

SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 13:7-19

To better understand a heart strengthened by grace.

Read the Text:

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 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. 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. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. (Heb. 13:7–19, ESV)

Study the Text:

Strengthen by Grace.

At first glance, this seems like a list of random, semi-connected thoughts the author adds at the end of his letter to tie up loose ends after spending all his pen's ink on Jesus's superiority. But here is a beautifully crafted petition to his audience that gives practical advice while still affirming what Jesus has accomplished. Below is a breakdown of the key terms and concepts in this passage.

THE OUTCOME OF THEIR WAY OF LIFE

The author draws his audience's eyes toward their leaders. While the author intends for his audience to identify leaders as those who "spoke the word of God," he also calls on church leaders to speak the word of God. The author continues by telling his readers to consider "the outcome of their way of life" (literally the

"exit of their life"). Back in chapter 11 is a list of the faithful which includes Moses, David, and Samuel (all who died at an old age) as well as others "whom the world was not worthy" and they "were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword" (Heb. 11: 38, 37). The point of the "exit of their life" is not how the world took their body, but that they held on to the faith until the end. Those who spoke the word of God to the church and have fought the good fight, have finished the race, and have kept the faith and therefore worthy of being viewed as leaders.

IMITATE THEIR FAITH

And when a leader who speaks the word of God is found, they are to be imitated. In 1 Corinthians, Paul says, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). The readers should look around and identify leaders who have communicated the word of God and have lived with faith, and once identified, consider the outcome of their way of life. While considering the outcome (including death) of following Christ is important and required (Luke 14:28, Luke 9:23), the author of Hebrews also wants them to look carefully at the faith his leaders had in all circumstances. For instance, Paul says in Philippians 4 that, in whatever situation he is in, he has learned to be content. This is a way of life. This is living by faith. Not that the short-term outcome of faith dictates his contentment, but that His "God will supply every need of [theirs] according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:11).

JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME

The chant that we get next is one worth memorizing: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." But its context presents its meaning to be his consistency in leaders' "outcome of their way of life." If a leader died with faith that demands imitation, then the reader should expect a similar outcome. Now, this does not mean a horrific death is required for a faith to be imitated. But it does mean that Jesus is not changing the path to eternal life. People are "led away by diverse and strange teachings" (Heb. 13:9) but Jesus' promise a few verses earlier is, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). If he allowed the leaders to die (or *fall asleep*, as Paul would say) when Hebrews was written, then it is the same 2,000 years later.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The author seems to be identifying for the reader two different types of food available: diverse/strange teachings and grace. While it may seem off to read these as food, the bible uses food as a metaphor many times. In Jeremiah 15, God's words are found, and Jeremiah "ate them," and God's words became to him "a joy and delight of [his] heart." Similarly, God tells Ezekiel (and John in Revelation) to eat a scroll only to find out that it tasted "sweet as honey," and ultimately, we are told by Jesus that "man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." These foods are beneficial because they are God's word, not diverse or strange teachings. Likewise, God's word has been revealed as grace to those who believe that Christ has been offered once to bear the sins of many. Remember Hebrews 4, "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

LEVITICUS 16

The author assumes his readers know Levitical law. To understand the author's intent in verses 10 through 15, we must bring the day of atonement back to the forefront. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering for himself' (remember, Hebrews 5 "For every high priest chosen from among men… is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people"). With the bull he brings a goat, "then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil." After these two are killed, then "the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the

camp. Their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be burned up with fire." With this in mind, the author ties it to Jesus to teach us the cost of grace (the food that strengthens the heart). "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." Where the high priest of old would sacrifice a bull and a goat to atone for their own sins as well as the people's, Jesus himself sanctified the people through suffering. And where Leviticus notes that the action of the high priest worked in saying, "You shall be clean before the Lord from all your sins," Hebrews has previously noted "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:13). His point is this: they should bear the reproach, offer up a sacrifice of praise, acknowledge his name, not neglect to do good and to share what they have just as Jesus did, for in suffering this way the exit of their life will show the next generation that "here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" and their hearts will be strengthened by grace instead of dead works.

OBEY AND SUBMIT

"Obey" is a word readers have *never* enjoyed. If obedience was humanity's default, the command "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" wouldn't be spoken of with the promise "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land," which is followed by "for this is right" (Eph. 6:1-3). In Jesus' great commission, he says, "teach them to observe" (Matt. 28:20), which can be translated as "obey". To walk in faith is to walk in obedience. And Jesus has given leaders - apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:9) - to strengthen the church's heart by reminding them of the grace they find in the blood of Jesus in every season of life. If leaders (as the author defines them, those who speak the word of God and are worth imitating) are truly keeping watch over your souls, then obedience and submission to them is for your benefit.

PRAY FOR US

Once again the author uses plural words like us and we to note that a community is in view here. More than that, the request, coming on the heels of "obey your leaders," immediately calls readers to pray for their leaders, including the author. And then he writes, "I urge you the more earnestly to do this [prayer] in order that I may be restored to you the sooner." The author of Hebrews has proven time and time again that he is a leader and teacher whom you would want to visit, and while our ultimate prayer is found in alignment with John at the end of Revelation—"Come, Lord Jesus" (and He will come!)—an expectant prayer for a leader/teacher is also worth praying.

What About Now?

Let your heart be strengthened by Grace. This world is full of diverse, strange teachings that draw the heart of man toward sin. We are told we are not enough, then told to fill ourselves. Told we are broken, then told to fix ourselves. Told we are dirty, then told to wash our face. Often, when we can't do these remedies, we carry the weight of our situation's truth with shame. But Jesus despised the shame (Isaiah 53). And the author of Hebrews says that while we are drawn to these fixes, the true strength does not come from our actions, but from our faith in the finished work of Jesus, and that our hearts are strengthened by grace. When our hearts are strengthened by grace, we can bear the reproach of our broken, empty, dirty selves because Jesus has made us a creation that can "offer up a sacrifice of praise to God" and offer sacrifices that are "pleasing to God." Praise Jesus! And if you focus on being able to "please God" through these sacrifices, then you

likewise will despise the shame and be strengthened by Grace. Another takeaway revolves around obedience and submission to leaders in the church. Church leadership carries weight because “they are keeping watch over your souls” and “will have to give an account.” This should cut both ways. Church leadership needs to be careful how they feed the church (speak the word of God). But for the church’s own benefit, you should want leaders to do this with joy, since the author says it will be to your advantage.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 13:7. What attribute does the author give to define a leader?

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2. What should you consider and what should you imitate of a leader?

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Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 13:8. What three time markers are used to show that Jesus never changes?

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2. What does it mean for Jesus to be the same all three of these?

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Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 13:9. What should we not be lead away by? What should we be strengthened by?

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2. Read Hebrews 13:12-13. Why did Jesus suffer outside the gate?

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3. What should we do because of this?

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Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 13:17. How should we treat our leaders?

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2. What does the author say we should hope the leaders have while watching over our souls?

Discuss the Text!

Session 35 Discussion: Obedience

Obedience is a difficult word for many of us. Some of us may have been hurt by someone in authority, and for others the individual American spirit runs deep in our veins. Yet obedience is crucial to our walk with Christ. We may say that we obey Him when we say “Jesus is Lord,” and that let’s us sidestep a lot of the hard conversations. It gets murkier when the call is to obey a leader. And although some of our hard heart is not going to be convinced immediately, the author does try and provide a few defining characteristics of a leader. One who speaks the word of God, does not neglect to do good and to share what they have, and who keeps watch over your souls. When we submit ourselves to a leader like this, we begin to walk in freedom and know what it truly means to “speak truth in your heart” (Psalm 15:2). Discuss as a group what it looks like to obey and submit to a leader.

1. Icebreaker: When you hear the word “obey,” what is your first reaction, and where do you think that comes from in your own story?
2. Why is it easier to say “Jesus is Lord” than to submit to a human leader who represents him?
3. Think of a time you submitted to a leader, or refused to. What did it cost you, and/or what did it produce?
4. What would it look like for you to submit to a leader this week in a way that leads to freedom rather than frustration?
5. Kid Talk: Who are some people in your life who help take care of you and tell you what to do, like a parent, teacher, or coach? Why do you think it’s good (even when it’s hard) to listen to them?

Takeaways:

1. Remember your leaders.
2. Strengthen your heart with grace.
3. Obey and submit to your leaders.