

Follow the Pattern

Pastor Kevin Hay

Hebrews 13:8-9

September 17, 2023

Well, good evening, Redeemer. My name is Kevin and I get to be one of the pastors here at Redeemer Bible Church. I was so encouraged by our first Sunday night live service last week, and I've been looking forward to gathering together again tonight. So I'm grateful you are here and I'm grateful that we have the opportunity to open God's word together again this evening.

So with that said, we are continuing our sermon series this evening on The Sheep and their Shepherds, The Sheep and their Shepherds. And so I'd like to invite and encourage you to open your Bibles with me now to the book of Hebrews chapter 13. Hebrews chapter 13 is where we'll be, not just tonight, but throughout this entire series. And while you're turning there, I want to remind us, take just a few minutes to do that of what we saw as we began this sermon series last week.

So we started with the context of this letter, and we said that although we don't know for certain who the author is, we can have fun speculating of course, but we don't know for certain or even what specific church the author is writing to. What we do know is that the recipients of this letter were Jews who were professing faith in Jesus Christ. And it's clear that these Jewish believers were contending with at least two major issues. So first, there was some bad theology and even heresy being affirmed by certain people within the church. And of course, that was spreading throughout to others. But then second, there was some form of persecution being experienced by this church which was causing them to seriously question whether or not Jesus Christ was worth it. Was He worth following after? Was He worth it to claim as the Messiah?

So last week in our first sermon of the series, we looked at verses seven and eight and it was there that we saw the author of Hebrews exhort these believers to remember their former leaders. So to think back and recall in their minds the doctrine that those leaders taught them, and of course, the faith that those leaders demonstrated before them as they endured and persevered in faithfulness to the very end. And then, he called these Hebrew believers to press on in their faith individually and to imitate the faith of those leaders who had gone on before them. Why?

Because we have a great shepherd, a living resurrected savior who is now ascended to the right hand of the Father, who leads us on this path of life and who is indeed worthy of our worship.

And so it's with that in mind that we're now going to continue in this series and in our text, and tonight, look at verses eight and nine. Hebrews 13 verses eight and nine. And if you are able, I would ask that you stand with me for the reading of God's word. Hebrews 13 verses eight and nine, and it's there that God's word reads.

"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." And with that, you can be seated As we pray together.

Father, we come to you in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. We're able to enter in with confidence and boldness, not because of anything within ourselves, not because of some sort of religious merit or righteous effort, but because of what Jesus has done on our behalf. And so as we are robed in the very righteousness of Christ, we want to plead with you, your throne of grace, that you would be kind and gracious to us tonight as we open your word and as I attempt to expound upon and expose what your word declares, I pray that you would bless us abundantly. As a church family, Lord, I thank you for the opportunity that we have to open your word together. And I pray that each of us will treasure this opportunity and opportunities like these recognizing that there are literally places in our world today where this is not possible. So may we treasure it, may we be grateful to you and our hearts for this privilege to worship you through your word. I pray that as we spend time together seeking to hear your voice, that it will come through loud and clear that you will indeed give us eyes to see and ears to hear, illuminate your word for us. Help us to think clearly and apply this truth to our hearts. And as a church, help us, Lord, to gain a better perspective, a clearer picture of who you've called us to be and how we can more adequately and effectively bring you glory in this city and beyond. We pray this in Christ's name, amen.

Well, when I was a teenager, and then again, as a college student, I spent a lot of time working for my dad who owns a construction company back in Ohio. I have so many fond memories of working with my dad over the years from funny stories that happened on the job site to the multitude of projects that we worked on together. But there's one interaction that I often come back to in my mind from time to time and really sticks out in my mind and it took place while we were framing a house. My dad gave me the responsibility of cutting several boards all to the same length and measurement. So he set me up with a sawhorse, a pair of sawhorses, a circular saw, a pencil, and then he gave me a pattern to use, which was basically a board that he had cut out with specific angles and measurements.

And so as I began to cut each of those boards one after another, it dawned on me with all of my youthful wisdom and years of carpentry experience that this process would go so much faster if I would simply use each newly cut piece as the pattern for the next one. In other words, I thought to myself, why do I need to keep reaching for this pattern when I have a perfectly good piece right here in my hands? Well, it didn't take long for me to complete the job, so I proudly let my dad know that I was finished. But just a short time later, I realized that there was a problem because as my dad began to take these boards that I had spent lots of time cutting, they were all coming up short. And so my dad in that moment conveyed in his own not so subtle way that I had messed up. But then he said something to me that I'll never forget. He said, "Son, didn't you use the pattern I gave you?" "Kevin, I gave you a pattern to follow. Why didn't you follow it?"

I'll never forget the principle that I learned from that experience. Sometimes it seems easier to bypass the pattern we've been given in order to more quickly reach a desired end only to realize

that the corners we cut were crucial to the quality of the finished product. And as it pertains to the church of Jesus Christ, what we're going to discover this evening is that the Lord Himself has given us, as the church, a pattern to follow, and He's simply calling us to follow the pattern, follow the pattern. And so what we need to understand tonight at the outset as we consider the pattern, we've been given by our heavenly Father is that there is far more at stake in the pattern we've been given than wasted wood, way more at stake.

It's imperative for us to grasp the reality that a church functioning according to its God-given blueprint is a force to be reckoned with in the world. A healthy church that is glorifying God, edifying and equipping saints, and evangelizing sinners is accomplishing more for the kingdom of Christ than any other entity on planet earth. That's why, as Pastor John MacArthur has said, that one of Satan's most subtle approaches to the Christian is to move him away from sound doctrine, to get him wrapped up in beliefs that are unfounded, uncertain, and changing. And it's why one of the saddest things in the world is for a Christian to get drawn into false doctrine and be rendered ineffective, to lose his joy, reward, and testimony.

And yet, my friends, how much more devastating is that if it's allowed to wreak havoc in the church? In the same way that we spent time last week reflecting upon those from our past who have faithfully taught us the word of God, many of us could give firsthand testimony this evening of pastors and churches that have abandoned their theological convictions causing spiritual devastation and disillusionment to an untold multitude. Can I get a witness, right? We've seen it. And so as we walk our way through this evening's text, I want us to remember what's at stake. And as we do, we're going to find four ways to make sure that we're following the pattern we've been given by the Lord. The first three will be stated for us as cautions, and then the final one will be stated as an exhortation.

And so with that in mind, we're going to begin with the verse we ended on last week, verse eight. So if you'll look there with me once again, the first caution to consider as we seek to follow the pattern, we've been given is that we ***don't depart from the faith delivered, don't depart from the faith delivered.*** The author of Hebrews says there, once again, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Well, as I mentioned last week, this eighth verse really acts as a kind of hinge between verses seven and nine. So following verse seven, the author of Hebrews uses the truth of verse eight to point us to the unchanging nature of Christ's divine power. His point in doing that is to say that the same powerful savior who preserved the faith of those from the past is the Savior who promises to preserve us today. But here, as he transitions to the focus of verse nine, the author is emphasizing the unchanging, unified nature of Christ's divine person. It's a similar idea to the one communicated by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter four, verses four through six, where he says, "There is one body and one spirit, just as you are called to the one hope that belongs to your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

In other words, the great shepherd of the sheep is immutable and unchanging. Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church, is the same today as He always has been and always will be. And He has purchased and blessed us with the gift of faith, which is a treasure of infinite worth and eternal significance. One faith that has been delivered to the saints and only one. In fact, as the author of Hebrews said to these very believers back in chapter 12, this Jesus is not only the founder of our faith, but He is also the perfecter of their faith. And so the obvious question then is this, why would you be tempted to leave this faith? Like the house that is built on the solid rock, Christ is a sure and steady foundation, a place where our weak and weary souls can find and rest in absolute assurance. We can find security for our souls in the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

So where else are you going to go? As Jesus tells in the parable, everything else is sinking sand. And so following the pattern of the unchanging Christ both begins and ends by persevering in the unconquerable faith of Christ. It's the faith that He has delivered to us as a gift of His grace. And therefore, departing from this faith should be completely out of the question. Where else can we go? Instead, we should have the attitude and the fortitude expressed by the Apostle Paul to Timothy in Second Timothy chapter one.

It's beginning in verse 12 of that chapter that Paul writes to his beloved son in the faith. And he says this, "But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me." Who's guarding it? He is. And then he says this in verse 13. "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me. In the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you, dear Timothy."

And so that, likewise, my friend, should be our attitude as well. But of course, as we know there is also a content to our faith. To use Paul's words, we have a good deposit that has been entrusted to us and therefore we must live it out. So true saving faith is not merely a mental ascent to particular ideas. It's not some arbitrary set of facts that simply exist in a compartmentalized section of our brain, disconnected from the rest of our lives. No, genuine faith works and produces fruit. As the reformers are so famously known for saying, "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."

And so as we continue on now to the beginning of verse nine, we're going to find the next way we are to faithfully follow the pattern of Christ. And it comes in the form of our second caution for this evening, which is that we ***don't deviate from sound doctrine, don't deviate from sound doctrine***. Our text continues saying, "Do not be let away by diverse and strange teachings." So it's here that we really begin to see the tone of warning that's found within our passage, and it's also where we begin to recognize the practical significance for why these believers have been called to remember their former leaders and pastors.

It's clear that these Hebrew believers are now being tempted to walk away from that sound doctrine that was taught to them by their former pastors. And so the author of Hebrews wants to provide them with this final word of warning to end the letter. And I say final because

throughout this letter he has been addressing them on their immaturity and instability in the words. This is not new territory, this is just summing up everything he's been saying throughout these, what are to us, 13 chapters. And so back in chapter five, verses 11 through 13, here's what he said to them.

He said, "About this, we have much to say, and it is hard to explain. Since you have become dull of hearing", it's not a compliment, "for though by this time, you ought to be teachers. You need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the Oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food. For everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness since he is a child." In other words, because these professing believers are failing to grasp spiritual truth or to grow in their faith, the author of Hebrews is telling them that they are a bunch of spiritual babies at best, at best. At worst, they may be deceived, which is why he went on to warn them in chapter six saying this.

And just keep in mind this is one of a few very, very sobering warning passages throughout the book of Hebrews. It says this, "For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance since they are", listen to this, "crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt." That is serious language. And so in light of the very real and present danger of apostasy, and I want to be clear here, not danger of losing their salvation, but the demonstration that they were never actually saved to begin with potentially, the author of Hebrews wants these professing believers to understand how vastly important it is to remain steadfast in sound doctrine. Don't waiver for a moment from the soundness of the truth that you have been given.

And of the two types of teaching that we see the author of Hebrews highlighting in verse nine, the one we want to focus on first is diverse teaching. Diverse teaching. And diverse teaching is really any doctrine that is different and incompatible with the primary essential truths of the gospel. For the immature, ungrounded believer, there is often a tendency to be deceived into believing something that is untrue. And there are a variety of reasons for that. But if sound doctrine is the path, to be led away from that path by diverse teaching is to be persuaded by some doctrine that contradicts the very gospel which you are professing to believe in for your salvation.

Diverse teaching, in most cases, it's adding something to the gospel. The Judaizers, who very well may be part of this context, were those who would say, yes, we believe in Christ's finished work, but we need to do this, this and this. Right? Adding to the gospel some legalistic requirement that supposedly needs to be met rather than believing in the pure truth of the gospel, which is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone for the glory of God alone.

And so while the church in every generation has some diverse teaching it must contend with, it's almost always a repackaging of some old heresy from the past, just stamp on a different name. As Charles Spurgeon once said, so well, "They say the world is marching on and the gospel must

march to. No, the old gospel is the same. Not one of her stakes must be removed. Not one of her cords must be loosened. Theology has nothing new in it except that which is false."

And so as we think this evening about the relationship between pastors and those entrusted to their care, it's important for us to understand that a major part of pastoral ministry is teaching and equipping believers towards spiritual maturity. That's one of the primary jobs of the shepherd of Christ's church. This is what the Apostle Paul tells the Ephesians in chapter four, verses 12 through 14. He says that the ministry of pastor teachers is this, "To equip the saints for the work of the ministry. For building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. To mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ so that", why, "we may no longer be children", remember those spiritual babies the author of Hebrews spoke of, "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes, but rather that we would all grow up into Christ-like maturity."

That's what our sanctification in its progressive form is all about, growing and becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. And so it's important then, as we seek to follow the pattern of Christ, that we do not deviate from the sound doctrine that comes to us from the very word of God. But then connected to that, we also see in verse nine, a second type of teaching that must also be avoided. And it's there that we find our final caution of the passage, which is that we ***don't disregard spiritual discernment, don't disregard spiritual discernment.***

The author of Hebrews calls the church not to be led away by strange teaching. And strange teaching, just in terms of a definition for us, would be really any belief system or doctrine that is completely foreign to the teaching of scripture. The things that make strange teaching often attractive to those who are not anchored in the truth of God's word is that it's unusual in nature. It's a novelty of sorts. So it gets people's attention. Well-known beliefs that would fall into this category in our modern context would be things like Mormonism or Scientology. And I just want to kind of frame this or put this into perspective for us so that we can fully appreciate the danger of heretical teaching.

Sometimes we may be tempted just to think, yeah, I know it's false, but I'm just going to focus on what's in front of me. But to use the example of Mormonism, I want us to remember that it began with one man, one man named Joseph Smith who officially formed the church of the Latter Day Saints in the year 1830. Joseph Smith fundamentally rejected the teachings of the Bible and he claimed to have a spiritual encounter with God. And when you dig into that, you find out just how ridiculous those claims really are. But today, fast forwarding to the year 2023, and we find that the Mormon religion claims to now have 17 million adherence worldwide. Which just to put that into perspective for us, is equal to the population of the states of Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and Idaho all put together.

Think about all the people that live in those states I just mentioned, and that is representative of the number of people who claim to believe in the heresy of Mormonism today. And that's not counting the untold millions who have believed the lie of Mormonism in the generations

preceding ours. In addition to that, that number of individuals represents families who, as we know, are having lots of children and then teaching that strange teaching to their children and to many others throughout the world. But again, it all started with one man, one set of lips, one tongue, uttering blasphemies and heretical doctrine. And so just think, with me, of all the souls that have been damned while believing in the heresy of Mormonism since its inception, and just let that sink in for a moment. Souls that will live for eternity in hell. That is the danger of rejecting biblical truth and teaching unbiblical doctrine, that's what's at stake. It carries with it eternal significance.

And for those who are professing faith in Jesus Christ, it demonstrates the critical importance of being able to discern what's true from what is false, critically important. It's also the mark, scripture tells us, of being a mature believer. This is what the author of Hebrews said back in chapter five at the end of the passage about their spiritual maturity that I read earlier. He said to them kind of finishing up that section in verse 14, "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have made their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." And where does this training come from? The training and the powers of discernment takes place, of course, through the study of God's word, because it is the word of God that is the only infallible source of all truth.

It's the word of God that reveals to us what is false. It's the word of God that convicts of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. And it's the word of God where the very gospel of Jesus Christ is found. And so it's all about the word of God and it's that training and that strengthening that leads us this evening to the final section of our text. And now that we've considered three cautions from our passage, we're now going to conclude our time this evening with a word of exhortation. And that exhortation calls us to ***be devoted to the grace God has demonstrated, be devoted to the grace God has demonstrated.***

If you look there with me, the author of Hebrews goes on to say this, "For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods which have not benefited those devoted to them." And so it's here that we begin to understand the particular false teaching that these professing believers are being tempted to affirm. As we'll see next week, it's apparent that these Jewish believers are being coaxed by some within the Jewish community to believe that eating certain foods or celebrating certain Jewish festival meals would more fully strengthen and establish them in God's grace. Similar to what I mentioned earlier with the Judaizers. It's worth noting here that the language that the author of Hebrews uses actually echoes the words from a psalm and it's Psalm 104, verses 14 and 15.

Here's what the psalmist says there. "You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate that He may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart." And so what's interesting about his use of that language in our text is that this psalm was often pronounced before every Jewish meal. It was very common before eating for a benediction to be declared just in the same

way that we would bow our heads in prayer. And they would often say this, "Blessed are you, O Lord, king of the world, who brings forth bread from the earth." Again, quoting from Psalm 104. And so the author of Hebrews here seems to be using a play on words in order to drive home the point. It's certainly not to say that expressing our gratitude to God for His gracious provision is inappropriate, nothing could be further from the truth. But he's using this to declare that the saving grace of God is not found in the food we eat, nor is it found for that matter in anything else that we could possibly do. There is no righteous act or religious service that can replace or supplement the saving grace of God that has been demonstrated to us through the perfect person and perfect work of Jesus Christ alone, nothing.

The unmerited favor of God to sinners is only found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's found nowhere else. As one commentator said, "The grace that strengthens the heart flows from the death which Jesus tasted for us." So if we are going to follow, my friends, the pattern of true faith, then that is the grace of God we must be devoted to, the grace of God that is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And brothers and sisters, although you and I are probably not tempted to usurp the gospel of grace with a religious feast, we must be ever watchful and careful not to think of our own religious service as an addition to our justification, right. We can't be thinking that somehow, we're going to make God's face shine brighter upon us or His smile to grow ever larger because of acts of service. He smiles upon us because of what His Son has done in our place.

If we're truly trusting in Jesus Christ for our salvation, then it is by grace alone, through faith alone that we have been declared righteous by the Father. And there is nothing we can add and there is nothing that we can subtract from that declaration. Nothing we can do can change it because God, in His sovereignty and according to His grace, has declared it. But as it pertains to the relationship between pastors and those entrusted to their care, I want us to understand that this is the foundation for where it all begins. Amen. As we saw last week, we look back with love and adoration and respect for all of those who have poured into our lives and who have faithfully taught us the word of God. And we seek today and every day to imitate the faithfulness that we have seen demonstrated in their lives with Christ, the unchanging, immutable Christ as our ultimate example.

And as we've seen this evening, in order for us to support and encourage one another in following that pattern of true faith, it has to start with a mutual affirmation that we are living in the midst of a spiritual battle. This is not spiritual Disneyland; this is a spiritual battle. This is warfare that we find ourselves in. We have an enemy who seeks to steal our joy, steal our testimony and our rewards. We know that about him, but we also have a great shepherd who is powerful and faithful to save us and to lead us along the path of righteousness according to the truth of His word, by His grace and for His glory. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your word. I thank you for the faith that you have delivered to the saints, to your people who have been purchased by your Son. And I thank you for your spirit who dwells within us to work and to do your good pleasure, shaping and molding us into the image of

Christ and causing us to pursue hard after Christ and your holiness all the more. Lord, I pray as we are establishing the foundation in this series, that you'll unite our sights upon the calling that you have given to the church, and more specifically to our church, I pray, oh God, that you will bless Redeemer Bible Church by your grace, that you will help us to be more committed and more effective disciples of Jesus. Help us, O God, to demonstrate mutual submission in various ways, that we would seek to honor your authority for your glory, praise, and honor. And I pray all of this in the name of the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ, the Lord. Amen.

Hey, thanks for tuning in to our Redeemer YouTube channel. If this is helpful for you, please make sure that you like this video, smash the subscribe button, and hit that bell icon. It will help us reach more people with biblical truth. Thank you so much.