

Title: Show-Stopping Faith
Text: Hebrews 13.7-9
Theme: Theologically-informed relationships
Series: Hebrews # (I lost count)
Prop Stmt. The church is protected by pure doctrine and deep relationships built on it.
Aim: I aim to encourage people to grow close together based on our mutual relationship in Christ.

This text is a very personal look at some of the results of a church that really embraces the primacy of the gospel. The leaders in the church show the reality of the gospel by faithful living. (v.7) The leaders in the church promote the gospel by accurate theology (v.8). And the church protects the integrity of the gospel by guarding against fall doctrine. The church has to live faithfully upon the foundation of accurate theology. If you only promote good living, without the gospel, then your church will be full of moralism, behaviorism and works-righteousness. If your church has good theology but no application, then you will be full of Pharisees. That is why Paul told Timothy to watch your life and your doctrine. But, there is a third aspect and it is not always pleasant, but it is necessary and that is to guard against false teachers. (v.9)

Read Text:

Hebrews is full of deep doctrine. But God's goal is not for you to simply be able to intellectually grasp rich theology. His goal is for your heart to sing in amazement and for your actions, (which is your will on display) to joyfully obey him. How do you know if you really understand the gospel? Well, what splashes out when your cup gets bumped? So, I want you to see these commands as both the logical next step of the theology that we have learned about Christ and the gospel and the logical next step of what his plan is for this world, but I want you also to see these commands as tools that God uses to gauge the reality of our spiritual condition.

Now, let me give you an example. This past week I had a Heb. 13.1 opportunity. I was given the chance to show "brotherly love." I don't mean simply saying kind things and being nice, that's easy. I mean I had an opportunity to act. Right in front of me was a chance to serve someone and I did not want to. In my heart a war broke out. I knew what I should do, but I did not feel like it. As I stood there, I had to examine my heart and ask myself, why? What was it about this situation that gave me pause? Now, if it had been a situation that confronted me in public, well, I can promise you that I would have acted rather quickly because it would make me look good in front of you. But, this wasn't in public. And, except for my confessing to you right now, there is really no way that you would have ever found out about this unless I told you. But I am telling you because in that moment, I had to confront my own heart, my own self-centeredness, my own

desires, and the only thing powerful enough to confront, assault and dominate my sinful heart is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, please listen carefully and try to understand my heart in what I am about to say. We are so appreciative of the many gifted and talented people who serve in many different capacities here. But, the reality of the gospel is not seen in how talented the church is. The reality of the gospel is not seen in how wealthy we are or how organized we are or efficient we are. The reality of the gospel is not seen in how big we are, nor in how impressive the “church-show” is. The sad truth is that many people who claim to be Christians are willing to settle for a “church-show” and many people who claim to be leaders are willing to give it to them. But “church-show” is not church. The reality and depth of our church is not seen in how we behave in front of each other, but in how we live in the corners and nooks of life when we are confronted with situations that expose our hearts. Churches have no use for a show when they discover the power of the gospel. This past week, I did not need a show. Shows are designed to make someone feel good and I did not need that. I was dealing with an obstinate spirit and I had to preach the gospel to myself and remind myself of the excellencies of Christ, the sufficiency of his death, the triumph of his resurrection, the eternality of his kingdom and his calling upon my life to die to myself by taking up my cross daily. I needed theology and I needed to live it out!

The gospel is not a game and the church is not a show. That is why this text assumes honest-to-God relationships, and lives that are known, observed, and accountable. We are people of the gospel. That means that we fundamentally think and live differently than this world. Instead of living with ourselves and our desires at the center, we think and live with Christ and his kingdom at the center. Instead of trying to get rich so that we can live away from people and live “like we want” (which means not being dependent on anyone, not even God), the gospel changes us into people who want to connect with others because we are connected to God through Christ. Keep that in mind because this text, like a double-edged sword has two aspects to it. The commands in verse 7 are given directly to the church at large, but the commands assume certain characteristics on the part of the leadership.

Assumptions:

1. The church is governed by a plurality of elders. (based on leaders - plural and how this phrase and the one in v.17 describes the activity of what other New Testament passages call elders)
2. The elders are characterized by their handling of the Word of God (versus being managers, program directors, organizational gurus, etc.)
3. The elders are known by the congregation. Their testimonies, over the long haul bear testimony to the integrity of their message.

In short, the lives, families, testimonies and reputations of the elders stand as a unified testimony to the integrity of the gospel and the validity of Christ. That does not mean that the elders are perfect, not a chance! It means that they show, even in their imperfections, their love of Christ.

Later in this chapter we are going to come to verse 17. This verse threatens some of you. For some it is because you have seen abusive situations where leadership has been controlling, manipulative, self-serving, and cultic. For others of you, this command threatens you because you want to live as an island, as your own god because you think that you know more than anyone else. But verse 17 makes a great deal of sense when understood in light of verse 7 and it is supposed to be understood in light of verse 7. In fact, verses 7-19 form a paragraph that is introduced by verses 7-9, concluded with verses 17-19 and focuses upon 10-16. This morning we are looking on 7-9.

So, let's re-establish the context. These believers, (in Rome) have already endured one round of persecution and are about to face another. They desperately needed to realize that this world is not going to last, so they should not live for the moment, but live for the gospel. If, by following Christ, everything is lost, the truth is, nothing of eternal value can ever be lost. But, what is lost, is what is going to go up in smoke anyway. (rent vs. own) These believers were blessed with some leaders (elders) who put this on display for them and perhaps were martyred ("remember" implies they are no longer here). These believers are now exhorted to look at the testimony of these guys. Look at how they responded to persecution. Look at how they persevered under pressure. Look at what they believed. Look at the impact of their faithfulness for the gospel. And look at your own life. Yes, you can become weary from the persecution and chose to give up and give in. You can decide to blend in with the world because Christ is not worth the effort. Two weeks ago I told you the story of Polycarp. I have told you about Jon Huss, Savonarola, Wycliffe, Bunyan and Bonhoeffer. We would not be talking about these testimonies and finding encouragement from them if they had given up and quit.

1. **Following your leaders assumes that your leaders are worth following.** (7) (Faithful living)

The language of this verse calls the believers to carefully consider the entire life and testimony of the leaders. I believe that the leaders in view here were the ones who brought the gospel to Rome and whose preaching and teaching ministries helped establish the people in Christ. Now, some of these first generation believers, leaders, elders have died. They may have died from age or during the persecution, but the fact that they are dead gives people an opportunity to look back over their entire lives. What scandals have been uncovered? What secrets have been exposed? The commands (remember, consider and imitate) while given to the church are in reality a charge to the

leaders of the church because this command assumes that the closer that people get to you, the more they will be encouraged by your commitment to Christ.

There are a couple of things to point out: 1) Leadership in the church is so fundamentally different than leadership in so many other areas. Granted, there are certain leadership principles that overlap, but the world looks at leadership so differently than Christ does. I read about one man who said, (paraphrase) *“The reason why I have worked so hard to get so much money is so that I could simply pay people to do everything that I did not like.”* The leader of the company is on the highest floor away from the rest of the world. He owns a home, surrounded by gates, walls and security cameras. He travels alone, dines alone, vacations alone, stays aloof and is in need of no one. Leadership in the church is not like that. Good shepherds smell like sheep. The implication of this command is that the leadership of the church is not only engaged with the community of believers, but when people get close to the leaders, they see that the gospel is not a game. Leadership in the church does not see a separation between ones private life and public life. It is all coram deo (before the face of God). That is the emphasis of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 that outline the qualities of elders and church leadership. The only talent and giftedness that is required for an elder is that he be “able to teach.” There is nothing in there about being a visionary, a motivator, an inspirational leader, an executive or respected professional. The list is short on hype and long on internal character. He is “above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive....” Those who know him best, his family, trust him most. When he teaches, his children do not roll their eyes because earlier that day he was screaming at them in rage and now that he is around people from the church he acts like some saint. Faithful people of the gospel are the mark of a healthy church. When people ask, “how was church today?” what do you think they mean? But, is that the question that Christ would ask? I don’t think so. Church is never about how big of a production was made, how sweet the staging was, or other showy things like that. It is all about faithful proclamation of the Word and humble submission to it. That is why the emphasis of this verse is on the character of the leaders. But this verse is a command to the church at large. Look at this command: remember your leaders – that assumes that there are not only recognized, identifiable leaders, but this verse assumes church membership. Only by joining a church can you legitimately claim that the leaders of the church are your leaders. Apart from joining, the leaders remain the leaders of the church, but not your leaders, or the leaders of your church. Also, these commands to “consider” and “imitate” assume a closeness where the lives of the leaders can be observed and imitated. That is why TV church, internet church, and satellite church is not church.

The church is a family where our lives are involved with each other; which impacts how we ought to view discipleship. Discipleship is not primarily a class

we attend where we learn information. Discipleship is the process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ through the influence and examples of gospel-loving people who are the church. That is why hospitality is so very important for the church. The reality of the church is not determined by the Sunday morning show, but by the Monday night lives. As we choose to open up our lives to each other, to encourage each other, and pray with each other, we will put on display a show-stopping faith.

Note: Emphasis is on content, not just personality
Emphasis is on outcome, not just program.
Emphasis is on relationships, not just habit (going through the motions)
Emphasis is on reality, not just hype.

2. **Following your leaders means that the leaders are preaching Christ.**
(8) (Faithful Preaching)

Verse 8 is a confessional statement that functioned like a creed. In the previous verse the readers were commanded to remember the leaders who spoke to you the Word of God. Now, what did they speak? They preached doctrine. They spelled it out boldly and plainly. Here is what we believe! And an example of that and a summary of that are found in this verse. (8)

This becomes even clearer when we look at the next verse that warns against false doctrine. Now, false doctrine does not arise in the church with the label of false doctrine. It comes in “innocently” in the sense that some of the people who bring it in do not realize it. It is usually characterized by that which fails to focus upon the centrality of Christ and the gospel. It is easy to assume the gospel. “Oh you already know this” – sort of thing. When you assume the gospel, it isn’t long before you confuse the gospel and then you lose the gospel. It all starts when the church fails to emphasize the centrality of Christ and when the church fails to preach doctrinally about Christ. Here in this verse we have some rich theology about Christ. This verse speaks to the unchanging character and nature of Christ. The theological term is “immutability.”

This statement boldly proclaims the deity of Christ. He is none other than the eternal God who has always been what he will always be. This is not only good doctrine, but good doctrine is fuel for the soul. Do you see how this truth would be so encouraging to these readers? The initial excitement that surrounded the founding of the church had given away to the tough grind that comes with living under the heavy hand of an oppressive regime. It was tough to live in a country where the gospel is hated. So, to know that Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever would be so needful and encouraging to these people. When you fail to preach Christ, you fail to give people the fuel for their souls.

It is very common for leaders of various religions to attempt to find common ground. One large effort in recent years attempted to find common ground

between Muslims and Christians. Now, before you can have that conversation, you have to define what a Christian is. Christendom is full of non-Christians. They are non-Christians because they deny the core doctrines of the gospel, like the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement for sin by the death of Christ on the cross, his bodily resurrection, and that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, etc. So, some of these non-Christians within Christendom wrote a joint statement with some leaders within the Islamic religion where both sides promised to be peaceable and kind to each other because the God we worship is love.

Now, the idea of being kind and peaceable to one another is a no-brainer! The Scriptures are clear on that. We are to love, even our enemies. But, to say that the basis of that is because of the God we worship is love, assumes that what we call God is the same being. In other words, the entire agreement is built on the premise that when a Muslim refers to God, that because he views God as being the God of Abraham, that when we refer to God, that we are all referring to the same God. That is popular. That is assumed. That is accepted by many and it is dead wrong!!

The God of the Bible is a God of love. Look at 1 John 4.7-11

Who is this God of love? He is not only the Father; He is the Son and the Spirit. And the love of the Father cannot be embraced, nor understood without understanding and embracing the fact that Christ was sent by the Father to live in our place and to become credited with our sin and then die on the cross as not only the payment for our sin but he died as the sacrifice that satisfied the wrath of God against the sinfulness of our sin. If you reject that truth, which Islam does and which a great deal of Christendom does as well, then you do not understand the love of God. The love of God is put on display through Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. That is another reason why His love endures forever.

You cannot find common ground with Muslims regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ. Without that, you have no doctrine of the love of God and no doctrine of God. So, while I admire the desire to have peaceable conversations, you cannot build peace on a foundation of heresy. And here is where this leads. Whenever you downplay the centrality of Christ, you will eventually deny the doctrine of grace. (9)

3. **Protecting the Flock is a group effort** (9)

(Guarding against those whose life does not match the gospel and guarding against those whose gospel does not match the Gospel.)

When grace is not preached, then something else will replace it. People are always coming up with some new fad, or new secret to spiritual success. Here,

pray this prayer 3x a day. Repeat this mantra, eat this food, buy this water filter, take these vitamins, or stay away from meat. Of course, in this context, the Hebrews were tempted to view certain meats as being unclean. The idea is that if you eat kosher food then you are eating the foods that God designed for the body.

Stay away from that non-sense. Do not be led away. Like a powerful river current will sweep away a person who is not grounded, false teaching will sweep people away to destruction. Do you see what the writer is talking about? There were some people who, instead of preaching Christ, had replaced Christ with food or some other work or performance to earn God's favor. Your heart, your soul, your being will not be sustained in times of persecution because of a special diet, but because your soul has fed on the unchanging grace of God made manifest in Christ and his gospel. Anything that threatens or undermines the Bible's teaching on grace is a full frontal assault upon the gospel and must be rejected. Now, I love to eat M&M's. But, if somehow it became a fad that eating M&M's was the inside track for spiritual growth, I would stop! Food does not count.

This warning in verse 9 is not just to the leaders (though this appears elsewhere in the Bible). This warning is for the entire church. Do not let people gain a foothold in the church by promoting anything that will take our attention away from Christ and what the Bible teaches about grace. Nothing else satisfies, because nothing else can save. Nothing else will fortify your soul with joy in the midst of pressure! If you're facing cancer or any other affliction, your greatest challenge is not the affliction, it's unbelief. The greatest weapon you have to defeat unbelief is the gospel!