

37—Hebrews 13:7-9—Strengthened By Grace

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I. Introduction

- A. If you know something really hard is coming up, how do you brace yourself to face it?
 - 1. What if you are concerned about a doctor's appointment or a diagnosis or test results?
 - 2. Hard conversations are sometimes necessary and they aren't fun but how do I get ready for that?
 - 3. Maybe you know the load at work is beyond your ability and time this week.
 - 4. What about the game coming up Friday night? Or the test or paper that's due?
 - 5. How am I going to have confidence to do what I need to do today?
- B. To answer everyone of these questions in detail would take more time than I can afford this morning but everyone of them takes preparation to be strengthened for the task at hand.
- C. Let explain this from a sports perspective.
 - 1. How will I have strength (physically and mentally) to play that game Friday night?
 - a) PREPARATION
 - (1) If I miss practice and do not know what our game plan is or what kind of defense we are facing I will likely fail to some degree mentally. You cannot depend on talent alone.
 - (2) If I miss conditioning workouts then I will not be physically ready for the strenuous task of four quarters.
 - b) Preparation makes you confident in sports.
- D. But the book of Hebrews has commanded us to endure to the end and warned us of the outcome if we do not. Hebrews was written to be a merciful and loving means to prepare you for the difficulties of a life and to continue trusting in Christ.

II. Main Point

- A. We need strength to endure and we are strengthened by God's grace—practical means of grace.
- B. (The last chapter of letters is very hard to pull together. Like this one, there appears to be some bullet points that are loosely connected to each other but work in the overall theme of the book. I did my best to explain them and put them in the theme of enduring faith.)

III. Outline

- A. Remember your leaders
- B. Believe Jesus Never Changes
- C. Do not be led away false teachings

IV. Exposition

- A. Let's take a look at our text this morning. The section really extends down to verse 17 or so but it too long to cover all of that today. Therefore we are going to focus on these three verses and pick up the rest over the next couple of weeks. I will not be covering the final part of verse 9 concerning not being strengthened by food because that gets unpacked in the following verses. But let's prepare ourselves to endure by faith in Christ through some very clear means—the first is by remembering your leaders.
 - 1. Something is going to happen to you or to someone really close to you. Your job isn't going to go perfectly. Life will hand you a hard pill to swallow. It's inevitable. The problem is will you be able to endure through it without losing hope?
 - 2. The last two weeks we've talked about what it looks like to live as God's family. We are to continue in brotherly love.
 - a) Our text instructed us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, to love strangers, remember those in prison and mistreated for the faith, hold marriage and the marriage bed in honor, and keep our way of life free from the love of money and be content in Christ.
 - b) These are a means to be strengthened by God's grace.
 - (1) It is so encouraging to love others. We are uniquely helped when we are serving others.
 - (2) It's also uniquely damaging to live in sexual immorality. It will weaken your soul and you will likely walking away from the faith if you do not repent. See how Proverbs 7 ends.
 - 3. This week, we have more ways to live as the family of God that are practical means to endure in the faith.

- a) The first one we see there in verse 7 is a command to remember our leaders.
 - (1) I think this verse addresses former leaders who had served the church among these people.
 - (a) It seems very possible that they had died trusting the Lord to the end. Their death could have been anything from illness to persecution. But whatever the case, they were to be remembered.
 - (b) Verse 6 ended by asking the question, what can man do to me?
 - i) The reality is, man can do a lot to us.
 - ii) If these leaders had suffered persecution from men, they need to remember how they endured in faith through that.
 - iii) Their lives should be a picture of how God was their helper and ultimately, man could not touch their soul or snatch them out of God's hand.
 - (c) These people obviously knew them in order to remember them.
 - (d) How they are to respond to the present leaders comes later in verse 17.
 - (2) Leaders here are defined as those who spoke the word of God to them.
 - (a) This is the main task of pastors and elders. The scriptures are our source of preparation and what we live by!
 - (b) We cannot be prepared without God's infallible word. His truths give us hope in the gospel and set us free from slavery to sin and instruct us how to live.
- b) However the focus here is on the outcome of these former leaders way of life.
 - (1) Certainly their way of life is informed and shaped by the word.
 - (2) But they must believe it and live it out. Embody it!
 - (a) I can tell you that I have been uniquely helped by my former leaders but I have also been uniquely harmed by some of them too.
 - i) In some, their way of life did not match what they said they believed.
 - (1) This left me very skeptical and confused.
 - (2) Their lives were not, as the text commands us, to be imitated.
 - ii) However, I have had many more leaders who have lived out the faith that was to be imitated.
 - (1) The skepticism and confusion can be fixed through the lives of good leaders.
 - (2) I do remember them and I do imitate their faith.
 - (3) I hope I will be a leader for whom that is true as well.
 - (3) To remember the outcome of their lives means we should be able to recall how they responded to the difficulties of life and how they endured through faith to the end.
 - (a) For example—back in verse 5 it said to keep your way of life free from love of money.
 - i) There should be observable ways by which you could remember how they instructed you and how they themselves lived this out.

4. But how do we remember our leaders?

 - a) First, I cannot commend your former leaders to you. I don't know the outcome of their lives like the writer of Hebrews knew their former leaders. You will need to determine that. My guess is that it's much like my own experience. Some are to be remembered and some aren't.
 - b) But practically speaking, you cannot remember someone without keeping them in front of you.
 - (1) Out of sight is out of mind.
 - (2) Think through the things they taught you.
 - (3) But most importantly remember the outcome of their lives.
 - (a) I remember my grandfather when I notice things that I do that was just like he taught me.
 - (b) The same is true of my former leaders.

B. While remembering your former leaders is one way to be strengthened by grace, another way comes to us there in verse 8—by believing in the unchangeableness of Jesus.

 - 1. He is the same yesterday, today and forever!
 - a) This truth is enormous! It is one of the foundational, objective truths that runs through every truth about our God.

- (1) If this isn't true, then you have no reason to be strengthened by grace because who knows if God will remain as he is.
 - (2) You have no reason to remember your leaders.
 - (3) If God changes, he might change his view of sexual immorality.
 - (4) Why would you love your brothers or strangers or even God?
 - (5) Why trust and endure for such a fickle and puny God, if this isn't true?
- b) You will have to decide whether to believe this truth and stand on it or not.
 - (1) But if it is true and I wholeheartedly believe it is, then you have all the reason and hope in world to endure and be strengthened in his grace.
- 2. This is an important fact that I need to point out because some people do not believe that Jesus is equal to the Father as is the Holy Spirit.
 - a) This truth describes who God is in Psalm 102 which is quoted here.
 - b) The basis for this truth was revealed most clearly when God told Moses in Exodus to tell the people—I AM!
 - (1) God is the eternal present being! He has always existed and he will always be!
 - (2) This is extremely important for our faith!
 - c) But I just want to point out that the truth that God is unchangeable is also true of Jesus Christ.
 - (1) Indeed, we believe in the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - (2) We believe in the one divine being of God in three persons.
 - (a) Each person fully God but fully distinct.
 - (b) The Son submits to the Father while being the same nature and equal.
- 3. So, what does this mean for us and how will this strengthen us to endure by grace?
 - a) God's nature cannot change. (What follows is taken from Wellums' Systematic Theology, pp. 607-608)
 - (1) "He will never be more powerful, knowing, loving and holy. He is who he is and always will be."
 - (a) Maybe this will resonate—God cannot learn anything because he already knows all things. He cannot forget anything.
 - (2) God is eternal and unchanging.
 - b) God's character is unchangeable.
 - (1) "God does not lie. He does not repent; he is the absolute standard of perfection; and what God says he will do, he does."
 - (a) Sam Storms says this about the unchanging character of God: "If God could change in respect to his moral character, it would be either for the better or the worse. If for better, it would indicate that he had been morally imperfect or incomplete before the time of change, and hence never God. If for the worse, it would indicate that he is now morally less perfect or complete, and hence no longer God."
 - (b) This truth is so basic to our understanding of God that we simply could not have faith if God were otherwise.
 - c) Also God's eternal plan and purposes are unchanging.
 - (1) "Let's ask the question, "If God changed his plan and purposes, that would indicate that he did not have enough foresight and knowledge to anticipate any and all possibilities..."
 - (2) "...or, assuming he had the necessary foresight, he lacked the power or ability to bring about what he planned."
 - d) One more—God promises are unchanging.
 - (1) "Our God is the promise maker and keeper, a truth which is always tied to his covenant promises centered in Christ Jesus."
 - (2) Therefore, we can and should fully trust him with no reservation and we should never give up on him.
 - e) This truth strengthens us to endure by believing and trusting Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

- C. One last point to make. We've been commanded to remember our leaders considering the outcome of their way of life and that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Now we are commanded to not be led away by diverse and strange teachings.
1. Most of this is explained in verses 10-16 which we will look at next week.
 2. However, we can begin thinking about that now concerning what we've heard already.
 - a) This command is made on the basis that it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by food.
 - (1) I've heard people pray over a meal for our bodies to be strengthened for thy service.
 - (2) God designed our bodies to be strengthened by food, right? If you do not eat you will become weak.
 - (3) And all of that is true. But here what needs to be strengthened is the heart.
 3. This is where we began—prepare to endure by being strengthened by grace.
 - a) My guess is that we have all prayed something like that but really haven't considered what it means or how it works.
 - b) We over spiritualize things sometimes. We use language of the Bible or we imitate what others have said without really knowing what it all means.
 - c) To be strengthened by grace is not some mystical or magical thing that happens to us.
 - d) It's not some force like Star Wars or some superpower strength like Captain America was given.
 - e) No. It is the ordinary means of grace that we have been talking about—remembering your leaders and knowing that Jesus Christ is the same forever.
 - (1) I know my heart needs something outside of myself everyday to face what comes or what might come.
 4. But how did I prepare my heart to face that and how would I endure it if it were permanent?
 - a) How do I prepare?
 - (1) I am going to pray and ask others to pray. I am going to get my heart submitted to whatever outcome God has for me and I will trust him through it.
 - (2) I am going to fill my heart and mind with the truth of God's word. I need objective, concrete truths to stand on.
 - (3) I am going into those situations confident because of that preparation to put those truths at the forefront of my mind and heart. And those are a means of grace to accomplish that.
 - b) I do all the same to preach. I don't just waltz up here without preparing.
 5. When I was new believer, I was being tossed around by my thoughts and emotions. It was as though I was in the ocean and every wave swept me away.
 - a) I could not discern what was true in my mind. It was like a tennis match going on in my mind that never ended.
 - b) When I got busy reading the Bible and praying everyday of my life, I found myself firmly planted on something solid and immovable which was Christ.
 - (1) In other words, I was preparing everyday for whatever crossed my path.
 - (2) I am confident of these truths and I set my feet on them everyday.
 - c) The winds may blow and the storms may come, but I am standing on a foundation that cannot be moved.
 - (1) And I really like that!
 - (2) If your life gives evidence that you have nothing solid to hold on to during the storms of life, I would like to offer you Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
 - (3) He will forgive you of your sins and make you a new creation. You get to start over and nothing can change that so long as you trust him.
 - (4) Will you repent and believe in Christ?