

# Hebrews 13

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Date: 30 April 2023

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[ 0 : 00 ] In some very important ways, Jesus Christ is not the same today as he was yesterday.! Think about in his incarnation when he took on flesh.! He became one of us.

So Augustine said, you know this quote, Without ceasing to be what he eternally was, he became what he eternally was not. Without ceasing to be what he eternally was, he became what he eternally was not.

He has become one of us. And the word that was with God, John 1, the word that was face to face with God, that word was made flesh, took on skin and bones, and dwelt amongst us.

And we have beheld his glory, the glory of the one and only, of the Father, full of grace and truth. And after his earthly career, after he was raised from the dead and he appeared over 40 days, he ascended on the clouds bodily to heaven.

And so that tonight, there is a man in the glory, isn't there? At the right hand of the majesty on high, he seats the risen and ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 1 : 13 ] And it's a man. He didn't discard his humanity when he ascended to heaven. He didn't get rid of his humanity like a set of clothes that were shed as he went up on the cloud.

When he returned to his Father's presence, he returned as a man where he sits tonight. I love the words of Martin Luther. He said something like this, I live as though Christ died yesterday, rose again today, and is coming back again tomorrow.

Christ died yesterday. He bled and died on the cross. He suffered abject shame and pain and humiliation. Yesterday, he died on the cross. Today, he is alive from the dead.

And we proclaim him as his church in word and in sacrament. But tomorrow, he's coming back again. And with all his holy angels unto salvation to all who look for him.

So it's not true to say that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So clearly, you can't take this verse just on its own, pull it out as a kind of Chinese cookie verse, whatever it is, and apply it in an unqualified, unlimited way.

[ 2 : 27 ] And so we need to put it into its context because it is a wonderful verse. And there are three things that it teaches us about the unchangeableness of Jesus Christ.

What does this verse really mean that you're going to learn this week? The first thing I want to say is this. Jesus Christ is always the same yesterday, today, and forever in his own person.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever in his own person. The context is interesting, isn't it? So look with me at verse 7. Look at verse 7. Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. And then compare it with verse 17. Obey your leaders and submit to them. For they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that will be of no advantage to you. And so verse 7, we're told to remember. Remember your leaders, we spoke the word of God to you.

[ 3 : 26 ] And then verse 17, we're told to obey the leaders and to submit to their authority. So the context is really interesting, isn't it? The context is about leadership. Leadership that is past and present.

Verse 7, it's present leaders that they're told to obey. Verse 17, it's present leaders. Sorry, verse 17, it's present leaders.

Verse 7, it's past leaders. Now who are they? Well, we don't know, do we? We don't know exactly who they are, but they were probably people like Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Probably people like James, the brother of our Lord.

And the leader of the Jerusalem church who was beheaded. Remember those leaders who spoke faithfully the word of God to you. And so whenever there's new leadership within a church, or a change of leadership, there's a tendency, isn't there, I think, to compare.

I think that's a great tendency in London churches, to kind of compare your church leaders, to kind of play top trumps with them. And there's a tendency, certainly, to romanticize leaders of the past. [ 4 : 34 ] To idealize the heroes of the faith, those who've gone by. To put those men on pedestals and venerate their memories. To look back with rose-colored spectacles.

I think I've used this quote in the past with you about the pastor, the minister. If he visits his flock, he's nosy. If he doesn't, he's a snob. If he preaches longer than ten minutes, it's too long.

If he preaches less than ten minutes, he can't have prepared his sermon. If he runs a car, he's worldly. If he doesn't, he's always late for appointments. If he tells a joke, he's flippant.

If he doesn't, he's far too serious. If he starts the sermon on time, his watch must be fast. If he's a minute late, he's keeping the congregation waiting. If he takes a holiday, he's never in the parish.

If he doesn't, he's a stick in the mud. If he runs a bazaar or a gala, he's money mad. If he doesn't, there's no social life in this parish. If he has the church painted and decorated, he's extravagant.

[ 5 : 37 ] And if he doesn't, the church is shabby. If he's young, he's inexperienced. If he's getting old, he ought to retire. But when he dies, there's never been anyone like him. And the tendency is, isn't it, and I find this in my own heart, I make too much of men and too little of the Lord Jesus.

So remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you, and consider the outcome of their way of life. Do remember them. Imitate their faith. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Leadership is really in vogue, isn't it? There's lots of good things about that. There are many books, many conferences in leadership. Sometimes feels there's more chiefs than Indians around. And sometimes Christian books on leadership get more bizarre and more eccentric, the more original.

And the more people seem prepared to follow. But I think we need to say this, don't we? Originality in the leadership of the church is not a mark of Christian leadership.

True Christian leaders don't strike out by themselves. True Christian leaders, I don't think, are great innovators.

[ 6 : 57 ] They keep in line with Jesus Christ. They follow well-worn paths of those who've gone before. And I think tragically, in conservative evangelicalism, which is a bit broader than us, pastoral practice over the past 13 years has kind of gone away from the well-worn paths of Christian leadership and pastoral practice, and we're reaping the fruit of that.

And so when you look for elders, don't look for original minds. And if you're going to look for a leader in Christ's church and follow a leader, you better make sure he knows where he's going.

And you better make sure that they know where they're going in as much as they follow Jesus Christ. And the writer of the Hebrews is saying, you follow them, imitate their way of life, their faith, because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, forever.

And don't follow them blindly. Follow them in as much as they follow Christ. Because in the end, he is the only king.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only head of his church. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only leader it is safe to follow. Always himself.

[ 8 : 14 ] Apparently, you can translate it like this, Jesus Christ always himself. Always himself. And that can be said of very few people, isn't it? Very few of us. As we grow older, as we change, we see that with people, don't we?

In your workplace, new young people, full of zeal and idealistic. And that is the more cynical people who've been through it all. Been around a bit. It's got to them.

They become cynical. There are very few people who are always the same, aren't they? Those kind of people are like gold when you meet them. We know, don't we, as a church family, circumstances change us.

Life situations change us. Some of us are affected by the weather. Some of us have been greatly affected by hard things. We're affected by all sorts of things, but Jesus Christ is always himself, always the same.

Earth did not change him. Heaven has not gone to his head. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He's unchangeably the same. He's always himself.

[ 9 : 27 ] The arm of flesh, it will fail us. The best of men, the best of leaders, are men at best, and they have feet of clay, but Jesus Christ is always himself. He's always the same. He's unchangeably the same in his own person, but secondly, he's unchangeably the same in his message, in the message that we preach.

Again, look at the context. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Don't be led away, verse 8, verse 9, by diverse and strange teachings.

You see, Jesus Christ is not only the leader that we are to follow, but he's also the message that we are to proclaim. Him we proclaim, Paul says in Colossians.

The word that the New Testament spoke was all about him. And that message, which you've heard from your leaders, was the same. That message about Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Error changes. Can you notice that in verse 9? Truth is singular. So, verse 7, they spoke to you, the word of God, that's singular.

[ 10 : 40 ] But in verse 9, do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings. That's plural. Because once you move away from the faith that's been delivered to all the saints, you have to keep reinventing the gospel for every generation.

One of the hallmarks of God in the Bible is that nothing needs changing. Nothing needs to be revised or adapted or rewritten.

Take, for example, I don't want to get into, well, I don't mind getting into controversy about it, but take into the creation account, Genesis 1 and 2. It stands for all time. It can be understood in any age, the plain reading of the text.

It does not have to be rewritten and revised for the 21st century. It can be understood by a caveman, it can be understood by an Oxford scientist.

It's one of the hallmarks of God, but error is constantly being rewritten and revised and updated. John Stott, in his lovely little book and the contemporary Christian, identifies 13 different interpretations of Christ.

[ 11 : 49 ] 13 different attempts of the church to fashion Christ. And we could probably come up with some more. It's been a few years since this was written. So you have Jesus the ascetic, the pale Galilean, the cosmic Christ, the teacher of common sense, the clown of God's spell, the star of Jesus Christ, superstar, the revolutionary, the socialist, the mystic, the magician, the carpenter, the management consultant.

And you name it, people are always trying to reinvent Jesus and adapt him for their own age, but he is not. Jesus Christ is always the same. The message which you heard and read in your scriptures is the message that we are to preach today.

It's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And Jesus never needs updating or revising. He's always new, if I can put it like that. Not in the novelty kind of way, but in the sense of freshness. It's why it is, isn't it, a wonderful thing. It's a great, great privilege to be a preacher of the gospel because the core thing is to introduce people to the Lord Jesus Christ.

To bring people to Christ. I can't think of anything better. There's nothing more reviving than when that happens. And when you see someone meeting Christ for the first time during the preaching of the gospel, Jesus is always new, not novel, but always fresh, always relevant.

[ 13 : 21 ] Just look at the direction of this exhortation. I wanted to do a bit more work on this, but I haven't enough time really, but see if you can stick with me here.

What happens in the church today, it's the exact opposite of what Paul is, of what the writer to the Hebrews is kind of exhorting us here.

So he's saying, remember your elders, who were these leaders? Well, they were the apostles of Jesus Christ. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Remember them who first spoke the word of God to you.

Now what do we have in today? We have the reverse of that, don't you? It's not we who remember people like Peter and what people like Paul preached about Christ.

Today, they have to remember what we have discovered. And they have to remember what we have suddenly discovered. So to make it even more controversial, let's talk about women's ordination for a minute.

[ 14 : 23 ] The ordination of women to the office of elder and minister. What is that about? It's about the authority of the Bible. And it basically comes down to this. Are we going to follow the New Testament?

Are we going to remember what the apostle Paul spoke to us and what Paul wrote? Or does he have to remember? Does he have to remember what we think today? Does he have to follow our view on things?

And so do we follow Paul in the first century AD or does he have to fit in with our modern culture and our political correctness? so that what he wrote then needs to be reinterpreted in the light of today.

People say it has to be contextualized. It has to be lifted out of the first century setting and dropped into the 21st century. And the amazing thing is that when you do that, Paul is made to teach the exact opposite of what he actually taught.

And he agrees with our culture, amazingly. And that's not where we're to stand. We stand under the authority of the word of God, under the authority of the apostles and of our Lord Jesus Christ and we're to remember those who spoke the word of God to us.

[ 15 : 39 ] They don't have to remember what we think. We have to remember what they have spoken, what they have said. That kind of twisted thinking, if you go down that track, what it does is it takes the Bible away from you altogether.

So remember, remember that word that has been spoken to you. We are Protestants. We don't use that very well. It would be a good word to kind of actually reuse.

But I used to think that means someone who protests. But the word is from the word protestare, which means to confess. It means to attest to something.

It means to proclaim. To be a Protestant is to proclaim Jesus Christ. It's the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

He is unchangeably the same in his person. He's unchangeably the same in his message. And he's unchangeably the same in the message that we preach. And thirdly and lastly, he's unchangeably the same to his people.

[ 16 : 49 ] He's unchangeably the same to his people. And it's all very well, isn't it, to look back to the past. Some of the great heroes of the faith, people like Luther, Athanasius, Wesley, Calvin, Whitfield, Spurgeon, Amy Carmichael, people like that.

But that can be a form of escapism, can't it? I'm a great fan of Martin Lloyd-Jones.

I'm a kind of preacher from the last century. He would often say to people, I don't agree with everything he said, he would often say, well, I'm an 18th century man. And you know what he means.

He means that if there was any period in church history that he'd like to have gone back to, it was in the TARDIS. He would go and visit George Whitfield, preach. But there is a danger in that.

And that is, the danger is that many of the people who followed Dr. Lloyd-Jones actually preached like they were in the 18th century. And believe it or not, we don't live in the 18th century. We live in a very different time and a very different place.

[ 17 : 56 ] And we have to serve Christ here and now in London. And there were giants in the land in those days and so much of church history. And we are a race of little people in comparison. But don't forget those men who spoke the word of God to you and sealed their confession with their own blood, they were just flesh and blood, weren't they?

These people, they were just men and women like you and me. And times have changed but Jesus hasn't. And what he was to them, he will be to you. Jesus Christ is the same.

That word that's used there in verse 7 is an interesting word. There's only two places where you find that word in the New Testament. In verse 7, he talks about these leaders who spoke the word of God consider the outcome of their way of life.

And the word that's used there means a coming out of it. It's the same word that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13 where he's referring to the wilderness wanderings and he's reminded the Corinthians that it was Jesus Christ who was actually leading the people out of Egypt.

the rock in the wilderness was Christ. And then he says this in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13 he applies it to them and he says God is faithful. You will not be tempted beyond what you can bear.

[ 19 : 18 ] And when you are tempted, when you are tried, when you are like those people in the wilderness between a rock and a hard place as they came out of Egypt with Pharaoh's troops

breathing down their necks and the Red Sea in front of them they're surrounded by hills and mountains it's a trap there didn't seem to be any way out.

And just as Jesus opened up the waters of the Red Sea and they crossed on dry ground Paul says when you are tempted when you are tried like that what will he do? He will provide a way out. An exodus that's the word.

That's the word that's used here in Hebrews. Remember what Jesus was to these people at the Red Sea when they were entangled in the land and the Egyptians are in hot pursuit and they're trapped and there didn't seem to be any way forward.

I frequently find myself in that kind of situation I'm sure we all do don't we? And in those situations what are we to do when we're trapped and we haven't got a clue what to do will we remember that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever?

The same Jesus Christ who opened up the Red Sea and brought his people safely through that Jesus Christ is the same today as he was then and what he can do for them he can do for you and he can provide you with a way through the challenge that you are facing and you don't know how am I going to cope with that I don't know if I've got the resources to get through this week and he is the same he can provide you with a way through how else do you explain someone like Stephen the martyr how do you explain the way he died with his face like that of an angel as it's smashed in by rocks remember what we're told in Acts 7 that as the rocks were raining down on him he fell on his knees and he cried out Lord do not hold this sin against them and when he said this he fell asleep how do you explain that?

[ 21 : 17 ] how do you explain a man like Peter who denied the Lord Jesus with oaths and curses before a servant girl he says I don't know the so and so and he swears how do you explain that man just a few weeks later boldly proclaiming Christ and 3,000 people are converted how do you explain that?

how do you explain Paul and Silas singing hymns at midnight in a rat infested prison hole in the ground in the stocks a Roman instrument of torture and we're told they sang hymns at midnight think of Athanasius and he is told the world is against you and he says well it's Athanasius against the world the courage of Martin Luther when it seems the whole might of the church is against him and he says here I am I can do no other how do you explain that?

the only way you can explain that is in the terms of our text that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever and what he was for Athanasius and what he was for Luther and what he was for Stephen and what he was for Peter and what he was for Paul and Silas he is the same for us I don't know if you know it's a daft story of a man painting a stripe down the middle of the road and that was his job and on his first day at work he paints two miles of the road people are amazed no one's ever painted so much before on the second day his production dropped to one and a half miles which is still far above average on the third day it was only one mile fifth day it was even less apparently his boss went to him and asked why has your production fallen off so sharply and he said

I'm just getting so far from the bucket it's a rubbish story isn't it that's the trouble with our society our society has drifted from its heritage hasn't it a very very long way it's the problem with the Christian church that wants Christian values but actually doesn't want the radical teaching of Christian of the Lord Jesus and you can't have Christian values without the Lord Jesus Christ you might want a traditional Judeo-Christian ethic but you won't have that without the Lord Jesus people need Jesus Christ and it's the gospel that they need here and Jesus Christ has not passed his sell by date he never will he'll never be superseded!

and he'll never be replaced and kingdoms will come and kingdoms will go and empires will rise and fall and whole civilizations will disappear but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever I've told the story haven't I of Lord Reith and the founder of the BBC and he is late for a meeting and as he walks into a room all the board of directors are talking at the BBC and as Lord Reith comes in they fall silent Lord Reith is quite a fiery man he's a really interesting man to read and Lord Reith wants to know what they're talking about and they're very reluctant to tell him and in the end he loses his temper and they tell him and they say Lord Reith we are planning a program on the funeral of the Christian church Lord Reith smacks the desk and says the church of Jesus Christ will stand at the funeral of the BBC that is true because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever

[ 25 : 00 ] Charles Spurgeon said there is the same water in the well still and if we've not drawn it out it's our own fault we've come away from the fire and that's why we're cold let's return to him and he will receive us gladly as gladly and as warmly as he did when we first believed isn't that why there's so many ups and downs in your Christian life and mine yesterday you could pray tomorrow you can't today you know a measure of victory over the temptations that you've struggled with tomorrow you're totally overwhelmed by them why why is that because we take our eyes off Jesus and if you're anything like me you've turned to men and movements and books and programs and it's Jesus Christ you need not another book of all him but the living Christ who is always the same always himself yesterday and forever here is solid ground there is the same water in the well still and if we've not drawn it it's our own fault we've come away from the fire and that's all we're cold let's return to him