

Hebrews 13:7-9 "Do Not Be Carried Away By All Kinds of Strange Teachings"

This last chapter of Hebrews is a summary of how God's people ought to live, in light of the fact that we serve a God who loved us by sending His Son into this world to die for the penalty of our sins.

He encourages us to love one another in verses 1-3; to honor marriage since God instituted it for our good and His glory in verse 4; to keep our way of life free from the love of money so that God will not take a backseat to it or anything else in this world as we see in verses 5-6. He is to be our all in all.

But keeping these things in mind our writer also reminds us not to forget those who were instrumental in helping us grow in Christ, not just by what they taught, but also by their example.

HEB 13:7 "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."

This is an interesting verse because it speaks of remembering those who spoke the word and also considering the outcome of their way of life. That could also be translated, considering the end of their life.

It also speaks of their faithfulness to the very end. These leaders spoke the word of God to these Christians. They were committed to God's word in a way where they taught it, they preached it, and they lived it.

They understood that it is the word of God which is used of the Holy Spirit to change the hearts of people and to encourage them to walk in the ways of the Lord. Unfortunately, in today's world and Church, the word of God has taken a back seat to the wisdom of man.

It's as though many in the church today have surrendered to the tactics of the enemy which places more emphasis on anything else but the word of God. We have the Toronto "blessing" or "holy laughter movement" which minimizes the word in favor of the experience; the infiltration of pagan practices in the church like visualization, or the attempt to find our sanctification in Freudian humanistic teachings which we call psychology.

Is Jesus Christ and His word not sufficient for all of life? Do we have to borrow from the world to make our salvation complete? Peter would have something to say about this in his second epistle.

2PE 1:2-4 "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

It is the word of God that enables us to grow in Christ, not anything the world could offer. When Jesus was praying to the Father on our behalf that we might grow in our life with Him He said in JOH 17:17 "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

To suggest that we can be sanctified, to be more like Christ, by means of anything other than God's word, through His Spirit, is to miss the mark. Much of today's church would have us believe that you can get a quick fix to your problems in life, a quick sanctification if you will, by sitting down and paying \$75 an hour to someone who sprinkles his counsel with God's word as he or she espouses the latest in psychological techniques.

Oil and water don't mix. You can shake them up and they may appear to mix for a short time, but sooner than later they are shown to be distinct and opposed. Many in the church today are all shook up with the latest fad-teachings in the world, but sooner than later these same Christians are going to be hurt with the wisdom of the world which Christian leaders have introduced into the Church as an alternative to God's word.

God foretold this very thing which is why we need to be discerning.

1TI 4:1 "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons."

To compromise God's word in favor of doctrines which are contrary to His word is to abandon the very means by which we can grow in Christ. That's what sanctification is all about. And that will only happen as Jesus prayed in JOH 17:17 "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

Every philosophy and teaching of man will prove not to endure for eternity, but we know this, "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." (ISA 40:8)

This is what the writer of Hebrews is commending here in our text. He commends those leaders who stood firm on the Rock of our salvation and His word which is truth. And he tells his readers to remember them who spoke the word of God to you.

Dr. Donald Guthrie points out that the word *remember* in the Greek is "significant, [because] it stresses continuity, i.e. 'keep remembering'." And the idea here is that though we don't dwell on the past we certainly can be encouraged by those in the past as Hebrews chapter 11 points out.

And so, the idea is that we look to those who were faithful to God and we consider how we too might be faithful as we follow their lead as they were led by Christ. This is the reason Paul could say in PHI 3:17 "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."

PHI 4:9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

We can learn from others who follow Christ. We can learn from their faithfulness, from their steadfastness in the word, from their perseverance during trials, from their joy in being content in whatever situation they find themselves.

This doesn't mean that they are super-Christians, it simply means that they have put their hand to the plow and are not turning back. They are committed to following Christ even when it's not popular or advantageous from a worldly stand-point.

Paul would be the first to admit that he was not a super-Christian, but he could also say in 1CO 4:15-17 "Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church."

Paul may not have been able to personally be with the Corinthians but he could send them Timothy whom they could see and imitate, as he imitated Paul, who imitated Christ. No mere man can be the

perfect example, only Christ is. But you and I do not have the privilege, as did the apostles, to walk with the man, Christ Jesus.

This is why when we look to other faithful men and women we must consider that they are mere humans and yet our God allows us to get a glimpse of Christ in their lives as they were faithful to the Lord.

The question we might ask ourselves is, are we the kinds of followers of Christ that others should be imitating? Are we being faithful to Christ in every area of life? Are we decreasing so that He might increase in our lives? Are we considering one another as more important than ourselves? Are we learning to be content in whatever situation of life we find ourselves?

These are the kinds of questions we need to answer. Leaders in the church are to be the kind of people who others look up to for guidance, not only as they bring the word of God, but also by their example, so that others can imitate their faith.

As we seek to walk by faith and to please our Lord and be encouraged by the faith of others we will find, that as we grow, we will in turn help others to grow. This is what Paul told the church in Thessalonica.

1TH 1:6-7 "You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."

You see, not just the leaders are to be models, but the entire church. And so each one of us has the responsibility to not only imitate the faith of faithful saints, but in turn to walk in our faith so that others can learn and be encouraged; not to put ourselves on some sort of pedestal, but to be real people who struggle in this world and yet display the hope that is found only in Christ.

The psalmist also says in PSA 37:37 "Consider the blameless, observe the upright; there is a future for the man of peace."

Whether they be saints who have gone on to be with the Lord or saints who are now living, we can learn from them and be encouraged by their faith if we're willing to walk by faith in Christ who is our ultimate example and strength.

In fact, the next verse in our text addresses this.

HEB 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

This verse certainly speaks of His unchangeableness, but there's more here that we want to look at. Keeping the context in mind verse 8 and verse 7 are connected. Unlike those faithful saints who died in Christ, whom we no longer have access to, Jesus Christ, by contrast, is still available to us. He's the same yesterday, today and forever.

When God addressed Israel through the prophet Isaiah He said in ISA 48:12-13 "Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last. 13 My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together.

This same God who created the heavens and the earth is the same God who we read of in REV 1:16-18 "In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

Last week we looked at the incarnation of Christ, as the Son of God took on flesh, that He might come into this world to save sinners. But, the incarnation, as seen in the birth of Christ, doesn't suggest that Jesus came into existence at the birth.

Our Lord is eternal as we see in our text. And the reason this is so important in this letter is because the main theme of Hebrews has to do with contrasting Judaism with Christianity. All throughout this letter our writer has been encouraging his readers not to turn back to Judaism with its customs and its regulations and its traditions, as though somehow it made them more holy and acceptable to God.

There is no comparison between the eternal Christ and the temporal covenant found in the law given at Mount Sinai. A.W. Pink points out that "under Judaism, Aaron had been followed by Eleazar, and he, by Eli; but our High Priest abides forever. Israel's prophets followed each other on the stage of action; but our Prophet had no successor. So too there had been a long line of kings; but Zion's King is eternal."

And so our hope doesn't lie in something temporal, but in Christ who is eternal. He hasn't changed, and neither has His word. And because He is eternal, His Word also abides yesterday, today and forever.

This is why we can depend on the teachings we have in God's eternal word to be sufficient for our lives. Jesus Christ is called the Word in the Gospel of John and it His word where we find our encouragement.

The doctrines of man may satisfy the mind for a season, but God's word gets to the heart.

HEB 4:12 "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

It is the heart of man that needs to change as only God can change through the power of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with His word. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

'Are we hearing and listening?', is what God asks. Jesus says in the book of Revelation, "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says." In fact if we're listening to our God and following Christ then we will be less prone to be carried away by strange doctrines.

This is why our writer continues in HEB 13:9 "Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them."

There are lots of strange teachings in the world today which, as I mentioned in the beginning of this sermon, have been found in the church today, just as they were in the early church. In the early church there were those who taught that to be a good Christian you needed to be a good Jew according to the law. Paul addresses this heresy in the letter to the Galatians.

There were those who taught that the second coming of Christ had already taken place and left many Christians behind. This teaching freaked out a lot of Christians as you can well imagine. And so Paul addressed this false teaching when he wrote to the Thessalonian church.

2TH 2:1-3 "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction."

The apostles were always putting out fires the enemy started. The target of the enemy was the very thing Christ cherished the most, His sheep. From day one the enemy has come against God's people. We see this in the Garden of Eden.

But as we come to the N.T. church we see that there were always deceitful people who wanted to upset the body of Christ. Paul addressed this in TIT 1:10-11 "For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach - and that for the sake of dishonest gain."

With all of the deception going on out there, how can any of us be equipped to handle all of the false teachings which can cause us to be tossed around like rag dolls?

Well, the answer is very clear and yet because it seems so simple there are those who have a tendency to try and complicate matters. God knew that there would be all of these attacks on the truth of God's word which is why He "gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."
(Eph.4:11-13)

You see, God has provided the very means of being equipped so that we don't have to be casualties on the battle field, if we will avail ourselves of the gifts the Holy Spirit has provided to be built up in our faith.

EPH 4:14-15 "then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

Being in the word, being those faithful servants who diligently seek Christ and who spend time in prayer, as we seek His truth, will enable us to grow in our faith and in turn will provide the means for us to help others who might be struggling in their faith.

This is what our writer means when he says in verse 9 of our text, "It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them."

He's comparing the spiritual with the temporal. Our hearts will be strengthened by the grace of God, not by chasing temporal answers found in the world. His grace is sufficient for every area of life. But, it's when we begin to think, as did many of the Jews, that as long as I eat the right foods, and say the right prayer and observe the right holy day, I'll grow in my faith.

No, if that's what we're occupied with, as our writer says in verse 9, then we will not be benefited. Now the question might be asked, how do we occupy ourselves with such temporal things? Most of us are not caught up with trying to keep the Mosaic law as a means of obtaining salvation; but what about sanctification?

Is the church trying to be more like Christ by being more like the Pharisees? They dotted their "I's" and crossed their "T's." They prayed continually with long prayers and made sure that everyone saw their good deeds.

And yet what did Jesus say to them?

MAT 23:13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."

We can become so busy with trying to be holy that we miss what holiness is all about. It's about being set apart to live for Christ in the power of the Spirit. Now don't misunderstand me, I'm not against living holy lives, but what some have done is to substitute true holiness with their own regulations which they impose on others, which is nothing short of self-righteousness.

That was the problem with the Pharisees. For all outward appearances they were quite holy. But Jesus saw their hearts and called them white washed tombs full of dead men's bones.

And many in the church at large have done the same thing. They set up rules and regulations to try and keep some sort of semblance

of holiness. We've gone over this list before but it's worth repeating to make the point.

There are churches, where to join, you have to vow that you will not go to movies, you women will not wear make-up, or pants. You can never dance. Some churches insist that you not eat meat, but be vegetarians to be a good Christian. Some of these same churches insist that Christians must worship on Saturday to truly honor the Lord, despite the fact that all of the apostles worshipped the Lord corporately on the first day of the week, the day Christ rose from the dead, which we call Sunday.

If there are a rules to be made, some people will try and incorporate them into their system of worship to try and insure that their people will be these stellar examples of what it is to be holy.

Nothing would please me more than to see all of us be stellar examples of holiness. But holiness, according to God's word, not according to what men have devised, which may be fine for them and their consciences, but must not be imposed on others if the Scriptures don't make such impositions.

Paul spoke of this in COL 2:20-23 "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

COL 3:1-3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

This gets back to creating false doctrines which cause those who are weak to be tossed here and there. If you've ever talked to anyone who has come out of a cult or a church where legalism abounds, and seen them blossom in Christ because they no longer had this heavy hand of affliction imposed on them, it's amazing to see their whole countenance change from despair, wondering if they could ever be good enough to considered holy before God, to joy, finding that God has accepted them on the merits of Christ alone.

And when they finally realize that their holiness depends on only one thing; surrender to Christ for their salvation, it sets them free to be truly holy. Only the **Holy** Spirit, who indwells a believer, can enable anyone to be holy. It's His work in us. And as we submit to Him and love Christ above all will we be able to live lives that magnify our Lord.

There is no benefit in seeking the things of this world as a substitute for Christ. No magical system in man's wisdom, no magical or mystical experience to take the place of God's word, no super holy formulas that we've devised to ensure that we will all truly be holy.

No, it's an honest seeking of our heavenly Father and desiring to be used of Him for His glory. It's an honest approach to our own inabilities and weaknesses and a humbling of ourselves and a turning from self to seek after the Lord that will enable us to shine for Christ.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever and He has always and will always say to us, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." (JOH 10:27-28)

Do we follow our great Shepherd? Do we listen to His voice instead of the voice of men who want to sell their agenda? Do we love Him above all, knowing that His grace has been given to us as He has given us eternal life? Do we live as though we have this life and the joy of knowing that we shall never perish because no one can snatch us out of His hand?

If we will consider Him in everything we do then we will grow and mature and be useful in His kingdom. And we in turn can be an example for others to follow as we follow Christ. We will be much less prone to be carried away by varied and strange teachings.

That sounds like a well-rounded, growing and vibrant Christian. And that's what the Holy Spirit will produce in our lives when God is #1 in our lives. That's true holiness. A holiness which comes from the heart and is demonstrated in the fruit the Holy Spirit produces in our lives.

EPH 5:8-11 "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light

consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord."

I'll end with a prayer from Paul. May this be a prayer we pray for each other every day.

PHI 1:9-11 "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God."