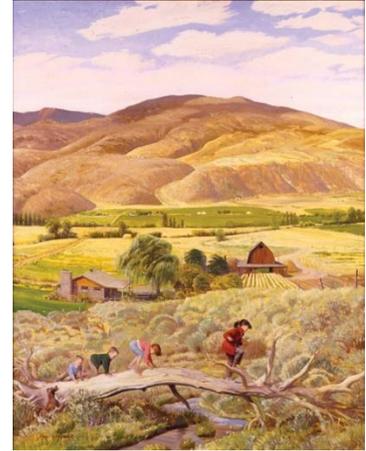


Founding Fathers

Hebrews 13:7,8 *Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. ⁸Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*



Applications are being made here at the end of this letter written to the Hebrew Christians living in Jerusalem shortly before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. There is among these, not a few who are longing to return to the pathway of Judaism. They might be coming to the end of their lives and wish the benefit of settling sentimentally into the traditions of their past relatives as they wait for death. At death the custom was to wash the body, candles were lit and placed near the head of the body, a traditional reading called the Kaddish was read, the body cleansed was carried on the same day to its resting place, with a large procession following. On the anniversary of the person's death a candle was lit and the kaddish was repeated. **Here the author calls all those he is writing to, to keep in mind the deaths, not of their Jewish forbearers, parents, grandparents etc. but to recall the deaths of those who gave them the message of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior.** These are identified as **their leaders.** They Spoke God's Word to them. They lived out a faithful exhibition of that Word in practice. They died faithful and consistent to that Word in their practice to the very end.

Three actions are called upon by those being written to: **Remember** the Word they spoke. **Imitate** the faith they lived. **Consider** the death they died. They are being referred to the early Apostles who led the church. For a moment lets look at these Apostles as they are identified to us.

1. The Word they Spoke.

The church is founded upon the eye witness accounts of those disciples who met with and learned for the Lord Jesus, saw the life He lived, the death He died and His resurrection and ascension. They were the first to receive the Holy Spirit and by that Spirit that had brought to their minds everything that Christ had ever taught them. It was the witness of Christ they saw, and the lessons Christ taught that by the power of the Holy Spirit they reported to us. What they spoke the Holy Spirit now tells us from **Hebrews 13:7** was THE WORD OF GOD. That Word found its central theme in the person and work of the unchanging Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Apostle Peter put it this way in **2 Peter 1:16-21** *For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ¹⁷For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My*

beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”—¹⁸ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.¹⁹ So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.²⁰ But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation,²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. Paul put it this way in **Galatians 1:11,12** For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. John also wanted those he to whom he spoke to know that he and all the apostles spoke the Word of God revealed to Him as an eyewitness of Christ. In **1 John 1:1-4** he speaks for all these founding fathers saying, *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.⁴ These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.* They proclaimed the authoritative Word of God.

2. The faith they exhibited.

When the Bible uses the word ‘faith’ it can refer to a number of things. It can mean the sum of their belief system. What they believed to be true of Christ and His teaching is ‘the faith.’ So **Acts 14:22** the Apostles are exhorting the people to “*continue in the faith.*” That is, they are to keep adhering to what has been taught them in mind and deed. Again ‘faith’ can refer to the trust a person puts in Christ as Savior and Lord. **Ephesians 2:8** “*for by grace are you saved through faith.*” It can also refer to the works that come out of a life of faith. So James says “show me your faith.” But finally faith can refer to fidelity or faithfulness. Galatians 5:22 says that one of the fruits of the Spirit is ‘faith’ along with others like love, joy, peace etc. Faith is a fruit produced in those who hear the Words of faith, and by faith receive those words and through faith live out those words and so a pattern of faithfulness grows out of their lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. These men were men of faith. They were faithful to Christ in a life of enduring service and surrender to Him. They not only proclaimed God’s Word but they lived in surrender and consistent obedience to it. It was lives lived in surrender to Jesus Christ their Master and Savior who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

3. The Death they Died.

The passage says *considering the end of their conversation.* Their life communicated a message to the very end. And they held to that message in the face of death and died for that message. Those in Jerusalem are being reminded of the first Martyr Stephen who was stoned in Jerusalem in the early days of the church. They would have been

reminded of the first of the 12 to die, James the older brother of John. A cousin of Jesus as well as one of the twelve. He was early on beheaded by Herod Agrippa to please the Jews. Philip was crucified some 20 years after the resurrection of Jesus. Matthew was cut down in Ethiopia some 25 years after the resurrection. Again, by now James the brother of Jesus and head of the church in Jerusalem as recently been stoned to death in Jerusalem on the Temple mount. Maybe they have learned of Peter's recent death under Nero and how he refused to be crucified like His Lord Jesus and so was crucified upside down. If Paul is not the author of our letter it could be, they have also recently learned of His beheading by Nero in Rome. These founding fathers laid down their lives as a testament to their enduring trust in Jesus Christ.

Remember the Word of God they Spoke. Imitate the Faith they exhibited. Consider the death they triumphantly went to by faith.

Now let me for a moment draw a principle for those who are to lead the church today. The pastors who have entered into a full-time vocation of service to the body of Christ.

1b. We are to Preach the Word of God. Our duty is great. It is to faithfully proclaim God's Word so that it can be understood and believed and followed. We are not to use this opportunity to share our opinions, to provide our personal advice, or to speculate on theological matters of which we lack a clear understanding. We are to faithfully teach God's Word when it is being popularly received and when it is popularly disregarded. We must be careful not to so communicate it that our manner of communication over powers or undermines the very heart and spirit of that Word. I.E. the Medium is the message... so be careful not to use communication strategies that do not rest fully upon the Spirit of Christ to make known the person and work of Christ through a faithful life. So important is the ministry of this Word of God to God's people that the 12 disciples set up deacons in the church to care for the administrative and personal needs of the members of the church. They did this so that they could devote themselves to the prayerful application of God's Word to the people. (**Acts 6:4**) And this Word must be drawn up conclusively to point to Jesus Christ as the authority behind it. The power of it. The answer to its demands. The end of its promise and hope. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever.

2b. We are faithfully live out what we are given to Preach. The Bible teaches us that the leaders of the church will be more strictly judged. They are given the primary responsibility for the ministry of the Word of God. They live most closely then to its judgments. **The call to preach God's Word is not a demand to offer up novelties and innovative and interesting speeches but to provide clear witness to the far-**

reaching implications of God's truth made know in this Word and made alive by the Spirit of Christ living in the Christian.

The pastor is to be at the front lines of surrender to this Word and he is to be the first audience to its instruction. He is not allowed to only teach only what is familiar to himself of this Word or only what is habitually practiced of himself. He is to preach the whole of God's Word and all its implications. Having studied God's Word and led by God's Spirit to discover a new implication of obedience and surrender to that Word, he must say yes to it and he must be in ready surrender to it before he offers it to others and **listen**, he is required to offer it to others. If he holds back from preaching a truth discovered in God's Word because he is not yielded to it himself, he is wrong. If he does preach it but is not yielded to it he is wrong as well.

There should never be a time when he preaches the Word of God and then offers a way of retreat from what it demands to the faithful heart by saying, "*but who is perfect in these matters*" or "*but we all fail to obey as we should.*" Such an expression is not faithfulness but a concession to unbelief before the very Word of God. For our sufficiency is of Christ and He can give us all we need to live in full surrender and obedience to Him if we will only yield our wills to His and receive what is already ours; His life in us to be for us Himself in perfect holiness. No. If that is what he sees as he preaches it then he should confess this before God and all and seek God's mercy and forgiveness and offer God before all His surrender to that truth. The preaching of the Word is to be an act of faith and demands a life of faith that follows after what is taught...

3b. We are called to be faithful and this implies finishing well. Paul tells us that the one requirement of a steward is that he be found faithful. The very idea is one of endurance to the end. It ought to be the concern of every leader in the church to end well. We want to say with Paul in **2 Timothy 4:7,8** *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: ⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* This means that life will press in on us its difficulties, but we are committed to meet them with the grace of our Lord Jesus. The story of the early Church fathers was a story of men who went to death glowing in a confidence and trust in the Savior. Some didn't walk to the sentence of death but ran to it...eager to give witness to their faith up to their last breath. Ex. well known pastor and preacher who learned he had less than a year to live. He gathered his children around him. Told them the facts of his situation. Then said, "*now watch me. All my life I have wanted to teach you how to live, loving the Lord Jesus and trusting in His life. Now I want to teach you how to die doing the same.*" Ex. of the sweetness in my mother in laws passing, in my fathers last day. Something odd to look forward to. Only be faithful to the end. End well. If you have got off tract then repent now and let God give you a good run up to the

end. And in the end it will be Jesus that they see and glorify the same yesterday today and forever.

For ourselves there is a three-fold application: Remember, Imitate, Consider

1c. Remember the Word Spoken to us. This is a call to not take at all lightly the Word of God made clear to you in the preaching and teaching of the church. You are to remember it so as to affirm it, apply it, meditate upon it. You and I have a duty to take care how it is that we hear God's Word and who we heard it from. There is no better way to honor the life the leaders God has given you than to live in obedience to the Word of God that God declared to your heart through them. John the Baptist was popular for a short time. In **John 5:35** Jesus gave witness to John before the crowds that had gathered around him. What he said was a tribute to John but not to the crowds. He said of John, *He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.* John was burning under the flame of the Spirit of God in him. He was shining out the truth of God as result. And the people liked it so but only for a season. They were drawn to John only as a fad. Once he was gone they faded from attention to the truth he proclaimed. God speaks to Ezekiel describing those who enjoy the passion of a good preacher but have no intent to consider that God is speaking through him. **Ezekiel 33:31-32** *And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with lustful talk in their mouths they act; their heart is set on their gain. And behold, you are to them like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it.* There is a seven fold warning at the end of each letter to the 7 churches in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation. There it says, *“He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”* It is a over arching declaration to our age and to us all. We must be at attention and we must remember what God has said to us. And if you were to say what it was you would find that it would be all things spoken that make Christ all things to you.

2c. Imitate the faithful example of your leaders. Paul said, *“follow me as I follow Christ.”* *“Whose faith follow.”* Find leaders you may follow not because they walk shallowly and slowly in places you are comfortable and accustomed to – Find leaders whose teachings and lives demand you go fully and all the way into the Jesus. And then follow them there. It is not enough to hear and remember the Word of God from those who teach it and seek by God's grace to live it... we must learn and live it with them. **AW Pink** observed, *“There are many who sit more or less regularly under the ministry of God's servants, and they approve of their doctrine, admire their courage, speak will of them, but they do not carry out their principles or emulate their example.”* Now what does it mean to follow their faith?

It means look where they are looking. Look with them to Christ. Find in Christ your source for everything good and then do it relying on Him to live His power and life

out from you. It is not to follow men alone. Follow them only as they teach you to follow Christ. Don't rely on them. Rely on Christ. Copy their virtues and ignore their quirks. But always claim their Savior and Lord as Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever.

3c. Consider the end of where a life is pointed. Where is my life pointing and where will it end? If not at Jesus and if it will not end at His feet... if it is not a life fully vested in following and finding Him to be everything and all then don't follow me. But look at the trajectory of the lives of your leaders and your own. Where is it pointing? Where is its end directed? If not at Christ... if not in Christ as the one you will meet having lived for, come to, served, worshipped, followed, obeyed, relied upon day in and day out, and met one day for reward. If your life is not all about Jesus the same yesterday, today and forever... consider the end of your life!!! What will it be? Find an example in those pointing in all they do to Jesus... Now consider them... follow them into His presence and worship there.