

May 24, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Transition
Community Baptist Church
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THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PASTOR

Faith Communities Today concluded in a recent survey of 2,500 churches that more than half of the members said that they did not believe their church was spiritually vital. To make that more personal, we could conclude that it means over half the people in the churches that were surveyed said that their pastor didn't matter. We can be pretty sure that if anyone actually said that to their pastor, he would not have a good day nor would he be unconcerned about the matter.

Maybe that kind of conflict or lack of appreciation explains in part why the typical tenure for senior pastors hovered around four years for the past couple of decades. Youth pastors generally stay for about three years. The good news, according to Thom Rainer who quoted a Lifeway Research Study, is that from 2000-2004 the average tenure for pastors was four years, but since 2012 it seems to have increased to an average of six years. His theory is that the average age of pastors has increased because the old guys (average age of pastors now) aren't as prone to move around.

So who writes the rules that govern how the congregation ought to treat their pastors? A couple of weeks ago we studied God's plan for the pastor's responsibility to the congregation. Could it be that God has also given direction and instructions for how the people are to relate to the pastor? Indeed He has. There are multiple texts and statements in the New Testament that help us understand the other side of the relationship coin.

As we are in the beginning stages of the transition process, we need to realize that this will require the establishment of new relationships. It is good for us to look forward to establishing those very important relationships according to God's plan as we will see it outlined in these texts.

The Congregation's Responsibility to the Pastor

The Right Attitude.

The people begin to fulfill their responsibility to the pastor when they hear what he says. The writer to the Hebrew Christians challenged them, *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it (Hebrews 2:1)*. To hear what the pastor teaches will require that each person in the assembly pay close attention or, as the writer put it, *we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard (v. 1a)*.

In chapter one of this letter, the writer quoted no less than seven times from the Old Testament Scriptures. All of these passages argue for and present the majesty of Christ's divinity. Whatever the Church is or does is built on the character of Christ. The character of Christ is revealed most fully in the Scripture. By and large this was the official Scripture for the Church in the early days. Therefore, what the preachers preached, and what the people were supposed to pay much closer attention to was the explanation and application of those Scriptures.

In addition to the Old Testament truths, the preachers in the early church often had access more and more to writings available from Paul, Peter, James, Jude. Of course, we know that none of John's writings were available in 67-69 when this letter to the Hebrews was written. John wrote near the end of the first century. The topic of the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors/teachers was God's Word none the less. It was equivalent to the authority of our completed Bible.

Therefore, the author of the letter reminded the people that they had already heard it, just like the people in this assembly have already heard God's Word. To hear is the expected cognate of divine revelation. God does not speak His Word simply to have it floating around in cyber-space. God's messengers declare it and the people hear it. And the word translated *hear* can refer to simply hearing a sound or intentionally listening to something with purpose. Both ideas could apply in this challenge. Some people attend a preaching service but only hear sound. Other people attend to preaching in order to be taught, to understand, to be changed.

But more than hearing the sound or even listening to the words, the assembly is challenged to pay close attention. The challenge here is to hold on more exceedingly to what you have heard taught. It means to turn one's mind toward something. In short, the people are supposed to stop and think about the truth that is declared. Meditate would be a good synonym. A fine picture of it is families or friends meeting together later to discuss the truth that was unfolded.

Why all the effort? Why is it so important to pay close attention to what the preacher preaches? Because there is a danger of drifting. Pay close attention *lest we drift away from it (v. 1b)*. The verb behind the words *we drift* can refer to the implied object, *what we have heard*. It is too common for God's people to hear the wonderful truths of Scripture so often that they lose significance to us. When something is not important, we do not think about it, pay attention to it, meditate on it, or discuss it. If we let truth drift, we will lose our boundaries.

Or the verb can refer, as our English text indicates, to us drifting. We drift personally in our fellowship with God when His truth is no longer vital to us. A theme throughout this letter is apostasy. Apostasy occurs when someone knows the truth, claims to hold to the truth, but not being changed by truth, lets the truth slip away. That person is described in three different texts in this letter. In Hebrews 4:1-16 we find the illustration of Israelites who rebelled against God and did not enter the Promised Land. The application is to us who need to strive to enter the eternal rest of heaven and not fall by the same sort of disobedience. In Hebrews 6:4-8, we learn that it is impossible to restore the person who has been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, and then walked away.

Then Hebrews 10:26-27 states, *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries*. The apostate knows much about the gospel, made a profession of faith, was closely associated with the local church, but was never truly born again. They heard sounds and maybe words. But they drifted and let the truth drift from them.

It is the responsibility of people in the congregation to pay close attention to what the pastor teaches. It is also their responsibility to

respect the pastor (according to most English translations). Paul addressed Christians in Thessalonica by writing, *We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you (1 Thessalonians 5:12)*.

That this is a request is obvious from the way it is stated, *We ask you, brothers, to respect*. It is rather interesting that this is a request and not a command. We might have expected a command to go along with the 1,000 other commands in the New Testament. But respect is an attitude and one cannot demand a particular attitude. It is like the person who is able to paste a smile on the face, but in the heart is angry and bitter.

Let's consider what is requested. The verb actually means to know. It would be very similar to the idea expressed in Proverbs 27:23 that the shepherd is to know the condition of his flock. Here, in a reversed form, the "sheep" are encouraged to know the shepherd. The word speaks of mutual knowledge and understanding. Therefore, while "respect" might not be the typical translation of the word, we can understand why the English translators determined that when you really know the pastor, you will respect him. The text unpacks how that idea works out in the reasons for respect.

The first reason for respecting the pastors or leaders is because they labor among you. The Lord desires for His people to be intimately aware that the pastor is working hard among them. While the Greek word behind *labor* means to work hard, it is generally used to explain extreme work. It means to become weary and exhausted from carrying a heavy load. In fact, in the secular use of the word in ancient Greece, it described someone who was as weary as if he had been beaten. That kind of adds a new meaning to the phrase, "Man, I'm beat."

The pastor is working to the point of exhaustion among the people. It is hard labor to try to maintain relationships. Trying to help those who are struggling spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically is very tiring. No one can imagine how tiring it is to *reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2)* until they have tried it.

Just to give a point of reference, my schedule is not abnormal compared to pastors across the country. I begin at 7:00 each morning seven days a week. I study and prepare sermons from 7:00 -11:30

Monday through Friday. Then I come to the church office and work until between 3:00 and 5:00 depending on Bible studies, counseling, or hospital visitation. I like to take off Saturdays, but about half the time I will be involved in some kind of church work on Saturday (like Men's discipleship breakfast, Encouragers, Weddings, Recitals, any number of things). Sunday is a full day with a 2 hour break for lunch, then back to final preparations for Sunday evening at 2:15. By 7:30 that evening I am usually home. Wednesday evening is prayer meeting. Twice a month Tuesday evening is board meetings. Plus there are hospital visits, non-critical visits, and counseling multiple evenings in a month. Suffice it to say that 50 hours is a slow week, 60 hours is a normal week, and 70 hours is not unusual. Your new pastor will also keep a schedule similar to that. It is exhausting.

Second, the people in the assembly should learn to respect the pastor or leaders because they are over you in the Lord. The participle translated *over you* means to stand before in the position of leadership. Typically, the word would be used to describe political or government leaders. The pastor is not over the congregation because he is in any way superior but because it is God's appointment. Therefore, his responsibility of leadership is carried out *in the Lord*. Leadership involves practical wisdom in mundane matters and especially in spiritual matters. At Community Baptist Church, we have shared leadership by way of the elected elders who advise the pastor's leading.

Third, the people should respect the spiritual leadership because they admonish you. To admonish is to "put in mind." It is part of the pastor's job to remind people and to warn people. This is the work of warning people of pending danger, or to warn them about God's teaching lest they forget. It also applies in the sense of rebuking the people because they have forgotten the Lord's teaching and have wandered off into sin or have become rebellious against God. Christ, the founder and builder of the Church, expects the people He has brought into the Church to know these characteristics about the pastor/teacher He has given to the Church.

A third attitude of the congregation is to esteem. Continuing on in Paul's statement to the Thessalonian believers, *And to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:13)*. The people should esteem pastors

because of their work. They are to *esteem them very highly in love because of their work (v.13a)*.

To esteem is to think about, to consider, to establish an opinion. In that sense, this requirement is much like "know." But this word goes a little deeper to mean give intentional, deliberate consideration. It is a present tense verb which describes the congregation's characteristic of their relationship with the pastor.

They are not only to consider and establish a right opinion, but they are to esteem highly. The word *highly* adds to the requirement making it excessive, *quite beyond all measure*. To show esteem is difficult enough, going beyond what is normally expected is pretty unusual. But Christ the Church Builder says, "Sure, but that is what I want to see as the norm."

Furthermore the people should highly esteem the pastor in love. Genuine love has the motivation for this attitude. Obviously, the word for love here has to be *agapei*, an intentional decision to do what is best for the recipient of your love even if it requires sacrifice on your part. Love has to be the prevailing motivation for the pastor's work, and the congregation's response.

The reason for such extreme esteem is because of the pastor's work. Here the word for work is the more typical reference to work. It is the work God has called the pastor to do. Think about your pastor, get to know him, esteem him exceedingly high in love because of his work . . . even when he makes you angry! And someone might actually respond to that by saying, "Oh, but my pastor would never do that!" If that were actually true, it means that you are not human and neither is he. Because we are humans, you are at some point going to get crossed up with the Bible. When you do, because your pastor loves you, he will "rebuke," that is put together the evidence and correct you. And he may not do that as kindly and gently as he should because he too is human.

That is why we are also to strive for peace. Paul ended verse thirteen in this text by telling the people to *be at peace among yourselves (v.13b)*. It also requires that the people will need to work at being at peace with the pastor. By the way, "be at peace" is a command not a suggestion or recommendation. Is it difficult? Very. And yet it is to be the standard goal. Work at being at peace among yourselves because it will make the pastor's work a lot easier.

The Right Response.

Maintaining a right attitude toward the pastor will make it easier to have the right response. That is especially necessary when the right response is to imitate. Yes, the Bible actually requires that. Again it was the writer to the Hebrew Christians who told the people to *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7).*

Notice that the specific instruction is to remember those who spoke the Bible. *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God (v.7a).* This is yet another call to think about the pastor other than just on Sunday. And think positively because he speaks not his opinions but God's Word.

While the people are remembering that the pastor speaks the Word of God to them, they should also consider the outcome of the pastor's way or, *consider the outcome of their way of life (v.7b).* If God's Word is as effective as the pastor says it is, it should have an effect on him also. The beauty of a pastor staying in one Church for a long time is that it gives everyone opportunity to observe how the Bible changes a person.

Having weighed the results of the Bible in the pastor's life, the people should *imitate their faith (v.7c).* This is a command to keep on mimicking the pastor's faith. The reference to the pastor's faith does not just refer to his confidence in the future. Rather it speaks about the outworking of his complete confidence in the Word of God.

Isn't it dangerous to try to copy a faulty human? Actually, the Bible sets a pretty clear precedence about the matter particularly concerning Paul and other spiritual leaders. Paul wrote:

I urge you, then, be imitators of me (1 Corinthians 4:16).

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

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us (Philippians 3:17).

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you (2 Thessalonians 3:7).

It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate (2 Thessalonians 3:9).

The writer to the Hebrews presented a similar argument. *For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:10-12).* God not only says that it is okay but expected that the people follow the pastor's example as far as it is biblical.

A second right response is to obey. In Hebrews again we read, *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 (Hebrews 13:17).*

The call is to obey and submit. *Obey your leaders and submit to them (v.17a).* The Greek word translated *obey* actually means to persuade or convince. How do we get obey from that? It is a passive voice verb which describes an action that happens to you. Therefore, it means to be persuaded, be convinced that the pastor/teacher is teaching God's truth, which then leads to what we call obedience. To submit is to arrange your life according to the truth of the Bible that he has taught you. That is very hard to do when you constantly remember that the pastor is as human as you are.

But there is actually a very important difference because of God's plan, choice, and work. God's reason for the people's obedience is that the pastor is *keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account (v.17b).* That the pastor keeps watch over your soul is a frightening idea, especially for people who like to think of themselves as being quite independent. The word *watch* naturally implies careful observation, concern, diligence to feed, lead, and direct Christ's flock according to Christ's instruction. But the Greek word used here actually means to stay awake. That is at times literally the case when the pastor is aware of danger or spiritual illness.

The idea is pictured well by Jacob who watched over Laban's sheep (not his own). Jacob told Laban, *"These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. What was torn by wild*

beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes” (Genesis 31:38-40).

After spending his life watching over Christ’s sheep, the pastor will give an account to Christ. That is even more scary than the fact that he watches out for you. He will be like Jacob who gave account to Laban for his sheep. Literally, the Greek word used here means “giving back a word.” How does the pastor give back a word to Christ about His sheep?

On one hand, it is a bit hard to imagine as pastor standing before Christ and giving an account for each individual Christ has placed under my care. On the other hand, I already do that regularly as I pray for each sheep in the flock (some more than others depending on the need). I recount to the Chief Shepherd the needs of His sheep regularly. In the end of time, I will confess the same needs and likely the results or lack of results.

There is, therefore, a great danger in not obeying. *Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (v.17c).* The pastor would like to give a joyful accounting. But at the same time, he has to be truthful with the Chief Shepherd. It might be that the under-shepherd will have to speak of a sheep’s rebellion, or foolishness, or refusal to eat, or undependability, as when the shepherd keeps wondering, “Where is that sheep now?” Far better for the under-shepherd to be able to tell the Chief Shepherd that so-and-so is a wonderful, growing sheep.

A final right response and a very important one for the assembly is support. Paul issued to Timothy a command to support those who preach and teach. *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17-18).* This statement reminds us that some elders are vocational and some serve in an advisory or lay elder role. The elders who labor in preaching and teaching are typically vocational. The elders who help to oversee, rule, administer by necessity have limitations imposed by their normal work responsibilities.

Those who are vocational should be considered worthy of double honor. Double honor is reserved for those who work hard

(again the word *kopioo* means to labor to the point of exhaustion). There is no room for mediocrity in the handling of God’s Word. That double honor has something to do with financial remuneration is obvious from the next verse. The principle for paying the laborer is taken from the laboring ox. *For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages” (1 Timothy 5:18).* Old Testament principle required the farmer to allow the ox to eat while it crushed grain.

So, too, God expects His people to provide for the pastor who is working for their benefit. We see the same principle stated in the illustration that the hard-working farmer has every right to be paid from his labor. *It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops (2 Timothy 2:6).*

Who should give this support? *One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches (Galatians 6:6).* The one who is taught refers specifically to the person who attends the preaching regularly. If he or she is not being taught, why would they attend? To share all good things speaks of more than compliments and pats on the back. All good things includes financial remuneration. The support should be fair and equitable, which in a very practical way could be determined by the average received by other men in similar settings, or even the average income of the congregation.

If the pastor will take care of his responsibilities to the congregation and the congregation will take care of their responsibilities to the pastor, it should result in a well working, unified, peaceful assembly. Bearing in mind that all of us are humans will require that everyone, pastor and all the people, will strive to do what Christ the owner, founder, and builder of the Church requires.