

## HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part fifty-six

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### JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY AND TODAY AND FOREVER

**Hebrews 13:7-14** - "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. [8] Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. [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. [10] We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. [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. [12] So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. [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."

Our writer continues his closing reminders to this group of persecuted Hebrew believers. Like any teacher wrapping up, you can almost sense his tension as he feels pressed for time in his closing remarks. Most of the instructions are quick and to the point. Following New Testament pattern, he is building application *after* laying the doctrinal foundation.

#### 1) THE ONLY LEADERS WORTH REMEMBERING ARE THE ONES WHO REGULARLY GIVE YOU THE WORD OF GOD

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

This is quite striking. Leaders can be remembered for a lot of things. Our writer doesn't ask these disciples to remember leaders for their *cleverness*. They're not to focus on their leader's *brilliance*. Leaders weren't to be cherished for their *popularity*, which is what we might naturally expect.

The command is to remember the *Word* teachers. That's the instruction. Remember leaders who took you into the text. And the implication is there's nothing important enough in *any* leader in and of himself or herself to merit sustained attention. Leaders ought not to be remembered if they magnify something *other than* the Word. *Forget* about those leaders. You don't have time to be thinking about them. There may be fondness and excitement. But there will be no spiritual growth there.

This emphasis was the glowing center of the early church mind-set:

**Acts 2:42** - "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Underscore that word, "*devoted*." This Word focus wasn't just a passing interest. When Luke says they *devoted* themselves to the Apostle's teaching he means they didn't naturally *have* time for this. He means they *made* time for this. They were *devoted* to the Word the way a husband is *devoted* to his wife - the way a mother is *devoted* to her young child - the way a business person is *devoted* to profitability.

The only difference is the early Christians had to *develop* this devotion to the Word. Devoted is a *verb* in this text. This was a *trained* devotion. They *developed* this taste. They were involved in the *creation* of this love.

**Romans 10:17** - "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

I think this verse is frequently misread. I misread it for years. Paul isn't just saying people *develop faith* by hearing the word of Christ. That's not quite it. He's saying something more profound. He's saying the capacity of hearing itself comes through the word of Christ. You can't become a *hearing* person without the Word of Christ. Without the word there is only *deafness*. Without regular exposure to the Word I have no way out of my own spiritual obtuseness.

This is huge. *Hearing* comes through the word of Christ. Hearing is the *capacity to learn and know and recognize and cherish*. This *comes from the Word*. It is *living book*. Read humbly and prayerfully, it has the ability to *open our eyes* and *transform our low tastes*.

There's actually a text that describes this divine working of the Word:

**1 Thessalonians 2:13 - "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."**

It's as though Paul is concerned people may not fully appreciate what's going on in a gathering like this. We aren't getting the impact of this time together around the Word unless we know who is speaking to us. Apparently we can *hear* the Bible and *forget* God. Hearing *God* in the Word is what it means to "*receive*" and "*accept*" the word of God. Those are the words Paul uses.

Notice something else. We are to receive the word as a working word - "*...which is at work in you believers*." Look outside on Gorham Street. Look at all the orange cones and torn up pavement. Look at the heavy machinery parked on Crowder. And the next time you feel your tires clunking over those torn up trenches of pavement tell yourself, "*O, so that's what God's Word is doing in my distracted, inattentive, and frequently proud heart. The bigger construction project isn't on Gorham. It's in the sanctuary!*"

***Bring your hard-hat to church.***

## 2) **THE ONLY REMEMBERING OF THE WORD THAT COUNTS IS A MORAL REMEMBERING**

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

Speaking *as* a leader in a local church, I can tell you I think our writer is taking quite a risk in those words. I kind of wish they weren't in the text. I can think of different parts of my life you would be better off *not* imitating.

And I think our writer *knows* that. He knows only Jesus is sinless and follow-able in every area of life. But I still think there is a point in this imitation command. I'm assuming everyone here reads his or her Bible. We all have the capacity to learn what it *says*. And our writer wants all of us to know that *isn't* the kind of attention to the Word he has in mind.

Note his instruction. Look to *godly examples* to find areas of visible transformation through the Word. We all find it easier to be moved by *example* than by mere *instruction*. We want to see proof the instruction *works*. So our writer tells his readers to look to find the *beauty* of the working of the Word in visible lives. Your leaders aren't perfect. But look for the fruit of the Word in their lives. And pray for them where it's lacking.

## 3) **JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY AND TODAY AND FOREVER - AND THIS IS BOTH PRECIOUS AND DANGEROUS**

**Hebrews 13:8-9 - "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. [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."**

This slogan appears at the front of many, many churches. It hangs in kitchens and family rooms. And it's almost always quoted all by itself, as though it never was part of a textual context.

I believe it's a verse that sits like the cream in the middle of an Oreo cookie. On one side there has just been the command to consider the example of the godly. And immediately following will come the warning of false teachers and their false teaching. That's the nest in which this well-known text sits. And here's how I think this all fits together.

These persecuted Hebrew Christians have just read the list of faith hall-of-famers in Hebrews chapter 11. And they've just been instructed to study the example of godly leaders. But there's problem. All of those faith-heros in chapter eleven were dead. And the New Testament apostles were dying off one by one.

Where would this leave these persecuted refugee Christians? The voices of faith were gradually being silenced by the grave. The examples were all aging. Would their faith starve?

Here's the writer's answer. They had exactly the same Jesus as every other saint - living or dead. You have the same Jesus as Apostles Paul and Peter and James. And He inspired their adoration right to the gates of martyrdom. He loves you no less. He is worthy of the same loyalty from you. And your eternal destiny no less secure.

You have to go through some tough life before you feel the preciousness of those words about Jesus remaining **the same**. Jesus Christ doesn't change with personal loss or sickness or poverty or depression. Our feelings about **Him** may change. His for us **never** change.

My mother no longer has the capacity to **feel** the same love for Jesus as she once did. But she is none the less secure in His unchanging love for her. There is a solid, beautiful foundation of **constancy** in everything about our risen, reigning, returning, death-defeating, constantly sympathetic, sin-forgiving Lord. This is precious beyond telling.

But before saying, "Amen," too loudly we must also see there is a problem here. And it's raised in **verse 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.**"

You can't help but see what our writer is getting at when he uses that word "**diverse**" in describing these strange teachings. Diverse means **varied**. It's root in the Greek means "**manifold**."

Think about that. Right on the heels of saying Jesus Christ is exactly **the same** yesterday and today and forever our writer cautions these **same Christians** against teachings that will be constantly **adapting** and **morphing - teachings that will customize themselves to whatever a given culture will desire to hear**. It's not always a good thing when churches become naturally pleasant places for everyone to be.

This is exactly what Paul warned pastor Timothy about in **2 Timothy 4:1-4** - "**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: [2] preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. [3] For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, [4] and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."**

Look at those stunning words - "**...they will turn away from the truth and wander off into myths" (4). And you just have to ask, "**What would make people do that? What would make people who knew the glory of Jesus "turn way" and "wander off?"**"**

The answer isn't complicated. I'll tell you what it is. It's never easy to keep giving attention to something that never changes. It is the **glory** and the **danger** of Jesus that He never changes. We take for granted things - even very precious things - that are always the same.

Think about this. What if someone came and told you today this was the last day - the **very** last day - you would ever see a Bible in any form? What if someone came here today and told you this would be the last day - the **very** last day - you would ever gather with another Christian - that you would never see another believer again? Or what if you were suddenly told you would never again - not **ever** - hear God's praises sung by a group of fellow-believers. What if you found out today you never again - not even once - hear the voice of another saint praying for you or anybody else?

Yet we can so frequently piddle through these precious, Christ-centered things - or perhaps just stay home if the weather's nice - and not even miss any of them. And that's because we have gotten used to them. They're just the same. It's hard staying excited about a Jesus who is always the same. It's just as hard as it is precious.

#### 4) **THE KIND OF FALSE TEACHING OUR WRITER WAS DEALING WITH**

These are the tricky verses in our text:

**Hebrews 13:9b-12** - "**....for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. [10] We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. [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. [12] So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.”

Our writer recaps the central theme of all the theological arguments of this entire letter. Everything that the “*altar*” was for that obsolete old covenant, “*Jesus*” is for God’s final covenant with mankind.

The key sentence is found in verse 10 - “**We have an altar from which those who serve the tent *have no right to eat.***” Imagine what this would mean to these persecuted Hebrew saints being pressed back into their Judaic covenant. Our writer boldly claims if they want to place themselves back before that old covenant altar they have no participation in the broken body and shed blood of the new covenant sacrifice, Jesus Christ. He is *un-combinable* with any other religious system.

Something else. And it’s easily missed. Our writer seems to labor the point that the old covenant animals offered on the day of atonement were buried outside the camp after the sacrifice was finished. Why? Why did God care where these dead carcasses were buried?

It’s more than dark superstition. And it’s more than concern for hygiene. This burial outside the camp symbolically pictured the idea that the sins of all the people were now *located* in the bodies of those animals. Those animals were unclean because of the *imputation* of the sins of the people.

Here is the wonderful reality behind that symbolism. Our writer tells us a great deal about the nature of the atoning death of Jesus when he reminds us Jesus was crucified “*outside the gate*” - Hebrews 13:12 - “**So Jesus also suffered *outside the gate* in order to *sanctify the people* through his own blood.**”

This needs restating in today’s church. Jesus didn’t just die as a great moral example or as a demonstration of God’s non-violent love in the face of injustice as *Brian Zahn and Greg Boyd* would have the church believe. He bore my actual sin. He died as my wrath-bearing substitute. He brought about atonement. That’s what this whole text is graphically depicting.

#### 5) ALLEGIANCE TO JESUS WILL ALWAYS BRING REPROACH AND THIS MUST BE BOLDLY EMBRACED

Hebrews 13:13-14 - “**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.*”

Just to be clear, there is no reproach whatsoever for admiring and even quoting the *teaching* of Jesus. Every talk-show host in the world chimes in on the lovely sayings of Jesus when it suits. That’s why our text ties the *reproach* of Jesus to the *death of Jesus for our sins*. This is an unacceptable concept to the moral reformers and social activists of our culture.

The idea that there is sin - God-displeasing sin - in even the most appealing of people is reprehensible and insulting. It is religiously exclusive and hence, intolerant. The atonement seems insulting to people - straight and gay - who seem very nice and loving just as they are - thank you very much.

The future of the church - and your eternal future as a child of God - hinges on what reproach we are willing to bear for allegiance to Christ. Religious talk is fine. The Gospel isn’t and we’re told never to expect it will be.

Fortunately we have an example of *reproach-bearing* in Jesus Himself - Hebrews 13:13 - “**Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and *bear the reproach he endured.***”

We also studied it in this letter - Hebrews 12:1b-3 - “**....let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, *despising the shame,* and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.**”

Here’s my closing point. You will never experience *reproach* for allegiance to Christ like He experienced in being executed like a wicked, cursed criminal. There was shame experienced by the divine, sinless Son of God the likes of which has never been witnessed on this planet before or since.

Jesus “*bore*” that reproach. And He *rejected* that shame. That’s what those words, “*despising the shame*” mean (12:2). He took all that shame and stepped on it. He choked the life out of it. And He did that for *you*. Jesus not only gave His life, He

gave up the *glory* of His Person and reputation. He gave up the admiration of the crowds. He took on *shame* in its place.

The reproach of allegiance to Christ is going to come. It comes because of your refusal to make this culture your *"lasting city"* rather than living for the *"city that is to come"* (14). The searching question now is do you - will you - shy away from the reproach of Christ? How will you express allegiance to the Lord who took on nothing but shame for you - Hebrews 13:13 - **"Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured."**