

A Faithful Minister 3) Keeps Watch for the Benefit of Souls

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How do you suppose most people view pastors? If you're like me, you probably know some pastors that you hold in the highest regard and others which you might not hold in quite such high regard. I looked at some surveys which listed how much people regarded various professions. Usually I found professions like doctor, surgeon, and firefighter sitting at the top of the list. But the profession of pastor? It was found near the bottom of some of the surveys. In one survey it ranked so close to the bottom that it was placed just above car salesmen. The professions which were highly regarded by most everyone all had something in common. They were professions with people dedicated to saving and helping others. Where should a faithful minister of the gospel fall on our list? Today we continue our series looking at "A Faithful Minister" and find our answer as we look at the closing chapter of the letter to the Hebrews. We see how a pastor does need to be highly regarded because he works to help and save others. A faithful minister keeps watch for the benefit of souls.

You don't have to dig too deep to find Scripture's admonition to hold spiritual leaders in the highest regard. I'm amazed at the way God comes to Moses' defense. God struck Miriam with leprosy when she displayed contempt for Moses. God struck King Uzziah with leprosy for his contempt for the priests. God burned up those who joined in Korah's rebellion and rained fire on those who threatened Elijah. God sent bears to maul forty-two boys who mocked the Prophet Elisha. Ultimately, God destroyed all of Jerusalem because they rejected his prophets. Conversely, God delights in those who honor the teaching and preaching of his Word. When Mary anointed Jesus' feet, he said it was a beautiful thing. God clearly desires that those who faithfully preach and teach his Word be held in high regard.

This doesn't mean a minister should have a big head. As we saw last week, humility is one of the qualifications listed in Scripture for those who serve as pastor. We are warned about the minister who holds himself up in pride. A minister who is self-serving and proud should not be held in high regard. The Lord gives warning against such men. The writer to the Hebrews warns against holding spiritual leaders in high regard just because they have the customs and traditions which you might have grown up with. A minister must faithfully and humbly point to Christ, not just traditions or trends. Pastors are warned to not seek their own honor. A pastor who seeks honor will get his reward - but it won't be honor from God. Jesus warned against the teachers of the law who wanted to sit in Moses' seat.

"Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets... These men will be punished most severely." (Luke 20:46-47) A faithful minister cannot love and chase after the respect of men.

But faithful ministers are to be held in high regard by those they serve. That is true not only of Moses and the prophets of the past, but the preachers and teachers in your past. That is what the writer to the Hebrews tells us.

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Carefully consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." Do you know a faithful pastor who once shared God's Word with you? Don't forget about him. Remember what he said and did. His life serves as an example for you to follow. Think about what his life was like. It didn't matter whether he had lived and died with riches or poverty or with health or disease. Consider the outcome of his way of life. His life was filled with fruits of faith. His teaching and life encouraged you and others. He persevered through trials. In the end, he received the promised gift of eternal life. We are told to imitate the faith of such men.

Sadly, today many are only imitating the heroes of hedonism. Many young girls aspire to imitate the life and outcome of the latest tic-toc video craze. They don't remember or imitate godly spiritual leaders. Young men try to imitate the life of celebrity and mocking God instead of choosing celibacy or a godly marriage. Do you want your children imitating the heroes of this world? The outcome of the way of life of so many of them is a ruined family life. The outcome of their faith is one which is shattered. The final outcome is the same cold grave and judgment of God. Is that the outcome to aspire to follow and imitate? That's the type of life which most remember and imitate in this world.

Remember your godly leaders who shared God's Word! Consider their life and imitate their faith. Someone might say, "Well, that was a different time. Things just aren't like they were back then. I can't follow the example my faithful pastor left. The world has changed too much." But God's Word doesn't change. Nor does our Savior. The godly life of a faithful pastor you once knew is still relevant for you to follow today. We know this because God does not change. His Word does not change. What is good and right does not change. *"Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever."* Don't give into the lie that the world is changing so we can't follow the examples set down for us by those faithful Christians who came before us. A godly marriage, a faithful worker, a dedicated life of devotion to the Word is still just as important today as it always was. The world would have you believe otherwise, but the way that faithful pastors spoke about marriage, human sexuality, and the two genders of male and female is still just as true today as it was in the previous generation. And the gospel preached by a previous generation is just as powerful today as it ever was. Remember and imitate past spiritual leaders. I'm not saying you have to memorize all the works of Luther or spend your life reading sermons from your parent's era. But Scripture is telling us not to forget spiritual leaders who have gone before. Remember and imitate them.

What about the faithful spiritual leaders of today? How are we to regard them? *“Obey your leaders and submit to them.”* The writer to the Hebrews is talking about spiritual leaders, ministers of the gospel who preach and teach the Word of God. And although they are to serve the flock with humility, the flock is supposed to listen to them and obey them. That’s not always easy. Our sinful flesh will often be at odds with God’s Word. There may be something which we don’t want to hear. A faithful minister will rebuke the person straying from God’s Word. He will patiently and gently instruct them. He will lead them to follow Christ and his Word. But there will be times when members of the flock may not like what he says. The flock may think, “times have changed.” Or it may see part of God’s Word as too difficult to follow because it will involve taking up a cross. So, they don’t listen. They regard their pastor with so little worth that they just ignore him or slander him like a car salesman. They do the opposite of obedience and respect.

And there may be times when someone might even have a legitimate disagreement about something with a pastor. Maybe they want to argue about the choice of spiritual programs, the chosen topics for Bible classes, or some other disputable matter which lies within Christian freedom. They might disagree with their pastor on things like the style of music or worship style. Maybe the argument isn’t about teaching but just in their approach towards ministry. Arguments and animosity arise. Complaints abound. The flock refuses to be fed or to follow. But the writer to the Hebrews says, “submit.” Instead of crashing with them and arguing, yield and give way to such matters. Instead of giving them a hard time about it, lovingly submit and support their work.

Why should we? For one, they are not serving themselves. They are serving Christ and his flock. They are serving you. *“For they are keeping watch over your souls as men who will give an account. Obey them, so that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no benefit to you.”* If a faithful pastor rebukes you for some sin, it is for your benefit. They have nothing to gain from it. If a faithful pastor sees you in spiritual danger and talks to you about it, don’t resent it or become bitter. Don’t make his life and ministry difficult. Thank God that you have someone who recognizes his responsibility is to care for your soul.

We regard people differently once we realize they are only there to help us. If you had someone throw a rock through your window you’d probably be upset. If they demanded that you jump through the window you’d probably fight back and resist. But if you saw they were wearing a firefighter suit and the fire they were pointing to, you’d likely comply right away knowing they are there to help you. That’s what a pastor does when he causes a disturbance in your life. He is there for your benefit to do you good, not to harm you. He keeps watch for your benefit.

Resisting him not only makes his work a burden; it harms you! This spring an assisted living home in a New York suburb caught fire. Hundreds of residents were helped out by numerous firefighters. One firefighter died in the rescue effort. He was there to help, not to harm. It’s unfortunate that a fire inspector had pointed out numerous violations at that building two years earlier. Apparently, there was no indication that the building managers acted on those warnings. Think of the harm that could have been prevented! How much more spiritual harm can be prevented when pastors take their job seriously and serve faithfully and the flock listens carefully!

Your reaction will make his work either a groaning burden or a joy. He will either see you struggle against his help, or he will see you safely helped. It is a great joy when pastor’s serve faithfully, and the flock listens carefully! Your pastor isn’t looking for recognition or fame. He is looking for the end result of you sharing in the joy he has in Christ! He is looking to see all the flock gathered in eternal glory with Christ!

How are we to regard faithful ministers? The writer urges us to pray for faithful ministers. Pray that they can remain faithful and honorable. Remember and imitate past pastors. Obey and pray for present ones.

The writer concludes with such a prayer and song of praise. *“Now may the God of peace—who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, in connection with his blood, which established the eternal testament—may he equip you with every good thing to do his will, as he works in us what is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* We have a God of peace. He still gives us shepherds to keep watch over us. He works in us what is good. He equips us. Our good deeds don’t depend on our pastor. They depend on the same God which every faithful pastor depends upon. It is the same God of peace who raised Jesus from the dead. He equips the shepherd and the flock to do his will.

It’s really not about the minister. It is about the Great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus. He is the one who served the flock with his very life. He gave himself for our sins so that by his blood we might have eternal life. And he was raised from the dead in victory. He is the faithful minister who is perfectly worthy of remembrance and imitation. He is the faithful minister who still keeps watch over his flock as our living Lord.

Some surveys about the most valued professions rank pastors below occupations like garbage collectors. Thankfully surveys about professions which are the least trusted still rank pastors above members of congress. May God give us faithful ministers who keep watch and members of the flock who remember, imitate, obey, and pray. A faithful minister keeps watch to benefit souls.