

## **Studies in Grace and Faith**

### **Toward a Better Understanding of Hebrews 13:8-25**

#### **VERSE 8<sup>1</sup>**

**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

*Thus, this verse stands connected both with what precedes and with what follows. "Yesterday" carries the thought back to the lifetime of the teachers now no more; what the Saviour was to them, that will He be to their survivors. The whole period since He "sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12-13) is covered by this word. What He was "yesterday and to-day" He will be forever. (See Hebrews 1:11-12.)- Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*

#### **VERSE 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.**

*Because "Jesus Christ is the same," says our author, "do not be swept off your course by all sorts of outlandish teachings; F.F. Bruce*

1. **"Strange doctrines"** implies ideas foreign to the gospel message. Many of the ideas which the author of Hebrews was confronting were Jewish in origin—pertaining to the ritual observances, sacrificial feasts, and various laws identifying what was clean and unclean.—Nelson Study Bible

**Amplified:** *Do not be carried about by different and varied and alien teachings; for it is good for the heart to be established and ennobled and strengthened by means of grace (God's favor and spiritual blessing) and not [to be devoted to] foods [rules of diet and ritualistic meals], which bring no [spiritual] benefit or profit to those who observe them.*

#### **Colossians 2:4-10**

**Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.** <sup>5</sup>For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. <sup>6</sup>As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

<sup>8</sup>Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. <sup>9</sup>For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; <sup>10</sup>and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, main text scriptures are in the NASB Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Supporting text is in the NKJV Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Unless otherwise noted, definitions of Greek words are from the Strong's Concordance.

## **Studies in Grace and Faith**

### **VERSES 10-12**

**We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.**

*Christians had none of the visible apparatus which in those days was habitually associated with religion and worship—no sacred buildings, no altars, no sacrificing priest. F.F. Bruce*

*The writer now makes it clear that those Jews who persist in adhering to the First Testament sacrifices can have no part in the blessings of the New Testament. The two testaments are mutually exclusive.—Wuest*

*The word altar is used figuratively of the sacrifice of Christ. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest did not have the right to eat the sacrificed animal because it had atoned for the people's sins. Instead, it was burned outside the camp. The believer has a sacrifice, Jesus Christ. He atoned for the sins of humanity with His death on the Cross. But unlike the high priest of the Old Testament, believers receive their sustenance from Christ in a symbolic way, by believing in Him.—Nelson Study Bible*

*In other words, "those who carry out the worship in the tent" have no permission to eat from the altar which typically foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ. But the sacrifice of Christ is a better sacrifice, not only because the spiritual antitype is superior to the material type, but also because those who enter the heavenly sanctuary "by Jesus' blood" (10:19) know that the one who became their perfect sin offering is permanently available as the source of their spiritual nourishment and refreshment, as they feed on him in their hearts by faith. F.F. Bruce*

### **VERSE 13**

**So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.**

*To be outside the gate, was considered a disgrace to Jews because it meant being separated from the community. The author exhorts his readers to take on Christ's reproach or disgrace...In essence, the author's command to go forth to Christ was a command to abandon Judaism. Anyone found with Christ—outside the city gate—would be considered outside the Jewish community.<sup>2</sup>—Nelson Study Bible*

*Our author may have recalled an Old Testament occasion when, according to the Septuagint version he knew, God was rejected in the camp of Israel and manifested his presence outside. For, after the incident of the golden calf, "Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and it was called 'The Tent of Testimony'; and so it was, that everyone who sought*

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<sup>2</sup> We need to consider the sacrifice that these believers made to follow Jesus. They would be rejected not only by the religious leaders but by friends and family who would have had no difficulty stoning anyone who identified with Jesus.

## Studies in Grace and Faith

*the Lord would go out to the tent which was outside the camp." Now, in the person of Jesus, God had again been rejected in the camp; his presence was therefore to be enjoyed outside the camp, where Jesus was, and everyone who sought him must go out and approach him through Jesus. F.F. Bruce*

### VERSE 14

***For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.***

1. Praise God! This is not "it". We are living in our temporary home.

***Romans 8:18***

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

***Revelation 21:1-7***

*Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. <sup>2</sup> Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

*<sup>5</sup> Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."*

*<sup>6</sup> And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. <sup>7</sup> He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."*

### VERSES 15-16

***Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. <sup>16</sup> And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.***

*"That kind of religion which is without stain or fault in the sight of God our Father is this: to go to the help of orphans and widows in their distress and keep oneself untarnished by the world" (Jas. 1:27, NEB). To the same effect, too, is Peter's exhortation to those who come to Christ, the chief cornerstone, to be themselves as "living stones, ... built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5), F.F. Bruce*

*To the sacrifice of praise is added the sacrifice of kind and loving action. "Never forget to show kindness and to share what you have with others; for such are the sacrifices which God approves" (NEB). F.F. Bruce*

## Studies in Grace and Faith

### 2. With what sacrifices is God pleased?

#### a. *Praise Him continually. (Faith)*

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

*Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

#### b. *Do good and share. (Love)*

**Galatians 6:10**

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

## VERSE 17

***Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.***<sup>3</sup>

*Obey your guides and submit to them: they keep watch over your souls in the knowledge that they must render an account of their service. Help them to do this with joy and not with sighing: that would not do you any good. NEB*

*The guides referred to here are probably the successors of those whose memory they are exhorted to cherish in v. 7. Our author evidently has as much confidence in the present leaders as in their predecessors. F.F. Bruce*

### 1. **Obey:** peithō; to *convince* (by argument, true or false); by analogy to *pacify* or *conciliate* (by other fair means); reflexively or passively to *assent* (to evidence or authority), to *rely* (by inward certainty): - agree, assure, believe, have confidence, be (wax) content, make friend, obey, persuade, trust, yield.

#### a. **We are to yield to those whom God has given us as spiritual leaders-overseers.**

### 2. **This scripture is commonly used to coerce believers into absolute loyalty and obedience to a local pastor.** Common sayings such as, “I am the spiritual authority here,” and “Touch not God’s anointed,” might be used to threaten or discourage people from, “Proving all things and holding fast to that which is good,” and even cause them to ignore the leading of the Holy Spirit in their personal lives. Sidelining or shunning those who disagree with something the pastor teaches or how he/she is going about his duties is a common characteristic of a fellowship that is out of balance. Believers should feel free to express their concerns about doctrine or about any practice which appears to go against sound teaching.

### 3. **What are the truths that will set us free in this area?**

#### a. **Our ultimate authority is God. God does not expect us to obey/submit to leaders who are teaching false doctrine.**

**Galatians 1:6-10**

*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, <sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are*

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<sup>3</sup> The discussion that follows is an overview of the relationship between believers and spiritual leaders. It is by no means an exhaustive study.

## Studies in Grace and Faith

some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. <sup>10</sup> For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

- b. **Those who teach are each responsible to obey God in what they teach. Acts 5:27-29**

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, <sup>28</sup> saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: **“We ought to obey God rather than men”**

- 1) Peter was referring to what he was teaching. The Jews did not want them preaching Jesus. He did not submit to them. We also must not submit ourselves to false teaching.

*Having exhorted the Hebrews to keep in mind their former rulers and adhere to their teaching, the writer now admonishes them, probably in view of a certain mutinous and separatist spirit, (10:25) encouraged by their reception of strange doctrines, to obey their present leaders, and yield themselves trustfully (hupeikete) to their teaching—an admonition which, as Weiss remarks, shows that these teachers held the same views as the writer.—Wuest*

- c. **Believers are not expected to obey or submit to leaders who are behaving in a manner contrary to the Scripture. God is always our ultimate authority.**  
d. **Believers are each individually led by the Holy Spirit and should obey God above all others.** If you believe God is telling you something different than your pastor, you should discuss this with him/her. A good pastor will share needed scripture to help guide you (because it is always possible that you are not “hearing” correctly or that your “leading” contradicts the word of God). Provided you are not violating Scripture, the pastor will encourage you to do what you believe God is guiding you to do. **In other words, a pastor does not manage (or manipulate) your personal life, but the life of the fellowship (which includes teaching and overseeing ministry).**  
e. **Leaders are to be servants, not masters.**

**Matthew 20:25-28**

*But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. <sup>27</sup> And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

**Matthew 23:10-11**

*“Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. <sup>11</sup> “But the greatest among you shall be your servant.*

## Studies in Grace and Faith

4. **As those who will give account:** “The current leaders would give an account of their service at the judgment seat of Christ (see Rom. 14:10-12).”—Nelson Study Bible

- a. **Anyone who is teaching the word of God, should do so with the utmost of integrity, determined to teach the original meaning of all scripture in context and in light of the New Covenant.**

**James 3:1**

*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*

**1 Corinthians 3:5-15** (Note: this passage is in reference to the ministries/teachings of spiritual leaders.)

*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. <sup>7</sup> So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. <sup>8</sup> Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. <sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. <sup>11</sup> For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work<sup>4</sup>, of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup> If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*

5. **Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.**

*This is expressing the spirit of cooperation between those who are overseers and those who are being taught. The leaders oversee the ministry and teach the people the word of God accurately. The people then submit to the word of God and live their lives accordingly. Overseers also encourage those who are overtaken with a fault and serve as ultimate mediators in conflict among the brethren (when the parties cannot resolve their own affairs). The author is here encouraging the believers to obey the sound doctrine which will necessarily agree with what the author has just taught, and cooperate with the overseers in matters concerning the ministry. When believers cooperate with the overseers*

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<sup>4</sup> Again, please note. The “work” here is referring to how teachers build on the foundation.

## Studies in Grace and Faith

and submit to the teaching/word of God, the overseers' work will be joyful. When believers do not cooperate, the ministry can be grievous.<sup>5</sup>

(13:17) Expositor's note on this verse is so illuminating, that we quote it in its entirety. "Having exhorted the Hebrews to keep in mind their former rulers and adhere to their teaching, the writer now admonishes them, probably in view of a certain mutinous and separatist spirit, (10:25) encouraged by their reception of strange doctrines, to obey their present leaders, and yield themselves trustfully (hupeikete) to their teaching—an admonition which, as Weiss remarks, shows that these teachers held the same views as the writer. The reasonableness of this injunction is confirmed by the responsibility of the rulers and their anxious discharge of it. They watch, like wakeful shepherds (agrupnousin), or those who are nursing a critical case, in the interest of your souls (huper ton psuchon humon) to which they may sometimes seem to sacrifice your other interests. They do this under the constant pressure of a consciousness that they must one day render to the Chief Shepherd (v. 20) an account of the care they have taken of His sheep (hos logon apodosontes). Obey them, then, that they may discharge their responsibility and perform these kindly offices for you (touto referring not to logon apodosontes . . . but to agrupnousin) joyfully and not with groaning (stenazontes, the groaning with which one resumes a thankless task, and with which he contemplates unappreciated and even opposed work). And even for your own sakes you should make the work of your rulers easy and joyful, for otherwise it cannot profit you. Your unwillingness to listen to them means that you are out of sympathy with their teaching and that it can do you no good (alusiteles gar humin touto)." - Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament - Volume 2.

**Amplified:** Obey your spiritual leaders and submit to them [continually recognizing their authority over you], for they are constantly keeping watch over your souls and guarding your spiritual welfare, as men who will have to render an account [of their trust]. [Do your part to] let them do this with gladness and not with sighing and groaning, for that would not be profitable to you [either].

### VERSES 18-19

**Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. <sup>19</sup> And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.**

1. Here we see the true heart of a leader, always desiring to have a good conscience toward God and man and behaving in such a way that they will bring honor to God in everything. The author asks for their prayer that they will be able to thus live, and that he will be able to see them sooner.

*Request for prayer is common in the Epistles, 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1; Rom. 15:30; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:3. The reason here annexed is peculiar. The allusion to his purity of conduct, and strong assertion of his consciousness of it, in regard to them and all things, when he is petitioning for their prayers, implies that some*

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<sup>5</sup> Source uncertain. David thinks I wrote it. I'm not sure due to the wording.

## Studies in Grace and Faith

*suspensions may have attached to him in the minds of some of them. These suspicions would naturally refer to his great freedom in regard to Jewish practices' (Davidson). But notwithstanding verse 23 it may be that he was under arrest and shortly to be tried and naturally adds to his request for prayer a protestation of his innocence of all civil offence . . . The writer was conscious of a readiness and purpose to live and conduct himself rightly in all circumstances. This gives him confidence and will lend confidence to their prayers. He is more urgent in this request . . . because he is desirous to be quickly restored to them; implying that he in some sense belonged to them and that the termination of his present exile from them would be acceptable to them as well as to him."*  
- Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament - Volume 2.

### VERSES 20-21

**Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, <sup>21</sup> equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

*The title God of peace is used six times in the New Testament...Whenever the title was used, some sort of difficulty existed among the recipients of the letter. This is also the case here. The readers of Hebrews were wondering whether they should reject Christianity and return to Judaism in the face of increasing persecution. Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep, having laid down His life for them...and now continuing to make intercession for them...The New Covenant is an everlasting covenant; it will never become obsolete like the Mosaic covenant.—Nelson Study Bible*

*21 make you perfect in every good work to do His will, doing in you that which is well-pleasing before Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom [is] the glory -- to the ages of the ages! Amen. Youngs*

*Perfect, equip, katartizo: to render, i.e. to fit, sound, complete 1a) to mend (what has been broken or rent), to repair- Thayer*

*Fit you to do his will in everything that is good, as he brings to in us whatever gives him pleasure, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. NEB*

1. He, God, will perfect, equip, repair us, as HE works in us whatever gives Him pleasure.

### VERSE 22

**But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.**

1. In many ways the letter does not seem brief. The thought the author is trying to communicate is that he had more he could have said, but kept to the most

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## **Studies in Grace and Faith**

important information. He is encouraging them to receive this word of exhortation (encouragement).

### **VERSES 23-24**

***Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. <sup>24</sup> Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.***

### **VERSE 25**

***Grace be with you all.***

1. The Nelson Study Bible points out the appropriateness of this ending as grace was repeatedly taught throughout the letter.

a. By God's grace, Jesus died for us.

***Hebrews 2:9***

*But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.*

b. Because Jesus is a high priest who understands our weakness, we can come confidently before His throne of grace to receive grace.

***Hebrews 4:16***

*Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

c. The author warns the reader about insulting the Spirit of grace by deserting Jesus.

***Hebrews 10:29***

*How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?*

***Hebrews 12:15***

*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God.*

***Hebrews 12:28 (HCSB)***

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us hold on to grace. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe.*

***Hebrews 13:9***

*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.*

***Hebrews 13:25***

*Grace (God's favor and spiritual blessings) be with you all.*