

Do something with me. Take out your cell phone. Doesn't matter what kind, smart or not. If you text, send a text to someone you love about telling them you're listening to God's Word right now. If yours takes pictures, take a picture of me, the cross, or your neighbor. If it only makes phone calls just look at it. You do remember that all of this would've been impossible 25 years ago. For as dominant as cell phones have become in our lives, they haven't always been around.

25 years from now who knows what some pastor will use for an illustration. It probably hasn't been invented yet. It most likely will not be a cell phone. It's all a reminder that the things we have, buy, and hold on to actually come and go. Nothing is forever. Ah, but that can't be true. Something must last forever. Yesterday I was a sinner and so were you. Today I'm a sinner and so are you. Tomorrow I'll be a sinner and so will you. But I won't always be a sinner. Humanity wasn't always sinful, think Adam and Eve before sin entered the world. So it must be true, nothing is forever.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews would say otherwise. The things we have won't last forever. The things we want can't ever give us happiness. Other people, even our family, aren't enough to make life worth living. I've got news that doesn't surprise you. None of those things is forever. But the second lesson says what is...

**Jesus is Christ always
You learned his message of love
You imitate his messengers of love**

I like the comfortable feeling of driving my car. I'm use to the views I have and the feel of the pedals. I know the noises it makes and it fits so nicely. New cars don't drive like mine. They have different braking pressure. The views are all different. The buttons are changed. When I drive one I want to go back to what I know, what I'm comfortable with. The people receiving this letter, the Hebrew Christians, wanted the same thing spiritually. They were comfortable being Hebrews, Jews. They were comfortable with sacrifices, priests, and temples. So as Christians following Jesus it was hard. It meant giving up all those other things. It also meant teasing and hardship from others. With all that, it was tempting to go away from Jesus and his message of love.

"Keep on loving each other as brothers." The writer reminds them brothers who love each other don't exalt themselves or seek their own way. Brotherly love humbly takes the lowest seats and saves the important ones for someone else. **"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."** This was more than just being friendly because they had to. This was hospitality. This was serving in a ministry of love.

There were also two kinds of false loves the writer warned them to stay away from. **"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money."** First was any false love in marriage. That would be anything that dishonored marriage, be it from a single or a married person. Anything bringing sin into a bed meant only for marriage would be false love. The other was a love of earthly things. Putting trust in them was false love.

Do you remember the last time you got mad or screamed at someone almost without thinking? At that moment you didn't love them as a brother or sister. You sinned and didn't love them at all. Did you ever feel the pressure to fit in so badly that when someone new came along you avoided them? They were strange and you didn't help. You didn't show love. If we don't welcome guests or people who are yet strangers to our worship, but rather make them feel unwelcome or uncomfortable we're sinning. When we go along with the world thinking that marriage is a dying institution that doesn't work anymore or that sex doesn't have to be that big of a deal, we're sinning. God gave marriage, he governs it, and he guards it. Christ's message of love is lost in our sinfulness.

We could respond with love towards others because we fear God will judge us harshly if we don't. That would be a wrong reason. We love and we're humble because we've learned Christ's message of love. Jesus is Christ always. He first loved us. He gave himself. We love because we know we're loved. And hear the promise God makes to ensure we get it. **"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."** The writer stresses the negative to enforce the positive. *"Not ever, never will I leave you; and no, not ever, never will I forsake you."* The strength of that promise is based on Jesus Christ. The cross is completed work. The payment has been made. Jesus has already risen from the dead. Never, ever, never, will God leave us. He has saved us. That's Jesus' message of love.

With Christ's love as our motivation we can love and show humility. We can love both people we know and strangers. We can seek to serve them and show hospitality to them. We can love those who are suffering. We can love our spouse exclusively. If we're single we can honor God's gift of marriage by not misusing it. We can keep money in its proper perspective as a gift from God to use and enjoy. Jesus is Christ always and we have learned his message of love.

Two chapters before this, in chapter eleven of Hebrews, the writer allows us to see all the heroes of faith. Men and women who learned Christ's message of love, trusted him and honored him. The writer records it as a great cloud of witnesses for the Hebrews to look up to. These heroes of faith heard Christ's message of love and believing it they put it into action. Now they were examples, messengers of Christ's love to be imitated.

Someone to imitate can be a big help. My nephew wasn't born able to cast a fishing pole. He imitated his dad to learn. He could give it the same flick of the wrist. He could whip it the same. He could imitate what his dad was doing. The Hebrew Christians were learning Christ's message of love. They were tempted to return to their old ways though apart from Christ. They needed people to imitate. **"Remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."** These weren't just great people who did great things. These were leaders who had faith. Asking who they trusted and why and then imitating that would be helpful. Remembering their humility and that they were messengers of love with a faith that didn't change was good to do. Everything else may have changed, but one thing did not. Jesus was Christ.

Your parents didn't teach you to be hurtful at school and pick on others. Your grandparents never showed you how to be greedy or complain. Your family didn't make you sinful. They likely did their best to keep you from sin, but you sinned anyway. You imitated sins they committed. You added your own. You learned new ways to deny Christ, modeling what you saw in them and the rest of the world. God holds you accountable for all of it.

Here's the truth though. **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."** There are messengers from your past that tell you that, parents, grandparents, pastors and teachers. Those messengers have changed, but the message of forgiveness in Christ they share has not. It's a message of Christ's love, Christ's death and resurrection, Christ's promise to return. It forgives hurtful sins, greed, and complaining. Christ forgives all the sins you learned from your family and the ones you made up on your own. Jesus is Christ. Always. He is Savior today and will be tomorrow. All the messengers of your past who died in faith knowing Christ Jesus died in comfort with his promise. Imitate that. Live that now. Learn what they learned about Jesus. Love that message and love those messengers for sharing it with you. Believe in what they believed and center your faith and life on Christ.

If you had asked me 25 years ago I wouldn't have had a clue about technology today. And I don't know what technology will be like 25 years from now. But if you ask me what will save me from my sins 25 years from now, I'll say Jesus Christ. If you ask someone who has believed for a long time what saved them 25 years ago, they'll say Jesus Christ. That's a message of love we've learned. It comes from messengers of love we imitate by believing what they did. Jesus is Christ always.