

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Teaching Plan
July 20, 2014
“Obeying Our Leaders”

Memory Verse

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.” Hebrews 12:28, NIV

The Big Idea:

Sermon Scripture: Hebrews 13:17-25
Sermon Title: Receiving God’s Unshakable Kingdom: Part 5: Obey & Pray

Sunday School Scripture: Hebrews 13:17-19
Sunday School Title: “Obeying Our Leaders”
Big Idea: We are called to obey and pray for the leaders of our church.

Last week, we discussed leaving the camp to share in Christ’s sacrifices and suffering so we may share His love with others.

This week, we’ll talk about respecting our Christian leaders.

What are some qualities of a good leader? What are some responsibilities of a leader? What are some responsibilities of those who follow?

At the end of the letter to the Hebrews, the author concludes with a practical yet crucial point. He commands the people to obey their church leaders. Today, we’ll look at the AIM of leadership, the MEANS of leadership, and our RESPONSE to leadership..

READ Hebrews 13:17-19

OBEYING OUR LEADERS

1. THE AIM OF LEADERSHIP

Hebrews 13:17 encourages Christians to “*obey your leaders.*” In this context, the author is referring specifically to the leaders within the faith community. So before we talk about why and how to obey leaders, let’s first define the purpose or aim of godly leadership.

If you had to write a mission statement for the pastor of a church, what would it say? What would his main purpose be?

Based on the emphasis of the book of Hebrews, a godly leader helps believers persevere in their faith. Hebrews 10:36 says, “*you need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.*” Christians need help persevering. So how do godly leaders encourage believers to keep running the race of faith? They continually point believers back to Jesus and highlight the grace He offers. Hebrews 12:2-3 might be a mantra for a Christian leader: “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...consider Him so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*” So the aim of leaders within the faith community is to help believers persevere in their faith by constantly pointing to Jesus and the grace He offers.

2. THE MEANS OF LEADERSHIP

So we’ve defined the purpose of church leadership. Now let’s look at the means, or the HOW, of church leadership. How do godly leaders effectively lead believers? Hebrews 13:17 offers three roles of a godly leader.

READ Hebrews 13:17

Within that one short verse, let's look at 3 key phrases that define a leader's role: *KEEP WATCH*, *JOY*, and *GIVE AN ACCOUNT*.

A. Leaders are Watchful

Hebrews 13:17 says our church leaders “*watch over you as men who must give an account.*” The leaders in our faith community watch over us in several different ways. First, they must carefully watch the Word of God. Verse 7 of Hebrews 13 confirms that godly leaders speak the word to their flock. Godly leaders must constantly study, memorize, and teach the Word of God to those under their influence. Second, godly leaders watch Christ's example. Just as leaders point others to Jesus, they too must continually focus on Jesus and strive to imitate His life and love in every area. Third, leaders must watch their own conduct. In 1 Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy as a leader with these words: “*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*” Much of a leader's effectiveness hinges on his own integrity and upright conduct. Finally, godly leaders watch their people. Hebrews 10:25 encourages Christians to continue meeting together and encouraging one another. Leaders care about their people and set an example by their eagerness and faithfulness to meet with their faith family. Leaders watch over the believers entrusted to them just as Jesus, the Great Shepherd, knows, cares for, and watches over His children (sheep). So godly leaders must be watchful in many ways.

B. Leaders are Joyful

Hebrews 13:7 encourages Christians to submit to their leaders so that the leaders' work “will be a joy, not a burden.” Leaders must be joyful! And let's be honest: sometimes it takes work to be joyful. But leaders must set an example of finding their joy and satisfaction in God alone. Pastor John Piper says, “If God is not the satisfying portion of those who give their whole lives to knowing his word and living it, why should anyone in the church believe this God is real? And if you do not believe he is real, your faith will fall and not persevere. So the joy of leadership is not optional. It is essential.” In other words, if leaders cannot find joy in God and His Word, why should anyone else be expected to? Leaders must live and minister joyfully.

C. Leaders are Accountable

Hebrews 13:17 says our leaders are “*men who must give an account.*” This means that one day, each leader will stand before God and give an account for every person under his leadership. Leaders will be held accountable for how they influenced the believers with which God entrusted them. Before God, leaders might answer questions like, “*How did you help the believers persevere in their faith? How did you magnify Jesus? Did you teach the Word? How did you live? How did you love? How did you spend your time? Energy? Money?*” This is a serious thing! The leaders of our faith community have an immensely important responsibility for which God will hold them accountable. They do not lead flippantly or carelessly; they lead with purpose, carrying the weighty knowledge that they will stand before God and answer for the way in which they led His people.

Of these 3 roles of leaders (watchful, joyful, accountable), which would be most difficult for you if you were a leader? What impresses you most about those who take on the calling and responsibility to lead God's people?

3. THE RESPONSE TO LEADERSHIP

Now that we realize the significant purpose and roles of the leaders in our church, we must respond appropriately to their leadership. And our appropriate, biblical response to their leadership is simple and twofold: obey and pray.

A. Obey

Hebrews 13:17 commands Christians to “*obey your leaders and submit to their authority.*” In this verse, the Greek word translated *obey* means to be persuaded by, to trust, and to rely upon. The Greek word translated *submit* means to willingly yield to. So as believers, we are to absorb and act upon our leaders' teachings of God's Word. We are to trust the God-given direction in which the leader guides us. We are to rely upon His teaching and example to encourage and challenge us as we grow in the faith. And we are to do this willingly – humbly yielding ourselves to his leadership. Pastor John Piper says, “a church should have a bent toward trusting its leaders; you should have a disposition to be supportive in your attitudes and actions toward their goals and directions; you should want to imitate their faith; and you should have a happy inclination to comply with their instructions.” God's Word commands us to obey our leaders.

Has there ever been a time when you hesitated to obey a church leader? If you ever find yourself in this situation, what are appropriate actions to take? What are some inappropriate actions to avoid?

B. Pray

In Hebrews 13:18-19, the author says, “*pray for us – I particularly urge you to pray.*” The prayers of the believers mattered greatly to this leader. While he was confident in God’s power in and through him, the author was also humble enough to plead for prayers. Our leaders need our prayers! Too often, they receive more criticism than encouragement from us. They have great responsibility and influence. Let’s pray that God protects them and equips them with everything they need to live their lives righteously and teach God’s Word effectively.

How often do you pray for your church leaders? What are some things that we should be praying for when we pray for our leaders?

CLOSING: We are called to obey and pray for the leaders of our church.

APPLY IT!

Find a way to encourage your pastor this week. Write a note or email, send a text, or verbally encourage him. Pray for him this week – for his personal life, for his family, and for his ministry. Pray that God would protect and use him.

RESOURCE: The outline for this lesson is from a sermon series by John Piper: *Obey your Joyful Leaders, Parts 1* (preached October 5, 1997) and *Part 2* (preached October 12, 1997). Both are available online:

<http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/obey-your-joyful-leaders-part-2>

STUDY NOTES:

(These are for your own study. This is NOT the lesson. Commentary written by David Guzik and available online: http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/guzik_david/)

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive: We are to **be submissive** to the leaders God has given us (assuming they have the character mentioned in Hebrews 13:7). We are simply told to **obey those who rule** over us. When speaking on the authority of God's Word, leaders *do* have a right to tell us how to live and walk after God.

As those who must give account: Why should we **obey** and **submit** to our leaders? Because God has put them in a place of responsibility and accountability over us. Of course, this does not relieve individual responsibility, but it puts an *additional* accountability and responsibility to leaders.

Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you: Cooperative conduct is not only a joy to leaders, but it is profitable for the whole body. It is for *our own sake* that we should **obey** and **submit** to God-appointed leaders.

Pray for us: The writer to the Hebrews considered it important that others pray for him. We all need and should welcome the prayers of others. In the grammar of the ancient Greek language, **pray** is in the *present imperative* verb tense. It looks for continuous activity and implies that they had already been praying for him.

That I may be restored to you the sooner: There were obstacles preventing the writer from being reunited with his readers. He knew that prayer could remove those obstacles.

I especially urge you to do this: As far as the writer to the Hebrews is concerned, their prayers will determine *if* and *when* he is reunited with them. This shows how seriously he regarded their prayers for him.

In this blessing, God is first recognized in His attributes: **peace**, power (**brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead**), loving care (**that great Shepherd**), and ever giving love (**the blood of the everlasting covenant**).

The idea of **the everlasting covenant** has been taken to express the **covenant** that existed before the foundation of the world between the Persons of the Godhead, working together for the salvation of man. Other passages which may speak to this **everlasting covenant** are Revelation 13:8, Ephesians 1:4, and 2 Timothy 1:9. Some, however, simply take **the everlasting covenant** as another name for the New Covenant.

Then, the desire for blessing is expressed: **complete in every good work**, God's **working in you**, and all **through Jesus Christ**.

Bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words: The writer to the Hebrews reminds us of his purpose. His desire was to write a **word of exhortation**, that would encourage discouraged Christians, both then and now. In Acts 13:15, the phrase **word of exhortation** is used to refer to a sermon. Perhaps the writer to the Hebrews means in Hebrews 13:22 that he has given his readers a written sermon.

Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly: These final words give us a few tantalizing hints of the writer's identity. But these words only tells us that the writer knew **Timothy**, and that he planned to visit his readers soon. It also tells us that his readers were based in Italy (**Those from Italy greet you**), probably in the city of Rome.

Grace be with you all: This is a fitting end for a book that documents the passing of the Old Covenant and the institution of the New Covenant. **Grace be with you all** indeed, under what God has given through the superior Savior, Jesus Christ! **Amen!**