

*Introduction:*

- A. Illus.: I read this story a long time ago about a young man who was being ordained, the service which would begin his ministry as a pastor. In some traditions—like the Presbyterians, for instance—when a person is ordained he sits down in front for the entire service receiving charges and prayers. Then at the end of the service, wearing his new clerical vestments, he comes to the platform to offer the benediction, his first official act as an ordained pastor.

So this candidate comes to that auspicious moment, stands and begins to go up the steps, but on the first step he stepped inside the hem of his robe. Now the obvious thing to do would be to step back out of the robe. But he didn't. The poor guy kept climbing the steps all the time walking up the inside of his robe. Each step made him smaller as he was forced to duck walk up the inside of his own robe.

Finally, at the top of the steps, looking like a dwarf in a white tent, he turned around. His robe could not turn with him, since he was standing inside it. Turning placed the left arm of his robe right in the center of his chest and the right arm between his shoulders. All he could move was his wrist, which he waved as he gave the benediction. When he was done, two ushers came forward, picked him up by the arms and carried him off like a piece of furniture. [#4562 <sup>1</sup>]

- B. Welcome to the ministry, Pastor Kenny. That's what it's like some days. This morning I want to challenge this congregation and you from **Heb. 13** in the work ahead of you all. Hebrews is a book urging Christians to persevere in their faith. In the concluding exhortations we're going to look at three statements to believers about their leaders. **VCL, you need this pastor because no one can persevere as a Christian without spiritual leaders. Vv.7-8...**

I. “REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS” BECAUSE CHRISTIANS NEED EVERYDAY SPIRITUAL MODELS (13:7-8)

- A. If we are to grow and persevere as Christians we need models. We need models from the Bible so **Heb 11** pointed us to the great OT models of faith. We need models from the history of the church. And we need models from our own experience, *our* leaders. Without them, we’ll have trouble persevering, because these models show us how to live out faith in the messes of life.
- B. There’s been a big change in church leadership over my lifetime. Church leadership has dived deep into the thinking of corporate leadership. There have been some advantages to that but frankly corporate leadership, for all its challenges, has little in common with spiritual leadership. For one thing, **spiritual leaders display faith under pressure to those we lead.** Spiritual leaders aren’t just charged with getting the job done. **We must be models whose way of life proves the value of faith.**
1. Our first distinguishing mark is in that phrase, “*who spoke the word of God to you.*” In the order of priorities, **preaching outweighs leadership strategies.** But preaching doesn’t always happen from a pulpit. Proclaiming God’s word happens in counseling, over coffee, in classes and in hospitals. But the leadership priority is communicating God’s word to God’s people.
  2. Then the central charge: “*Consider the outcome of their way of life.*” ‘Consider’ means ‘observe closely, reflect upon.’ Read them like a book. Look past their personalities and talents. Look at what happens in someone’s life who loves God’s word and who have trusted it. The writer has in mind **vv.5-6** just before this:

*God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"*

That is what you look for in your leaders.

Let me tell you, Pastor Kenny, and all of you, that is easier said than done. In the months and years ahead your *confidence* in God's constant presence and help will be tested again and again, not only by trials but also by simple complacency, or by your own pride. Speaking for myself, it can often be a long spiritual hike to get to, "*I will not be afraid.*" **When our people get glimpses into our long struggles to trust God we become their models.**

3. Then, to God's people: "*imitate their faith.*" 'Mimic their faith.' Trust God the way they learned to trust God. You won't see their faith in some striking display of water-walking or wall-crushing. Rather, you saw their faith when they refused to live for things of this world and invested heavily in the next; in how certain they were of unseen realities; in how they kept their eyes on Jesus when it seemed like the wheels were coming off life. **Imitate them!** When you're in a difficult situation, think what Scripture teaches, and how you've seen one of your models live that out.

*Illus.:* I read about a celebration, a long time ago now, of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of missionaries from the Covenant Church coming to what was then the Belgian Congo. Near the end of a very long day of celebration, an old, old man insisted on speaking. "He said that he would die soon and that there was some information that he alone had. If he did not speak, it would go with him to his grave. He explained that when Christian

missionaries came 100 years before to that part of Africa his people didn't know what to think of them. They thought the missionaries were strange and their message unusual. The tribal leaders decided to test the missionaries by slowly poisoning them to death. Over a period of months and years, missionary children died one by one. Then the old man said, *'It was as we watched how the died that we decided we wanted to live as Christians.'*” [#3791] **Who taught you how to live as a Christian? Remember how they taught you the word. Consider the outcome of their life. Mimic their faith.**

- B. We study the faith of the people in the Bible, the believers whose stories we hear and the faith of our leaders. Why? **V.8:** *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”* This wonderful verse is here to say, what Jesus was to your model he will be to you and to your children's children because *Jesus is the same*. Your life can turn into a work of divine artistry, like the lives you've watched, because *Jesus is the same*. As it was with those before you, so your faith can open your eyes to unseen certainties, move stubborn hearts, walk through floods and fire, because *Jesus is the same!* **We remember our spiritual leaders because they help us see the unchanging Christ.**

I've wanted to tell you this story. Illus.: When the great missionary pioneer, **William Carey**, lay dying he was visited by a man named Duff. After a long visit, Duff left, only to be called back to the bed by Carey's feeble voice. *“Mr. Duff!”* said Carey, *“You have been speaking about Dr. Carey, Dr. Carey. When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey—speak about Dr. Carey's Savior.”* [#2623] When you consider your Christian models and heroes, never forget, it was Jesus who made all the difference! *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”*

- C. Pastor Kenny, Pastor Casey: note what matters here. It is not so much where we take people as what we show them of Christ in our own lives. **Robert Murray M'Cheyne** said, "*My people's greatest need is my personal holiness.*" He also said, "*It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.*"

Now we must pass quickly by some extraordinary treasures here to get to **v.17**: "*Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.*"

## **II. "HAVE CONFIDENCE IN YOUR LEADERS" BECAUSE THEY GUARD YOUR SOULS (13:17)**

- A. Some translations say, "*Obey your leaders...*" The meaning is, "*Obey your leaders with confidence, with conviction.*" Not grudgingly, but because you trust them. Illus.: I prayed with a friend this week told me how highly she valued our emphasis here on prayer. She said, "*Whether I agreed with everything or not, I always know that our leaders prayed and that was good enough for me.*"
- B. **C. S. Lewis** describes pastors as "*those particular people within the whole church who have been especially set aside to look after what concerns us as creatures who are going to live forever.*" [#1045] The Gr. actually says, "*Obey your leaders and submit, for they keep watch over your souls as ones who must give an account...*" The NT sometimes calls spiritual leaders *overseers*. **What they oversee is not primarily the organization but souls—the spiritual hearts of God's people.**
- C. Our individual spiritual life and perseverance is most definitely *not* a private matter. We are not allowed to trust

our souls to our own recognizance. We're accountable to others. Pastor Kenny, the souls of these brothers and sisters are now your responsibility. Long before pastors were regarded as organizational leaders, **the task of the pastor was "the care and cure of souls."**

No one taught me more about the care of souls than **Eugene Peterson**, whose writing always seemed to run against the grain of so many other pastoral leadership books I read. He wrote, "*The cure of souls, then, is the Scripture-directed, prayer-shaped care that is devoted to persons singly or in groups, in settings both sacred and profane. It is determination to work at the center, to concentrate on the essential.*" He also wrote about hearing, as a young pastor, the idea that pastors "run a church." He said, "*I can still remember the unpleasant impression it made... I didn't like it and decided... that being a **physician of souls took priority over running a church**... It is a way of life that uses weekday tasks, encounters, and situations as the raw material for teaching prayer, developing faith, and preparing for a good death.*"

In going through some old files I was very surprised to discover I had received a personal letter from Peterson in 1988. Apparently I'd written to thank him for something he'd written. Evidently I'd spoken of my inclination to administration. He wrote,

*Don't be apologetic of your enthusiasm for administration—it is honorable and necessary work. But it must be kept in its place. Just like my writing must be — I am a pastor first and a writer second and must be watchful lest my love of writing push my spiritual tasks to the sidelines. Keep at it — this is daily difficult — to keep our focus, to keep our adoration fresh. And we need each other's help.*

D. The Bible's command here is for believers—for you all—to obey and submit to these guardians of our souls. This, of course, doesn't give warrant for heavy-handed authoritarianism and abuse of power. **But it does mean what it says!** When it comes to your spiritual leaders and their care of your souls you can't have a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. Please be careful about second-guessing leaders. Your personal opinion, often formed without prayer, is a dangerous substitute for the decision of godly leaders who have met, prayed, turned a matter over and over, and tried to think what is best for the people of God. In the end, your opinion might be right and theirs wrong but leave that to God. Obey your leaders and submit to them.

That said, the real test of submission in a church is not actually when there is some controversial matter. It is when believers are simply challenged through sermons or the decisions of leaders to walk on paths of righteousness.

When you are asked to pray together will you do it? Will you love one another? Will you give sacrificially? Will you respond to the sermons you hear?

E. This verse says that it is to your advantage that the guarding of your souls be a joy to your leaders. The greatest joy for godly leaders is not when everyone votes for their new plan or budget but when people are teachable; when they respond to soul care. That gives your leaders the enthusiasm and energy to work even harder for you.

F. So that is the challenge for you as God's people. Pastor Kenny, there's a two-fold challenge here for you also:

1. Guard these dear souls. The souls of these brothers and sisters, along with their children, is Job #1. We deal with budgets and strategies, plans and programs, but your first priority to watch over these souls.

2. We will give an account to God for our care for the souls of this congregation. We are those “*who must give an account.*” You have no idea how sobering that is! Pastor Kenny and Pastor Casey, we cannot make hard hearts soft and we cannot fight people’s battles for them, but we can obey **1 Thes 5:14**, “*warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*”

One more thing: the writer of Hebrews speaks for all church leaders in **v.18**, “*Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.*”

### **III. “PRAY FOR” YOUR LEADERS BECAUSE THEY’RE IN OVER THEIR HEADS (13:18)**

- A. Spiritual leaders always face daunting obstacles and a fierce enemy. When you’re in spiritual leadership, there’s always something too big or tough for you to handle! If it isn’t a shortage, it’s a wall. If it isn’t a wall, it’s a storm. If it’s not a storm, it’s a plague. There’s always something that is too hard, too complicated, too big, too inscrutable.
- B. In turn, spiritual leaders help your prayers by being properly positioned, by not doing anything to short-circuit the effectiveness of your prayers. So Pastor Kenny and Pastor Casey, keep a clear conscience. You will need to often go boldly to the God’s throne of grace “*to receive mercy and find grace to help you in your time of need.*” I’ll tell you from personal experience: it will be most difficult to go when your sin is shaming you from going. But go! Never forget, in Jesus “every debt that you ever had has been paid up in full.”

Likewise, “*desire to live honorably in every way.*” That means integrity. Do not try to fake it! Listen! This is where pastors fall. In subtle, almost imperceptible ways at first,

they begin to put on a pastor mask. They lose their desire to live honorably. You want these people to pray for you, and they will. Your job is to be positioned for God to answer. When you do that God has in you a sharp tool and a tender hand!

Now, Pastor Kenny Silva, with those things in view, and with this beloved congregation mindful of their responsibilities, we have the privilege of commissioning you as the pastor, albeit for a short time, but as the pastor of Village Church of Lincolnshire.

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<sup>i</sup> From, *God Laughs, Too*, by William Goodin, C.S.S. Publishing Co, Lima, OH