

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #38

Hebrews 13:7-9

It has been observed that the world can do almost anything better than the church. You don't have to be in a church to build houses, feed the hungry, or help the sick. But there is one thing this world cannot ever do that only a true church can do and that is offer a true perspective of the grace of God as it relates to Jesus Christ.

Like many of you, I am reading through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. I am presently in the Psalms. As you read through Psalms, you cannot help but see the grace of God. One verse that I read on Wednesday said this: "For You, LORD, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all who call upon You" (Psalm 86:5). Only a church that has a true grasp of God's grace understands this and can communicate this. Grace is the best message our church can give to this world; and when you look at this text, it is clear we need to clearly grasp grace.

We will never be strengthened by O.T. law, but we will be strengthened by N.T. grace.

In the first six verses of Hebrews 13, the writer set forth practical ways that we demonstrate a fear and reverence for God and we live life in this sin-cursed world. In contexts of love, morality, and money, the writer exhorted all of us to a godly application of Biblical truth.

As we come to this next section, we come to more admonitions which are designed to instruct us and strengthen us. Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said one thing that often gets overlooked here is the fact that **Hebrews 13:8**, which is so often quoted, is preceded by **Hebrews 13:7** and followed by **Hebrews 13:9** (*Hebrews 13:7-9*, p. 2). The specific challenge for us here is to keep our focus on God's grace found in Jesus Christ and not ever go back under some O.T. form of ritualistic legalism. One of the key ways we do this is by remembering those who taught us the grace Gospel concerning Jesus Christ and by remembering and in fact mimicking their faith.

A KEY TO US LIVING OUR LIVES IN REVERENCE AND FEAR OF GOD IS BY USING OUR MINDS TO REMEMBER SPECIFIC PEOPLE WHO BELIEVED IN JESUS CHRIST AND THE GRACE OF GOD AND COMMUNICATED IT TO US.

Jesus Christ is the author and the finisher of our faith. Our relationship with God is totally and completely due to His grace and it is by faith we are saved through grace. It is obvious that the Church of God is to be a place that stresses this point, especially by its leaders. The leaders of a church must grasp and defend the difference between law and grace and they are to be remembered for this reality.

There are three main admonitions given here in this text:

ADMONITION #1 – Remember your leaders. 13:7

In this final section of the book of Hebrews, the mention of the importance of church "leaders" occurs three times: **13:7**, 17, 24.

Obviously, **God's work is connected to God's leaders.** The word "leader" (ηγεομαι) is one that specifically refers to a ruler or leader who goes before as a guide (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 198). What spiritual leaders do is they lead us in the sense of going in front of us and guiding us in the way we ought to go, which is a way consistent with the Word of God. They are in a position of ruling and guiding because they know God's Word and lead us into truth. Now the present tense of the verb "remember" means that God wants us to continually call to our minds the memories of faithful leaders and rulers who guided us into the things of God, specifically into understanding the grace of God.

It is very possible that this refers to former leaders who have presently passed away. The assumption of this text is that almost every believer has had some mentor who really made a Biblical difference in his or her life. We are to remember those who knew the truth of God's grace and they communicated that to us. By their grace leading, teaching, lifestyle, and faith, they helped mold us and shape us.

The memorial marker on the tomb of John Wesley in Westminster Abbey says, "God buries his workmen but he carries on his work." Memories of godly people who influenced us are good for us to remember. There are **four areas of remembrances** that we should have:

(Remembrance Area #1) - Remember their leading. 13:7a

By virtue of the fact that the word "leader" is used, we may assume the leader does in fact lead. The noun "leader" (ηγουμενον) comes from a verb which means to lead the way in war (*Ibid.*, p. 198). The noun contains an article "the" (των) which would mean we are to remember specific leaders who have led us in a specific way. God wants us calling to our minds those leaders who took the Word of God, understood the grace of God, and fought a good fight in this world and finished their course. He wants us to remember those who led the way.

I understand this to mean that in each of our lives God will raise up certain leaders who will lead us into an accurate understanding of God's Word and lead us in warfare. These leaders will grasp the difference between law and grace and we need to remember them.

(Remembrance Area #2) - Remember their teaching. 13:7b

A good leader worth remembering will have been one known for his commitment to and communication of the Scriptures. He will be known as one who spoke "the Word of the God" (τον λογον του θεου). Leading God's people and knowing and teaching God's Word go hand in hand. Since no specific book of the Bible is mentioned, I understand this to mean we are to specifically remember those who were intent upon teaching us the entire Scriptures.

I find it interesting that the key memory we are to have about a leader is not their backslapping joviality or their love for sitting around and drinking coffee, but we are to remember their ability to communicate the Scriptures.

I have read much history of some of the famous people in Church History. I have read the story of the lives of Martin Luther, John Calvin, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, C. I. Scofield, Donald Grey Barnhouse, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Miles, John Walvoord, J. Vernon McGee just to name a few. I can tell you personal stories, funny stories, and interesting stories almost about every one of them.

But the thing that stands out about every one of these men is their love for God's Word and their teaching of it. All of those men were serious students of God's Word. That is what the writer of Hebrews says we are to remember. They led us and they spoke the Word of the God to us.

(Remembrance Area #3) - Remember their conduct . 13:7c

The word "conduct" (αναστροφή) is interesting. The actual word means to turn back and turn oneself around (*Ibid.*, p. 34). What seems to be stated here is that we need to remember how faithful leaders continually turned themselves around in view of Scripture. We need to remember how they would analyze God's Word and then make adjustments in their own lives. They lived their lives always returning to the Scriptures to determine whether or not what they did squared with God's Word. The Greek emphasizes the way a person went out and lived in the world.

I cannot help but think of the Apostle Paul who well into his Christian life said he was still working on things. He said he was even working on his thought life (II Corinthians 10:5).

(Remembrance Area #4) - Imitate their faith . 13:7d

The word "imitate" (μιμεομαι) is the word from which we get our English word "mimic." There is an article "the" before the noun "the faith" (την πιστιν), which means we are not talking about any kind of faith but something specific.

It is our job to mimic and imitate those leaders who have believed totally and completely in the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ. We are to mimic the faith of those who literally believe God's Word as it relates to the amazing grace found in Jesus Christ. We are to mimic those who carefully sought to understand all of God's Word so they could apply it to their lives. Leaders who operate like that do that by faith. We are to copy and mimic their faith. They experienced God's grace and by faith they stayed focused on the Word of God and the will of God.

There is to be a connection between the faith of others and our faith. We are not to come up with our own original expression of faith. We are not to come up with our own faith system. We are to actually imitate and emulate other believers who have proven themselves faithful to God and His Word.

There is a major list of people in Hebrews 11 who demonstrated a great faith in God and His Word. We are to mimic that in our lives.

ADMONITION #2 – Remember proper doctrinal truth about Jesus Christ. 13:8

The entire grace system of God is found totally and only in Jesus Christ. We had better know that and we had better believe that.

Jesus Christ is immutable in His character, attributes, and Personality. He cannot change; He is always the same. Now this does not mean He is immobile. Jesus Christ can and does move within the context of everything. He moves within churches and He moves within individuals. He does not change but He does move.

You and I live in a changing world. Presidents come and go. Empires rise and fall. We change. We go through the teen years and then we hit the twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, seventies, and eighties. We change physically from being young and strong to old and weak.

People we know and love die. Many of the leaders that we are to remember are gone. Some of the great men and women of God are gone now. Ah, but the One they believed in, the One they spoke of, the One they taught about, and the One they lived for, He is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The first thing that jumps out to us from this is that two proper nouns are used for the Lord: Jesus and Christ. **Jesus is the name that refers to the fact that He is the Savior, and Christ is the name that refers to the fact that He is the Messiah.** Jesus Christ has always been the only Savior and Jewish Messiah; He was that yesterday, He is that today, and He will also be that tomorrow and forever.

All that Jesus Christ is, He is forever. He never changes. All of His Person and attributes are the same always. You and I don't have to get up in the morning and wonder if the Lord had a bad day. We don't have to ask the Lord how He feels or if He got a good night's rest. He is God and He is the same. You do not have to worry about whether or not His grace can be sufficient for you. He is always the same and His grace is always there.

All individuals change. They go from bad to better or better to bad or bad to worse. All individuals change. Some move from immaturity to maturity and some never grow up. God cannot change in any direction. Jesus Christ cannot ever go from better to good, from lesser to greater, because He always is the same perfect Person.

Jesus Christ is the only unchangeable human who has ever walked on this earth. Nations and empires have come and gone. Churches change. Individuals come and go, but not Jesus Christ. The sciences and philosophies in the world today will be obsolete laughable matters tomorrow. We are already seeing the fact that global warming is a joke. But what does not change is Jesus Christ. He is always the same. This is very important because we are in a world that promotes one doctrinal heresy after another.

Remember Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I find it amazing that God actually puts leaders in the same context with Jesus Christ. However, no matter whom the leader is or was, the fact is at some point the relationship will change. The leader will either leave or die. But never is there a change in relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the same.

ADMONITION #3 – Do not get carried away by strange legalistic teachings. 13:9

In very close proximity to the fact that Jesus Christ is the same, we come to **verse 9** which basically says because Jesus Christ is the same God and Savior forever, you do not need to invent new legalistic doctrines beyond the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is the only God/man. Jesus Christ is the only Savior from sins. Jesus Christ is the only Jewish King/Messiah. He will never change. You do not need any works to be saved other than to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In I Timothy 4:1-5 it is specifically predicted that in the latter times of the Church Age there will be a falling away from the faith system into a demonic legalism. **The biggest threat against the Hebrews was that of going back under O.T. law and moving away from grace that is found full and free in Jesus Christ.** They were in danger of moving from the Gospel into ceremonialism, from grace into asceticism and legalism.

One of the most pathetic things you will ever see is believers who will be drawn into false legalistic doctrine. Handle not, taste not, touch not become a rigid code for those who do not grasp grace. The worst false teachers of all are those who disguise themselves as orthodox grace teachers, but actually are deceptively bringing in their legalistic, ritualistic law works. Typically religious cult leaders and blatant heretics are easy to spot. But these false teachers are not easy to spot. The most dangerous of all false teachers are those who know how to introduce legalistic works to grace (II Corinthians 11:13-14). These types of teachers are satanic. New doctrines that conflict with grace are teachings that do not benefit you or strengthen you in any way.

Now because God is the same, the Word of God and the doctrines found in the Word of God are the same; we do not need some new doctrinal innovation apart from the Word of God. We do not need ceremonialism or impressive rituals or clothing or liturgy because we have the Word of God and it never changes. As we have seen in Hebrews, we are forever saved by the blood of Jesus Christ when it is judicially applied to our case before God the moment we believe.

Now apparently there were some people getting caught up in legalistic practices. The writer says your spirituality is not determined by manmade, outward, legalistic taboos. It is determined by your grasp of grace as it relates to Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in regard to the Word of God. Notice how a heart is strengthened, by grace. We are strengthened by grace. If you do not grasp grace you will end up a pathetic, miserable, rigid disaster. You will get before God with all of your legalistic baggage and you will look at Jesus Christ and realize you never did embrace the freedom He offered.

You are free and you have the full righteousness of God in Jesus Christ and any type of teaching that tries to pull you away from this is that which is leading you astray. Any form of legalism impedes grace. It doesn't matter what the legalism is; it impedes grace. Full grace is found in Jesus Christ and any system that tries to pull you away from Him is false.

I just recently read a book on the life of Charles Spurgeon. Charles Spurgeon, a preacher who influenced thousands perhaps millions of people, fully grasped the grace of God. He enjoyed his Christian liberty in a couple of areas that some of the rigid believers didn't agree. One time a person challenged Spurgeon on a gray area issue and Spurgeon said this, and I am paraphrasing, If you can show me one verse in the New Testament that says this is a sin, I'll walk away from this right now and never do it again. If you can't, then keep your mouth shut. Spurgeon understood grace.

The clock is ticking on every one of our lives and sooner or later, if the Lord tarries, we will be gone. What memory will we leave behind? Will the memory of our lives be, there is one who loved God's Word, who understood grace, was strengthened by grace, and taught us by his/her life and lips to embrace the grace of God. Or there was a rigid man/woman who was carried away by strange legalistic teachings?

We will leave a memory behind. Which will it be?