

Steady Faith
Hebrews 13:7-14

In my early years of being a believer I attended a few youth retreats.

The go to place for my youth group was Muskoka Bible Camp and we usually went during the winter months.

Those were weekends filled with fun activities, good food, and times of worship.

I appreciated my time at those weekends and the focus that was placed on the gospel and encouraging young people to commit their lives to Jesus, but after a few times I also began to see it a little bit like being setup for disappointment.

It was at those events that I first witnessed what I would describe as roller coaster Christian experiences.

What I mean by that is people, usually during the group sessions, would have a conversion experience.

It might happen while the band was playing, or it might happen when the speaker was teaching.

Someone would tell the group about their need for Jesus and call people to the front and people would go down confess their sin and accept the LORD.

Good right? I remember people going up that I never thought would, it was great!

That is the top of the roller coaster. Everyone is excited, overjoyed, and thankful.

What believer wouldn't be happy at such a sight?

It was all good and then we came home and went back to regular life.

In almost every instance where people had made radical commitments to the LORD, once they got back into normal life their commitment faded.

That is the bottom of the roller coaster. It was incredibly disappointing to see that happen.

With some people I saw it multiple times. People come to the front weeping and repenting and then walking away again.

Those experiences gave me a great distaste for roller coaster Christianity.

Now please don't misunderstand. I am not saying that every altar call experience is worthless.

I have no doubt that there are several believers who can trace back their moment of conversion to something like that, but what I am saying is the reality of faith

cannot be determined in a momentary emotional experience.

The reality of faith is determined by long obedience and a steady faith.

I am strongly convinced that the Christian life should look much more like a road leading up a mountain instead of a roller coaster.

Yes there are twists and turns. Yes there are even some ups and downs, but generally speaking on a mountain road you are slowly heading up.

[That is one of the major goals of the book of Hebrews. It is to keep believers on the road of faith. It is to encourage steady progress in the lives of followers of Christ. In our text this morning **Hebrews 13:7-14** the LORD shows us some important lessons for making our lives look less like a roller coaster and more like life of steady faith. Whether we have been a believer for fifteen minutes or a hundred years, we should be concerned with building a consistent and steadfast faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These verses give us at least three helpful lessons toward that end. Number one is to...]

Point #1 – Look to the example of those who have trusted God. (Verses 7-8)

The LORD has graciously provided us with many examples of those who seek to live in obedience to Him. We should examine and think on lives like this so that we might clearly see the value in God's ways.

Let's look together at the first half of verse seven and think carefully about who exactly we are being pointed to here. (Verse 7a).

As the writer is encouraging believers to remain faithful to Jesus he encourages us to bring to mind some people.

From the way they are described, he is likely referring to elders sometimes called overseers, and sometimes called pastors.

These are people entrusted with the spiritual leadership of the church.

One of the primary roles of the elder/pastor is to teach the word of God.

Implied in that statement is that these leaders are speaking the word of God correctly.

They are not thinking up their own ideas, they are not trying to twist it to say what they want, but they are faithfully giving it to you as it is.

If a preacher reads from the bible and then closes it for the rest of the sermon, that should concern you.

If he spends most of his time trying to tell you why it doesn't say what it plainly says, that should concern you.

Someone who is speaking the word of God is someone who is constantly pointing you to the text, trying to show you what it really means, and trying to get you to see it for yourself.

Every ounce of authority in the pulpit must come from the text and NOT the preacher.

Bring people like that to mind it says.

Secondly, he writes this in the second half of the verse (**Verse 7b**).

It is not enough to speak the word of God, the preacher must also live the word of God.

Of course it goes without saying, that no one is perfect. We all need grace.

However, it is equally true that God's ways are good and seeking to obey them even though we fall short is going to make a positive difference in a person's life.

This is why the Bible lists qualifications for an elder/pastor like faithful husband, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, not given to drunkenness, gentle, not a lover of money, and a stable family life.

As I have often said, the preacher is the first listener of the sermon and if that is true you can see it in his life.

When it says here, "consider the outcome of their way of life" that suggests a long period of faithfulness, it may even indicate that their life is over.

In other words this is a legacy of a life lived in faith that has produced the good and lasting fruit of godliness.

[In some ways it is like being a piano teacher. To be a good piano teacher you need to know somethings about music theory. Which notes correspond to which keys, how long the notes last for, when the music is telling you to press the pedals, and I'm sure there are other things. What if a piano teacher learned all that stuff but never bothered to actually play the piano, what if they never ever practised? Would you want them as your teacher? Likely not! A good teacher is someone who can demonstrate the goodness of what they are teaching.]

It is the same in the church. Those teaching God's word display the goodness of what they are teaching in their life and he says to us, "imitate" that.

Why? **Verse 8** has the answer.

Jesus has not changed in the past, He is the same in the present, and He will always be the same in the future.

That means that the good fruit of believing God that was enjoyed by faithful believers in the past is just as available to us today as it ever was and it will continue to be so in the future.

Maybe you have been driving your life into the ditch. Maybe your life has not been lining up with the word of God and you are feeling the effects of that.

That can change. That can start to change today.

Look to the lives of faithful people. People who have lived many years in steady faith and imitate that.

[Dramatic displays of tears and lament, commitments to repentance and faithfulness can be good things, but if they do not produce long term faithfulness, then they are of no real value. Roller coaster Christianity is not good. One way to avoid it is to follow the examples of believers who have trusted God over the long haul and have the evidence in their life to show it. Here is a second important lesson about building a steady faith. To avoid the roller coaster we need to...]

Point #2 – Be firmly established in Biblical truth.

There is simply no substitute for having God’s word saturate our hearts and minds when it comes to keeping us from drifting into all kinds of error. We need to...

This is the point of the command at the beginning of verse 9.

The word translated ‘strange’ can mean strange in the sense of ‘unfamiliar’ or ‘strange’ in the sense of foreign.

Unfamiliar may or may not be trouble depending on the situation.

To a newer Christian there are many things that are unfamiliar as he/she begins learning about God’s word.

New in that sense does not necessarily indicate some kind of error.

He has to be meaning something other than that in this text.

From earlier in the book we know that these believers have been taught on a solid biblical foundation.

So by strange here he must mean something that is different on contrary to that foundation.

It has been a common theme throughout church history for people to come along and say, “I have a new word from the LORD” that is different from the Bible.

It has been a common theme throughout the history of the church to try and isolate people from the Scriptures in favour of human authority.

Don’t be carried away by that.

While I admit there will always be differences between bible believing Christians on secondary issues, the Bible is absolutely clear on every doctrine related to our eternal salvation.

If you simply pick up a bible and read it with the simple principle of accepting what is written as the word of God you will come to a right understanding of how to be right with God.

Don't be carried away from that!

The rest of **verse 9 and 10** give us a sense of the situation that was going on in the church that first received this letter.

What was likely happening is that people made their way into the church saying something along the lines of "Yes of course Jesus' death and resurrection is important, but you need to add to that the ceremony of the Law of Moses."

You see several of the Old Testament sacrifices included the worshipper and the priest eating part of the cooked meat from the altar.

It is a picture of fellowship and belonging to God and it looks as though someone was teaching these believers that without those meals you don't belong to God.

The exhortation here is don't be carried away from grace.

Don't walk away from the sufficiency of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The fellowship and standing a believer in Jesus Christ has with almighty God depends completely on the infinite worth of our LORD dying in our place.

We don't add anything to that.

Commentators think that the 'altar' that "we have" according to verse 10 is the cross of Jesus.

There is some debate about exactly what he has in mind when he is talking about 'eating' at the altar' but it for sure means that we belong.

The point being if you try and go backwards to have fellowship with God by means of animal sacrifices and ceremonial food, then you have no place at the cross.

At the time this was written, the temple in Jerusalem was likely still standing which means there were priests offering sacrifices and eating ceremonial food along with those who offered the sacrifices.

Doing that is a rejection of cross. Don't do that. Instead have your heart "strengthened by grace."

Trust in the sufficiency of the LORD Jesus.

Know and believe the gospel, don't be carried away from the truth.

[Since this word translated "carried away" can mean driven along by the wind I couldn't help but think of sailing. If you have a raft with no keel and no rudder and you put a sail up you will go wherever the wind blows you. But if you have a boat with a keel and a rudder you can drive that boat to a destination regardless of what direction the wind is blowing.]

What are you? A raft blown about by the wind in all kinds of directions, or do have the rudder and the keel of the word of God to keep you on course?

I am constantly amazed at how people flock to this new teaching and that new teaching.

I am amazed at how godless men can fill thousands of seats week in and week out.

I am amazed at how easily people get carried away by all kinds of strange teaching.

[It happens because they are not firmly established in Biblical truth. I have long said that the test of a faithful ministry is what happens after the pastor is gone. Far too often churches go with the whims of whoever is in the pulpit. We need churches who will throw men of strange teaching out on their ear. We need people in the pew to love the riches of the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ. That is absolutely essential to steady faith. Here is a third thing that steady faith requires. If we would be people who avoid the roller coaster we need to...]

Point #3 – Embrace the shame of the cross looking ahead to eternity. (Verses 11-14)

Salvation in Christ will always be foolish and offensive to the unbelieving world; therefore, to persevere in this great salvation we must expect to be ridiculed and looked down upon. Such experiences testify to the genuine nature of our faith and therefore the certainty of our future joy. We must...

We already know that we cannot go back to Old Testament sacrifice and ceremony, but at the same time we must see how those things point to the LORD.

He shows us in **verses 11-12** how some of the Old Testament sacrifices do that for us. Commentators think the writer of Hebrews likely has the Day of Atonement in mind here.

While the blood of the animals was sprinkled in the tabernacle and at the altar, the bodies of the animals were burned outside of the camp.

The picture that we are to see in this is the blood making things holy and the separation of the unclean things from the camp or later the city.

He then relates that picture to what Jesus did.

Remember, Jesus after He was condemned to die by Pilate was forced to carry His cross outside of the city.

Now look again at verse 12. Why does it say that Jesus died outside the city? “To make the people holy through his own blood.”

As we have seen time and again in the book of Hebrews earthly things are often pictures of greater realities.

The city of Jerusalem represents the home of the people of God.

Jesus dying outside the city is a picture of Him removing or carrying the sins of God’s people away from them.

That’s how we are ‘made holy.’

If you have read what the Bible says about that event, then you know it was utter humiliation for the LORD.

Stripped of His clothing, insulted by those passing by, mocked by those who nailed Him to the cross and even those who were crucified along with Him.

The King of Glory treated with absolute contempt and disgrace.

That is what Calvary represents. It represents suffering and shame.

And that is where we have to go to be saved. We must cling to that cross by faith no matter what other people may think or say. (**Verse 13-14**)

The gospel says to people, ‘You are wretched and rebellious and you deserve God’s eternal wrath.’

How many people like to hear that?

The gospel says, ‘You can’t do anything to save yourself, all of your goodness is disgusting in God’s sight.’

How do people take that?

Then you say, “Your only hope is Jesus Christ Who died in your place and rose up from the grave, and who lives and reigns forever.”

When Jewish people and Romans heard that in the ancient world they thought it was offensive and foolish.

Many people today still think the same.

To be a Christian may mean to be thought of as a fool.

To be a Christian may mean being the object of ridicule from unbelievers.

It may mean being the object of their anger.

I may mean missing out on some stuff this world has to offer.

Why go there then? Because the cross invites us to look beyond the things of this world to things that last forever. That is how Jesus endured the cross (**Hebrews 12:2**) and that is where He points us to look as well.

[I wonder how many times in the early church people from the outside looking in thought how foolish Christians were and mocked and made fun of them. Just think of Christians being killed in Roman arenas. The crowds jeering and delighting in them facing animals, or gladiators, or some other terrible fate. How many people must have thought they were wasting their lives? All they had to do was say, “Caesar is Lord”, but instead they kept clinging to the cross saying “Jesus is Lord.” They did that because by God’s grace they were able to look ahead and see the glory of their redemption and therefore embrace the shame of the cross.]

If you and I want to avoid a roller coaster kind of Christianity we need to do the same.

True we may never suffer to that same degree, but we cannot be persuaded by those who think we are fools.

We cannot value earthly things above eternal things, instead as Jim Elliot once put it, “We must lose what we cannot keep to gain that which we cannot lose.”

Think about your life for a moment. What does your faith look like?

Is it a roller coaster? Is it constant ups and downs?

Or is it a steady and sure faith.

That is what we ought to be striving for and we get there, at least in part, by following the example of those who have trusted the Lord and have demonstrated the goodness of obeying His Word, we get there by being firmly established in Biblical truth, and we get by embracing the shame of the cross as we look ahead to eternity.

May God encourage us in these things so that He might be most glorified in us.