happens: elders who struggle with rebellious and sinful sheep either grow discouraged and leave the ministry themselves or the rebellious faction gains enough political control to vote them out
3. Either way, the church loses

4. If the rebellious people have enough clout to force out godly elders, that church is on a short route to apostasy:

2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

5. Amazingly, less than ten percent of men who begin as pastors actually retire as pastors!!!
6. Amazingly, the average length of pastorate in the SBC is less than TWO YEARS
7. This is of NO ADVANTAGE to the church, because now no one is shepherding your souls
8. It is to the church's great advantage to cherish godly pastors and follow their godly leadership... make your godly elders happy now, and you will be happy with the spiritual results beyond Judgment Day

VII. Praying for Godly Leaders (vs. 18-19)

Hebrews 13:18-19 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. ¹⁹ I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

- A. Spiritual Leaders Need Prayer!!!
- B. With the Overwhelming Responsibilities and Pressures, One of the Best Things You Can Do is Pray
- C. Pray
 1. For their walks with Christ, so that they would keep a clear conscience and live honorably in every way
 2. Pray for them to preach and teach the truth in accordance with the word of God
 3. Pray that their leadership will be humble, Christ-like, servant leadership, saturated in biblical truth
 4. Pray that the church will FOLLOW that leadership
 5. Pray that the elders will DELIGHT in their ministry
 6. Pray that the elders will evangelize boldly and clearly and fruitfully
 7. Pray that Christ will be glorified in the leadership of FBC