



Ministry of the Word  
**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2019**  
by Vincent Gannon

**Scripture:** Hebrews 13: 7-9

**Subject:** Part 46 – Leaders, Lord and Liberty

***<sup>7</sup> Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. <sup>9</sup> Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.***

Everyone forgets something at some point. There was a survey done in America to test how good people's memories are. It was interesting to find out the most common things that people forget according to this survey. Top of the list at 83% were names, 60% forget where something is... you know that special 'safe place'. 57% forget Telephone numbers and that's probably more now-a-days with the mobile phones that remember everything, so we don't have to! 53% forget words, 48% forget what was said, hopefully you will not be in that number this morning and 42% forget faces.

So it's no wonder that the writer of Hebrews once again calls on those who are reading these verses to remember. Remember our leaders in verse 7, Remember Jesus is the same always in verse 8 and remember the great liberty we have in Christ in verse 9. Remember in this sense, is not just '*don't forget*' but it means in the original Greek language, *keep it in your mind, be mindful*, when you think about these things, do so with fond memories.

## What are we to remember first? - Our Leaders (verse 7)

*Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.*

Here we are to remember those who rule over us, and in verse 17 of the same chapter, it goes on to say, be submissive to their teaching, while in verse 24 it continues to greet those who rule over you.

Rule in this context is in relation to those who lead you not those who police you. So what kind of people are these who rule, or lead? When Jesus told the Apostles to lead the people, He told them to lead as shepherds. This means that a Pastor's job is to lead, guide and guard. In the Middle east, the shepherd carried a staff to gently led the sheep as well as rescue them but the rod they carried was not used to beat the sheep with if they got out of line, or bleeped too much, but it was to beat the wolves away with. The Shepherd guides and guards his sheep. Jesus also told the Apostles to feed his sheep and lambs and so too should the Pastor lead with the word of God as this is the spiritual food to feed the flock of God. The Pastor's job is not games, smoking mirrors, fancy lights or entertainment. His job is not to tell you whatever you would like to hear or for however long, but it is to feed.

Hopefully this is what you find here because that is one of the central purposes of church, to be feed the Word of God. Do you recall what Chapter 4 verse 12 of Hebrews said about the Word of God? It's not the Word made manifest in Jesus but it's the Scriptures and it's the same in this context. The Word of God is sharper than a two edged sword. Because of its source, it is divine, it is living, it is powerful in its working, precise in its division between flesh and soul, it is critical in its analysis and it is discerning in relation to what is going on inside our

hearts and minds, of who we really are. It cuts whichever way it is wielded, either for correction or teaching because it is a two edge sword. It is the believer's foundation, the pilgrim's guide, the soldier's weapon, the saint's rule, the worker's study and the grower's food. This is why it is essential for the Christian not just to read it, but to study it, to internalise it, to allow it to change the way you think, behave and live. We can look to any book for information but we look to the bible for transformation. The Bible not only teaches you to be wise, but it keeps you safe, and if you practice it, it enables you to be Holy, walk in peace with all men and walk away from sin.

This is why when you come to church it shouldn't be just for a thought for the day, but a bible study, not just a little milk to wet the appetite but steak to fill your soul. If a leader refrains to give you God's word, tell you about the real love of God or is not following God's word, then they are not a leader according to God's standard. Therefore, you don't follow that leader. We must be careful who we follow, Paul was able to say,

*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*

in 1 Corinthians 11:1 and also in Philippians 3 verse 17-19 he said –

*Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. <sup>18</sup> For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: <sup>19</sup> whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.*

We should follow leaders not because they say so, but because of their actions, their lives, their teachings are all reflected in God's word alone. When we are asked to follow their faith, it is not a blind following. These leaders need to have the characteristics of Christ. Pastors will have to give an account to God for what they taught, and how they treated the flock as well as their example. If the flock

has disobeyed the word of God, then the sorrow is not his, It's theirs. We each are responsible for our own actions but also our own ministries.

One of the duties of a Pastor is to establish the template or pattern of faith (discipleship) for the people to follow, which is why it says here to consider the outcomes of their conduct. The *outcome of their conduct* is an expression which does not mean "*the glorious finale of their witness in martyrdom or death*" as many commentators have understood it, but rather, the 'sum total' or 'achievement' of their day-to-day behaviour, manifested in their whole life. 'The outcome' signifies the manifestation of a genuine Christian life, not preaching like saints and living like pagans. Their ultimate achievement should be to glorify God in their life and in their death, be it peaceful or not.

Matthew Henry wrote –

***“Remember them – their preaching, their prayer, their private counsel, their example. “Follow their faith; be steadfast in their profession of faith they preached to you, and labour after the grace of faith by which they lived and died so well. Consider the end of their conversation (Behaviour). How quickly, how comfortably, how joyfully, they finished their course!”***

***Remember those who made a difference in your life”***

We must remember that leaders are not just Pastors, or just leaders appointed to lead in the church but they can be individuals who were willing to teach both in word and in deed, spiritually and practically. Their daily lives are themselves a epistle read of all men, and telling them the same story. The recollection of these victorious witnesses who first led them in the way of faith, of their joyful living to the glory of God, and of their untroubled dying in the assured hope of

resurrection, should inspire them to follow their lead and to put away all unworthy thoughts of giving up the struggle. This is very applicable to us today. Warren Wiersbe wrote –

**‘Pastors come and go, but Christ remains the same’**

This brings us to verse 8 and Our Lord,

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.*

This affirmation has been a source of strength and encouragement to Christian believers in every generation. It has rightly been understood as expressing the unfailing reliability of him who is our Redeemer. F.F. Bruce Wrote –

*“His help, His grace, His power, His guidance are permanently at His people’s disposal; why then should they lose heart? Others serve their generation by the will of God and pass on; ‘but He’, because He abideth forever, hath His Priesthood unchangeable! He never needs to be replaced, and nothing can be added to His perfect work.”*

Warren Wierbse was right, Pastors can come and go, they can be replaced in a moment but not our unchanging Saviour. As William Barclay put it like this –

**“It is the nature of things that all earthly leaders must come and go. They have their day and they lead their generation, and they must pass the scene. They have their part in the drama of life, and the curtain comes down. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. His pre-eminence is permanent; His leadership is for-ever. And therein lies the secret of earthly leadership. The real leader is the man who is led himself by Jesus Christ The men who have made the Churches, the men who have led others on the upward way, the men who in every age and every generation have themselves been led by the eternal and unchanging Christ. He who walked the ways of Galilee is still as powerful as ever to smite evil and to love the sinner; and, even as then He chose twelve to be with Him, and then sent**

**them out to do His work, so now He is still seeking those who will bring men to Him, and Him to men.”**

Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever. This truth applies to all ages and generations and it is not a statement in isolation; it belongs to the context in which it appears, and accordingly we must first seek its significance within this particular setting. The point would seem to be that, in the case of the original recipients of this letter, he who yesterday was the source and object of the triumphant faith of those leaders who instructed them in the word of God is still today the same all-sufficient and all-powerful Redeemer and Lord, and will continue so for ever.

In other words the same Christ who was with them is with you, and will be with those who come after us, even to the end of the age. Yesterday he was with the fathers; today he is with you; and he will be with your posterity for evermore. In the past He was the perfect sacrifice, He lived, died and arose, today He is working everything out for you. Today He is making us acceptable before God, Jesus our Great High Priest meets our every need, He hears and answers prayer, He pours out His forgiveness, grace, mercy, love and hope. He saved us from the penalty of sin yesterday, He keeps from the power of sin today, and He'll remove us from the presence of sin one day and forever.

So when the author wrote in verse 5 "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" it is in effect inviting his readers to conclude that He who 'yesterday' did not fail to help Joshua, just as He promised, "today" He will help them, and will continue to help his faithful people 'for-ever' without end. As many commentators have pointed out, the contextual connection is not only with what preceded but also with what follows; for, if Jesus Christ is unchanging, so

also is the truth concerning Him, with the significance, that there can be no place for different and conflicting doctrines.

In Him we have the completion as well as the source of our faith (verse 2). The constancy of Jesus Christ, implied throughout, and now reaffirmed here, is inseparable from the constancy of his word. It was already announced in the opening section of the epistle Hebrews 1 in verses 10 to 12 which says –

*“You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. <sup>11</sup> They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; <sup>12</sup> Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail.”*

We see many disclosures of the unchanging nature of the Lord in the Old Testament. For example, Psalm 90 verses 2 to 4 speaks of the eternal existence of the Lord. The same revelation also appears in Psalm 102 verse 27 and 28. Psalm 103 verse 17 speaks of the Lord’s mercy as timeless. While in Isaiah 41 verse 4, we can also see this. Again in Isaiah 41 verse 6 and in Malachi 3 verse 6, the prophets declared the un-changeableness of the Lord. The Jews who read this epistle would have been aware of, if, not completely versed in these Old testament verses.

When it comes to the New Testament, we are all aware that Jesus said that He was the First and Last. Jesus told the religious leaders that he was in fact the Lord manifested in the flesh. Let’s see this in John 8 verse 56 to 59, please turn there. Here not only will we read of Jesus’ declaration to the religious leaders, but we will read of their reaction. They were very clear of what Jesus was stating, no doubt about that –

*Jesus answered, "If I honour Myself, My honour is nothing. It is My Father who honours Me, of whom you say that He is your God. <sup>55</sup> Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. <sup>56</sup> Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." <sup>57</sup> Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" <sup>58</sup> Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." <sup>59</sup> Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*

The deity of Christ has been attacked on so many levels by society throughout all generations and even in some so called Christian churches but they obviously never read or took seriously John 1 verse 1 to 17 and Revelation 1 verses 4,8, 11, 17 and 18. The un-changeableness of Christ is an immense blessing to the believer who knows, studies and rejoices in this truth. Yet there are countless millions who are not aware of this and even countless more that deny this truth. On the other hand we as believers rejoice in the fact that Jesus Christ of Scripture is the same Lord in Heaven. We rejoice in the amazing news, not just good news, that God stepped down from heaven, took on flesh and redeemed us. Now, Jesus is sitting on the right hand of the Father, ever the same as yesterday, today, and forever more.

In light all these verse in we come to verse 9

*Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited.*

It's time to connects the dots once again and think about why did the writer put this advice in now? Well what happens if a person does not have a Pastor who leads them in the word of God? What happens if they neglect the Word of God

for themselves? They can become susceptible to all kinds of strange, weird, even wicket things. For example, there is a book out presently that has been written by the leaders of a particular church called Bethel Church in the States called the Physics of Heaven. These leaders call themselves Christians, they can have what seems lovely thoughts for the day, even preach them it like it was a new thought and some have even performed what looks like miracles. They are very highly thought off by many, not just in their church but in many Christian circles. But when you begin to read this book, it would frighten you to your core, as it is basically encouraging people into new age, new thought practices so as to get closer to God, but one would have to ask, which god? It's not the God of Scripture. There are many who want to know God, and his voice.. but they want the magic formula so to achieve their want list and in their own time, they want a God who loves to serve them, but they do not want to serve Him, a servant God, not a Holy, All-knowing, Unchangeable, Saviour.

The scripture keeps warning us, we are not to be carried away by strange doctrines, but we are open to do so if neglect, ignore or reject God's Word. Anything, even it is small, if it is not keeping to the Word of God is dangerous. Small things grow big with enough of time, money and willingness. It is seriously dangerous to a person; spiritually, emotionally, mentally, financially and even physically. It can also be seriously dangerous to families and communities as well as churches. Yet we see now more than ever, the twisting of God's word to suit either the leaders or the church members. Never mind the twisting, how about what they don't teach them in many modern church, it's kind of like Junk food Christianity.. they are just told about God's love and that He'll get them through it or that God just wants the best for them, ask God and you'll get. There

are so many into cliché Christianity.. not into proper bible study and obeying God, regardless of the cost.

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. Bad doctrine results in bad living. 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. Yet such has been happening since the earliest days of the church. Paul was amazed that some of the Galatian believers were

***"so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ"*** (Galatians 1:6-7).

False teachers can be kind, likable, and perhaps even sincere. It is often difficult to believe they would teach anything false or misleading, but, we are to judge doctrine by God's Word, not by the appearance or personality of the person or even their academic qualifications. Even if it is an angel from heaven as we read of in Galatians 1 verse 8 and 9-

***"Even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed."***

Paul also warned the Ephesian elders of this danger in Acts 20 verses 29 to 30:

***"I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them"***

God knows that one of the greatest battles His church faces is purity of doctrine, because that is the basis of everything else. Every bad practice, every bad act, every bad standard of conduct, can be traced to falsehoods. The end result of the work of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, and of believers becoming unified in the faith and maturing in Christ, is that

***"we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming"*** (Ephesians 4:14).

As a body, and as individual Christians, we cannot be steadfast in Christ unless we are

***"constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine"*** (1 Timothy 4:6).

A church that is not sound in doctrine is unstable and vulnerable. People are so ready to believe in all kinds of things, for example the doctrine of Grace. They don't have the right understanding of it, many think that you can do whatever and just say sorry, they think that God is just so very gracious that he'll just forgive them and they can go back and do what they want. They are not taught about true repentance which is where we find Grace, and pursuing holiness. We know that if grace is not understood, it will dissolve into religion. If you do not believe in biblical grace in which we are established as believer, then the temptation is to be established by something else or by another means. It's not grace plus something else, like certain books, certain amount of money, going to certain churches, but it through faith by grace. If Jesus is the same as was established in verse 8, yesterday, today and forever, then it is Jesus who saves, it is Jesus who keep you and sustains you, Jesus is sufficient, and Jesus is our all in all. We need nothing more or nothing less, no-one else to save us and we are

to grow like Him, and run the race He has set before us, not add or take away from Him.

Here in verse 9 the writer uses food as an example which was to do with the food that was attached to ceremonies, to their traditions and the law. Being spiritually concerned about food is unnecessary under the New Testament. In fact, insisting on dietary regulations for religious reasons is against the gospel. Paul uses the harshest possible words to describe those who propagate such ideas in 1 Timothy 4:1-5

*But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For every- thing created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.*

It was difficult for the Jewish people to whom this letter was initially written to accept the truth Paul expresses in 1 Corinthians 8:8, that

*"food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat."*

We are saved through faith alone, not what we eat or don't eat. It is not what goes into your mouth that defiles you, it's what come out of your heart, mind and actions. God dealt with this very clearly with Peter in Acts 10 when God showed him through a vision, three times that food was not an issue.

The New Covenant in Jesus Christ has standards, very high standards, but they do not involve ceremonies, rituals, holy days, and formalities. They are internal,

not external. This is about legalism and why would anyone want to go back to that. Does the bible teach us that we should follow the law? Yes, but not the law of Moses but the law of Christ which is the law of love and the law of true liberty as described in James 1 verse 25

*But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

2 Corinthians 3:17 tells us -

*"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."*

Christ has rendered all external observances invalid and useless.

*"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).*

The Colossians were exhorted: *"let no one act as your judge in regard to food" (2:16).*

As Christians, our hearts are only strengthened by grace. The grace that strengthens the heart flows from the death which Jesus tasted for everyone (Hebrews 2 verse 9).

As we conclude, let's just take a moment to recap.

Verse 7 asked us to remember our leaders and in doing so we looked at what leaders we should be looking to, the kind of person they should be, their qualifications and their standards. But in judging them, and we are told to do so in the light of Scripture, do we hold to the same high standards ourselves? You may not be a pastor or a preacher or even a teacher but you are a 'leader' in the sense of a witness to the truth that you profess.

Verse 8 declared the Un-changeable Christ and the deity of Christ. Is our view of Christ as high as we expect others to have? Do we really know Him as the same Jesus we find in Scripture? Knowable, approachable, reliable, receivable, Holy, loving, , all-sufficient and all-powerful and unchangeable Redeemer and Lord?

Then we examined verse 9 in which we took time to examine the liberty we have in Christ. Freedom is very precious and often hard to handle unless we are walking in the truth, under the authority of God, that's not just talking but it is living it out in our lives authentically. If it's not real to us, how can we make it real to others?

Take the time to reflect upon the verses, because they will make a difference to you as a believer. We need to be alert to what is going on around us and what is being taught in the light of Scripture. We need to be discerning of who we listen to and who we follow in the light of Scripture. Jesus is the same, He never changes and neither does His teachings. When we read the bible the fact that Jesus is never changing is the ultimate joy and security we have in Christ especially in this ever changing and chaotic world. Cling to the Word of God.

*Amen.*