

EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW
HEBREWS 13:7-8

SEPTEMBER 23, 2012

“There are two things that will change your life,” a college roommate once told me “the books you read and the people you meet.” Looking back over the years, I can honestly say that truer words were never spoken. Authors such as J. I. Packer and John Stott have had a profound influence in my understanding of the Christian life and ministry, and of the Scriptures in general. And my understanding of the Gospel was forever changed by the faithful preaching of James Montgomery Boice during my years at Tenth Presbyterian Church. Through his weekly exposition of the Gospel of John, I came to embrace the glorious doctrines of sovereign grace.

Likewise, the recipients of this letter were so blessed. They had faithful leaders who mentored them in the faith and then modeled that faith in their midst. They are mentioned three times in this chapter. In verse 17 the Hebrews are told to obey them; in verse 24 they are asked to convey the writer’s greetings to them; but here they are exhorted to remember them (v.7).

There is something about how faithful leaders live – and die – that is designed to be a source of encouragement and strength for us all. All the more so when we consider that the substance of their faith was the unchanging Christ, who is just as available to us today: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (v. 8). This morning we want to look at both the exhortation (v. 7) and the word of encouragement (v. 8).

1. The Three-Fold Exhortation: “Remember . . . Consider . . . Imitate . . .” (v. 7)

- “*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God . . .*” The leaders mentioned in vv. 17 and 24 are clearly the present leaders of the fellowship. But the leaders spoken of here are the original leaders – now presumably with the Lord – hence the exhortation to “remember” them. These are the ones who planted and nurtured this fellowship by their faithful ministry of the Word of God. Unquestionably, our author is highlighting one of the primary roles of all Biblical leaders – that of preaching and teaching God’s Word.
- “*Consider the outcome of their life . . .*” Having completed their faithful service, the whole course of their lives now lies before their followers to review. Both by precept and example they have demonstrated “the right path to tread; being dead they yet speak, and the record of their faith is still alive in the memory of those who know them” (F. F. Bruce, Hebrews). Many of us today are blessed to have had the opportunity to do this very same thing.
- “*Imitate their faith.*” Theirs was a persevering faith; they had run the race unwavering to the end. They were no doubt characterized by joyful living in the face of adversity and untroubled dying in the hope of glory. This faithful testimony should inspire all to follow their lead and to resist all temptations of giving up the struggle. In the midst of so much contemporary confusion about the nature and role of Christian leadership, we need to know and follow leaders like these (Cf. Heb. 6:9-12)!

2. The Source of Encouragement: “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever” (v. 8). This is one of the most affirming truths concerning the unchanging nature of our Savior found anywhere in Scripture. Yet it does not stand in isolation; it belongs to the context in which it appears. In light of the preceding verse, it’s meaning takes on a special significance. The point would seem to be that the very one who *yesterday* was the source of the triumphant faith of those who instructed these readers in the Word of God, is still *today* the same all-sufficient Savior, and will continue so *forever*. By His enabling grace, what others have done in the past we also can do (Cf. Phil. 4:13).

One of the most attractive, magnetic characteristics of the Christ is His consistency. When you need Him, He is there. He’s there even when you don’t think you need Him! You’re never too early or too late. He’s never in a lousy mood nor will He ask you to call back during office hours. He’s available . . .because He’s immutable. With Him, there’s no new year or old year. He is “the same,” regardless. (Chuck Swindoll, Seasons of Life)

With this understanding, we can see a connection with the promise cited in the previous passage: “I will never leave you or forsake you” (v. 5). In effect, our author is inviting us to believe that the one who helped Joshua *yesterday*, (as He had promised, Cf. Josh. 1:5), helps and strengthens us *today*, and will continue to help and strengthen all His faithful people *forever*. As the hymn writer of another generation reminds us: “We have an anchor that keeps the soul”

Will your anchor hold
in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold
their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift
and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift,
or firm remain?
We have an anchor
that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure
while the billows roll,
Fastened to the Rock
which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep
in the Savior’s love.
(Priscilla Jane Owens, 1882)