

It's been 16 years now, so things may have changed, but when we visited the US, I came away with a firm belief, that what these people really need, is simple plumbing that works...

For a start, almost every toilet had a plunger sitting beside it, so you could get the thing unblocked. Some would fill up and almost overflow before they began to swirl and empty.

When it came to taps, we were only staying in cheap motels, but I think we'd stayed in 8 or 10 different motels, before I found a tap and shower combination that wasn't different to every other tap and shower combination that we'd used before.

Some would have:

- a knob that you would have to pull and turn; Others*
- a button you would have to push to make it go to the shower head;*
- when you pushed the button, it took it away from the shower head;*

It was almost like every motel owner said to their builder, "I want something different. It doesn't matter if it doesn't work, or if it's complicated. I just want something different."

And I came away from there wishing we could have just good old fashioned hot and cold water taps.

It wasn't until our final night (and we were in Canada by then), that we went out to a restaurant, and our boys returned from the toilet, all very excited, "Dad, we found a toilet that worked!!!"

And I said “This I gotta see”, and went and had a look, and on the toilet was written “Coroma, Sydney, Australia”... (homesick)

It’s quite common, to crave for something different.

It’s what keeps the fashion houses in business. I once heard somebody describe “fashion”, as “something you didn’t like yesterday; Love today; and hate tomorrow...” But of course, because it’s different, I like it today...

It’s the reason biscuit manufacturers and ice-cream makers bring out their limited addition flavours – we are drawn to experience something different...

And so, as individuals/consumers, the prospect of:

- a new taste;
- a new look;
- a new experience

entices us, to what promises to be, the most exciting thing that we’d better not miss out on.....

But when it comes to the church, the appeal for all things “new” and “different” has always been a problem.

You see, when it comes to the Gospel, how does one improve upon perfection. And for me as a Bible teacher, I know that

most people would love to hear something new, that they have never been taught before. And if that's you, I've got nothing to offer, because my task and calling, is to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and His Gospel of grace...

But, the Devil cashes in on the desire for something new. He **will** offer something different, only what he offers, will be a corruption of the real thing... And some will find that appealing, because they want something different...

There's an old hymn,
Tell me, the old old story:

*Tell me the story slowly,
That I may take it in—
That wonderful redemption,
God's remedy for sin;
Tell me the story often,
For I forget so soon,
The "early dew" of morning
Has passed away at noon*

*Tell me the old, old story;
Tell me the old, old story,
Tell me the old, old story
Of Jesus and His love.*

Our Bible reading today said:

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of

life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

You see, when he said “Remember your leaders”, it’s not about “the leaders” – it’s about their faith/what they believed... It’s about Jesus Christ. **He is the same yesterday and today and forever** . He does not change.

And when he says “leaders”, he’s not talking about leaders who regurgitate whatever teaching is popular today. He’s talking about the ones who brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the church he’s writing to. The letter to the Hebrews was written only about 30 or 40 years after Jesus rose from the dead. And so, the “leaders” who taught them about Jesus, were likely, first generation Christians... (Most likely Apostles, who had seen Jesus with their own eyes, and known Him)...

What do you look for in a leader??? When Hebrews says, “Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”, what do you think of?

I’ll tell you what a lot of people think of today:
They seek a leader who seems to be doing well.

- nice family;
- fun times;
- prosperous;
- successful;
- charismatic;
- a person of influence...

“Yeah, that’s who I want to be...”

But do you realise, when Hebrews says ““**Consider the outcome of their way of life**”, he wasn’t talking about “being fit” and “looking good in a muscle t-shirt”. Many of their Christian leaders were languishing in prison. That was the outcome of **their** way of life/their faith in Jesus – persecution... In fact, at the end of this letter, he says “BTW, Timothy’s been released...” Oh wow. Good news... But, what does that reveal about the outcome of **Timothy’s** way of life? He’s been in jail...

and imitate **their** faith.

In what way? Well, ⁸ **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

These are the ones who introduced you to Jesus Christ. Imitate their faith. They held fast to the old, old story. They continued to preach the unchanging Word of God, even if it meant that they would land in prison because of it... Imitate **their** faith...

Now, throughout the ages, there has always been temptations to change the Word of God,, but Hebrews says, ⁹ **Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings...**

Don’t be led away by teachings that are:

- different to what the apostles taught;
- strange/foreign...

And of the strange and different teachings:

- some will keep coming up again (century after century);
- Others will be new, for a particular generation.

I suspect, if this was being written today, it would probably say something like, “Don’t believe what you’ve heard on social media/read on the internet. Believe what’s in the Bible.”

For the Hebrews, it looks like they were under pressure to compromise on the Gospel, in order to continue fellowshiping in the local Jewish synagogue... And this was a common theme for the early church.

In the early days, Christianity rose up out of Judaism. How could it not? The People of Israel are God’s chosen people. Jesus is a Jew. Every single one of the original 12 apostles were Jews... Jesus used to teach in the Synagogues, and so did the early church. When the apostles came to another town, it was their practice to go to the local synagogue on the Sabbath and there proclaim the resurrection of Jesus, and the Gospel of repentance in the Name of the Lord Jesus...

But there came a time when the religious leaders made it impossible for that to continue. And it came to the stage where anyone who professed faith in Jesus, were put out of the synagogue.

They were shunned. Shunned by their:

- religion;
- community;
- family...

And so, into this situation, came different teachings – strange teachings – teachings that were not the old, old message of grace...

Now, we don't know exactly what these were, but we do have a pretty good idea. You see, one of the big issues of contention, revolved around the Jewish cleanliness laws, and what you were allowed to eat and what you were **not** allowed to eat. In the book of Acts, we see this being played out in the life of Peter, where he was given a dream of the clean and the unclean, and he was told, "Don't call what I have made holy, unclean"... And he learned at that point, that he could fellowship with the gentiles. He could eat with the gentiles, and it didn't matter if they didn't eat the pure foods...

And yet, in the book of Galatians, we see where the Apostle Paul takes the Apostle Peter to task, because he had come under pressure from the Jewish religious leaders, and he was withdrawing from table fellowship with the Gentiles (he wouldn't eat with them)...

And it seems to me, that could well be what's going on here.

⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

You see, the message of Jesus Christ, is we are saved by grace. Both Jew and Gentil (non-Jew) are save by grace. Jesus died, as the sacrifice for our sins. He is the only way our

sins can be atoned for. And so, we repent of sins, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are saved...

Back in chapter 10, Hebrews said that the Law (the Old Testament Jewish way of doing things), was a shadow of what was to come in Jesus Christ... And the blood of bulls and goats never saved anyone... It's impossible for that to take away sins....:

And Hebrews goes on to say:

¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.

(the tent, meaning the tabernacle) (those who follow the old religious sacrificial system)...

And he uses an image to say to them, "It's OK if you are shunned". "It's OK if you get kicked out of the synagogue."

The blood of the sacrifices gets brought to the altar, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And Jesus was taken right outside of the city to be crucified... He was shunned. He was rejected by His own people... The Son of God, came to the temple of God, and they killed him...

¹³ Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

In other words, you might be getting shunned because of your faith in Jesus; Maybe you don't fit in because you're a

Christian... That's OK. We don't live for this world. We live, for the kingdom that is to come.

So, that was the situation before them...

Into this situation, there must've been some kind of teaching, that they could be welcome in the synagogue, as long as they met the food cleanliness rules... And given the past controversies, that probably meant, "Don't eat with a gentile"...

So, that's probably what's going on, but we don't know.

V⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods

You see, there was something **critical**, that was at stake here: **Grace**.

The religious law would tell them, "Don't eat this; Don't touch that; Keep this ceremony; Make these sacrifices..." But the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, is a message of grace...

Our inheritance, is not a temple, or a city that will be reduced to rubble and vapourised on the day of His coming... **we seek the city that is to come** – that which is eternal.

So, V¹⁵ Through him (through Jesus Christ) then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

We don't sacrifice sheep/bulls/goats/doves... Our sacrifice, is a sacrifice of praise, and a sacrifice of good works...

V¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Sometimes we protestants get so caught up on "saved by grace, not by Law", that we confuse "Law" with "good works"...

And this passage here, captures the way it's meant to be: The principal of salvation at stake here, is "Grace"... We are not the works of the Law... In fact, to follow Jesus, you'll probably get kicked out of the Temple/Synagogue.... And that's OK, because our spiritual strength is found in grace...

But "good works", are not what he's talking about...

Do you remember, last week we were talking about this series of "let us" statements, that began in chapter 12, and continues into chapter 13, and it holds together the concept of worship that is good and acceptable to God.

Well, it continues here...

- let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.
- let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Don't be ashamed of Jesus. No matter what the cost, acknowledge His Name before men.

And:

- ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

It's all part of acceptable worship.

- Doing good;
- Sharing what we have with our Brothers and Sisters;
- Giving praise to God;
- Acknowledging Jesus, even when it's not popular...

It's a sacrifice that pleases God....

So:

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

What are the different/new/foreign/strange teachings that lead people away today???

Oh, they are multitude.

Some will:

- mix Christianity up with other religions to make it sound less offensive in our inclusive culture;
- tell us we should embrace Jewish religion and customs;
- tell us “We must not try to do good, because that’s Law”, and if you personally put any effort into it, that’s working against the Spirit;
- claim to be some kind of progressive Christianity, and reject the spiritual power of God;
- bring in new and diverse teachings about:
 - the power of words; or
 - prosperity; or
 - claiming blessings; or
 - speaking things into being

Some new teachings will:

- focus on “revival”
- be a social gospel, where we tell the Government what to do, rather than focusing on personal repentance and doing good ourselves...
- introduce secret bible codes and number codes, and tell you that you won’t understand prophecy unless you buy

and read this book...

- change the definition of repentance, and change faith into a thing of the mind, rather than a complete surrender of self...

The thing is, if you hear a teaching that you've never heard before, or if it's something that's only been around for 100-200 years, go back to the Scriptures. Is this the old, old story, or is it something new...

I have to monitor this in myself, every day.

*There have been a few times, where somebody has come to me after a message and they've said "Wow, I don't think I've ever heard that before... I've only ever heard **this** interpretation, but what you've just said, is different to what I've heard before..."*

And whenever I get that kind of feed-back, it forces me to take stock:

- Have I been true to the Word of God?
- Did my message reflect the age-old, unchanging Gospel of Grace???
- Is this the faith that our forebears have believed? Or,
- is it strange and diverse???

Because either this person has been denied the full message of the unchanging Gospel of Grace, for way too long, or I have

diverged into the thinking of man, rather than the unchanging Word of God.

And so, as a Bible teacher, I have to take stock of this all the time, and you should too.

Just because something we are taught, is a popular belief today, doesn't make it true. Is it the old; old story, or is it something that's new, and that's what makes it attractive.

Christianity, is not a fashion. It doesn't change. The way of communicating it may change, but the message itself, is timeless. When it comes to Christianity, nothing new is worth having, because one cannot improve upon perfection.

So, through the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the same yesterday and today and forever, let us

- unashamedly, hold fast to the old; old story;
- continually, offer up a sacrifice of praise; and
- not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
We thank You,
for Your unchanging Gospel of Grace.

We praise You,
that our Lord Jesus Christ is unchanging.
- that we are never left wondering
Who He will be today,
because He is the same
yesterday; today; and forever.

Help us to proclaim His unchanging Gospel of Grace,
and to praise His Name;

By Your Holy Spirit, help us to do good,
And to share what we have.
To do it sacrificially,
in the Name of Jesus,
Amen.