

Beware Of False Doctrine Part 1

Hebrews 13:9

April 6, 2025

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Please open your Bibles with me again to Hebrews 13. As we're in Hebrews 13 verse 9 today, we continue to journey towards the end of this wonderful letter.

The title of today's lesson is **Beware of False Doctrine**. Beware of false doctrine. We enter into a section, verses 9 to 14, and we'll just introduce this section today and finish it in the coming weeks.

But this week as I was preparing, I was reminded of the great responsibility and the joy it is to be a parent. Of course, that's clear to us as we have the child dedication this morning, great reminder of the gift of life. But I can't believe, honestly, how blessed my wife and I are to have our two wonderful children. We don't deserve them. They are a great gift to us from the Lord. We praise Him for them.

And I was reminded this week of the immediate protective feeling that came over me the very moment that my firstborn was handed to me by the nurse. I remember the gratitude. I remember the weight that I felt holding her for the first time. I can remember praying and thanking the Lord and whispering in her ear things like, Daddy's got you. I'll take care of you. We love you.

I remember checking the car seat meticulously, leaving the hospital for that first time. I remember looking in my rearview mirror over and over again, driving as cautiously as I've ever driven, driving home from the hospital so as not to have an accident. There was just this great new weight about life.

I remember even being bothered internally, even though I knew it was in jest, when people would play tricks on my daughter or on my son, little things we do with kids like, I've got your nose or I've got your ear, because I didn't want them to be deceived. I didn't want them to have that sense of believing something that wasn't reality. And that only grew as they got older and the stakes got higher.

Now that they're teenagers, I have a fatherly protective desire for them to know the truth of God's word and to know who God is. And so when I hear that they've heard something or been taught something that's not true, my fatherly instinct to teach them truth and to keep them from being deceived overwhelms me.

But I thought about this week, the fact that while that is innate to us as Christian parents, to desire for our kids to know the truth and not to be deceived by error, our desire pales in the comparison to the zealousness of God for His people and for the truth, for His people to know the truth and to walk in the truth and not be deceived by error and by deception.

And this morning, our author is inspired to warn us to not be carried away by false teaching. You remember the theme of Hebrews, **The Superiority of Christ** and how it ties into everything that we see. Even today, we will see this theme coming to life.

Because of the superiority of Christ, there are these practices that ought to be natural and normal in the life of a Christian, the life of the church. We've seen six of those, things like **Brotherly Love, Intentional Hospitality, Compassionate Care, Marital Honor, Contented Trust**, and then last week, **Faithful Imitation** of faithful leaders in our lives. But today, we come to another important practice, practice number seven, **Reject Error**.

And this comes to us in verse nine, but I want to read all the way through verse 14. Hebrews 13, beginning in verse nine:

"⁹ Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. ¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³ So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come."

The theme of this section boils down to this, **Reject false teaching and cling to Christ no matter the cost**. Reject false teaching and cling to Christ no matter the cost. In verses nine to 14, we have the command, the argument, and the response.

And today, we're just looking at the command in verse nine, and we'll see the argument and the response next week. The command is simply this, **Beware of False Doctrine**. Beware of false doctrine.

Verse nine begins *"⁹ Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings;"* Notice the imperative here is don't be carried away. That's the command. Don't be misled. And to be carried away is a good description of what it's like to be swept away with deception. It's like being swept away by a fast-moving stream and that river's moving you further and further away from biblical truth.

Now, in context, there's no way to specifically identify exactly what false teaching the church was dealing with in this particular passage, although we get a hint at what it consisted of in the rest of the verse. But he does give us these two helpful descriptions. This teaching was varied, and it was strange.

Varied, meaning this was not just one particular false doctrine, but a variety of things that could come against the local church. Strange in the sense of foreign, that is outside of the truth they'd been taught. Remember, last week was all about how they had faithful leaders who taught them the truth. This teaching that's coming against the church is strange, it's foreign to the truth that they have already been taught in the past.

Now, if you were here last week, I gave you a little breakdown of how verses seven, eight, and nine tie together. Let me just repeat that, because it helps us understand the flow of where we are.

In verse seven, we were called to remember your leaders' teaching and imitate their faith. And then in verse eight, the Jesus they proclaimed and trusted has not changed and never will. And that leads us to verse nine. Therefore, do not be led astray by false doctrine. So,

what you heard before was truth. That's still true today, because it's based in Jesus Christ, and he can't change. Therefore, don't be led astray by any new, false, strange teaching.

Now, we were called to imitate the faith of those who had faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, meaning He never changes in His nature, nor does He change in the sense of His word. That is, you will never wake up a day in your life and find that the character of God has changed. He is who he says He is.

And you will never wake up a day in your life and find out that some aspect of the word of God now is no longer true. That will never happen, because it's based in the person of God Himself. It is His word. He breathed out these words, and therefore, that's the tie-in to our passage today. Sound doctrine will always be sound doctrine, and therefore, we have to be careful not to be led astray by those who would add to or take away from the clear teaching of Scripture.

Now, in our case, in 2025, we have the privilege of having a completed canon. We have all 66 books of the Bible neatly bound together here in our leather or faux leather binding. And the application then for us is that we must be on guard in the sense that we don't let anything slide that doesn't pass this book. Any deviation from what's on the clear pages of Scripture is to be rejected.

And this is, by the way, a common call in the New Testament. Many passages, as you begin to look for this, are dedicated to warnings to be on guard against false teaching. We see it in places like Ephesians, chapter five, verses five and six. He begins with this statement: *"⁵ For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (And then verse six, he says) ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, (That is, if anybody tries to tell you that that's not true, what I just said in verse five, don't be deceived) for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."*

Last week, we mentioned also that Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. As he says there:

"²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (And listen to this) ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; (And what is it that these wolves are going to do? Verse 30) ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

People are coming, Paul says, who are going to teach lies. They're going to teach things that are strange, that are foreign to what I've taught you, seeking to draw away the disciples after them.

So the question for us is, if false teaching is such a real threat for the church today, how has our God helped us by protecting us from false teaching? Well, there are several places we could go in scripture to see that.

Obviously, first and foremost, he has saved us and given us his spirit who indwells us. He's given us his word. But also, Christ, the head of the church, has organized the local church in such a way that when it functions in the way that Christ designed, it creates a hedge against false teaching.

Ephesians 4:11-14 describes how this works. He says:

"and he gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers."

So these are the offices in the church. Some have passed away. There are no more apostles or prophets. But they gave us the scripture. So we have their ministry here and the inspired words of Scripture. The evangelists then, there are different, various takes on those evangelists and maybe those who were church planter type people going out, breaking new ground, planting churches.

But then we come to pastors and teachers, that is elders, pastors, teachers in the local church who are there for this purpose, verse 12, *"for the equipping of the saints."* So that will come through the preaching of the word. The people are equipped to do what? *"For the work of service."* So the pastor, teachers, they preach the word of God.

The people are equipped by that teaching, both publicly and in private. They then are equipped to use their gifts. They're serving one another. And through this, the body is built up, verse 12, *"to the building up of the body of Christ."* Now how long is this supposed to go on? Verse 13, *"until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."*

And here is the result, verse 14, *"as a result of all of this working together, we are no longer to be children, (that is immature), tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming."*

Now verse 14 is why I say the local church and the way God has designed it creates a hedge against false teaching when it is operating in the way that God prescribed. That is, the teachers, the leaders, it begins there. They must preach the word of God.

2 Timothy 4:1-2:

"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

So this is the content of the equipping, both publicly and privately. The equipping comes through the word. The body then grows from the word. They use their gifts, build one another up in Christ, and through that we all grow into a mature man and we are kept safe from error because we know truth.

Now, this is relevant and needed for us today, this call in verse nine. Don't be carried away by false teaching. It was relevant and needed here in this context. In the early church, there was a specific danger because there was a practice of traveling preachers who would come

into town and begin to teach. Some of these preachers were faithful men. The associates of Paul, for example, traveled. Titus, Timothy, Apollos, Paul himself.

They would travel from town to town and they would preach. This was a common practice. But what began to happen is false teachers also began to copy the same practice and come in behind the clear teaching of the word from Paul and his associates and undermine their teaching by teaching false doctrine.

When you understand this, a lot of the letters in the New Testament begin to make more sense because Paul is speaking back to these churches, calling them not to be led astray by these new voices that are coming into the church and trying to teach false doctrine. One of the places we see that most clearly is his letter to the Galatians. In Galatians chapter one, verses six to nine, he says:

"⁶ I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;"

Someone is coming in, they're teaching a different gospel, and it's beginning to shake the confidence of the people in the teaching of the gospel that Paul gave them. He says in verse seven:

"⁷ which is really not another;" (as to say there's not another gospel, there's only one really) only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (Now listen to this warning) "⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! (that is, he's to be condemned) ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"

So this is how the threat often presented itself in the New Testament time. But I believe that in our day and age, this call is needed perhaps even more urgently than it was in the New Testament because the practices of our day are different. It's less likely that this is the way that you are going to be taught false doctrine, although it's not impossible, but we guard this pulpit really closely."

We vet those we put in this pulpit so as not to have false doctrine taught in this pulpit. And if it was taught, then we would correct it. But the reason that we are even in more danger today is because of the advancements of technology.

False teachers no longer need an invitation to come to the church and preach to our people. Instead, they just start a YouTube channel or a podcast or a social media account. They begin to make reels and write books and create podcast content, and it's being effective in causing others to walk away from the faith or to question the faith or to believe false doctrine.

People are pushing every kind of errant view imaginable. You can find legalism, antinomianism, Eastern orthodoxy is on the rise, Catholicism, the prosperity gospel. All of the ancient heresies of old are still alive and well, just wearing new clothes that are more presentable to our culture in our day and age.

But this is where the danger lies. Now, does that mean there are no good podcasts and no good social media influencers and no good pastors to listen to or books to read? No, that's not what I'm saying at all. Just like in the New Testament era, many of the pastors that, preachers that came through town were solid, biblical teachers, but some of them were not.

And so, just as that was true, today there are many great resources that we can glean from, but there's a lot of junk out there as well, to be frank. We need to be careful. Do not be carried away by strange teaching, false doctrine, that's the call for us.

It's really a call to discernment. It's a call to follow the example of the Bereans. I love this in Acts 17, because the response of the Bereans was so balanced when Paul came to preach to them.

It says this in Acts 17:10-11:

"¹⁰ The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews".

You remember, this is Paul's normal practice. He goes into the synagogue to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And verse 11, it says,

"¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word (listen, two descriptions of how they received the word) with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

So they weren't sitting back with crossed arms, like Paul, you're going to have to convince us, in the sense of not believing the best of his message. They were excited. With great eagerness, they were gladly receiving the word, but they also didn't take it at face value without testing it. They examined the word by the Scriptures. That is the biblical balance.

That's the recipe for cultivating Christian discernment. Take every teaching that you hear from this pulpit, from every podcast, from every book, from whatever media source, take it back to the scriptures. This is the infallible word of God, and only this, and no other authority rivals this book. Nothing. So this is the plumb line. This is the standard.

And so you say, oh, how are we going to keep from being carried away by varied and strange teachings? Hopefully now it's becoming obvious that we need to eat, drink, sleep, and breathe the word of God. You have to know the word.

Let me ask you, do you feast on the word of God? Do you? Does your intake of God's word, how does it compare to your intake of other thoughts and ideas? How saturated are your meditations with the word of God?

One of my favorite sections of Psalm 119 inspires me to live life with this kind of mentality. Beginning in verse 97, he says:

"O how I love Your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

*⁹⁸ Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies,
For they are ever mine.*

*⁹⁹ I have more insight than all my teachers,
For Your testimonies are my meditation.
¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged,
Because I have observed Your precepts.
¹⁰¹ I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
That I may keep Your word.
¹⁰² I have not turned aside from Your ordinances,
For You Yourself have taught me.
¹⁰³ How sweet are Your words to my taste!
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
¹⁰⁴ From Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way."*

And just for context, when he's speaking of loving the law of God and the word of God, he's largely talking about those portions of the Old Testament that we find ourselves rarely in. The actual law of God. Leviticus is in the law of God. He's saying, I want to think on these things. They're like honey to my mouth. It's precious to him.

Christians, the truth is, we have no excuse for remaining biblically illiterate. Christians today have more access to more tools and resources for Bible study than Christians have ever had. Many Christians in history would have loved to have a Bible in the home. Just one. And what do we have? We can study the Bible for free online in the original languages with helps if we don't know Greek and Hebrew for free on things like Blue Letter Bible.

And we've got commentaries for free. We've got cross-reference resources for free. We've got all kinds of things. Just sitting there for the taking that millions of Christians would have loved to have in their lifetime. And yet far too often, Christians who have spent their whole lifetime in church still can't find their way around the Bible.

I remember a sermon my dad taught once that really affected my life even to this day. It came back to me as I was studying for this message. I grew up a PK, if you don't know that, which was one of the great joys of my life. It's not as bad as they make it out to be. It's actually wonderful.

I don't remember how old I was, somewhere between 10 and 12, when my dad was preaching on the importance of knowing the Bible. And he said something like this. He said, as conservative Christians, we teach that the Bible is the word of God, that it's inspired and infallible and inerrant. We claim that the Bible is true. Every word is absolute truth. And we claim that our entire lives are built on the Bible. We would die for the Bible, we say.

And then he said, let me ask you, have you ever read the whole Bible? Have you read all of it? This book that you claim your life is built on, have you ever really read the whole book? I remember as a young boy, that impacted me because the answer at the time was no. But it lit a fire in me to know the word of God, to read it voraciously, to not just say that I believe the Bible, blindly, but to read it and to know it and to read it over and over and over again.

And you know, as you begin to do that, you begin to realize this is not a chore. This is not even strictly a discipline that we have to force ourselves to do. This is the word of God, the

word of life. This is the Christian breathing and eating and drinking. This is it. It just changes your understanding of the gift of what we have in the word of God.

How are we going to keep from being carried away? By knowing the truth. When you know the truth and someone speaks error, it sticks out to you like a sore thumb, doesn't it? Something in your gut just says, that's not true. That's not who God is. That's not what God's word says. And I know that because it's in such and such a place.

Now, I do want to be clear. I'm not saying that if you've never read the whole Bible, you're not a Christian. I'm not saying if you've never read the whole Bible that you can't believe that it is the word of God. I'm not saying that.

What I am saying is that we have a gift in the word of God and if we're going to take seriously this command to not be carried away by false teaching, we need to dig in. We need to know the book and then error will become clear. We can't afford to walk out into the fallen world and face the temptations of the world and the flesh and the devil without being armed with the living word of God.

But now the author turns his attention to expounding on this command by confronting a particular type of false teaching that was coming up in the church. Let's read verse nine again. He says:

"9 Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited."

Now again, I don't believe we can be dogmatic and say definitively this is the false teaching or the heresy that these Christians were dealing with but we can glean some understanding from the description that's given here. At least we can conclude that they're dealing with some kind of temptation towards a legalistic practice related to food. They have begun to think that in some way they can be strengthened in the inner man by eating certain types of food or refraining from eating certain types of food.

And this makes sense when we remember this church is composed largely if not entirely of Jewish believers. They've lived their lives as Jews and we can have empathy for them, right? If we think about being raised as a Jewish person and your whole life, every meal, every holiday, everything centered around the way you washed your hands, the way you ate, the things you didn't eat, all of it was based on the law and it was part of the way they related to God. It was part of the way they worshiped God.

It was part of the way that God had set them apart from the other nations and so you can see how as a Christian, now that they're under the New Covenant and out from under the Old Covenant, at times they can begin to think, maybe I just need to add some of that back in. You know, that was beneficial to my spiritual life as a Jew. Maybe I can kind of mix these two things together and so it seems like that may be what's happening here.

They are adding back in certain practices related to foods as though they will strengthen them, spiritually speaking. And let's be honest, Christians today can struggle with similar temptations, can't we? Typically, the legalism that we deal with is not the dietary laws of the Old Testament, although some Christians have been tempted towards that, but typically,

the legalism that we're tempted towards comes from whatever heritage, church heritage we come from, whatever denomination or church we grew up in, all of them can come with their own unique temptations towards certain outward practices that are not commanded in Scripture.

So, things like how we dress at church. You go to this church, you have to dress this way. You know, certain churches, women can only wear dresses, never pants or shorts. If you're a man and you wear anything other than a coat and tie, then you're irreverent. The style of music in some churches becomes a big deal, what instruments are or are not allowed to be used. The lifting of hands can be used as a rubric both ways. In some churches, if you don't raise your hand, you're probably not a Christian. In other churches, if you do raise your hand, you're probably not a Christian.

And we can judge each other based on these external things when really it's a matter of the heart as to how you express those things in worship. Neither one is right or wrong as long as it's done with a heart of worship to the Lord. The way we eat. You know, there have been diets that Christians have been sucked into. The Daniel diet came out a while back. You know, you eat this way, it's a holier way to eat than that way to eat.

Our decisions really related to issues of conscience. Any of those can be attached to our faith if we're not careful and we can begin to believe my decision about dancing, alcohol, entertainment, holiday traditions and what we do or don't do as a family, school choices, and the list goes on and on and on. We can begin to think that God is more happy with me when I do or don't do these external things than He is otherwise.

And when we do that, we fall into some kind of legalism. Now, I don't want to go too far down this rabbit hole, but because legalism seems to be at the heart of what this false teaching revolved around, adding foods to your spiritual life, I do want to talk a little bit about the concept of legalism.

When we talk about legalism, we really use that term in two ways. The more traditional way to talk about legalism is adding works to the gospel. That is our justification. In this sense, that would be a false gospel. Anytime that we add anything to the gospel and say you must have faith plus these works, that is a false gospel. It's to be rejected wholeheartedly. But honestly, that's not typically the way we use the word legalism in our circles.

When we say that man or woman struggles with legalism, we don't necessarily mean they're not a Christian. What we mean is they are legalistic when it comes to their pursuit of sanctification, not justification. They're a true Christian, but they believe that by doing these things that are not clearly commanded in Scripture that they are more holy or closer to God or more acceptable to God than Christians who don't do those things.

Let me just say this very clearly. You cannot earn God's love or God's favor by good works. You cannot earn God's love or God's favor in justification. You cannot earn God's love and God's favor in sanctification. You cannot. It is given to you by grace in both, always.

The motivation for obedience to the commands of Scripture is not to earn anything from God. He's already done it. So there is an imbalance here, and we can fall into it just as easily as these Christians. Maybe not with food, but with a whole host of other things.

Let me ask you to consider this for example. If you miss Bible reading on a given day, do you feel guilty before God for that? You know, I think it's easy. It's easy to feel guilty when we don't read the Bible on a given day or a given week. But I would say the better way to think about that is not to feel guilt, but hunger in the way that you feel when you miss a meal.

I think of it like this. If I get really busy with whatever and a day or two goes by and my wife and I don't really have a good conversation where we really connect with one another in conversation, I don't feel guilty about that. I miss her. I feel sad about that. I want to be with her. I want to spend time with her, and so I have to rearrange my schedule so we can make that a priority. It's not any different in our relationship with the Lord.

I don't feel guilty if I miss reading the Bible or prayer. I miss that time. I realize the privilege that I have not taken advantage of, and so I begin to rearrange my schedule, not because I believe God's going to strike me down that I didn't read the Bible, but because I want to be with Him and I want to know His word, and I don't want to allow other things to get in the way of pursuing my relationship with the Lord. You see the difference.

But the temptation of these Jewish Christians is the same as ours, and that is to tag on these other things and to see them as if they stand between us and grace. I've got to do these things to receive grace. The Bible says, no, you've received grace, so do these things. You see the difference, and that difference is massive. It's incredibly massive.

Paul obviously instructs Christians throughout the Scriptures on the dangers of being sucked back into legalistic practices based on the law. Colossians 2 makes this really clear, verse 16 *"¹⁶ Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day (these are all aspects of the law) ¹⁷ things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."*

There it is. And Hebrews has made this same point. Why would you go back to the shadow when the person that the shadow predicted has come? Don't go back to that, he's saying. And he goes on to explain that further in this passage as it goes down through verse 23.

But for us as Christians in 2025, we need to guard against any teaching that tells us that we must do things to please God that He has actually not commanded in the Scriptures.

Now I do want to be careful because there's as is always the case, there are two ditches on the side of every road, theologically. One side is legalism, but others knee jerk across the road to what's called antinomianism or license. That is no law. And what happens when you make that swing is in antinomianism, they take the freedom that we have in Christ to an extent to which basically the commands of Scripture lose their thrust. You really don't even need to worry about the clear commands of Scripture because Christ has done it all, so don't worry about it. He'll sanctify you in His time. You just be thankful that you're saved sort of thing. That's an oversimplification, but that's what happens when we fall into the ditch on the other side.

But notice, here's the actual balance. Paul gives us the balance. Look back at verse 9:

"for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace"

For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace. So we dealt with the negative part first. The heart's not strengthened by legalistic works. But what is the heart strengthened by? Grace, he says.

We are to encourage our hearts not by adding a new checklist of things to do, but by remembering our Savior and that He has extended to us His grace. And it is so more abundantly beyond all we could ask or think.

This is the lesson that Paul had to learn in that famous passage in 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Basically in verse 7, he says it's because of the revelations he's seen. God gives him this thorn in the flesh. He asks in verse 8 for it to be taken away. In verse 9:

"9 And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, (my grace is all you need) for power is perfected in weakness.'"

As we've explained so many times before, these Christians here in Hebrews are going through difficult times because of persecution. And as is usually the case when we're going through difficult times and the Lord is stretching us and it's hard, maybe you get weak in your faith. Maybe you're lacking assurance of your salvation and you're struggling in the faith.

We begin to look for comfort. And often we begin to look for comfort from things outside that we can begin doing that will make us feel better or more assured of our faith. And what the author is saying here is no, the key is the other way around. Be strengthened in the inner man by grace.

Don't be tricked into adding legalistic works, but be strengthened by grace. Notice also that he says here that those who sought to be strengthened by these foods, he says, *"through which those who were so occupied were not benefited."*

That is, the people who tried this, who lived their life to be strengthened by these external works of righteousness, quote unquote, it didn't work because they were pursuing the shadow rather than the substance. And that fits perfectly with the whole theme of Hebrews, doesn't it? His whole point is, listen, Jesus is better. Jesus is superior and you already have Him, so be strengthened by the grace that has come to you in the Lord Jesus Christ, not by going back to the shadow and not by making a new shadow that can't compare to Christ.

Be strengthened by the grace that is in the person of Jesus Christ. There will always be teachers who try to add works righteousness both to justification and sanctification. They will come one after another and they often pray upon people who are feeling particularly weak or down at a certain time or who are weighed down by a guilty conscience and a lack of assurance.

And they come along and the false teacher offering legalism says, hey, brother, sister, are you weary under that heavy load? Hey, what you need to do is this, this, this, and this. Just

stand on your head and spin around three times and say this and you're going to feel better. That sort of thing. Tacking on things to sanctification.

But the antinomian on the other side says, hey, brother, sister, if you're feeling weak and weighed down, just calm down and do nothing. You don't need to do anything. Just wait and the Lord has done it all. And don't worry about it.

But what Paul says here, what the author of Hebrews says, rather, alongside Paul in other places, is no, it's good for the heart to be strengthened by grace. The source of spiritual strength then, this is the key of this whole passage, is grace itself.

So what do we do? If we don't add things and we don't simply do nothing, what do we do? Well, here's how this works. Remind yourself of the superiority of Jesus Christ. Get your eyes off of yourself and put them on Jesus Christ. If you want to be strengthened in the inner man by grace, remember the grace that has come to you in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Start recounting the forgiveness of Christ, the fact that if you're in Christ, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, that He has been good to you, that He will hold you fast, that He will never forsake you, that He never changes, and He is already pleased with you if you are in Christ.

Do you understand that? We can't earn anything from Him because He's already done it. He's already pleased with us because we're in Christ. *"²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

This is your strength. So you begin by strengthening yourself in the inner man with the truth of the grace that has come through Christ and then that inward strength strengthens you to get up and to walk humbly in obedience to God. That's how it works but not the other way around.

We don't strengthen ourselves in the inner man simply to remain stagnant and do nothing. We are to follow the Lord and obey the Lord but not to earn anything from Him but because we are overwhelmed with the gratitude and love that we have for Christ for what He's already done for us.

So as we begin to think about this in relation to our own lives I hope you begin to see the biblical balance the biblical road of truth to walk down to avoid either of those ditches of legalism or license. And you may ask well where does it begin? Where does this road of being strengthened by grace begin? And it begins with the gospel itself.

Have you come to know the Lord Jesus Christ? Listen if you're here and you're an unbeliever you've never come to know the Lord Jesus Christ. To be strengthened by grace begins by understanding that grace has been extended to us as sinners who deserve the wrath of God because of our sin. It's been extended to us in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

Jesus died on the cross to take the wrath of God upon himself for our sin and then rose again from the grave proving that the Father accepted His sacrifice. Those who would turn

from their sin and put their faith in Christ alone for salvation are saved from God's wrath over their sin and this begins the journey of grace.

Understand grace is not just a matter of justification. Grace is a matter of sanctification and glorification and all of eternity. We begin walking in grace and justification only to continue walking in grace and sanctification. But it must begin with humbly repenting and turning to Christ. If you're not a believer begin there and your heart of hearts turn to the Lord for forgiveness

But if you're in Christ how do you continue in this grace? Well really this verse boils down to two clear applications. Number one, **Be on guard against false teaching**. Be on guard against false teaching. And when I say be on guard I would suggest both a good offense and a good defense in this regard. How do you have a good offense so that you're not carried away by false teaching? Well this is what we talked about earlier. You have a good offense by washing your mind and heart with the word of God continually. Offensively. Be in the word.

Adopt the words of the psalmist in Psalm 119: *"Oh how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day."* Adopt the words of Psalm 1. *"He delights in the law and in His law He meditates day and night."*

Let me ask you to evaluate this morning for a moment what has been your perspective about reading the Bible and studying the Bible. Honestly, has it felt like a chore? Has it felt like something you've got to do or God's not going to be happy with you? Or is it a great gift and a treasure that you just see that you can't live without? You can't go a day without it.

Not because God's going to be mad but because you love the Lord and you want to walk with the Lord. This is the right way to think about the word.

Let me just make a practical suggestion. This is, again, a suggestion. This is not a command. Thus saith the Lord. I'm not adding to your sanctification. I am telling you something that's been helpful for me in this regard. When it comes to Bible study, think in terms of both deep and wide. Going deep in the word and wide in your study of the breadth of Scripture.

It's good to have passages that you're diving into, that you're spending a lot of time in and you're getting into the minutia, the details. But if you only do that, you'll find yourself stuck and only in certain passages for long periods of time and remaining ignorant of other parts of the Bible.

So do both. Have times where you're diving deeply into the word and have other times where you're reading larger sections quickly to have an overview of what the entire Bible says. But both of those together will help equip you not to be carried away by false teaching. That's offensively.

Defensively, how we guard ourselves is by being very careful about what we're taking in. Consider the podcasts and the reels and the books and the shows that you're listening to. What voices are you putting in your head and are you testing them with the Scriptures?

I do want to say not every preacher who stands and says open the Bible is worthy of listening to or safe to listen to. Honestly, not every teacher who even has some of the labels that we value like reformed or expositional or whatever it may be, not all of them are inherently safe to listen to. Anybody can claim that they're anything.

How do we know if they're safe to listen to? Bring it back here. Does it mesh with the Scriptures? This is the infallible guide. So that's a good offense and a good defense.

But secondly, not only should we be on guard against false teaching, but secondly, **Strengthen Your Heart With Grace.** Strengthen your heart with grace. How often do you meditate on God's grace to you in Christ? We all have different struggles, but some of us really struggle with melancholy, with being down in the dumps, with constantly feeling that God's not pleased with us, constantly feeling that God's angry, constantly lacking assurance.

If that's you, let me encourage you based on this passage to maybe take a break for a moment at looking so much at yourself and look at Christ. Look at your Savior. Of course, you don't measure up. You won't. I don't. That's the whole point.

Jesus does, and He saves you, and He's redeemed you, and He's sanctifying you, and one day, He's going to glorify you, and it's all going to be Him, start, middle, finish. So look at Jesus, and you'll find that you're strengthened in the inner man then to obey and to follow Him, not in perfection, but in the direction of your life without feeling crushed constantly by the commands of Scripture, but seeing them as the gift that they are when you see them through the lens of grace.

If we look at grace through the lens of the commands, then we will constantly feel that we are not measuring up. If we look at the commands through the lens of grace, now we understand it rightly. He's already given you grace and love and mercy, and He says, now go and live in light of that grace. That's a biblical understanding of the process of sanctification.

I hope it helps you. It's helped me. I hope it helps us all to take seriously this wonderful book that we have. Oh God, may You guard us from false teaching and may You strengthen us with grace. Let's pray together.

Lord, this is our prayer. It is my hope for myself. It's a hope for this church, God, that we would be on guard against false teaching and that we would know the difference because we're so saturated with truth that when error is taught, it immediately sounds wrong.

Help us to shepherd our hearts and our minds with what your word actually says and to seek to obey it, but not to earn anything, but because you've already given us all that we need in grace in Christ. Strengthen us in the inner man in the right way, not by external works, but by the grace of Christ. Help us to see Him as superior and to realize that when we are in Him, we are yours and that we'll never be taken away.

Thank you for our Savior. It's in His name we pray. Amen.