

Hebrews 13

What are we to be doing (v. 1)? Loving each other as brothers. Love brings people to Christ and will keep believers strong and united in the face of uncertainty and persecution....both of which the readers faced. **What is meant by brotherly love?** The word used for love is *philadelphia*, coming from the root *philia*. This ancient Greek word spoke of brotherly friendship and affection. It is the love of deep friendship and partnership. There should always be plenty of this kind of love among Christians.

What is meant by "entertaining strangers" (v. 2)? This is a general encouragement to show hospitality to believers who are strangers and may be passing through town or visiting. This was important because inns of that day were expensive and often centers of pagan practices and criminal activities. Oftentimes prisoners in the Roman world had to depend on friends outside the prison to provide them with food and other necessities. It was important for traveling Christians to find open homes from other Christians. This was simply a practical way to demonstrate brotherly love. **Who entertained angels?** Abraham (Genesis 18:1-22), Lot (Genesis 19:1-3), Gideon (Judges 6), and Manoah (Judges 13) are examples of those who entertained angels?

The point is that we do this for other Christians who are strangers to us. If you invite your best friends over for lunch, that is wonderful - but it doesn't fulfill this command. A wonderful way to fulfill this command is to meet and befriend strangers at church and to entertain them with hospitality.

Who should we care for (v. 3)? Prisoners here probably refers to those imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel. But it can also be extended to all who are in prison. This is yet another way to demonstrate brotherly love.

What is our responsibility to the marriage relationship (v. 4)? To honor marriage by keeping the marriage bed pure. The enemy of our souls wants to do everything he can to encourage sex *outside* of the marriage bed.

What are we commanded to do (v. 5)? Keep our lives free from the love of money and be content. Contentment has much more to do with what you *are* on the inside rather than what you *have*. The greatest contentment a believer can have lies in the one who promises, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (v. 5). The Apostle Paul had the right perspective on contentment (Philippians 4:11-13). We are most content when we are most focused on Christ.

What is the promise (v. 6)? Real contentment comes only when we trust in God to meet our needs and to be our security. When we do so, we need not fear men. Greed has lured many believers away from a life of faithful discipleship.

What are we commanded to do (v. 7)? Honor our spiritual leaders. Imitate them as you watch them live out their lives....as they cling to Christ and the truths of Christianity and bring God into every aspect of life. Just as much as a church needs godly leaders, it also needs godly *followers*.

What was the outcome of their leaders' way of life? They did not return to the Levitical system. They maintained their testimony and were faithful to the end....perhaps martyred. Their faith was to be imitated. We are not all called to the same forms of service but we are all called to a life of faith.¹

How is Jesus characterized (v. 8)? He has never changed. We should not expect something completely "new" as if it were from a "new Jesus." The nature of Jesus as revealed in the Bible is the same nature of Jesus that should be seen in the church today.

What warning does the author give (v. 9)? He warns against the false teachings of legalism...the idea that holiness was connected with externals such as ceremonial worship and clean foods....which produced *ritual cleanness*, as opposed to *inward holiness*. The reference here seems to deal with a return to Mosaic ceremonies and laws that were fulfilled in Jesus. The old Mosaic order was done away with at the Cross and must not be revived.

What should the heart be strengthened by, and what should it not be strengthened by (v. 9)? By grace and not by ritual. Our hearts are strengthened by an understanding and appropriation of God's *undeserved* approval of us, and not by an *assumed* approval gained through keeping a list of rules.

The writer to the Hebrews insisted that we have an altar, and it is an altar that those who cling to the Levitical system have no right to. **What is our altar (v. 10)?** Our altar is Christ himself (or the Cross) - the centerpiece of the Christian Gospel and understanding (1 Corinthians 1:18-24; 2:1-5).

Believers under the New Covenant feed spiritually on Jesus Christ. Those still under the Old Covenant ("*who minister at the tabernacle*") had "no right" to partake of Him for spiritual sustenance and fellowship with God, since their confidence (faith) was still in the Old Covenant.²

What happened to animals sacrificed for sin under the Old Testament (v. 11)? After their blood was sprinkled on the altar, their bodies were burned outside the camp on the Day of Atonement. **What is the illustration (v. 12)?** Jesus was crucified outside the city walls. Outside the camp of institutional Judaism, which rejected Jesus and Christianity, is where He sanctified the people with His own blood.

For us today, the camp is the entire religious system that teaches salvation by works, by ritual, or by ordinances. We are called to leave the camp and go stand with Him, bearing whatever suffering that may entail.

How does one come to Jesus (v. 13)? For the Jews of that day this was an encouragement to leave behind the temple sacrifices, cut their emotional and religious ties to Judaism and turn to the finished work of Christ as their sufficient sacrifice. Jerusalem was no longer their special city (v. 14). There is nothing wrong with Jewish Christians maintaining Jewish customs, provided they do not rely on them for favor with God.³

What kind of city do we not have here (v. 14)? A permanent city. **What does this mean?** The difficult job of bearing His disgrace is easier when we remember that the city or society we are cast out from is only temporary. We seek and belong to the permanent city yet to come.

What "city" do we seek (v. 14)? The city we seek is the heavenly Jerusalem. Our present habitation on earth is only temporary (11:10, 16).

What kinds of sacrifice should we make in response to Jesus' sacrifice for us (vv. 15-16)? Praise is not the only sacrifice that pleases God. We also please God with sacrifice when we do good and share....a call to sacrificial living. **What should motivate us?** Pleasing God.

Who are those who rule over us (v. 17)? The "leaders" in view are church elders (pastors; vv. 7, 24). These shepherds are responsible to watch over us and will have to give an account to God one day for their stewardship over us. These men are representatives of God.

What are we commanded to do (v. 17)? We must make their work a joy and not a burden by being obedient and submissive to their authority. Will the leaders of your church be able to tell God that leading you was a pleasure when they stand before Him?⁴

What is the author certain of (v. 18)? He has a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. Evidently he is referring to his critics who were encouraging the Jews to return to the worship of the Old Covenant.

What did the author ask others to do for him (vv. 18-19)? Pray for them. As far as the writer to the Hebrews was concerned, their prayers determined *if* and *when* he is reunited with them. This shows how seriously he regarded their prayers for him.

What observations do you have about the concluding doxology (vv. 20-25)?

What request did the author make on behalf of the Hebrews (v. 21)? God equips us with everything good. God works in us what is well pleasing in His sight. He does it through Jesus Christ. Then we do His will. In other words, He places the desire in us; He gives us the power to do it; then we do it; and He rewards us.⁵

¹ Believer's Bible Commentary, William MacDonald, 1995 Edition, (published by Thomas Nelson Publishers), p. 2209

² Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Hebrews, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 166

³ Ibid. p. 167

⁴ Ibid. p. 168

⁵ Believer's Bible Commentary, William MacDonald, 1995 Edition, (published by Thomas Nelson Publishers), p. 2211