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# The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

## Who Are You Listening To? Hebrews 13:7-9

*7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.*

As most of you are well aware, the current presidential campaigns have not only grown tiresome having been pursued for well over a year now, but, and as expected, they are also growing more and more ugly. Not only have Obama and Clinton been exchanging harsher criticism of each other, but this week a moral and ethical charge against McCain surfaced concerning an alleged improper relationship, a charge that seems to be more politically driven than based upon fact. I suppose we may never be certain of the truth, but now the American public is reduced to having to determine who to believe in a “he said, she said” controversy. So, who are you going to believe? To whom are you going to listen?

While I would tend to believe McCain’s side of the story, given his record and reputation as a man of character, my point in bringing this to your attention is simply this – whether we are considering a presidential campaign, or examining the reason why one sports team defeated another, or even contemplating the what’s and why’s of what we believe in matters spiritual, we are constantly bombarded with competing stories, various theories and often strange teachings. And the question becomes, “to whom are you going to listen?”

Last week, we looked intently at Hebrews 13:7, noting the exhortation to remember our spiritual leaders. There is much in that verse to consider, even more than we did eight days ago. And yet, it would be negligent for us to move on in our study of Hebrews 13 without stating and showing how Hebrews 13:7-9 must be understood together. I see in these verses a call to all people to know who they are listening to when it comes to the single most important matter of all life. The most fundamental issue that every person will have to deal with; the one question that must be answered by every soul, be it now or at the end of time; the concern that will determine whether or not a person spends eternity in the everlasting bliss and joy of the presence of the most gracious God or in the eternal torture and wrath hell, that place prepared for the devil and his angels is summed up this way - “Do you have a right and active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and who are you listening to in order to know this?”

From Hebrews 13:7-9, I offer you three exhortations that will help each us determine who we are listening to when it comes to having a right and active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- I. Remember your spiritual leaders (13:7)
- II. Rest in your sovereign Lord (13:8)
- III. Resist strange teachings (13:9)

These three exhortations will help us determine the genuineness of our faith in Jesus as well as reveal to us to whom we are listening. They will each answer a question concerning

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this matter of living for Jesus. Let us briefly review this first point, “Remember your spiritual leaders” before moving on to consider the other two.

## I. Remember your spiritual leaders (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.*

This call to remember answers the question, “whose words and actions speak to you of real faith in Jesus?” As we noted last week, there are three things we are to keep in mind when we remember our spiritual leaders; we must **remember** – their leadership and their communicating God’s word to us; we must **consider** - their godly conduct, noting how their lifestyles and behaviors reflected what they believed about Jesus Christ; and we must **imitate** - their faith, mimicking their words and actions so as to reflect Christ even as they reflected Christ. There is a great testimony of these principles in the life of Paul. Look with me at 1 Thessalonians 2:9-14:

### Remember

*9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.*

### Consider

*10 You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; 11 just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children,*

### Imitate

*12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 13 For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. 14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea,*

We are to listen to those who proclaim the word of God to us, calling us to live the faith, lives that glorify God, lives that they themselves lived, being diligent to follow their examples. It is our genuine spiritual leaders who spoke to us and lived out the true essence of faith in Jesus Christ.

## II. Rest in your sovereign Lord (13:8)

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

That was last week. This next exhortation, “rest in your sovereign Lord” helps us answer the question, “whose words and actions alone bring about real rest or peace with God?” Of course the answer is found in the first two words of our verse – Jesus Christ. It might interest you to know that while the book of Hebrews is so purposely devoted to proclaiming the superiority of Jesus, this phrase of two words, “Jesus Christ” – is only used three times in this whole letter. Generally speaking, the author of Hebrews refers to Jesus using only “Jesus” – pointing out to his readers His humanity – that Jesus was truly man. But

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here we have Jesus Christ – which is very Jewish and chalk full of meaning. Remember that “Jesus Christ” (or Iesous Christos) is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew, “Yehowshua” (Joshua – the LORD saves) – Mashiyach (Messiah – the anointed or chosen one). The Jews understood that Messiah was to be human, a man chosen by God to deliver His people. They did not necessarily understand that He would also be God Himself, or as His name means here, “Yahweh who saves His people by becoming the chosen man.” This speaks to us of the incarnation of Jesus – God becoming man; God in the flesh who would be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). We see this title used of Jesus in Hebrews 10:10 reading:

***By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.***

That is, by the will of God, all who believe in the sacrifice of the God-man; Jesus Christ, Joshua Messiah, have been sanctified, made holy and right before God. And this serves as a reason why we find rest in our sovereign Lord – He is the God-man, the one promised by God to save His people from their sins. This is the beloved Son of God, whom Father Himself instructed the disciples in Matthew 17:5 saying on the Mount of Transfiguration, ***“listen to Him!”*** “Hear His words!” Rest and peace with God is found only in the words and actions Jesus Christ.

But Hebrews 13:8 tells us more than He is Jesus Christ. This phrase is followed by an interesting adjective: Jesus Christ – ***“the same.”*** Please notice that the “is” in your text is italicized, meaning it is added to the text. But literally this reads, Jesus Christ the same – and seems to reference then His divinity. We find rest in the words and actions of Jesus Christ – we can have peace with God through Jesus Christ because He is God and being God, this idea of “same” communicates to us at least three things.

## **A. Immutable – Jesus Christ does not change**

First, being ***“the same”*** tells us that Jesus is immutable – meaning that He does not change. Now, let us be careful here to understand what this means, for most assuredly Jesus Christ did change when the eternal Word was made or changed into flesh. And most definitely Jesus Christ did experience a change when He was resurrected from the dead. And I would assume that the one we sing of as being the “Man of Sorrows” while treading this earth is no longer sorrowful, but joyful as He sits at the right hand of God. So then, if these things changed in Jesus, how can we understand Him to be ***“the same”*** – unchanging? What I see here is a reminder of the truth that His positions as prophet, priest and king are unceasing and unchanging.

Israel (and subsequently the Church) was blessed indeed to be the recipients of the words of the prophets as God raised up one after the other to communicate His will. But our Prophet, Jesus Christ, has no successor. He is the same forever.

And again, for Israel, God raised up Aaron, the son of Levi, to be her high priest. And after Aaron came Eleazer and all his descendants. Generation after generation of priests, men who could not continue in the office because they died. And yet, in the words of Hebrews 7:24-25, ***“Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God***

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**through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”** Jesus Christ is “the same” high priest forever.

And so too did Israel, starting with Saul, have a long and sorted history of kings; but Jesus Christ is the King forever, no one will usurp Him, nothing will change the status of His position as King.

Beloved – this is the very summary of the book of Hebrews. This is the point that needs to be drilled into our heads. Jesus is “the same” – unchanging, forever sure, always the same. This summary is given in the very first chapter of Hebrews. Turn there and let us see the immutable character of Jesus as prophet, priest and king. Starting in verse one...

## Prophet

**1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.**

## Priest

**When He had made purification of sins,**

## King

**He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,**

Jesus Christ – the immutable, unchanging, forever prophet, priest and king. We must find rest in this truth that there is no one better, no one stronger, no one wiser and simply no one like Jesus Christ.

## **B. Eternal – Jesus does not end**

The term “the same” not only tells us that Jesus Christ is immutable, but also that He is eternal, meaning He does not end. For as we read about the high priest Melchizedek back in Hebrews 7, it is truly Jesus Christ, the God-man, who is without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life (7:3).

Why is this important? Beloved, this reminds us that Jesus always has been the true object of faith. Too easily the object of some people’s faith is placed in an earthly person or in some meaningless rituals or customs. Even the Jews, as recorded in John 8, were guilty of making Abraham the object of their faith, believing that simply because they were his descendants, they were saved. If this be so, then why would they be concerned about Jesus? Why would they listen to His words and trust in His actions? They would not as they based their rest with God; the very peace of their souls upon this earthly relationship. And yet Jesus clearly said to them in 8:24, **“Therefore I said to you that will die in your sins, for unless you believe that I Am He, you will die in your sin.”** “But we have Abraham,” they said. But listen to the words of Jesus in 8:56, words that called them to see Him, not Abraham as the object of their faith, **“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”** Beloved, joy comes only by seeing Christ as the object of our faith; of realizing that rest and peace with God comes only by heeding what He has said and trusting what He

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accomplished for those who believe on the cross. The point is this, other leaders, even godly leaders, will come and go so the object of your faith is not to be such leaders – not Abraham, not Moses, not Joshua, not the Levitical priesthood, not pastors and elders, not even mom, dad or a godly grandparent. Only Jesus is eternal – or as the little saying on my calendar put it – “One of the great many things about Jesus is that we can always count on Him to be there for us.” Only Jesus is the **“the same”** – and He alone did everything necessary to make you right with God and to give you the heart of God if you will but deny yourself, pick your cross and follow Him.

## C. Sovereign – Jesus does not share

Finally, I would say to you that Jesus being the same tells us that He is sovereign; that Jesus Christ, being God, does not share His glory; does not give deference to others as equals or collaborators. And this is especially true in salvation. Even the headstrong and wayward prophet Jonah made the declaration in 2:9, **“Salvation if from the LORD.”** In Psalm 3:8, David exclaims, **“Salvation belongs to the LORD.”** And just how jealous is the LORD regarding His salvation? How willing is He to say that some other besides Himself contributes anything to this salvation? That anyone else initiates it, determines who gets it, accomplishes it and applies it? Look with me at a few passages in Isaiah starting with 43:10-11:

**10 “You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me. 11 I, even I, am the LORD, and there is no savior besides Me.”**

Is that clear enough? Are you listening to this? Turn over to Isaiah 44:6-7 and consider again the words of the LORD:

**6 Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me. 7 Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; yes, let him recount it to Me in order, from the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming and the events that are going to take place.”**

Beloved, the Lord is absolutely sovereign over all, including salvation. With reference to the salvation He promised Israel, a picture of the salvation He would provide all who believe in Jesus Christ, hear again the word of the LORD in Isaiah 48:11...

**For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.**

And how do I know that these references to the LORD’s glory and sovereignty in salvation may be applied to Jesus Christ? Remember that He is “the same” – the very **“radiance of God glory and the exact representation of His nature”** according to Hebrews 1:3. And most you know Acts 4:12 do you not?

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***And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.***

Beloved, this is a great cause for joy! That Jesus Christ is the immutable, eternal and sovereign God of salvation. We can and must rest only in His work as prophet – giving us the final word of God for salvation; as priest – performing for us the full work of atonement that we might be at peace with God; and as king – sovereignly reigning and ruling over the hearts and lives of those who believe, empowering them to live for God daily. This Jesus Christ has done these things for those in the past (yesterday), for us in the present (today) and will always be the sole source of life and peace (forever).

This is the gospel. This is the good news. This is the teaching, the doctrine of Christ – that He has freed us from striving after peace with God by the works or merits of our own hands, seeing that we could not attain it, but believing that Jesus has made us right with the Father by His death for our sins and proved this to be so by His resurrection from the dead. For this reason, we can rest in our sovereign Lord, Jesus Christ. Are you listening to His words and rejoicing in His actions?

### **III. Resist strange teachings (13:9)**

*Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.*

This brings us to our final point, that we must “resist strange teachings.” Let us read verse 9 again [Read text]. From this verse let us consider three things.

#### **A. The reality of strange teachings**

First, we are confronted with the reality of strange teachings. The verse begins with an exhortation – a command saying, “**Do not be carried away...**” as if to remind us how easy it could be to get caught up in things other than the gospel. It also reminds us that there are “teachers” out there who, in the name of Christ, teach something different than what Christ has taught and something different from that which your spiritual leaders have taught.

We must listen carefully to such things and compare them to what we have heard from the word of God, refusing and resisting anything that does not add up. But lest anything think they are exempt, hear the call, “do not be carried away” on the winds of different doctrines.

#### **B. The recognition of strange teachings**

But just what are these strange teachings? Our text identifies them as “**varied**” and “**strange**”. The word “**varied**” simply speaks of those teachings that differ from pure, historic and biblical Christianity. There are many groups today that may invoke the name of Christ, but their teachings are vastly different from what we read in the Word of God. It might be labeled as “Christian Science” or “Mormonism” or “Oneness Pentecostalism” but these and other like them are varied teachings.

The word “**strange**” or foreign takes us one step deeper, calling believers not only to resist the supposed varied form of Christianity, but also to resist any and all teaching that flatly and out-rightly opposes the Gospel. For example, one of the reasons why I resist “Theistic Evolution” – that teaching that says God started it all in Genesis 1:1 and then used evolution to

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bring about this present earth is because such a teaching actually opposes the gospel. It bring death into the world before the fall of man. According to Scripture and passages like Romans 5:12, death came into this world because of man and his sin. If there is death before the fall, then how can the penalty of sin be death. All this undermines the gospel.

So, any teaching that departs from the Scriptures, whether by some human logic or by means of so-called additional holy books; and all teaching that undermines the gospel is to be resisted. But how is it resisted? Before we answer that, I would like you to notice one more truth about these “varied and strange teachings.” Notice that the word “teachings” is plural. In contrast, what God have given to us by His revelation is referred to not as truths, but as Truth; not as doctrines, but as doctrine. According to Ephesians 4:5, there is but “one faith” even as there is but “one Lord.”

As A.W. Pink noted, *“The truth of God is one uniform system and chain of doctrine, which begins with God and ends in Him; but error is inconsistent and manifold.”* Therefore, with God there is but one body of truth but with man there is “varied and strange teachings.”

At the time of this letter to the Hebrews, those in this little church were confronted by a number of teachings that sought to carry them away from the truth. Perhaps the most prevalent of these teachings came from the Judaizers, those who wanted to mix the truths of the gospel with the ceremonies and rituals of the Law. You might recall Acts 15 [turn there please] and what is called the Jerusalem council. At this council a great debate was held as a number of Pharisees (v. 5) who had supposedly come to Christ, wanted to make Gentiles keep aspects of the Law, to do something to contribute toward their salvation.

To this, the Apostle Peter said (v. 11), **“But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”** But this attitude of mixing law with grace was a constant battle in the church. For Acts 15 took place about 50 AD and now some seventeen years latter, the church addressed by the letter to the Hebrews is still confronted with this error. Notice what the varied and strange teachings consisted of there at the end of Hebrews 13:9, **“not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.”** One of the errors of the Judaizers was to say that all believers must keep the dietary laws of the book of Leviticus. In other words, some called believers to live by law rather than by the grace of God.

## C. The remedy for strange teachings

And this brings us then to the remedy for such strange teachings. How might a person resist being carried away but such things. Notice the statement of fact there in the middle of verse nine – listen carefully. “for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.” That word strengthened means “to make strong or stable” and could be translated “established.” This stands in contrast to being carried away. What is the remedy for being carried away by the polluted and tainted teachings of man – to have your heart established, strengthened, rooted, grounded in the truth as revealed by Jesus Christ, taught by His apostles and communicated to us by our spiritual leaders. We have here the word “grace” – that is the free favor of God toward His people. Grace – meaning God’s own benevolent heart toward us, apart from our own hearts and wills, that freely offers salvation and made know to us by the Gospel. This is the doctrine of grace – capture so well in Titus 3:5-6

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**5 He [God] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior...**

As the song writer Bob Kauflin put it in his song “Grace Unmeasured”:

*Grace unmeasured, vast and free; that knew me from eternity;  
that called me out before my birth; to bring You glory on this earth.  
Grace amazing, pure and deep; that saw me in my misery;  
that took my curse and owned my blame; so I could bear your righteous name.  
Grace paid for my sins and brought me to life;  
grace, clothes me with pow’r to do what is right;  
grace will lead me to heav’n where I’ll see Your face;  
and never cease to thank you for Your grace.”*

Do you want to know how to resist varied and strange teachings? Then become a student of the grace of God. Understand, as far as humanly possible, the fullness of the doctrine of grace. When the grace of God is rightly perceived, then all teachings, systems, methods, innovations and opinions that undermine grace will be refused – that is, you will know not to listen to it.

I have a friend of mine who tells me that he is not always able to articulate the finer points of doctrine; that he might not be able to give a clear definition of a particular point of theology. But one thing he is certain of – that when he hears error, those varied and strange teachings – he knows it as error. Why? Because he has his heart strengthened by grace – he believes in the grace of God; praises the Lord for such grace and stands in awe of such grace. Maybe you feel like this sometimes, feeling like theology is over your head (which it is not by the way) – but will you be committed to knowing more of the grace of God in Jesus Christ? I love the way John Calvin put it, *“The only way by which we can persevere in the right faith is to hold to the foundation, and not in the slightest degree depart from it, for he who holds not to Christ knows nothing but mere vanity, though he may comprehend heaven and earth.”*

Beloved, we must hold to Christ, to the grace of Christ, to the words of Christ (the Bible); to the actions of Christ (His own self-sacrificing love for our benefit) as well as to the words and actions of His servants who guide us and teach us His Word. Who do you listen to? Have you remembered your spiritual leaders? Do you truly find rest in your sovereign Lord? And do you resist strange teachings by focusing on the grace of God? By doing these things we put ourselves into the best position by which to be blessed by God and by which we might bless God with our lives.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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