**Greater Than All - wk 26 – What to Look For**

**Finding a church can be hard and frustrating… church hoping.**

**The last chapter the writer has highlighted- Jesus is God in the flesh, creator of all, greater than all, the only forgiver of sins.**

**Hebrews final encouragements…today - church life & leaders.**

**Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life (“consider their conduct”) and imitate their faith.** **8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. (“strange doctrines”)**

**What to look for in a good pastor - spiritual leader**

**\*\* Look for leaders who live honorable lives**

**“Consider the outcome of the way of life” (lit. look at the result of their conduct)**

**Sadly, we see a lack of accountability with church leaders. Current controversies roll out daily…**

**Requirements for leaders - areas of maturity required for church leaders…**

**(Titus 1:5-9, 1 Tim. 3:1-7) Ex. – moral and spiritual character, good reputation, above accusation, healthy marriage and family, self-control, spiritually mature, not a drunkard, not argumentative, greedy, gentle, caring, holds to what is right, properly uses and teaches God’s word.**

**When someone cannot live up to them – they are disqualified as a leader according to the Bible. We / they are not going to be perfect, but we must live authentic lives in Christ.**

**If those you look up to have let you down, remember next (Oreo) 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Leaders come and go – they rise and fall – Jesus is the same….)**

**\*\* Look for leaders who have sound teaching**

**They “speak the word of God” not “strange teachings.”**

**13:9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.**

**“Strange teachings” - Doctrine matters. Hold tight to sound teaching – use discernment – use the scriptures.**

**There has never been a shortage of strange doctrines.**

**I have heard some pretty strange teachings in churches.**

**1 Timothy 4:16 - Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.**

**Bad theology hurts people. It can create environments of control and abuse – and can result in false faith and hell.**

**What follows is a good description of a healthy church.**

**Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 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. 10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tent[a] have no right to eat. 11 For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. 12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. 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. 15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.**

**What to look for in a good church? 5 Doctrines 2 Practices to hold tight**

**Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

**1. Look for a church that emphasizes Jesus as eternal God.**

**\* Doctrine of immutability of God – Jesus the unchanging God.**

**A reference to the eternal divine Jesus, faithful and consistent.**

**Everything changes… but God. This is a core attribute of God.**

**(Malachi 3:6, 1 Sam 15:29 – does not change) – The trinity.**

**Jesus did not become God, or filled w/ God, part or piece of God.**

**Unhealthy teaching that Jesus is God, but not on earth. He was a man filled with the HS. Teaching that we can do what he did. Strange…**

**Jesus retained all divine attributes and took on flesh & blood. He is the same yesterday… Be careful of “strange teachings”**

**Hebrews 13:9b It is good for our hearts to be strengthened (established) by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so. (We are not made right with God or receive his favor thru rules / ceremonies) 10 We have an altar (cross of Jesus) from which those who minister at the tabernacle (those who try to reach God thru religion) have no right to eat.**

**2. Look for a church that stresses salvation through grace**

**\*Doctrine of grace – saved by grace through faith.**

**Grace is - unmerited favor (lit God’s kindness and blessing)**

**Eph 2:8 - For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

**BTW - God does not benefit in any way – grace not only saves us it reveals the glory and goodness of God to his creation.**

**Mystery of God’s gift. This is gospel anything is else is strange**

**3. Look for a church that leads people to the cross**

**Hebrews 13:11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. (bodies of the sacrifices are taken outside the city) 12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate (Golgotha Calvary) to make the people holy through his own blood.**

**We are made holy “through his own blood.”**

**\*Doctrine of the substitutionary atonement**

**Jesus was not simply showing us the way of love. He was the very payment for sin with his blood. He took our place.**

**Strange teaching – an example of love, not payment**

**Hebrews 13:13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. (If Christ was rejected - expect to be rejected for following him – to be shut out of the worlds camp – but it’s okay, we are just passing through) 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.**

**4. Look for a church that points to the future kingdom of heaven**

**\*Doctrine of the kingdom - eternal salvation**

**Jesus teaches that this world is not our final destination – we are to strive to hold loosely to this world.**

**No need to be obsessed or stressed over events of this life.**

**We won’t always be accepted - but we have a greater city.**

**Strange teaching - Dominion (kingdom now) theology**

**Hebrews 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.**

**5. Look for a church that clearly exalts the name of Jesus**

**\*Healthy Doctrine of worship - what is taught about worship?**

**How do they worship? Who is the center of attention in worship? The supremacy of Jesus. “Openly profess his name”**

**Worship songs that don’t really talk about Jesus or focus on the power of the believer.**

**(then 2 practices) Hebrews 13:16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.**

**1. Look for a church that underlines care and outreach to others**

**Do they preach and live out love and care to others? Eyes outward on the community and to encourage those around them.**

**2. Look for a church that highlights generous living**

**Teaches and shows by example – that what we have been giving is for the service of God – so we share it willingly.**

**That is what to look for. Hebrews then adds this challenge - if you find a church like that – if you find a pastor like that then…**

**Hebrews 13:17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, (NIV = have confidence - original = obey your leaders) because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you. 18 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. 19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.**

**If you find a church and a pastor that reflects Jesus…**

**What to look for in a good follower (of the leaders God gives you)**

**\*\* Imitate their faith**

**Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.**

**When you find a preacher who faithfully preaches the Word of God and lives what he preaches – imitate their way of life.**

**God gives people in our life to help us grow and encourage us. One person’s failures dose not invalidate other leaders in your life.**

**…a failed pastor does not mean everyone in the church is bad.**

**(Paul) 1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.**

**Remember they are not perfect - they are not your hope. They we are humans saved by grace and looking for and needing grace.**

**Follow their examples… as long as it is an example of Christ**

**You need leaders whose life you can see – to imitate them.**

**A problem w/ corporate church leadership structures – how do you know if their life is honorable? Usually, we find out years after someone is exposed. There is so much isolation and insulation for pastors that it is almost impossible to know how many really live.**

**“Well, the pastor needs to be kept separate from the people…”**

**Jesus feeding of 5000 (15,000) sent disciples away and stayed back. Mark 6:45. He was with people as much as possible.**

**\*\*Follow their leadership**

**Hebrews 13:17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority…**

**Have confidence. Trust is needed. Some have lost trust.**

**Assuming they have the good character and good doctrine. Don’t just listen but follow their direction.**

**Some pastors abuse this to the point of control. 2 Major issues of cults: Abuse and Belief. Control and false teaching.**

**Red flag – when a leader says to submit to me. We are to ultimately point to Jesus and encourage submission to Christ.**

**What does submit to your church leaders look like? Do pastors really have a say in your life? Bigger questions - Does the Bible have authority? When we preach, teach, and instruct – that is authority. Never do anything that contradicts the scriptures.**

**\*\* Understand the weight of their calling**

**“ …they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden…”**

**It is my calling to point out the scriptures for your life. I will (all pastors will) answer to God for how they did this. I take this with fear and joy. A humbling high call for every spiritual leader.**

**2 reasons ministry becomes a burden: When they are doing it alone (not enough help) and when there is resistance to basic discipleship.**

**As shepherds we quickly learn that sheep bite – but we are to remain grace filled, kind, patience, and open to accountability.**

**\*\* Don’t resist spiritual instruction – it’s for your good**

**“…for that would be of no benefit to you.”**

**Spiritual leaders are given as a gift to teach, encourage, support, and keep the flock accountable to God’s word.**

**It is ultimately for your sake that we challenge you. It is for your good to follow the instruction and challenges.**

**It is our joy to see God work in your life and see you grow.**

**\*\* Pray for them**

**18 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.**

* **Pray for our life – that we live honorable lives before God. Not as hypocrites or a double life.**

**19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.**

* **Pray for our ministry – Things God has put on our heart to see happen. Pray that they are God’s will, and that God would remove obstacles. Pray for the harvest and workers.**
* **Pray of our relationships (“restored to you”) we need friends and people we can trust. Just as it’s important to you, it is to us.**

**I want to end with an encouragement on those 2 practices mentioned:**

**- Care and outreach – Easter Outreach April 16 – we need volunteers. We not been able since Covid – this is out reboot. We need you!**

**- Generous living – we together can make a difference. Faithful and consistent giving is needed for us to be here.**

**Hebrews 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.**

**Let’s end by doing this!**