

Persistent Faith

Hebrews 13:1-17

Introduction

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, after leaving Vanity Fair, Christian and Hopeful overtake a man called By-ends from the town of Fair-speech. He describes his personal philosophy this way: 1) he never strives against wind and tide; 2) he is most zealous when religion goes in his silver slippers; 3) he loves to walk with him in the street if the sun shines and the people applaud it. Christian tells him that if he wants to make it to the Celestial City, he must go against wind and tide; own religion in his rags as well as in his silver slippers; and stand by him when in irons, as well as when he walks the streets with applause. Put simply, a Christian, if he hopes to make it to heaven cannot "go with the flow" of the world, or seek worldly wealth and power, but must be willing to face persecution. This is what the apostle is talking about in **verse 9**, when he says, *Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings.*

Diverse and Strange Teachings

One of the biggest threats today to a Christian's faith is false teaching. Martin Luther said that the pillar of the church is the doctrine of Justification, that it is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And if we lose sight of that, we lose the church. The other doctrines work together to support that. Satan knows that if he can get us sidetracked on something that doesn't seem so important, it's just a matter of time before he can chip away at the core of our faith. Things to watch out for fall into three categories.

Legalism

Most church fathers and many reformers agree that the apostle is referring to the Mosaic law as the strange doctrine we are to watch out for. There were many Judaizers in his day, teaching that people had to subscribe to the Law of Moses to be Christian. Today, we still have that in the form of legalism, relying on our works for salvation.

False Religions

But he wasn't just referring to one problem. He says, "diverse teachings." There were and are other religions out there competing for our attention. Many people teach that there is one God, but He goes by many names, and every religion is a path to Him. But Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (**John 14:6**).

Heresies

Then there are false teachings which crop up in the church, heresies. These are dangerous because they are clothed in Christianity but are unbiblical. Some people claim to be Christians, yet they deny things like the Trinity, the virgin birth, or even the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Though we don't fully understand it, the church has always held that the core belief of Christianity, what sets us apart from other religions, is the doctrine of the Trinity. Without the virgin birth, God didn't die for our sins, which was the price that was demanded. Without the bodily resurrection, there is no hope for us (Read **1Corinthians 15:14-17**).

Avoiding These Teachings

So, how do we avoid these “diverse and strange teachings”? We can only avoid a trap if we recognize it as such. We recognize falsehood by knowing the truth. Many Christians think that’s the pastor’s job. He’s the shepherd; it’s up to him to teach the truth. But this letter wasn’t written to pastors. To be persistent in our faith, we must be able to think the faith, to know what we believe. There are things all of us can do to guard our faith, to be persistent.

Immersed in the Word

SOLA SCRIPTURA, the Bible is our sole authority for living. To know the truth, we must immerse ourselves in the Word of God. Not just a casual reading but meditating on and familiarizing ourselves with the Bible. God reveals something to us every time we read Scripture.

Study the Catechism

Martin Luther said we should read the **Catechism** every day. It’s a good idea to get an **Explanation to the Small Catechism** and study that as well. The **Catechism** is a great distillation of what the Word says.

Read the Book of Concord

CFW Walther said that every Lutheran home should have a copy of the **Book of Concord**, the compilation of the Lutheran confessions. Of course, to own one implies that it’s going to be read. It helps us stay grounded in the confessional faith and not get off track, as is so easy to do.

Confess the Creeds

Each week we confess the Creed, either the Apostles’ or the Nicene. These sum up the most important biblical teachings about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is what the church has taught as biblical, orthodox faith for 2,000 years.

Strengthening Our Frail Faith

But we are fallen, and our faith is frail. How can we keep the faith and make this pilgrim journey? How can we have the strength to persist? **Hebrews** says *the heart is strengthened by grace* (**Hebrews 13:9**). This is why church attendance is so important. God strengthens our faith when we hear the Word and receive the Sacrament. Through these means, He gives us the grace to have a **PERSISTENT FAITH**.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
