

Heb. 13:7-9 Exhortations to Faithfulness

1 Corinthians 15:58 says: “**Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**” This is another way of saying, “Be faithful.” This is the practical aim of the letter to the Hebrews. They had trusted Christ, the great high priest, the mediator of a new covenant. And because of this departure from Judaism, great difficulties entered their lives in the sense of persecutions and sufferings. Therefore, the author is exhorting them to be steadfast, immovable, to abound in the Work of the Lord, knowing their labor is not in vain. This is faithfulness. We are no different. We also must be faithful. In this text we have 3 exhortations to faithfulness that will help to us today: 1) Remember your leaders in the faith, 2) Look to the One who does not change, and 3) Be firmly established in the truth of the gospel.

1. If you will be faithful, remember your leaders in the faith. Look at v. 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.**” One of the ways we continue in the faith is by remembering those who preached the word of God to us. Notice the verb used here is in the past tense. “**Remember those who SPOKE to you . . .**” He is not speaking of their current leaders. Over in v. 17, he will address current leaders by saying, “**Obey your leaders and submit to them**” (present tense). But for now, he is exhorting them to “remember” their past leaders. A good translation here is also “guide,” those who have guided you in the faith. This suits well with the context of Hebrews. They are told to imitate the saints of the old covenant (cp. 11). They are reminded in 12:1 of the great cloud of witnesses who went before them.

The text is pretty clear about those leaders, those who preached the Word of God to them. Look back at 2:3-4: “**It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.**” This preaching began with the Lord Jesus himself. Then, it moves to the apostles, and later the elders/leaders in Jerusalem. Here, he tells them to remember these leaders. So, how does he tell them to remember? He says, “**Consider the outcome of their way of life.**” In other words, consider their lives, how they preached to you, what they did, what they accomplished for the sake of the gospel, how did they live in godliness? And then he says, “**Imitate their faith.**” Remember, Consider, Imitate . . . these leaders who have gone before you.

I think of Stephen, one of the first deacons in the early church. He was picked because of his great character (See 1 Tim. 3:8-13). He is described as a man “**full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**” and “**full of grace and power,**” one who did “**signs and wonders**” (Acts 6:5, 8). He was also great preacher of the Word, one who spoke with boldness. Do you remember what happened to Stephen the last time he preached. He was martyred! And because of his preaching and martyrdom, many of the local Christians had to flee, leaving their homes and possessions. (Do you remember who stood by and watched the possessions of those who stoned Stephen? It was Saul, later Paul the Apostle. (Acts 22:20)). This is just one man’s preaching the Word, one man’s outcome of life, one man’s faithfulness to imitate. There are so many more!

When I consider standing up for what is right in a different culture, living under an ungodly government, I think of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, as they lived by faith. When I consider suffering and the hard questions of life (such as what happened this past week), I think of Job, the man who lost his children, his possessions, and his health. On and on I can go.

For me it is always a great help when I feel I tempted in faithfulness to consider the great heroes of the faith. But, not just them. I REMEMBER, I CONSIDER, and try to IMITATE many of my heroes in the faith. I think of all the missionaries like William Carey who gave up everything to go to Asia. I think of John Paton, missionary to the Hebrides. A few years ago our family watched the documentary on Jim Elliot, who was killed taking the gospel to the tribes of South America. I think of great preachers like Charles Spurgeon, Martin Lloyd Jones, Johnathan Edwards, even more modern folks like Billy Graham and even a local pastor who passed away named Gary Hendrix (still maybe my favorite). It helps to remember the our leaders in the faith, to consider their outcome of life, and to imitate their faith.

Application: Can you point to someone you have preached the gospel to, and they remember, consider your life, and try to imitate your faithfulness? This is something all of us should consider. Yes, these folks were “leaders” in the early church, but the emphasis here is “leaders” in the faith, those who have preached the Word faithfully.

Application: Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). We must preach the Word. And further, we must be obedient in godliness as we preach the Word. He didn’t tell the Hebrews just to remember those who preached, but to consider the “outcome” of their lives. He exhorts them to consider their godliness, their faith.

Personal Application: We will not be steadfast in the faith without good leadership. Personally, I think of 1 Tim. 4 when Paul tells the elder Timothy: **“Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”** If I, if our elders, will not lead you in this way, then find others who will.

2. If you will be faithful, consider the immutability of Christ. In other words, Jesus does not change. Look at v. 8: **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”** In the context of Hebrews, he is saying, you may live under different circumstances than the saints of the old covenant, you may live in different times than your leaders in the faith, but Jesus is the same. He is immutable. He does not change. This makes him the supreme example of faithfulness. He endured. He was steadfast. Therefore, follow his example.

I think of running rows in a garden. One of my grandfathers’ neighbors had a huge garden. And he would always call me to help him run his rows. I do my rows manually with a home-made wheel with a rudder. But, for the longer rows, you need a tiller. And it’s not that difficult. You start on one side and, on the other, you put a stick in the ground. And as long as you keep your

eye on that stick, you will go straight. If not, you will have crooked rows. In the same kind of way, if we will be steadfast, we will keep our eyes on Jesus. And here, the emphasis is not Jesus in some abstract way, but in the fact that Jesus does not change. This is the focus of the “row” of life.

This statement is as full as any statement in the Bible about the Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s consider the fact that Jesus does not change from three aspects: 1) His purpose, 2) His teaching, and 3) His example.

i. One Purpose. The Book of Hebrews (and the Bible) make it clear that Jesus, in essence is God. As we have seen, He is the Heir of all things. Through Him God created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. He upholds the universe by the word of his power. Of the Son, we read, **“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever . . . You Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning and the heavens are the work of your hands: they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment . . . but you are the same, and your years will have no end.”** (Heb 1) This means that the same verses we read about God in his character, we also apply to the Son.

All his ways are perfect. All his decisions are right. He doesn’t think like us, *“If that doesn’t work, I’ll try something else.”* The purpose of all his actions, as divinity, has always been to display his own glory. And though mysterious and out of our comprehension, by faith we know that before the foundations of the world, his plan was to save his people. And in order for this to happen, there must be the incarnation. **“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14). There must be a sinless life. And his entire life was lived so that he would eventually go to Jerusalem and lay down his life as a sacrifice on the cross. As he said, **“I did not come to be served but to serve and give my life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45). ONE PURPOSE FROM BEFORE THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WORLD! There has been no change, nor could there have been.

ii. One Teaching. During his life on earth in the flesh, he taught the TRUTH. Everything he said was true. Everything he taught and preached was true. Everything he said about God is true. He told Phillip, **“If you’ve seen me you’ve seen the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me . . .”** (John 14:9-11). All his teaching was about the Father, the ways of the Father, the kingdom of the Father, the works of the Father, the mind of the Father. How did he know such things? I think of his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: **“And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed”** (John 17:5). How could he teach anything wishwashy? Because God cannot teach but that which is true. His teaching never changed. (one purpose, one teaching, now . . .)

iii. One example. Everything Jesus did was in obedience to the Father and in accordance with that which is true. And what makes the example of Jesus so great is bound up in the incarnation: God became flesh. He was one hundred percent man, flesh and blood just like us. As Heb. 4:15 says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”** Every reaction

Jesus had to the weaknesses of his own flesh, every thought and emotion he experienced as he walked and taught and healed, etc. was from sinlessness. Every reaction was the right one! Every emotion was the right one! Every burst of anger was always righteous! There are no holes in his example. With that in mind, let's read together Phil. 2:1-11.

Pastor: So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Congregation: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Pastor: Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Congregation: Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Brothers and sisters, in every way, our Lord Jesus does not change. And who is he? Paul says he is the head of his church (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18). And because He does not change, is one faith, one Lord, one baptism (Eph. 4:5). This means, if we are to be faithful, we must keep our eyes on the One who has always been faithful. Rev. 19:11 says “**Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True . . .**” He is “**the Alpha and the Omega,**” the One “**who is and who was and who is to come . . .**” (Rev. 1:8). So, when you feel like giving up, when your heart is in despair, when you don't what decision to make, when you consider all your weaknesses and know your heart is prone to wonder, CONSIDER THAT THE LORD JESUS DOES NOT CHANGE. He has brought you this far. He is leading you now. And He will be with you even through eternity. The truth is fixed, the gospel is everlasting, therefore, “**Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord!**”

3. If you will be faithful, be firmly established in the truth of the gospel. Look at v 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.**” Here, the context with those Hebrew Christians was the danger of falling away, not being faithful to the end. And how was this happening? They were being led astray by the old teachings associated with the law of Moses, particularly the ceremonial teachings of that covenant. There were those who professed Christ, but were being pulled back to the Mosaic law concerning the foods they ate, the days they kept sacred, whether they were to keep circumcision or not, etc. Through these practices and teachings, they were adding to the gospel of Christ. And by so doing, they were not firmly established in the gospel. And notice he uses the words “**strengthened by grace.**” By speaking of

the gospel in this way, he is saying what the Apostle John says: **“The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”** (John 1:17).

I think of Greg’s barbecue sauce. If any of you have ever eaten it, you know how good it is. I’m not sure what Greg did to get the recipe. But, he has it it. And he doesn’t give it out to anyone. Also, he doesn’t change the recipe. He doesn’t add to it or take something away. Why? It would change the taste from something that is about as good as it gets. In the same kind of way, we cannot add to or take away from the Gospel of Christ. In the Letter to the Galatians, this is Paul’s theme (very similar to the Book of Hebrews). He says in 1:6-8: **“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”**

Today, as we sit here as “Gentile” Christians, we are not in the same context. Our error is not so much of returning to the Law of Moses in the old covenant. But, we are, as our text says, always in danger of being **“led away by diverse and strange teachings,”** things that take us away from the gospel. Anytime we try to add to the grace of God in Christ by thinking there is anything we can do in our own works to be saved, is to add to the gospel. Also, if we add anything to the message of the gospel, we can be led astray. I wonder how many churches and movements within “Christianity” give lip service to the gospel but emphasize other things. Many churches have abandoned the gospel all together by changing the message of Christ, his incarnation, his sinless life, his sacrificial death, his resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God. Instead, they preach just a gospel of “love” and “acceptance.”

Other departures from the gospel are more subtle. I think of the prosperity gospel over the last 20 years as they certainly “profess Christ,” but the message has become more about God blessing the individual with material things than with God blessing his people with faith and love for Christ and his gospel. Many churches, that still believe the Bible, merely assume the gospel. This happens more often than you think. Preachers will say often *“Trust Christ,”* and *“Look to Christ,”* but without preaching Who He is, what He came to do, why his life and death and resurrection are so important. Often, doctrinal preaching is abandoned and the gospel merely assumed. Many churches are more concerned with having some “good worship experience.” Many churches are filled with the things of our “culture” associated with music styles or a particular type of “preaching.” Many churches have so much going on in their congregations with all kinds of “good” things that they have become too busy and miss the simplicity of the gospel. On and on I could go here. But, whatever we do, and however we do things here at grace, we must keep things simple and focus be established in the simple gospel of Christ. We must preach the gospel of Christ. We must teach the gospel of Christ. We must apply the gospel of Christ. We must not move away from this gospel! The things of this world change, come and go. They change. But, the gospel does not. Therefore, we must be established in the gospel if we will be faithful.

In closing, we must faithful! At the end of the day, we keep going, day by day, month by month, year by year. It is not how we begin the race, it’s how we finish the race. And, God is a God of

grace, which is found in the gospel of Christ. Today, if you will be faithful, remember your leaders in the faith, know that Christ does not Change, and be firmly established in the gospel.