

Grace to Endure Hebrews 13:7-14

In all that we could undertake, especially those endeavors which are daunting, it's normal to ask questions that help us count the cost. We measure and weigh with words like, "How hard is it going to be?" "If it's difficult, do I have what it takes to get through it, the intestinal fortitude?" "With all my other responsibilities, do I have the margin?" "Has this been done before?" "And if I get through it, will there be payoff, something good to come of it?" Maybe some of you are in the throes of those very considerations. You're at a crossroads in a career decision, or one that could potentially change the course of your life.

Beyond the daily, earthbound endeavors, which are also important in the eyes of Him who sees all, we can make application in the spiritual sense of things with these types of inquiries. With South Woods' longstanding commitment to global missions and the relationships with missionaries throughout the world here at South Woods, I thought of many I've met along the way who have come to a place like this: "God is calling our family to a context that is barren with gospel truth and gospel churches. If we go, our extended family will be devastated by our departure. Jesus has taught us that He takes precedent, even over primary familial relationships. We must weigh it all in the balance. It can't be a rash decision, based on an emotional flash in the pan. A life of prayer and counsel is a must. Deliberation and conversation seem wise, but some sense of urgency presses in on us. If we go, the cost will be great. The hurt will cut deep. But is Jesus not worthy of many wounds one might incur over the course of life? It seems right to consider what it cost Him to do the will of God." Counting the cost.

The book of Hebrews has presented to us similar circumstances. But more than circumstances, for twelve chapters the doctrinal development of Christ's supremacy has helped to frame these concentrated exhortations in chapter 13. We understand the concept of imitation in verse 7 better because of Hebrews 11. We're not surprised by the high Christology of verse 8 because chapter after chapter has held up His unique nature and work. We understand better, in part, the erroneous teachings mentioned in verse 9 because of the warnings levied throughout Hebrews concerning digression back into the enslavements of Judaism. We gain some insight on the nature of the reproach mentioned in our passage because of chapter 10. In other words, the accumulation of Christ-centered truths not only give sense to the exhortations but serve to propel God's people in the doing of what is called for beginning in chapter 13.

We'll consider more exhortations today. Stimulated by twelve incredible chapters of God moving the reader to gratitude by His incredible commitment to impart a kingdom, we come to verse 7. The content and the direction of our text are familiar. With eyes that look back, that survey the present, and that long as they glance ahead to a better living arrangement, we're once again brought to the demanding steps of persevering faith.

I. Underpinnings of a persevering faith

A. Imitating the exemplary

[7] Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

The instruction to imitate the faithful of the past continues. Examples from antiquity are to be considered, but the LORD doesn't leave His church without more current blueprints of faith either. Who are these *leaders*? The call to *remember* them as opposed to obeying them from verse 17 of this same chapter helps with our interpretive footing. We see that they are identified as heralds of *the word of God*. The word *leaders* is a generic term that can refer to leaders in all walks of life.¹ But this is obviously speaking of leaders in a church context. What is likely the case here, is that the call to *remember* and to *consider the outcome of their way of life* are markers that strongly imply that these past leaders are those who have passed away.²

And what was the *outcome*, or result, of their *way of life*? They lived a life of listening to God's word, marrying what they heard with *faith*, and expressing that faith until the end.³ Brothers and sisters, the lies bandy about unabashedly in our context and continue to dance to the tune of our darkest yearnings. You want to live the good life? Then, many would say to fix your eyes on vacation homes, 401K's, and luxurious golf carts. But a life that outlives our demise is found in a text like this one.⁴ Instead of aiming at collecting seashells on the beach before we pass on into an eternity, loftier goals rise out of a life of genuine faith.⁵ This text points us in the direction of people like Pernie Hester. The few hours I spent with her the last year of her life were peppered with conversations centered on the Bible. And based on my last conversation with her, the week before she finally met her Savior, the outcome of her way of life was enduring faith. It was an honor to know such a dignified lady who formed the decades-long habit of drawing near to God and loving His people. And her example is only one of many that are here today. We'd do well to consider the older saints among us who are quietly walking by faith, joying in Jesus, here every Lord's Day hungry for the Bread from heaven. That's the kind of example that believers were and are to intentionally consider on the regular.

Some of the former leaders of these first recipients may have been persecuted to martyrdom, but it's also likely that some of them were older saints who preached and taught in the local church who died of natural causes. The call was to keep faith in Christ until their journey's end, like these exemplary *leaders* did.

A. Enabled by immutability

[8] Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Here is the foundation stone of all perseverance⁶ All believers, past, present, and future, are attached this unchanging LORD Jesus. If those who have passed on gained their endurance through the Jesus of yesterday, if He's the same to these recipients, won't He supply all that's needed for the endurance of every saint, irrespective of which age they live? To be in Christ, who

¹ Thomas Schreiner, *EBTC: Hebrews*, 418.

² Gareth Cockerill, *NIC: The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 690.

³ Not perfectly. The church is a field strewn with broken stoney pieces, many of which are a mixture of coal and diamond dust.

⁴ Songwriter Shai Linne is right: "The rot quickens as the plot thickens." A line from his song called "Elder Statesman," November 10th, 2023.

⁵ Imagery found in the well-known sermon of John Piper from May of 2000 called "Boasting Only in the Cross,"

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/boasting-only-in-the-cross>

⁶ Cockerill, 689.

does not conform to the unpredictable tides of culture or tire with the turn of the calendar, is to possess a steadiness found nowhere else. All else is fluctuating. We can't see around the corner of time or the riverbend of circumstance. And when you know the unchanging Jesus, you're stretching and squinting in worry is checked. You learn that to walk securely and move contentedly in the present reflects the God-honoring contentment we considered last week from verse 5.

This verbal ovation of Jesus' inability to shift or change is further held up to show a contrast with the leaders who have passed on. They're no longer available to guide and help them through their current difficulties, but Jesus, who sits on the throne today, intercedes today—and does these forevermore—He is always available. He is the ever-living and ever-abiding LORD who makes all the daily difference. His presence alters our behavior. It comforts His people who often endure “*a great conflict of sufferings.*”⁷ And it emboldens His people to let go of what the world regards as ultimate treasure, because they know of “*a better possession and a lasting one.*”⁸ We find enablement for continued faith right in the midst of the unchangeableness of Jesus Christ.

II. Difficulties to a persevering faith

A. Diversions from the center

[9] 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.

What are the ***strange teachings*** of verse 9? Whatever it is, it's related to ***foods***. The easy tie is to loop in the food laws from Judaism. Paul expressed in Colossians 2:16–17, “...*let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink...these are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*” The likely problem, then, was an adherence to mere, external religious code as the key to maintaining a healthy devotion to God. Of course, this outwardness in spirituality sounds a lot like the religions of our day, with the difference being that many forms cancel God from the equation. Meditations encouraging the discovery of one's true self, gaining internal calm and balance by centering oneself in harmony with the universe, etc. There are many problems with these kinds of activities, but a glaring one is that none of them truly deal with the presence and power of sin in our lives. And so a common denominator within all religious expression devoid of the gospel is a total absence of or a fundamental misunderstanding of the grace of God.

The word ***grace*** is shorthand for what has been done through the work of Jesus. And, it's not only that Jesus gives it in salvation, but here we find the idea that the reality of grace and the power of grace can ongoingly empower all who have tasted it. Paul speaks of grace with similar connotations, Colossians 1:5b–6, “...*Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, [6] which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.*” See that? *Grace, word of truth, gospel*, all synonymous. And being led away into trusting that our religious efforts are in any way meritorious to God is a grave danger. It betrays

⁷ Hebrews 10:32

⁸ Hebrews 10:34

everything conveyed in the word **grace**. In fact, every other emphasis on human effort, subtle or obvious, is a diversion from the heart of our faith.

You want to know why you've not walked in here this morning met with pageantry, pomp, and with a bunch of spiritual hullabaloo and hubbubs? You want to know why we don't overload our bulletin each week with social and political events, or have our services in Latin, or air how much we're making a difference in our community? Because all of that runs counter to the grace of God in both its simplicity and power. Both the subject and application of grace in the gospel are enough for this church and every church in every age. Through Hebrews we've kept finding this commitment and trust in religious exercises expressed in things outside of grace, like here, again, the author mentions **foods**, likely a reference to the food offered through the Levitical priesthood. Well, guess what? That food had no benefit **to those devoted to them**. Why? Because it demeaned what Christ accomplished, as do all works of grit in which we place our trust and identity. Paul tells us how we can nullify grace in Romans 4:4, "*Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.* Then he gives the corrective in verse 5, *And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...*" That **food** offered in religious pride was undercutting grace in the early church. Works work to suck the air out of the room of grace, but a commitment and trust in the Jesus of Hebrews is ever nourishing and life-giving. It's the dynamic in our relationship to God that produces the deepest gratitude and the heartiest obedience. It stands at the center of this new and living way.⁹ And it's grace which enables us to be no longer encumbered by self-interest, or enamored in pride by past accomplishments, or atrophied by past failures.¹⁰

The imagery continues from the insufficient Levitical priesthood. Speaking of food, we read in verse [10] ***We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.*** At this point many of you likely understand that the pastor of Hebrews has moved past physical food. And the altar is not a literal altar either. The author of Hebrews knows what the author of John knows, inspired by the same Spirit, "*Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. [55] For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. [56] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.*"¹¹ Christ and His gospel of grace are the source of life and spiritual vigor, not the **teachings** that diverge from the center. Again, this is the figurative way to express the dual dimension of Christ's death.¹² His sacrifice is the root of our deliverance from sin, death, and Satan, as well as the main protein of our spiritual diet that leads to daily transformation. We will not persevere in faith if we continue to unfasten ourselves from grace by resting in anyone else's performance. We are to rest our weary heads on the accomplishments of Jesus our Redeemer. There are only two surfaces underneath every human being on this planet—the bedrock ground of grace or the deceptive sinking sands of everything else! This is our threefold boast: Grace. Grace. Grace.

We're saved by it, and we're strengthened by it to keep running resolutely by faith. It's what we desperately need, because, beginning in verse 11, we see that we must be willing to endure no less than He did.

⁹ Hebrews 10:2

¹⁰ Echoing Ray Orland in his remarkable little, green book called *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* (107).

¹¹ John 6:54–56

¹² Peter O'Brien, *PNTC: The Letter to the Hebrews*, 521.

B. Disgraced to the edges

[11] 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. [12] So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. [13] Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

The beginning words of verse 12, ***so Jesus also***, reveal a comparison between verses 11 and 12. How so? The author first supplies a kind of side-by-side analysis of the dead carcasses and Jesus. Corresponding to Leviticus 16:27, verse 11 refers to the priestly practice where “*the bull...and the goat for the sin offering...shall be carried outside the camp...[and] burned up with fire.*” The life of the animals was taken, and their lifeblood was ***brought into the holy places by the high priest*** to be applied ceremoniously, and this served as a gospel-shadow. Christ was our sin offering by the loss of His life.

Verse 10, again, starts by stating that believers are welcome to feast on what was “*offered once for all.*”¹³ Yet, we’re not simply those who gain approval and nourishment from Christ’s death, but we are those who willingly identify with and reflect Christ in life. Grace is what we’re to live on, but these verses are conveying what kind of life we’re to live. Yes, we’re to imitate the faith of the faithful, but the whole church is to emulate her Savior.

In what way is this emulation to take place? Hear the exhortation, verse 13, ***Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.*** The metaphors keep coming, meant to stir our minds to action. What does ***outside the camp*** mean? We know that in the Law of Moses, this was a place of alienation from God.¹⁴ The unclean were banished to live outside the camp. The worst of the worst in society were executed outside the camp. There was a communal shame in being declared unclean. Further, being excluded from the more sacred precincts in Jewish life only served to pile on the disgrace from the larger community.¹⁵ And according to those who crucified Jesus, he was among that number, though He is, “*holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.*”¹⁶ Outside the camp was the last stop for the animals who were condemned to death. There they were met with a consuming fire—a visible and stifling manifestation of the judgment of God. At the cross, which happened ***outside*** of Jerusalem’s ***gate***, Jesus was not only a curse, but He was condemned for the unworthy to the end that He might ***sanctify*** those who trust in Him. But the crown, nails, and spear were only a portion of what Jesus bore. There, the spotless Lamb of God was criticized, accused, shunned, and abused. He who dwelled in unapproachable light from all eternity endured a reproach He never deserved.

And the exhortation here is that we’re to meet Him in this place of ***reproach, to go to Him.*** What God has created in the gospel by the Spirit is a new people who not only are united to Christ by faith, but this new creation called the church is a community that actually follows Jesus. Imitation itself doesn’t always come with attached difficulties, nor is imitation always a good

¹³ Hebrews 7:27

¹⁴ Sigurd Grindheim, *PNTC: The Letter to the Hebrews*, 685.

¹⁵ O’Brien, 523.

¹⁶ Hebrews 7:26

thing. But imitating those individuals who do what is right, good, and necessary, despite the difficulties is the holy imitation called for in our passage.

The temptation for these recent Jewish converts was to divert themselves away from grace. It would have made life easier. But the author is encouraging his readers to keep God's grace in front of them. He's convinced that setting one's heart on grace can yield a harvest of strength in tumultuous times. In fact, if and when the situation calls for it, we must follow Jesus to the place of being disgraced for His sake. And if our prayers are continually filled with the plea, "Lord, make us more like Your Son," then when disgrace and dishonor come, just know that God is answering. Do we think we'll learn obedience through peace and calm sailing? No. Our pavement is grief and sorrow, where His footsteps can be traced.¹⁷ We will know difficulties as we persevere with faith in Jesus.

III. Incentive to persevering faith

We must see any mistreatment and ill-will towards us for following Jesus as an ancient guile meant to lure us away. But when we're willing to be degraded or downgraded in the minds of others because we hold to what the world deems as folly, then we're living precisely like heaven is home, not here. Verse 14, ***For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.*** We ***seek the city*** is a present action based on a past accomplishment that will find resolve on a divinely marked day in the future.

That God has given us this, *the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*¹⁸ through the mediating death Jesus, is the glorious incentive to keep going. Today, in these moments, let's put our trust in Christ. The promise of being with Him in the place He has prepared is worth every minute of reproach and censure by God's enemies.

Conclusion

Those disgraced to the edges by a glad-hearted willfulness to follow Jesus in the face of opposition—that's perseverance. Those who keep their footing on grace and find their strength in it—that's perseverance. The floorboard of their fortitude is the constant presence of an unchangeable Savior. We come and go like the green grass, but Jesus has not and will not vary in His person or His work on our behalf.

His payment to redeem was the final sale in salvation.

His resurrection, the final blow to death.

His kingdom reign over the curated city where evil is banished forever, that is our final stop.

¹⁷ Hebrews 5:8

¹⁸ Hebrews 12:22

