

Stewarding Our Leaders

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 August 2023

Preacher: Ernie Blanco

[0 : 00] Well, so glad to be able to open God's Word with you this morning. You can get your Bibles out. We'll turn in just a second. As we begin this morning, I wonder how many of us who have been married! Can remember the gifts that you received on that day long ago.

For me, it was about 15 years ago, just two weeks ago. And I was thinking about it. The only thing that I can remember that we received as a gift that day were some blue wedding plates that have no longer survived.

Now, this is funny to think about. If you go to a birthday party, you can see on the expression of your kid's face if they were hopeful for a particular gift.

We can see it in their eyes, their expression. This even happens in our marriages when we are giving gifts on anniversaries. Some of us have missed the mark, haven't we?

You see, it's often true that the giver and the receiver are on different pages. But this morning, we are going to consider that God is not like us in giving gifts.

[1 : 14] God never once gives bad gifts to His people. Now, how we make use of those gifts, if they are used towards their intended purpose, is a helpful way for us to think about what we're discussing this morning, the biblical idea of stewardship.

This morning, we will give attention, especially to one form of stewardship, and that's the stewardship of pastors and elders that have been gifted to each local congregation to lead the body.

Now, if you're newer with us this morning, you may not know that we have just recently appointed and affirmed new elders in this local body. Now, it's helpful for us to remember that this is only the beginning for us with these new elders.

See, there are a lifetime of transactions that occur between a pastor and a church member, those church members to their pastor. So that's our goal this morning, as we're going to open God's Word in just a second, to consider and to prayerfully ask the Lord, is there room for me to grow in embracing the gift of elders that God has given to this body?

So let's do that. We're going to pray this morning, and we will open in just a second to our first text. So let's pray. Father, we, today, this morning, recognize that it is by Your Word that You lead us.

[2 : 47] Lord, Your Word, by Your Holy Spirit, brings new light to our lives. There are new ways that the Gospel is intended to transform us, to increase our joy, to increase our longing for the day that You will come back.

And so we pray this morning we would do that. Lord, would You give us humble hearts that are no longer blinded to some of the areas that we fall short.

And Lord, we thank You that we can do this as sons and daughters, not under condemnation if we put our trust in Christ, but Lord with joyful thanksgiving.

So would You accomplish that and more as we spend our time together in Christ's name. Amen.

Now there's a few reasons that we don't normally think much about stewarding our elders and other leaders within the church.

We don't normally assume that elders and pastors in our life belong in the same category that something like a checkbook or a calendar do.

[3 : 55] We don't have a system of evaluating whether or not we are using them correctly, only a system in our minds of evaluating how they serve us.

So sometimes we forget our responsibility. We also are more familiar with the biblical qualifications and calling that we see across Scripture. So many of us are familiar with the qualifications from 1 Timothy 3, 1 Peter 5, or Titus 1.

These qualifications are essential for the health and proper care of the body. But there's even more that should be considered as a congregation.

So we're going to turn to a couple of different passages this morning. But let me first give you the outline for what we will be looking at this morning. So the very first point that we will be covering is actually a question.

And the question is, why does God give the church elders and leaders? And we'll look at Ephesians 4 to answer that question.

[5 : 04] We'll also look at three other points from Hebrews chapter 13. These points, how we steward our elders and pastors, are the following.

Number one, by considering and imitating. Number two, by obeying and submitting. And by number three, by pursuing the joy of our elders.

So please turn with me first to Ephesians chapter 4. Although most of our time will be in the book of Hebrews, it's helpful to start here. And the reason is because this chapter, really, this section of verses helps to lay the foundation and the groundwork for how to understand why God gives qualified men to local congregations.

So let's read Ephesians chapter 4. We'll start in verse 4. There is one body and one spirit.

Just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

[6 : 18] Who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore, it says, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men. In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth. He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood. To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

[7 : 30] As we head towards understanding how we are called to embrace the gift of leadership in the body, we first want to understand why elders and leaders are given to the church.

So first consider with me that this is not a man-made idea. Notice in our text who is the primary actor, the origin, and the one who is actively setting his course to achieve a particular goal.

Verse 7 says, But grace was given to each one of us, and it was according to the measure of whose gift? Of Christ's gifts.

At this point, we don't exactly know what is being given, but we can see that the one responsible is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because the gifts belong to him. And he is given from his own heart, and what we see is from his grace. This means that Jesus is not being compelled and he's not being forced.

[8 : 42] But this giving of gifts comes from his own heart. But notice also with me, what is the occasion that these gifts are given to?

So we tend to think of giving out gifts on special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, or other reasons to celebrate. But this particular celebration, it comes in response to what the text describes as an ascension and a descension.

Do you see that in verse 9 and verse 10? Notice it says, He descended into the lower regions, the earth. Now, kids, if you aren't familiar with what the word descension is, Think of somebody coming down from a position of great power, like a king.

And they come down to make themselves known to you. Now, that's a powerful picture. And that's what Jesus has done.

So Jesus has descended in history from his place of glory to become clothed in flesh, like you and I, In order that he might ascend and go back.

[10 : 01] Back to glory with his Father. So what we have again here is we have the occasion of a celebration.

A celebration of descension and ascension. And Jesus is celebrating the conquering of sin and death that he accomplished on the cross.

Now, as he accomplishes this great work, What Jesus does is he shares the spoils with his people.

See, it's unlike a birthday party that you go to, Where we give gifts to the person being celebrated here. What we see is Jesus gives gifts to his body through his accomplishment.

Jesus has won a triumphant victory. And we are the ones who receive the benefit. You're familiar with this line.

[11 : 05] It says, Why should I gain from his reward? I cannot give an answer. But this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom.

We receive gifts from what he's done for us. Now, we're getting closer to answering this question of why does God give pastors and elders?

We've seen that Jesus gives gifts to his people. And he does it to further enjoy, to further satisfy the things that he has accomplished for us.

And we also see that Jesus, when he gives gifts in this text, he's giving to two different categories of people. If you look at verse 7, he is giving specific gifts.

And it says, For building up the entire body. Oh, I'm sorry. Let me back up. We see that in verse 7, he's giving gifts to specific people.

[12 : 09] But in verse 12, he is giving gifts to the entire body of the church, the collective group of people that assembles together to worship the Lord.

Now, look again with me at verse 11 through 13. It says, He gave apostles and prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

See, our corporate gifts are the leaders that God has put amongst us. They are the ones we are called to steward. They have been specifically created and designed and placed within each local congregation so that the body can progressively enjoy the full bounty of the soul-satisfying work of the gospel.

Now, many churches don't enjoy the benefit of seeing those called and appointed as elders and leaders in their congregation. Perhaps you grew up in one of these churches as well.

You may have picked up habits from these earlier days and become accustomed to viewing pastors only on a horizontal level. See, the danger that we walk into when we do this is we can actually only start relating to our pastors in a form of compliance to their leadership, perhaps tolerance for their ministry, but worse, what can happen is disdain and resistance can creep in towards authority, and this can have great consequences on the church.

[14 : 08] So I ask you, brothers and sisters, do you receive your pastors and elders as gifts that we see from Ephesians chapter 4? These are for your good, and their placement is a primary means of grace so that we can know Christ more.

Now we're going to switch, and you can flip over to Hebrews chapter 13. We're going to read through a short section here, but before we get that, those of you who may be a little bit unfamiliar with the book of Hebrews, it's helpful to remember that the author of Hebrews spends a lot of his time laboring to challenge, exhort, and uphold the superior hope of the gospel as the end that the Old Testament anticipates.

So the sacrificial system of the Old Testament has been replaced by the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

But the book of Hebrews doesn't just hold out the hope of Christ. It also warns us about drifting in our own hearts. So chapter 2, verse 1 says, Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it.

Chapter 4 says, Let us therefore strive to enter the rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. In Hebrews 10, 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.

[15 : 59] These sober reminders are attention worthy. They call us to shackle the hidden areas of self-confidence and to root out any drifting of the heart that exists within us.

The closing words of Hebrews then are intended to protect us, to point us towards God's preserving grace that we receive through conduits of the Great Shepherd Himself, namely our leaders.

So point one is how to embrace biblical leadership to consider and imitate. Chapter 13, verse 7, we read this. It says, Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God, and consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

There is a progression within this verse that's important for us to follow. The progression begins with the idea of first remembering leaders of the past. The past tense word spoke and the focus on the outcome of their way of life leads us to assume that these particular leaders being referenced have now gone on to be with the Lord.

Now, our text alerts us that the call to remember our leaders does not stop only with admiration of our leaders.

[17 : 26] You see, the world celebrates and it memorializes leaders in an outward way. But we are called to a different type of remembering.

We remember leaders of the body with an eye towards consideration and imitation. It says, consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Now, why would God call us to imitate men? Doesn't that put us in a position of vulnerability to their own failures?

Well, consider just a few chapters before. In the chapter called the Hall of Faith, chapter 11, those mentioned are extremely flawed men with flawed resumes.

So, we recall Moses was a man who struggled with anger such that he was guilty of murder. Now, David was the same as well.

[18 : 31] He succumbed to the pleasures of his flesh by committing adultery. In themselves, these are ordinary men and so are your elders.

But why do we remember? Why does God call us to remember these leaders of the past? What is actually worthy of being considered and imitated?

The point of remembering our leaders is found in the connection to verse 8. It says, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The verse is intentionally positioned right here in the context of imitating our leaders because we remember in such a way that we fix our gaze not on men, but on the faithfulness of the one who sustained them until the very end.

See, Jesus is the one who gives pastors as gifts to demonstrate not sufficiency in men, but the sufficiency of his grace which works within them.

[19 : 51] We should expect a particular way that God will show us Christ in the men that are called to lead the church. So, how is the gospel manifested in their public and in their private lives?

Where do we witness their strength coming from when their flesh is weak and exposed? Hebrews 11 verse 13 reminds us of these leaders.

These all died in faith, not having received the things which were promised, but having seen them, they greeted them from afar, having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Now, these are the types of leaders who bring great benefit to the body of Christ. Many leaders clothe themselves in signs of external strength, but look to leaders, imitate leaders, and pray for our leaders, that they would be the type of men who wear the banner of Jesus Christ yesterday, today, and forever.

So, our flesh, it's good for us to think about, our flesh naturally wants to resist the call to imitate, to submit, and to obey and follow our leaders.

[21 : 21] leaders. Now, at least in my own heart, there are a couple reasons why this happens so naturally. The first is because individualism reigns supreme in our country.

We place value on thinking independently, on being able to navigate our course without needing help from outsiders, and this can be very sneaky within our own hearts.

What does it look like? Well, thoughts can quietly enter and say to us, we would do things just a little differently. They don't exactly see the things that we see.

They might have a funny personality. And slowly, our imitation turns only outward towards observation, or even reservation.

Is the Lord calling us to repent in this area? Could it be that the grace of receiving care from our Father means to fight against the spirit of individualism in our own hearts?

[22 : 26] The second reason is that our leaders are sinful, as we well know. While it's good to be discerning about the direction that our leaders will take, we can easily fall prey to the schemes of the evil one, which tell us to resist their influence for our safety.

can you imagine the sheep coming together with a call to resist the care of their shepherds? This is a very dangerous point, place to be, church.

You see, God has ordained biblical standards for our elders amongst us. Paul says, even if an angel comes proclaiming another gospel, let him be a curse.

God gives our leaders guidelines. How we are to be influenced should be very similar to the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

It says this, follow me, but follow me as I follow Christ. Our imitation is grounded in Christ.

[23 : 45] Point two, how to embrace biblical leadership by obeying and submitting. So for the sake of time, we're not going to unpack all the verses here in the next section of Hebrews chapter 13, but in brief fashion, notice verse 9 and the warning that is mentioned in this particular verse.

One of the primary reasons we're called to embrace leaders by obeying and submitting to them is because there is no shortage of what verse 9 calls strange and diverse teachings.

Now we aren't told precisely what these teachings are, but we do know that believers are being threatened to find false strength in some custom of food observance.

notice that the writer says halfway through this verse, it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace rather than by foods prepared at altars.

So pastors are called to do exactly what we find here by the author of Hebrews. They warn us to protect us from reaching for false strength.

[25 : 05] The gospel is indeed sufficient, the elders must declare, and that is their only banner. Now why is this important?

It's because we all reach for something when weaknesses are exposed in our life. That is built within our fabric. I am weak, I need strength.

I'm not content with my circumstances, what hope can I find in other circumstances where I've fallen down, what will lift me up?

I see this example in my beautiful daughter Savannah that many of you know. So she's not quite comfortable in a pool all by herself.

And while she reaches for her mom continually around the house, it can be hard for me to even capture a moment of her attention. But when we head over to the pool, there's only one person that she wants to be with.

[26 : 11] See, she reaches for the strongest thing that she can when her weakness is exposed. And thankfully, that's her dad.

Now, us elders are called to do just like I do for Savannah. I do not let her reach for her brothers and her sisters.

The pool noodle that looks really easy to hang on is just a trap. And that is what elders do for the congregation.

When we are weak only, Christ is sufficient to sustain us until the end. Now, God's under-shepherds have this glorious privilege of upholding the worth of Jesus.

But it also says in verse 17, obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will give an account.

[27 : 18] So be encouraged, church. Our obedience and our submission to elders is grounded in their accountability ability before God Almighty.

They are only stewards themselves, and God is presiding over their care for you. Oh, how the Lord loves you.

Having not spared his son, he can be trusted with the ones that he has put in charge of your care. our last point this morning is how to embrace biblical leadership by pursuing the joy of our leaders. And this also comes from verse 17. It says this, obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will give an account, but let them do this with joy and not with groaning, because that would be of no advantage to you.

So there are two goals in mind here with this final instruction, and the first of which is to pursue the joy of your pastors.

[28 : 40] Let them do this with joy. This is a call, church, to us, to you, to care specifically for the hearts of your leaders.

You see, our groanings, our complaints, our dissatisfaction has the potential to deplete the heart of those who care for us.

So fill them with joy, church. Refuel and replenish and guard your words against groaning. Measure the ambition of your heart by setting your course for joy in their ministry.

And secondly, remember that this is also designed for your good. Verse 17 reminds us that we are advantaged.

We are best cared for. we are best stewards ourselves when we are pursuing their joy.

[29 : 50] Now let me say this, I am brand new to the role of being an elder, as you know, but from talking to those who have labored faithfully year after year at Christ's family, they find it a joy to serve you because you do these things very well.

You increase our joy in Christ by the way that you live, by the way that you are gracious with our weaknesses, and by your desire to be led towards streams of living waters.

But as we strive to do this even more, there are just a few practical steps for us to consider.

So four steps for our consideration. The first, you don't have to turn there, comes from 3 John chapter 1 verse 4. It says this, I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

The first step is to walk in the truth. What is your compass church that navigates your relationship with your elders?

[31 : 14] Do your engagement with your pastors demonstrate that you are hungry for intimacy with Christ? Does truth preside over preference?

step number two, pray. Second Thessalonians 3 verse 1 says this, finally brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored and that we may be delivered from wicked and from evil men.

Are you praying for your pastors? A couple specific ways, pray that God would fuel us, that we ourselves would hunger for more of Christ.

Pray that God would protect us from the schemes of the evil one that are many times directed precisely at your elders.

And pray for grace within our families, that our wives and that our children would be healthy and established in the truth of the gospel.

[32 : 28] Number three, provide. 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 17 says, let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and in teaching.

This is a great verse that probably deserves more time than we are giving it this morning. But consider what is this verse calling us to?

Those who labor in teaching and preaching are those who make their living by proclaiming the gospel. We are privileged to have two men who are currently doing that in our body.

What a gift to excel in providing for these men. See, we can be intentional and do our best to remove any obstacles of provision that a full-time pastor may feel.

We want them to be freed from the concerns of outside work. By God's grace, our pastors do not seek riches, marriages, but they do have families, they do have weddings of the future to prepare for, and they do have retirements that one day they need just like we do.

[33 : 59] Number four, clothe yourselves in humility. First Peter chapter five says this, likewise, sorry, verse five, likewise you who are younger.

Be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another. For God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

Are you humble in the way that you speak of things that you see differently? Are you inclined to be persuaded by the direction and the encouragement that you receive?

Are you quicker to share a different opinion or way of looking at things? One last question, how would your elders feel if they heard the way that was spoken of them in private?

Church, remember, there are many other ways to care for our elders. But the way as stewards of a great gift, we are to honor and pursue the joy of our pastors is also to pursue the joy that we find in Christ ourselves.

[35 : 23] There are many other ways that we can consider how to walk in faithfulness with our elders. But let me close with this encouragement from 1 Peter 3.

It says this, finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, and a tender heart, and a humble mind.

I am confident you will continue, church, to do this because you know what good gifts our Father gives. and you know that your ultimate trust is not in men, but it is in the one who upholds these men for your good and for his great glory.

We love you, church. Let's pray together. Amen.