

Fact Sheet for **“Church Leaders”**
Hebrews 13:7-25

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We have come to the last sermon on the book of Hebrews. In the verses before us today we have a final word about church leaders, then some concluding words.

Verses 7 and 17 are sort of end caps, both mentioning “leaders”. Verse 7 mentions their original leaders and verse 17 mentions their current leaders. Consider what the teaching and example of church leaders should be today.

⁷ ¶ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

The past tense “spoke” and the word “outcome” seem to indicate that these leaders were the ones who initially taught them about Jesus Christ. These leaders were now gone but Jesus Christ remained continuously the same. The recipients of this letter were encouraged to remember their doctrine, their conduct, and their faith. There is a hint here that some were straying from the original teaching about Christ. The primary role of leaders is to preach and teach God’s Word, and their lives should reflect the Word that they teach.

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The truth about Jesus Christ does not change. (“yesterday” – Hebrews 1:1-3a, “today” – Hebrews 4:9-10, “forever” – Hebrews 10:12)

⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

These strange teachings don’t sound at all like a reference to normative Judaism, but an attempt by some to blend Christianity and some aspects of the Mosaic Law, such as the dietary laws. The author of Hebrews has already referenced these laws (Hebrews 9:8-10). Such strange teaching seems to have showed up in other localities (Colossians 2:16-17; 1 Timothy 4:1-3). Instead we should be strengthened by an ever deepening appreciation of God’s grace.

¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

“Those who serve at the tent” are those who want to follow aspects the Mosaic Law given when Israel was in the wilderness. Our altar is the cross and all it stands for.

¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.

The author describes the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:1-28) in which the bodies of bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering were to be burned outside the camp (Leviticus 16:27).

¹² So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

By analogy Jesus suffered and died outside the gates of Jerusalem and was our once for all offering for sin. Consider what the author wrote earlier in this letter (Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:1-4).

¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

In standing with Christ we bear the disgrace he bore (Hebrews 12:1-3).

¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

We are not asked to bring blood sacrifices any more. Christ eradicated that sacrificial system of the old covenant (Hebrews 8:13). But we are asked to bring a sacrifice of praise. (*Song – Sacrifice of Praise*) This “sacrifice of praise” is not primarily about song but about what we say and live out in obedience to God throughout life (Hebrews 12:28-29).

¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

In addition to the sacrifice of praise in verse 15 we should also bring the sacrifices of “doing good” and sharing.

¹⁷ ¶ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

This word for obey is very different than the one in Ephesians 6:1. This word for “obey” in Hebrews 13:17 can also be translated “follow, place confidence in, be persuaded by, listen to”. “Your leaders” are their current church leaders. Leaders will give an account to God of their teaching and example.

This verse closes the section of verses 7-17. Now there is a clear change in the author’s words. These are now words that conclude his letter.

¹⁸ ¶ Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. ¹⁹ I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Now the author gives a benediction that weaves in some of the thoughts from the book.

²⁰ ¶ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

“equip” – Compare Ephesians 4:11-12.

²² ¶ I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

The words “appeal” (a verb) and “exhortation” (a noun) are different forms of the same root word.

²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

Apparently Timothy had been imprisoned, but his imprisonment is not mentioned elsewhere in the NT. Think about Hebrews 13:3.

²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

Probably some Italians living outside Italy sending their greetings home

²⁵ Grace be with all of you.