

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

<sup>8</sup> **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

<sup>17</sup> **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.**

<sup>18</sup> **Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.** <sup>19</sup> **I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.**

<sup>20</sup> **May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,** <sup>21</sup> **equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Focus on the Ministry, not the man.

1. They are jars of clay holding a special treasure
2. They are sent by the Lord

There are many different names people use to refer to a public minister of the gospel. The term we typically use is “pastor.” Pastor is a Latin term for Shepherd—one who watches over God’s sheep. “Minister” is another term used because a pastor is one who serves others with the gospel. “Preacher” because many see the pastor only when he is preaching. There are other terms which are used for various reasons: Priest and Father come to mind. And then there is Reverend. Reverend is a bit different than pastor, preacher, or minister. Those other terms all describe the job or duty of the public minister of the gospel; Reverend is a term that describes the respect a public minister of the gospel is to have.

There are certain terms that probably better than others. Reverend may not be the best term to use for a public minister of the gospel; and yet it is somewhat fitting. And it may stem from our text for today, in which the Writer to the Hebrews tells us to, **Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you...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.**

Today we see that we don’t respect just the man; but the ministry. For pastors are but jars of clay holding a special treasure and they are sent by the Lord.

What is the job of a pastor? Of course there the joke that a pastor only works one day a week—on Sunday mornings. Of course the pastor preachers, he also leads the congregation in worship. There are the classes he teaches and meetings he runs. He administers the sacraments and uses the keys. He counsels with God’s Word; and shares the gospel with those who do not know him. He visits shut-ins and others in hospitals. He In short we can say that they watch over the spiritual life of the sheep under their care. Which is why Paul refers to them at times as “overseers.”

And in all these things he answers to God. Sure he is called to a congregation and works with them; but at the end of the day he must give an account to God. He must answer to the Lord for everything he says and does (or doesn’t say and do). So he closely scrutinizes everything he does. He gives the best he can in every sermon, visit, contact, and lesson. Martin Luther once said, “I have the commission and charge, as a preacher and a doctor, to see to it that no one is misled, so that I may give account of it at the Last Judgment.” It would be nice if every pastor did their jobs and did them well. But here is the problem—they are just like you: sinners. Sure, **they must be above reproach**, as Paul says; but they are still sinful. They are still weak, frail human beings who don’t always do what is right. Their sermons aren’t always the greatest; Bible Classes don’t always hit home; they don’t always connect that well with all the different groups in the congregation. Perhaps you wish he was funnier, or more personable, better at evangelism, or applied God’s truths more in Bible Study. As you all know all too well—a pastor isn’t always going to say the right things at the right time. He won’t always make the right decision. He may teach something false, use the law when he should have used the gospel; and he may unknowingly offend someone.

What we might do then is focus on the man; to zone in on all his shortcomings and faults. You didn’t like when he said this or did that. He isn’t all that good at this particular thing and really struggles with that.

You don't always see eye to eye with him. And so as a result you become critical of him. And your respect and honor for him is lost. And you don't really obey or listen to him—only when you want to. Or, of course, the opposite could be true as well. You only respect and honor a pastor if you are impressed by him. You listen to him and you obey him only because you like how he preaches, or you are engaged in Bible Study or you think he's great with kids or has a heart for the elderly. In both cases the respect and honor we give a pastor is due to the man not the ministry. We obey him, listen to him, worship more or less, attended Bible study or not based on whether or not we like the man. And then are motives are not right or pure.

So why respect and honor, why listen to and obey pastors? Not because of who they are but the ministry they do. Notice what the Writer to the Hebrews points out about the leaders they were to obey—they were those **who spoke the Word of God to you**. Pastors share the sweet message of the gospel. The message of the forgiveness of sins by Christ's suffering and death on the cross. By his wounds he paid the price for our sins and removes them far from us. His righteousness was credited to us on the cross; and the sure hope of eternal life is ours through Christ's own resurrection from the dead. This is the message that has been entrusted to pastors—the message of reconciliation, of being restored to our creator through the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross. Pastors daily strive to share this message with everyone. They are there to comfort in times of sorrow and assure you in times of doubt. That is the work of the pastor—to spread the gospel so that all may know the Lord and not doubt.

That is a beautiful message given to us by these men who aren't all that beautiful. We love them and cherish them, listen to and obey them, honor and respect them not because of who they are; but because of the message that has been entrusted to them and the message of the gospel they share with us. Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians, **we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us**.

The treasure of the gospel has been entrusted to jars of clay—weak fragile vessels, easily breakable and not worthy to be entrusted with something so precious. We don't love the breakable vessel but the treasure. In the same way we don't honor the messenger but the message entrusted to him. We focus on the ministry and not the man.

But still I've heard it on more than one occasion, and perhaps you think it about me or have thought it before about some other pastor: “why does he have to be our pastor? Why do I have to listen to him week in and week out?” Or, “How can this guy even be a pastor at all, he's completely incompetent?”

Notice what the Writer to the Hebrews calls Jesus in verse 20, The Great Shepherd of the Sheep. Christ is regularly referred to as a shepherd—it's one of the favorite pictures of the Bible. A shepherd his one who watches over and protects his sheep from all harm and danger; and even gives up his life for his sheep. But a shepherd can't watch over his sheep all the time, so he chooses others to do it for him. In a similar way, while the Lord is watching over his sheep from heaven, he sends men on earth to be shepherds, or pastors, to his flock. They are called by him to watch over the spiritual lives of his people, to take care of them, to use the law and gospel as needed so that the Holy Spirit can do his own work. They are a gift of God to his Church, whether we like them or agree with them or not. The answer to the complaint of “how can this guy be my pastor, or a pastor at all” is “Because the Lord chose and called him to serve him here.”

As we already talked about, he won't be perfect. He won't always say or do the right thing—especially in your mind. But he strives to be faithful to the Word and in his service to the Lord. And for that you are thankful.

And both the pastor and you realize that the power of the gospel does not come from the one sharing it with you on Sunday. The power to bring someone to faith does not depend on how good of speaker he is or how well he can relate to the youth. In the same way, we don't have to worry if our pastor is not the most well-spoken, if he struggles to relate, or we don't quite see eye to eye. The power of the gospel doesn't depend on his ability to spin a story. What is important is faithfulness to the gospel. As long as he spreads the gospel the Holy Spirit will work through that gospel.

The reason why our Chief Shepherd sends us pastors and others is to lead us to himself—to lead us to Christ. So that we may hear his word, grow in our knowledge and faith of him. So that we may willingly and cheerfully sing his praises as our one and only Savior. And this can only happen when the gospel is faithfully taught and shared.

They watch over our souls to lead us to Christ for eternity—for it is Christ who one for us eternal life through his resurrection from the dead; and it is received by us only through faith in him. When it comes down to it, that is all that really matters—is my pastor leading me down a path toward heaven with the gospel?

A faithful shepherd is one who has the sheep's wellbeing in mind. In the same way a faithful pastor is one who has spiritual wellbeing of God's sheep in mind. They care about each and every soul and want what Christ wants: that, **all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.**

And when the sheep follow their shepherd willingly his work is a joy; and when they fail to obey his work becomes a burden and bogs down the spiritual journey of the rest of the sheep—which is of no advantage to any of the sheep.

And so we focus on the ministry and not the man. We focus not on the one who is preaching but on the one whom the pastor is preaching about—Jesus Christ. It is the job of our pastor to lead us to Christ and to eternal life to him. His faithfulness to this task is truly what matters. And when he is faithful we willingly follow him, give him honor and respect—and even revere him! Amen.

**May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**