

How to Use Your Pastors for All They're Worth

By Daryl Wingerd

Do you take advantage of your pastors?

Pastors (also called “elders” in Scripture) are assigned the role of leading the local church, and they are invested by God with the authority commensurate with this responsibility.

History has taught us that following a leader can be frighteningly unwise if the leader is unqualified for the task, or if he wants to “lord it over” his followers, or if he is self-willed, or if he is not subject to meaningful accountability. But the Bible assures us that Christians under the care of pastors would be unwise *not* to value and submit to their leadership. This is made plain in Hebrews 13:17.



Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

The emphasis here is not primarily on the elders’ authority. Instead, the focus is on the reasons why believers should willingly and joyfully submit to pastoral authority, and why they should feel confident in doing so

In an ideal setting, a properly chosen and appointed team of pastors leads the church by carefully studying the Bible together, discussing the implications of what they are learning, challenging each other’s views, counseling each other in the best way to shepherd others, and carefully discussing the best course for the church. They proceed to give confident direction in serious matters only when all are agreed that they are reflecting the will of Christ. Church members who choose not to joyfully follow such leadership do so to their own spiritual disadvantage.

But then, Hebrews 13:17 is not about making life easy for elders. It is about making life profitable for the believers entrusted to them. Please consider a few ways for you to participate in keeping yourself and the other members of your local church spiritually safe, and your church healthy and unified—in other words, for getting the most from your pastors’ leadership.

Open your own heart to pastoral leadership. Keep your pastor(s) informed of any serious or troublesome matters in your own life or the lives of your family. They cannot lead you, or pray for your specific needs, or offer you counsel that would protect you from choosing a spiritually harmful

course of action, if they are unaware of the struggles you are facing. If you are tempted to keep a serious matter private when pastoral help should be sought, please consider your motives. To your own spiritual harm you may be intentionally avoiding the very leadership you know you need. You may be reluctant to hear what you know your pastor(s) will, and should, say.

Encourage others to value pastoral counsel. Consider the serious harm you may do by prompting other members to disregard pastoral counsel, discouraging them from seeking such counsel, or otherwise undermining pastoral leadership. You may disagree with your pastors’ counsel at times, but grumbling, gossiping, or expressing your disagreement in other ungodly ways promotes division, which God hates, especially when it is done maliciously (Prov. 6:16-19; Titus 3:10-11). It is not necessarily unwise to make it known that your view differs from your pastor(s), but it is wrong to use your personal disagreement to steer others away from the church’s godly leadership rather than toward it. Preserving confidence in godly pastors is good for the church, and it is everyone’s responsibility.

Maintain an open dialogue with your pastors. If you feel strongly that your pastors’ counsel is unbiblical or unwise, speak with them privately. Give them the opportunity to consider and address your position. Good pastors are men of strong convictions based on Scripture, but they are also teachable men who want nothing more than for every member to walk in wisdom and to know and obey the will of Christ. If they can be convinced that there is a way to follow His will more closely, they will gladly change course. On the other hand, if they can demonstrate an error or oversight on your part, be teachable yourself.

Submit yourself to Christ’s will for His church. Christ’s design for His church is for pastors to lead while others follow their leadership. Of course, Christians should never think of themselves as being consigned to blind submission, but life in the church is not a simple matter of every person doing what is right in his own eyes. Were it not for the prospect of conflicting wills within the church, there would be no need for any instruction to submit. Yet joyful submission to leaders is what is called for. If you choose to live independently of pastoral leadership, if you disregard godly pastoral counsel when it is given, or if your actions and words inspire these responses in others, you are, in effect, redesigning Christ’s church in a way that will cause much harm. You are separating yourself and others from one of the most significant benefits Christ has provided for His church.