



Strengthened By Grace

Series: *Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul*

Hebrews 13:1-14 (9-14)

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The flow of the pastor's thought in Hebrews 13, so far, can be summarized like this: Those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation and who are determined, by the grace of God at work in them, to endure and persevere to the end must love one another and as an expression of that love, we must show hospitality and care for prisoners and those in need, keep our marriage vows, avoid the love of money, and to pursue a life of contentment in Christ. All of these things are very practical, very necessary, right? And the way that we do this is not by our own strength, our own power, the force of our will, but by faith in the power of God's promise in verses 5-6, ***"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*** ***So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6, ESV)*** To bolster that faith, we are to consider the course of the lives of the leaders who have spoken to us the Word of God and make it a point to imitate the faith that kept them faithful.

And what do we see when we consider their faith? We find that these faithful leaders, the ones who didn't quit, didn't go astray, spoke the Word and lived the Word, they trusted wholeheartedly, unreservedly in Jesus Christ. That is where they placed all their hope. That is where they found their strength. And just as they trusted in Jesus in the past; we must trust in Jesus right now, and tomorrow, and the day after that, and every day after that one. We must imitate the same faith. Why? Because ***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*** Jesus remains forever the same. He was perfectly sufficient, more than enough for them, and he will be for you too. And as we saw last week, that is the heart of his message, the heart of the whole book. Jesus Christ is eternally reliable, eternally sufficient, eternally satisfying, because He alone is eternally unchangeable.

But the pastor has more to say to us this morning in order to spur us on in faithful perseverance. And he begins this next section by giving us:

A Warning Against False Teaching (9) Look at what the writer of Hebrews says here in verse 9 with me, **“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.”** (Hebrews 13:9, ESV) The warning against false teaching, against diverse and strange doctrines is one that we see repeated continually throughout the Word of God. It’s a recurring theme. A glance through the OT shows that it is replete with warnings like that of the word of the Lord to Jeremiah, **“An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?”** (Jeremiah 5:30–31, ESV) In the NT, Jesus said to **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”** (Matthew 7:15, ESV); nearly all of the epistles counsel us to beware of false teaching.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders when he departed from them saying, **“I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”** (Acts 20:29–32, ESV) Peter In his second epistle warned, **“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”** (2 Peter 2:1–3, ESV) Paul stressed how he would have to contend with false teaching saying how there would be shallow people in the church who **“will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”** (2 Timothy 4:3–4, ESV) This warning about false teaching is one that is desperately needed at all times, but especially when the professing church is shallow in understanding, weak in truth and grace, when the true gospel is out of season, when professing Christians are looking for a less costly alternative, when the gospel is confused, redefined, repackaged or disguised. We need this warning, because quite honestly, we don’t really believe it like we should and under the guise of tolerance and Christian charity we hesitate to call it what we should. And

yet, when we read the Apostles, we see that they had no problem identifying the issue of false teaching because of the incredible damage that it does to the faith and souls of those who hear and receive it.

The enslaving, deceitful power of false teaching is a real danger, an ever-present danger, even more pervasive in our age of celebrity pastors and teachers. Truthfully, as serious as persecution from the outside, from society really is, the greater danger is the infiltration of diverse and strange teaching from within. The writer of Hebrews recognized that. So we need this warning, right?

But here's the inevitable truth, whenever anyone has the courage to point this fact out, has the temerity to examine spiritual teaching and teachers under the light of Scripture and make definitive and discerning statements about such preaching and teaching, they are almost always labeled as a "hater" or "unloving" or "narrow" or "jealous" or "rigid" or "intolerant" – and that by those who are religious. Still, we ignore these warnings to our own peril.

The words that are used here – diverse and strange – are descriptive terms intentionally chosen by the writer of Hebrews to convey the nature of false teaching. The first word, "diverse" is a word that describes clothing woven with many colors, or alloys of metal – things that are mixed and speckled. The idea is that this kind of teaching mixes divine revelation with human reasoning, blending truth with error, yielding something that is enticing from every viewpoint, cleverly taking a new spin on things. The second word, "strange," is a word that was used to describe something alien, foreign, something never heard before, something unfamiliar. It speaks plainly of teaching that is foreign to God's Word, which is irreconcilable to the revelation of God. Diverse and strange – that is the idea here.

But here is the point – it's not always easy to spot. There are a number of diverse "gospels" that have infiltrated the professing church that are accepted by people as a lighter, more approachable "version" of the gospel. Probably the most popular is what can be called the "therapeutic" gospel in which the sin is disguised as simply the failure to reach our full potential and sin is primarily about us and how it robs us of our fullness. Christ's death

proves our worth and gives us power to reach our full potential and Jesus and the church are there to help us along in our quest for personal happiness and fulfillment. There is moralistic gospel that reduces our sinful condition to simply the individual sins that we commit and that redemption is found in greater willpower and purpose, with Jesus' help, to overcome the things that get in the way of winning God's favor and blessing on our earthly endeavors. The church is there to affirm us in keeping the code. There is the activist gospel that says that sees sin only in terms of how it keeps us down and afflicts society.

Redemption is found in Jesus as social activist who calls His people to political, social, and cultural transformation and the church is there to promote social projects and political causes. They all use similar language and mention Jesus but it is not simply enough to mention Jesus. Paul, in writing to the Galatians, said that there were others that were preaching "Jesus" but it was a different Jesus than what he had preached to them and his conclusion was this: ***"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed."*** (Galatians 1:8, ESV) Truth doesn't have versions. Beloved, these things that I have mentioned are not the only diverse and strange gospels out there and I am painting with a broad brush, but all of these pale in comparison to the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

How they pale in comparison to the story of God who created all things for the sake of His glory, who in love, made man in His image to freely enjoy fellowship and communion and joy with Him forever; of the fall of man into rebellion against the love and goodness of God, man who traded the glory of God for the lie, of man who committed cosmic treason against God, asserting our lordship over the Lordship of God, seeking worth and value in something other than the source of all worth, our personal sin against the only glorious God; of the guilt before God and our alienation from Him, of the curse upon our heads and the wrath we so richly deserve, of the brokenness of our fellowship with God, our enmity with Him and the physical and spiritual death that is the result; of the way that our broken fellowship with God has made us to war against one another, fighting for recognition and fame, making us suspicious, bitter, envious, hateful, deceivers, lustful and more; the plague of shame and guilt that we cannot escape by all of our attempts, the way our sin has brought all of creation under a curse.

How they pale in comparison to the story of the redemptive grace and glory of God to rescue us, promised throughout the ages but fully revealed in the incarnation, righteous life and saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, how the Son who has loved us in eternity past, who chose us to be His people has come into this world and through His sacrificial

death in our place has paid the debt of sin that we owed Him, how He has reconciled us to God by His blood, given us a righteousness not our own but that He earned. How they pale in comparison to the powerful grace of God to make us to be born again by His Spirit and His Word, His grace to create in our hearts faith to believe in Christ's saving work, His power to give us hearts to repent and believe simply because of His grace and not because of anything that we have done or any merit of our own, how He has remade us into the image of God that had been shattered, how He has given to us the Holy Spirit who leads us into real righteousness and into all truth, how He has inaugurated His kingdom and made us His people – the church.

How these false gospels pale in comparison to the truth of how the church is the reconciled people of God, made up of those who have repented of their sins and rested in the good news of Jesus Christ who died for our sins and has been raised from the dead, a people who have been vindicated and forgiven forever not by their own efforts or attempts at personal reformation but by the perfectly God-pleasing work of Jesus Christ, a people who have been raised from death to walk in the newness of life, a people who spurs one another on in faith and in good works and bear one another's burdens, who live as a colony of heaven on the earth, and who gladly and joyfully call sinners to join the kingdom, who preach and hold forth the word of God despite any opposition, not ashamed of the gospel, and who await the Savior from heaven who will return to judge sin and evil and who will usher in the consummated kingdom of righteousness and peace, reversing the curse. We are part of the gospel story that is about Jesus Christ and His glory, the slain Lamb who is conquering King – through whom and for whom the world exists. That is the gospel – that and so much more – the gospel of which the strange and diverse teachings of our age and every age are mutilated, mutated, and powerless copies. And all of them invariably goes astray on the doctrine of God's grace – our need for God's grace, the grace of God to save the wicked.

That's the gospel and you don't bend on it, you don't compromise. AW Tozer made this observation. He said, "One of the most popular current errors, and the one of which springs most of the noisy, blustering religious activity in evangelical circles, is the notion that as times change, the church (and her doctrine) must change with them." In contrast stands the wisdom of the Lord in Jeremiah 6:16, "**Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls."**" (Jeremiah 6:16, ESV) Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, and so is the gospel.

The measure of any teaching, of any gospel, is not the sincerity of the teacher, or his popularity or success, or his endorsements, or his personality or if “it works for me,” or if it draws a crowd and everybody is buying it. The measure is its faithfulness to the Word of God, its faithfulness to the gospel that the Apostles preached, and what it says about Jesus Christ. Does it make much of Him? Does it faithfully present Him in all of His wondrous and indispensable glory? Does it make Him the center, the cornerstone, the foundation, the all-consuming all-in-all of your life? Is He the Hero of the story? Does it honor Him – not just in words, but in actuality – as the King of kings, the Lord of glory, the only righteous Savior and judge? Is it rooted in God’s saving grace in Christ?

False teaching comes in all sorts of forms and in every shape and size, but apparently there was a specific threat to the Hebrew church. After the general warning, he goes on to say, **for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.** Now, we don’t know exactly the nature of the error that they were facing. Judaism, of course, emphasized eating or not eating certain foods but in this case, it seems that the focus went beyond the normal Jewish dietary regulations and focused on some supposed spiritual benefit, some blessing, some redemptive significance that came with eating certain foods. In other words, there was some diet that they were to eat that would give them some sort of spiritual merit with God. It was some form of works righteousness with God – do this and God is obligated to bless you. Do these things and God will give you x, y, or z.

And his message to them is clear – that if they understand the gospel then they know that the only thing that truly saves and that really matters is what had been given to them already in the true gospel of Jesus Christ – the grace of God in Christ. It is grace saves and strengthens the heart and feeds the soul – the very heart of the gospel. You don’t need a different gospel or some new rules. What you need is Jesus. What we need is grace, the grace that is alone found in Jesus Christ. Be strengthened by grace. And he makes this point so clearly in the comparison that he draws next. It’s a little cumbersome in the way he says it, but the message is clear.

Food For The Soul (10-12) He says, **“We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. 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. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.” (Hebrews 13:10–12, ESV) Notice what he does here. It’s pretty cool. He reaches back the Jewish religion, the religion that they had just come out of, and uses it as an illustration – an illustration to show that all they really needed is Jesus. He goes back to the priests in the Jewish religion.

You remember how they were fed – they ate from the sacrifices that the people brought to the tabernacle and later the temple. They got a portion of the sacrifice to eat. But the sacrifices that were made for sin, of those they were not permitted to eat. Specifically, the writer is talking about the offerings – the bull and the goat – that were made on the annual Jewish Day of Atonement. The blood of those offerings were used in the rituals in the tabernacle, the best parts offered to God, but the rest of the animal was taken outside of the camp and burned up. The priests got no food from those offerings. No lasting spiritual benefit.

But for us, it is the exact opposite. We derive all of our spiritual benefit – the forgiveness of sins, all our spiritual sustenance -- we feast -- upon what Jesus did on the cross, when he was taken outside the camp and was crucified. The cross is our altar and Jesus is our soul’s food. The altar of the cross, the crucified and risen Christ – and all that represents to us, what it means – full and final forgiveness for sins, the declaration that we are not guilty and fully righteous in God’s eyes, the power for growth in holiness, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the everlasting and redeeming love of God, our adoption as sons and daughters, the certainty of our perseverance in faith, the new life now and the promise of the resurrection to come and more – is where we feed our souls in the grace of God, at the altar which those who do not know and love Christ have **no right to eat**. We feast, we feed, we nourish our souls on Christ – who was taken outside of the camp, outside of the gate and crucified and why?

Think about this beloved. Because Jesus taught the truth about God and man, about Himself as the only way of salvation, the truth of the emptiness of religion and human efforts and ingenuity, He was despised and rejected by men, and was cast outside the city gates, became the object of scorn and abuse and He suffered and died. Even the location of the crucifixion was a sign of reproach. Golgotha overlooked the garbage dump of Jerusalem – a great pit where people went and threw out their garbage to be burned. And yet, in this

place, outside the camp, outside the city, Jesus has sanctified, set apart, cleansed, forgiven, saved, His people through His own blood.

Outside the Camp (13) Look at verse 13. The pastor writes, **“Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.” (Hebrews 13:13, ESV)** Here is where he is going with this. He realizes that standing firm in Christ, that glorying in Him, holding fast to the true gospel and all that Christ is for us, being singularly devoted to Him – he knows that’s not going to be popular but the pastor’s message is stick with Him.

And here is what that says to us: outside the camp of human philosophy and worldliness, outside the camp of religion, outside the camp of “man is the master of his own fate,” outside the camp of fallen man’s “approval” is where we go to find the grace of God. Outside the camp to where the cross was raised, where God meets with us to forgive our sins and to accept us in the righteousness of the Son whom the world, particularly the religious world, despised. We come out of the world to find grace and to accept the reproach that comes with identifying with the Savior by faith in the salvation that He bought with His blood to make you holy to God. You can’t stay in the camp of the world and “add a little Jesus” to your life. You have to leave the camp of the world and be all in with Jesus – even if and when that means reproach.

Those who found all of their hope and life on Jesus Christ on Him alone, who live with grand scope of the gospel as their desire and focus, who call others to respond to the true gospel with true faith and repentance, who really stake their lives on justification by grace alone and strive for a life of holiness, where Christ is the central figure and not simply a mascot, His glory the most important, and those who preach that truth will be the object of reproach in this world, even among those who are religious but far from Christ. There will be those, whose only concern is to build their own personal kingdom – a kingdom with an expiration date – who will think you are a fool, a fanatic, a religious zealot. But coming outside the camp and willingly embracing His reproach for the joy of embracing His grace – it is worth it a million times over. Our reward is not here; it is in heaven. Any reproach is worth it and the pastor again reminds us why this is true.

We Seek the City to Come (14) He says in verse 14, **“For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”** (Hebrews 13:14, ESV) We seek the city to come. That truth has been stated twice earlier as an encouragement to persevere in the faith and now, here the pastor is mentioning it again, so it must be important. We are not living to maximize this life – that is not ultimate goal. It is unworthy of the people of God. We live for a life yet to come, a life that has been purchased for us by Jesus Christ. This is not our home, but what we do now matters for eternity.

Don’t be ashamed of the pure, unadulterated, unvarnished, gospel of Jesus Christ. You don’t need the hip, trendy, faddish, latest, newest, coolest spin on the gospel – you just need the gospel. Don’t be ashamed to place your whole trust in the Biblical gospel. The temptation is certainly there – even Paul recognized that – but he said, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.””** (Romans 1:16–17, ESV) Nothing else is needful. Hold fast to the pure doctrine of Jesus Christ, the pure teaching of the gospel. Refuse to be led astray by diverse and strange teachings. Trust alone in the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Keep feeding your soul on the grace that is in Jesus Christ and be satisfied. I said these things on Wednesday night when we were in the book of Leviticus, but I want to say them to you again. Jesus says: **“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”** (John 6:35, ESV) **“For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”** (John 6:55–56, ESV) Keep feasting upon Christ by faith. We must continually feast upon the grace that is in Him alone. We are called to do things that are humanly impossible – to walk in a manner worthy of the calling of Christ, to live for His glory, to declare His gospel, to fight sin, to walk in holiness, to act righteously in this wicked and perverse generation, to please God and not men, to speak truth, to flee sexual immorality, to raise godly children, to lay down our lives, to sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom and for the sake of others, to set my mind on the things that are above, to bear with one another, to forgive, to rightly handle the Word of truth –and on and on it goes. All of the demands of the Christian life are impossible for us to fulfill and walk in apart from the superabundant sufficiency of Christ to make it possible.

And, then this: It is not just that we are to feast on this grace, but to hold forth this grace to everyone who is hungry. Everyone in this world is hungry –though they may not even know it. But there are some who are hungry and who know it – those in whom God is working and making them to see that what they thought was bread, what they thought was life isn't at all. Jesus Christ is mighty to save. He is mighty to save those who repent but he is also mighty to lead people to repentance. He saves those who believe but He is also mighty to give to men and women new hearts and to give them faith. He is mighty to make the one who hates Him to love Him. He did it for you and He is able to do it for others. So what if you suffer reproach for holding forth the gospel, for speaking of Christ, and for calling people to repentance. God will put in your path those who need to hear. In fact, some of the greatest critics and opponents of Christ have become His most devoted followers. Look no further than Paul, the Apostle.

How do we remain steadfast? Refuse to be taken in by strange and diverse teaching that seek to obscure or offer substitutes for the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Strengthen your heart at the altar of if crucified and risen Lord, feasting upon him, feasting upon His grace. Boldly identify with Him in face of reproach and do not be ashamed of the gospel, but call souls to Christ with confidence in the power of Jesus to save.

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