

**HEBREWS 49
(Hebrews 13:7-9)**

**Cling to the Apostle's Doctrine
By Ron Harvey
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INTRODUCTION

We have learned many things in the book of Hebrews. And if nothing else, the book of Hebrews has taught us something of the imperfect nature of that old economy under the Mosaic Law - that rather strange period of time from Moses until Christ. This period of time in human history featured rituals and regulations that seem very unusual and foreign to us. They slaughtered little lambs and goats on an altar. They burned incense. They dressed sinners up in holy garments and called them priests. They observed certain religious days and they ate certain foods and they were forbidden to eat certain other foods.

This was a strange earthly kingdom that God devised. And the people who were the subjects in this kingdom were the people of Israel. They were elected to be God's earthly and typical people. They were elected to be the administrators of this typical kingdom. Is this the same election that we find in Ephesians 1:4 where it says, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him?"

No, the election of Israel as a nation was quite a different election. That is why virtually the entire population who came out of Egypt, died in the wilderness. And they died in unbelief. Their carcasses were strewn there in the wilderness to show the utter ruin which comes from doubting God.

Were all the descendants of Abraham saved by this election of Israel? No. The election of Israel is quite a different election than God's election unto salvation. Ishmael was part of the elect nation of Israel, but he had no part in the election unto salvation. Esau was part of the elect nation, but he had no part in the election in Christ. Aaron's son, Nadab and Abihu, were Israelites, participating in the election which was bestowed upon

Israel the nation, but they were wicked priests and God destroyed them in his anger. They had no part in God's election to salvation in Christ.

Do you see how being an elect nation is another thing entirely from being elect unto salvation.

On and on we could go to show that being a physical descendant of Abraham is not the same as being elect of God unto salvation. Look at all the wicked kings of Israel who set up idols and worshipped other gods. They were descendants of Abraham. They were appointed by God to be king over an elect nation. But they had no saving grace in them whatsoever. They had no inner knowledge of God's goodness and mercy. They were not God's elect unto salvation, they were merely elected for an earthly ministry. God chose them to be subjects in an earthly kingdom that was in many respects devoid of spiritual reality.

Were there those within Israel who also had a spiritual election, an election in Christ, an Ephesians 1:4 kind of election? Yes. It appears that Abraham was saved by faith. It appears that Sarah was saved and Jacob and Joseph and David and Samuel and many others within Israel were saved by God's gracious election unto salvation. But they were not saved by the election of Israel as a nation. The election of Israel as a nation was a different election altogether. The election of Israel was the calling of an earthly people to perform earthly rituals and ceremonies that prefigured Christ. The election of Israel was the placing of a fallen people under the harsh requirements of an unbending law. And the law slew them daily. And it showed the world the great need of grace in Christ.

This kingdom of Israel lasted from the time of Moses until the seed came. (Galatians 3:19) And thankfully, this old kingdom of shadows and types came to a sudden conclusion when the light of the world appeared in Bethlehem and completed his work on Calvary. That old religion of Judaism became obsolete. And that is why you and I don't practice that religion today. It has passed away and given way to a kingdom that will never pass away. Moses has given way to Jesus Christ. Aaron and the human priesthood has given way to Jesus Christ. The earthly tabernacle has given way to Jesus Christ. The Holy of Holies has given way to the throne of God in heaven.

And there is a new kingdom that has come in. You remember that John the Baptist preached, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It was at hand because the Savior was walking the earth at that very moment. History was about to cross that great divide from the Old Testament to the New. Human history had come to that moment when those things which prefigured Christ would be swallowed up by Christ himself. It was that one great moment in history when the old would be swallowed up by the new, when the type would be explained by the antitype, when the typical kingdom would be supplanted by the kingdom of Christ.

We previously talked about how Israel's kingdom was not necessarily a kingdom of saved people. But Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of the redeemed. His kingdom is a kingdom characterized by salvation. It is a kingdom characterized by a work of grace in the hearts of his subjects.

The Kingdom of Christ is a kingdom made up exclusively of the saved.

I want to show you that this kingdom of Christ is a kingdom made up exclusively of the saved. Salvation is the very thing that is at the core of Christ's kingdom. Now salvation was not universal in the nation of Israel. But salvation is universal in Christ's kingdom.

In Matthew 19:6-24 a rich young ruler came to Jesus and he asked Jesus a question. And in this passage I want you to notice three ways that salvation is described. The rich young ruler described it first by asking, "What must I do that I may have eternal life." (v.16)

Now Jesus went on and told him that if he is trying to earn it, then he must keep the law perfectly. And when the man said that he had done so from his youth, Jesus told him to go sell all that he had and give it to the poor and follow him. Of course, the rich man was unwilling to do so. When the disciples heard this, they asked Jesus, "Who then can be saved." (v.25).

So, you see that the rich man called it having eternal life. The disciples called it being saved. But Jesus used another term to describe salvation. Jesus called it entering the kingdom of heaven (v.23) or entering the kingdom of God. (v.24)

When we receive Christ as our Savior, we receive His kingdom. Christ is not only a humble Savior, he is a mighty King. We can't have one without the other. And when we ask Christ to save us from hell and to take us to heaven, we also agree to be his subjects in his kingdom.

I want you to look very carefully at Hebrews 12:28. After all the doctrine of Hebrews has been taught, the conclusion of the matter is that we have received a kingdom. We have received the great kingdom of Jesus Christ. The message of Hebrews is that this kingdom is not Judaism. But this kingdom is Christ and Christianity. This kingdom is not that old religion of shadows but it is the kingdom of light. This kingdom is not that old religion of works, but it is a religion of faith. It is not that old religion of law, but rather the religion of grace.

Look in verse 28.

Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and fear.

The unbelieving Jews wanted their old law system. Why did they want it? They wanted it because they had unrepentant hearts. They could not serve God in their hearts, therefore, they preferred rituals. All unrepentant people in this world would rather have a ritual. They would rather say a thousand Hail Mary's than to bow the heart and say "Hail O Christ." An unrepentant man would rather haul a thousand lambs to the temple rather than bow the heart to the one true Lamb.

But, we receive another kingdom. And this kingdom is a kingdom of grace. God's true people say, "You can have all of those old rituals, you can have your altars and your bowls and your days and your regulations, but give me the grace of Christ whereby I may serve Christ acceptably."

This phrase, "that I may serve Christ acceptably," is a backhanded slap at the Jews who continued on in Judaism. They go on day after day with all their religious works, and everything they do is unacceptable. They could slit the throats of ten thousand lambs and it would be unacceptable.

But we come into another kingdom and in this kingdom we have the matchless grace of Christ. And our service is acceptable. Whatever we do in our service to God is accepted because of the grace of Christ. The Jews

had to do massive work in their religion and it was all unacceptable in the end. But I can give a cup of water to a thirsty traveler and God accepts my service. I can now serve my God acceptably. Whatever weak gestures of service I make on behalf of my God, God accepts them. If I offer a word of encouragement to a brother, God accepts my service. When you ladies bake a meal for your brothers and sisters, God accepts your service. When we share the gospel, God accepts our service. When we sweep off the front porch of the church, God accepts our service. Why? We have come into a kingdom of grace. We have stepped out of a kingdom of works and into a kingdom of grace.

Now chapter 13 is a statement of the principles that apply in Christ's kingdom of grace. You see, being in Christ's kingdom of grace is not a license to sin. It is quite the opposite. Being in Christ's kingdom is the highest motivation to righteous living. And chapter 13 tells of the principles that apply in the kingdom of Christ.

Love One Another

We have seen the first and foremost principle in his kingdom and that principle is – “Let brotherly love continue.” (13:1) Now under the Jewish law, it was sometimes easy to forget the law of love. They lived day after day jumping through the various hoops of Judaism and never considered the higher principles of religion.

But in Christ's kingdom love is the preeminent law.

Then we came to another great principle of the kingdom of Christ in verse 4. And that principle is the principle of moral cleanliness or purity. This is a great characteristic of the kingdom of Christ. I suspect that if you gathered together all those who are in the kingdom of Christ and you put them on one side and then you gathered together all those others in the world who are not in his kingdom, you would discover a great difference in moral purity. Those in Satan's kingdom laugh and giggle at the most horrific acts of moral corruption. Marital infidelity is a way of life for them and whore-mongering consumes their minds and destroys them. Not so in the kingdom of Christ for his kingdom is made up of those who have been changed and cleansed.

Be Content and Don't Covet

And then we saw in verse 5 that his kingdom is characterized by a lack of covetousness. Now the sin of covetousness occupies a high priority in the Scriptures. Whenever sins are listed, covetousness seems to be high on the list. And that is because covetousness is a form of idolatry. Covetousness is not being content with what God has given. Covetousness is an unhealthy desire to have more of the things of this world. Covetousness is selfishness. Covetousness is exalting self over God. But the principle in Christ's kingdom is found in verse 5.

Be content with such things as ye have.

Now you should notice that covetousness is not only being discontent with the things that you have, but also, it is being discontent with God. Covetousness says, "I want things." It says, "I am not happy with my God. I am not happy with what he has given me." Covetousness says, "I don't trust God. God has not given me everything that I want, therefore, he must not be for me."

But look at verse 5 again. God has said,

I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Covetousness is a sin that belongs to that other kingdom, but not in the kingdom of Christ. For we have a God that will never leave us nor forsake us. What more could we possibly want? We have a God who will pick up for us when our strength is exhausted.

The Lord is my helper. (v.6)

I don't need to steal my neighbor's goods. I don't need to scheme and plan as to how I might deceive him and take his things from him.

The Lord is my helper.

Covetousness applies not only to the things that you want, but also to the things that you have. Hoarding and clinging to earthly things is a form of covetousness. We don't have to do that in Christ's kingdom because,

The Lord is my helper.

Our greatest wealth is not contained in our home or in our bank accounts. Our greatest wealth is tucked away where no man can hurt it. Our greatest possessions are heavenly possessions. If I lose a thousand dollars, what have I really lost? If my covetous neighbor steals my goods out of my garage, what have I really lost? My riches are not counted in earthly possessions. Therefore,

I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (v.6)

Now take a look at verses 7-9 and you will find the next principle of the kingdom. And a very important principle it is. And I have titled the next principle,

Cling to the same old Word of God

Now if you look at the first phrase of verse 7, it says,

Remember them which have the rule over you . . .

You might think this is talking about giving respect to officers in the church. And that is not a bad idea. (See 13:17, 24)

However, verse 7 seems to be talking about those originals who first spoke the word of God to them. It says, "Remember them." This would suggest that the writer was talking about those teachers who were no longer with them. It says, "Remember them . . . who have spoken unto you the Word of God."

Now Hebrews was most likely written a few years before AD 70. It was very near the close of the apostolic age. The apostles, who served as the foundation for the church, were passing off the scene. The apostles were either killed or they got old and they died.

And the question is, "What is our responsibility toward gospel truth in the kingdom of Christ?" Are we constantly looking for new information from God? Are we always trying to come up with something original? Is the truth of God still coming in bits and pieces? Or is there a firm foundation that is once for all laid.

And the writer of Hebrews is saying, "Remember those who spoke the Word of God unto you." That is, give them full faith and credit. You will never improve upon the truth handed down to you by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and by Paul and by James and Peter. These were the original instructors in the Word of God. They delivered the gospel in its pure and pristine form. And when there is a question of doctrine we go back to their writings and their writings settle the matter.

Bro. Mark McNair has been teaching us about the early, post-apostolic writers. And even though they were good Christian men, and some of them even died for their faith, there were little errors here and there that crept in. And little errors became bigger errors down through the centuries. And now, after 2000 years, there are great heresies and great divergences in doctrine to the point that Christ is barely recognized in many religions.

And what is the answer? The answer is to remember apostolic Christianity. This was Christianity in its pure form. This was Christianity as taught by Jesus to his apostles. Truth will never be more pure than that.

Almost all cults are based on some new information that God gave to some supposed prophet. Mormonism is based on new information given to Joseph Smith. Seventh Day Adventism is based on revelations and visions given to Ellen White. And almost all religions claim they have some new handle on the truth of God.

But we believe that the truth originally given by Jesus Christ to the apostles is the final authority. It is and shall always be our rule of faith and practice. If someone comes along and says that he had a vision from God, we are not led astray, because we place no value in his vision. His vision is his own business, but our authority is Word of God delivered by Jesus Christ through his apostles. The truth of Jesus Christ begins and ends with the apostolic writings.

You know, sometimes preachers think they are supposed to come up with something original. But if preachers are coming up with something original, then it is something wrong. We are not to be originators of truth, but imitators of truth. The job of the preacher is to minister to you that same old gospel – that same gospel that Jesus conveyed to the apostles - that same gospel that the apostles wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit.

There is no other truth than that and there is no other gospel than that.

Look at verse 9.

Be not carried away with different and strange doctrines.

Our job is not to be seeking something different. That old gospel once delivered is good enough.

*Gimme that old time religion;
Gimme that old time religion;
Gimme that old time religion;
It's good enough for me.*

So, cling to the same old Word of God.

That means that we always go back to the original Scriptures preached to us by the apostles. That is the straight line by which all doctrine is judged.

True doctrine never changes. True doctrine is true in all ages and in any culture. Whether you are in China or India or the United States, we are to love one another. No matter what part of the world we are in, marriage is honorable and sexual purity is correct doctrine. Whether it is 70 AD or 2012 AD covetousness is inappropriate in Christ's kingdom. That is because,

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and tomorrow.

The principles of the kingdom of Christ will always be the same. They are universal truths for all ages.

So it says,

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.

Now there are about as many different doctrines as there are church buildings. Men have created doctrines ranging from snake handling to temple prostitution – all in the name of Christ. But in our passage this morning, the writer seems to focus on the false doctrines involving food. Notice in verse 9 it says,

Not with meats.

The core of true doctrine in the kingdom of Christ is grace. It is not foods. Grace is the air we breathe in the kingdom of Christ. Grace is true doctrine and foods are false doctrine.

Any religion in which foods become a critical issue is a false religion. In the kingdom of Christ, he accepts you by grace and not according to what foods you eat.

I have found that almost all of the cults have three things in common.

1. They deviate as to who Jesus was. Some say he was divine but not human. Some say he was human but not divine. But all of the cults have some weird doctrine as to the nature of Christ.
2. Almost every one of the cults embrace something other than the Scriptures. They believe they have extra revelation. They believe that God spoke to them through their prophet. And so, they embrace extra biblical teaching.
3. Almost every one of them has some dietary restriction.

Mormons have a rule against consuming certain beverages. They are not allowed to consume caffeinated beverages, or alcoholic beverages. And they are not allowed even to drink hot or cold beverages.

Seventh Day Adventists are vegetarians and they recognize the Jewish eating requirements found in Leviticus 11. They do not eat certain unclean animals. They do not eat pork.

Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to get a blood transfusion because to them this is eating the blood of another.

Even Roman Catholics have had eating restrictions. For a long time they did not eat meat on Fridays. Now, they can eat meat on Fridays, but they cannot eat meat during Lent. They do require fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

But listen to our text for this morning.

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. (v.9)

Eating or not eating certain foods have never profited those that did so. The Jewish eating requirements were ceremonies that had spiritual meaning, but there was no particular profit to the eater.

What matters is whether or not your heart is consuming the grace of God. What matters is whether or not you are appropriating the goodness and mercy of the Savior. Food is for the body, but grace is for the heart of man.

For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.

Listen to Romans 14:17.

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

You will remember the example of the Pharisees. They tried to make a big deal because Jesus and his disciples ate with dirty hands. And Jesus told them it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth that defiles a man.

So, what is the exhortation found here in verse 9? It is to cling to true doctrine. Cling to the grace of God which is the keynote of the gospel. Acceptance with God has nothing to do with what you eat. Acceptance with God has everything to do with what you think about Jesus Christ.

Don't be like the cults who are carried away with divers doctrines. But let your heart focus on the important things. Let your heart focus on the wonderful grace of Christ. When you go to bed at night, I hope you are not contemplating what foods you are allowed to eat. But I hope you are contemplating the great and wonderful work of redemption that Jesus has worked for you.