

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Christians and Leaders

Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

**Lord, give us the meaning and spirit of Your Word while it lies open before us;
Apply Your Word with power to our souls, threatening or promise, doctrine or precept,
whatever it may be; lead us with trembling and with joy into the soul and marrow of Your Word.
(adapted from C.H. Spurgeon)**

History – is defined by Webster's as *"a chronological record of significant events"* and as *"a branch of knowledge that records and explains past events."* History - to some nothing more than a hard class back in High School. To others history is associated with people, dates and places that seem to have little relevance to their own present. Of course there are some how seem to eat up history and can impress us with their ability to recall things forgotten by the rest of us.

Generally speaking, history involves people, people who have stood out from the rest, people who have inspired, some for good, some for bad. But, by and large, history involves people and most importantly history is directed by the hand of God. Concerning history John MacArthur wrote:

"History is the unfolding of [the] plan of God – as those whom He chose are called, justified, and glorified through the Person and work of the Son. History began when God created time and space according to His eternal redemptive plan. And it will end when all of His purposes for His creation are accomplished according to that same eternal plan."

"Not surprisingly, God's servants throughout history have understood and embraced this reality. From Moses to the present, there truly has been a long line of godly men who have demonstrated this certainty in both their words and their lives. These servants of God are our human heroes of the faith. But it is not their inherent greatness that we applaud. Rather it is the greatness and glory of their sovereign God, as reflected in their lives and their teachings, that is so compelling."

Let me call your attention to this one line again, *"From Moses to the present [from the past up through to now], there truly has been a long line of godly men who have demonstrated this certainty [faith in the plan and purpose of God] in both their words and their lives."* Beloved, as part of God's plan and as revealed in history, God has blessed believers with a godly heritage, this long line of godly men and women who because of their own certainty, their own faith in God, have touched the lives of countless others with the message of the transforming power of God. Each one of us here who professes Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior do not do so in a vacuum. No one here who is in Christ simply woke up one day and without the input or influence of others said, "I will give my life to Christ." Why is that? Of

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course we know Romans 10:17 well that says, “*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*” If we are in Christ, we have been blessed with salvation because God chose to communicate Himself to us through people; perhaps a parent, or a pastor, or a friend. But each of our own histories includes the influence of others.

Even as I say this, I am overwhelmed by the providence of God. As I consider my own history and look back upon those whom God used in my life to make Himself known to me, one of the persons who has had the greatest influences is sitting here today, a man whose passion for the Lord was evident to me some twenty-three years ago [am I really that old?] and whose passion for God and His people has only increased over the years – I thank the Lord for my friend and mentor Rocky Wyatt. And, it is hard to mention that name without also noting the influence of his wife, Sue. Thank you both for your faithfulness to the Lord, your faithfulness to His calling on your life and your faithfulness to His people – by God’s grace you two are an inspiration to more than you will ever know.

Now, I did not prepare this message to be a tribute to the Wyatts, but what I have shared encapsulates a part of what our text is driving at. In the middle of this closing chapter of the book of Hebrews, a book that has indelibly impressed upon our minds the superiority of Jesus Christ, and in the midst of this chapter that speaks of the practical outworking of the life of faith is a seemingly most unusual series of commands and exhortations. After the calls to love the brethren (v. 1), to love strangers (v. 2), to remember and love the afflicted (v. 3), to love the divine institution of marriage (v. 4), and to be free of the love of money (vs. 5-6); in verse 7 we are offered in effect *an exhortation to call to mind and to love the long line of godly people the Lord has brought into our lives.*

In Hebrews 13:7 then we are offered three means by which we might rightly honor and love those spiritual leaders God has brought into our lives. We must...

- I. Remember our spiritual leaders’ lives
- II. Consider our spiritual leaders’ conduct
- III. Imitate our spiritual leaders’ faith

So then, let us begin by looking again at Hebrews 13:7 and remember that as we obey the exhortations of this text to honor and love our spiritual leaders, we are in effect honoring and loving our Savior Jesus Christ.

I. Remember our spiritual leaders (13:7a)

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you...

Our text begins with a command, “**Remember those who led you...**”; the command is to remember our spiritual leaders. This word “**remember**” means to purposely and intentionally be mindful of something or someone. The word “remember” here has the idea of rehearsing; of going over something in your head. Perhaps some of you can “remember” a time when you wanted to say something important to someone. And so, in order to get it right, what did you do, you might have rehearsed in your head in order to remember it correctly. Right now the youth staff is working on memorizing 1 Peter chapters 1-2 and most of us, in

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order to remember it, will rehearse it, going over it in our heads. This is depth of the word here.

I might also point out that this call to duty is in the present tense, in essence saying, “Recall to mind and keep on recalling...” or in other words, “do not ever forget.” In Luke 17:32 the Lord Jesus uses this very verb saying, **“Remember Lot’s wife”** – “recall to mind her disobedience in looking back to the things of this world rather than keeping her eyes focused on the Lord’s directives.”

With this said, who is it that we are to be continually mindful of? Our text reads... **“remember those who led you...”** This word “led” is a term of authority. It means to lead, to rule, to govern, to have authority over you. In Matthew 2:16, Jesus is referred to using the noun form of this word calling Him a “Ruler.” In the context of Hebrews 13, **“those who led you”** refers to spiritual leaders, people who influenced you to follow after the Lord by faith. We can conclude this by noting the call at the end of verse 7 to imitate their faith. It is interesting to note that the author of Hebrews has much to say to believers about their relationship to their spiritual leaders making not only this statement here in verse 7, but also calling believers to right responses to their leaders in verses 17 and 24.

So, we are to remember those who have charge over us in the Lord. What is a practical way by which we might rightly respond to such leaders? In addition to this word “remember” meaning to recall to the mind, it also carries the idea of considering well or esteeming highly such leaders. Look with me at 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 where we see Paul express a similar thought. We read...

12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

When Paul writes in verse 13, **“that you esteem them very highly in love”** the idea there is to remember them, that you make it your desire to know them, to be acquainted with them, to know what makes them tick spiritually and that as you are so acquainted, you might give back to them with expressions of love, affection and gratitude. We will talk more about this in a moment.

Linking this with Hebrews 13:7, what I would have you see is that both the words **“remember”** and **“led”** in our text can carry the idea of well considering or esteeming highly. To that end we might read and understand the text to say, “Recall to your mind and esteem highly those who had charge over you, who have well considered and esteemed you by their leadership.”

But a question might arise here, that question being this. How do we know who to remember – who to esteem? To be sure, we have all had a number of influences in our lives, some good and some bad. To be sure there are some who have led us in the past that rather than remember we would do well to forget. So what is the criteria for this remembering? Our text goes on to identify those to remember as those **“who spoke the word of God to you.”** Might I say that nothing better demonstrates meaningful and godly leadership and godly regard of others more than rightly and effectively communicating the word of God. Think about those

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who have taught you the Word of God, who have used the Word alone as the standard to direct life and faith. Think about the people who have devoted themselves to faithfully teaching God's word. Just think about it for a moment. You know, sometimes I have heard it said that it is a wonder that anyone would come to a church service or bible study and sit for an hour to hear someone tell them about the word of God. But should it not be a wonder to us that anyone would be willing to devote hours of study in a week in order to effectively communicate in the heart of God to people in just under an hour?

Some of you have been blessed to sit under the teaching of a number of gifted preachers. When was the last time you took pause to remember them for their labors, to thank God for communicating to you His heart through their faithful exposition of His Word? This is not an isolated theme in the New Testament. Look with me at 1 Timothy 5:17. Here we see not only the aspect of preaching and teaching the word of God, but also again of how we might rightly remember them:

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Note that the those who rule or lead here are identified as “**elders**” – those who are called to oversee or pastor a congregation. And every elder who rules well, especially whose labors are invested in “**preaching and teaching**” – that is who speak the word of God, is to be “considered” or remembered how? As “**worthy of a double honor.**” What is this “double honor”? Let me quote John MacArthur:

Elders who serve with greater commitment, excellence, and effort should have greater acknowledgement from their congregations.

And the idea of “**double honor**” is important to note. It does not mean that a teaching elder is to receive twice the pay, but rather it suggests two things. First, that those who speak the word of God are to have our respect, as all elders are; and second they are to be remunerated, or compensated for their labors since they are investing time to study.

So, our spiritual leaders are identified as those who speak or communicate well the word of God to us. And part of our response to such leaders is to show respect, to honor, and to uphold them and additionally find ways to materially express our gratitude to them. I realize that by saying this I could come across as self-serving, but this is what our text calls us to and so I ask you – how have you shown respect and gratitude to those who have spoke the word of God to you? I think it would be easy to fall into the trap of saying, “Well, I give to the church and the church then pays the pastor, so I am respecting him and expressing my gratitude materially.” But may I remind you of something. In addition to myself, we have two Elders who faithfully serve this congregation. How have you personally manifested respect and gratitude to them? They are not “paid”? Have you remembered them? Additionally, we have two interns who also faithfully serve and teach in this church, how have you personally manifested respect and gratitude to them? You see, there is an intentionality here that calls us to be personally involved. I am so grateful for the monetary generosity of this congregation to the

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point of being overwhelmed, but no bi-weekly check from the church can ever replace one's own personal expressions of gratitude.

Now, before you are convinced that I might be treading on being self-serving, let me also point out from our Hebrews 13:7 text that this is all in the past tense. We are to always and continually be mindful of those who **“led”** – not those who are leading and those who **“spoke”** – not who are currently speaking the word of God. If you notice in Hebrews 13:17, there everything is in the present tense calling us to action with our current leaders. This does not nullify what we just said about manifesting respect and material gratitude to our present leaders, but it does tell us to recall our history – does it not? To remember what they taught us about God and His Word. In other words, we are not only to remember our current spiritual leaders, but also to recall those of our past. The author of Hebrews wanted that little church he first wrote to remember their spiritual heritage, their faithful pastors and leaders, some of whom may have been put to death for their faith, some of who may, as Hebrews 13:3 may indicate, be in prison. All our spiritual leaders are to be remembered.

What does this mean? So what? Perhaps you have a pastor, elder or other spiritual leader that you have not “remembered” for some time. Perhaps it would do you well to consider him, to think about how he challenged you in the faith and then to manifest this respect and gratitude. How might you do that? Write a letter of thanks, send a gift, make a phone call. Some of you might have spiritual leaders that have gone on to be with the Lord. Perhaps you might honor them by sending a word of thanks to another member of his family. Be creative, but obey the call to remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you.

Now, I know that this message has been top heavy. I have three points and thus far I have only covered one. But this is because these last two points really flow out of the first one and won't require as much explanation. These last two points are really the right responses to remembering those who led you and who spoke the word of God to you. It is by these two points we know we are rightly remembering our spiritual leaders.

II. Consider our spiritual leaders' conduct (13:b) *and considering the result of their conduct...*

The next point then in our outline is that we must consider our spiritual leaders' conduct. We read, **“and considering the result of their conduct...”** The exhortation here is really just an extension of the command to remember those who spoke the word of God to us. It answers the question: How can we know if someone is truly and rightly communicating the word of God to us? The answer: we can know by examining his life. In other words, consider his history. The word **“considering”** here literally means to repetitively and intensively look upon something. It is a careful and continual observation. And what is it here in our text we are to consider. Note that we are not considering now their rule or what they said but rather **“the result of their conduct”** – that is, “what do their lives tell us about what they believed?” Some see that this could read, and you might see this in your marginal reading, “considering the very end of their lives” – meaning that those who are being considered are dead. I have no doubt that some were. But I take it more generally to mean that we are to attentively observe the conduct, lifestyle and behavior those who lived by faith. These are those who do not just talk about faith in Christ, but live it out. How do they live? How do they endure difficulties? How

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do they face persecution? How do they handle the strain of temptation? How do they keep on course in spite of their own weaknesses? Look at their lives, see how faith works – that is what we are to consider.

The Puritan John Boys once said, “*He does preach most that does live best.*” A part of our remembering our spiritual leaders is not simply a recounting of their sermons or lessons, but also of reflecting upon the conduct or course of their lives. I hope this comes across and is understood correctly. I may not remember very many of the actual points of Rocky’s messages, but I do remember the consistency of his life and have seen the precepts of his messages lived out. That is what we must consider, what we must look for in the lives of those who led us. It is by the noting of godly behavior in their own lives that we can know they have effectively communicated the word of God to us and have rightly led us.

III. Imitate our spiritual leaders’ faith (13:7c)

imitate their faith.

But there is one final response that flows from this remembering of our spiritual leaders. If we have rightly noted their authority in our lives, have seen them appeal to us from God’s Word alone and have examined their lives to be holy in conduct, then, according to the end of Hebrews 13:7, what are we to do – we are called to “imitate their faith.” What a bold and perhaps strange command. We might counter with, “I am to imitate Christ, not a man!” But here the Word of God says, no, not says, it commands us, “***imitate their faith.***”

From the Greek term translated “***imitate***” we get our English word “mimic.” The idea here is that we are called to find a standard reflecting the person of Christ and become a copy of that standard. As you see a believer practically live out his faith, not just professionally, but one who puts his words into actions – follow, mimic, imitate, emulate that faith. Let us remember that the author of Hebrews gave us a long list of examples in chapter 11 of those whose faith you might mimic. Additionally, Church history adds hundreds more. I would encourage you to read for yourselves and read to your children Christian biographies and histories. Through these you have opportunities to live with godly examples like Martin Luther, William Tyndale, Jonathan Edwards, William Carey, George Whitefield and Charles Spurgeon. By reading them we can consider their faith. To be sure, all of them had flaws - just like us. But they all had great faith in Jesus, a faith that was not only heard, but also seen. Their faith carried them through battles within and without, helped them weather storms of persecution, to stand firm against untold dangers and challenges related to proclaiming the gospel.

And then again, I would ask you to remember your own history, asking who it was in your past that led you and spoke the word of God to you? It is interesting to note that in part it is from this verse that the Roman Catholic church worships saints. And while we know we are not to worship godly men and women of the past, we are most assuredly and biblically called to learn from them. This is not an option – it is the command of God. In other words, if you are not remembering and imitating some mentors from the past to help you flesh out the Christian life, then you are failing to wield a handy weapon for living the Christian life and are being disobedient to God who gave you these examples.

I would have you note that the faith of these spiritual leaders’ is directly tied to the conduct of these spiritual leaders. We are reminded that...

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Faith = Conduct

Faith = belief in action

Faith (what I believe in my head/heart and profess with my mouth) = **Action** (it will manifest itself in what I do).

Faith (without action) = **No Faith** (James 2:17)

We are called to take all that a spiritual leader says [remember], look to see that it manifests itself in his or her life [consider] and then mimic [imitate] that faith – their belief in action. So let me leave you with some questions to consider as we close:

1. Who are your spiritual leaders? (Make a list of past and present mentors)
2. How have/are you “remembering” (respecting, materially expressing gratitude) these leaders?
3. Have you considered their conduct, the way they live/lived their lives? What can you say about their manner of living?
4. Do you intentionally seek to imitate and implement some of their godly behavior, the visible manifestations of their faith into your own life?

As we will come so see next week, the practice of remembering, considering and imitating the faith of our spiritual leaders is not only a matter of obedience to God, but will also prove to be a primary defense against those things that seek to draw us away from living by faith. Let us do well then to so consider those whom God has graciously provided us for our encouragement and walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria

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