

HEBREWS CHAPTER THIRTEEN

My friend Mark is an excellent cook. I've asked him to share recipes with me, but he doesn't have any! He just whips up wonderful dishes without them. I can't cook that way. I need step by step instructions. Tell me what ingredients I need and how to put them together. Then I can cook something that's edible. Well, at least most of the time.

The author of Hebrews has beautifully articulated why his audience should persevere in the faith and not turn back. He challenged them to stand firm in the face of persecution, to cling to their High Priest Jesus Christ, and not turn away from the superior Covenant. But what should this look like in their daily life?

Here in chapter 13, the author gives his audience some practical direction for living out their faith. He begins with a few guidelines for ethical living and relationships, touches again on holding fast to our High Priest Jesus, and then concludes his sermon-letter with a request for prayer.

Ethical Living

Read Hebrews 13:1-8.

How should our Christian faith be lived out in each of the following areas?

With our Christian brothers & sisters:

With strangers:

With prisoners & those who are mistreated:

In our sexual life:

With our material goods:

Leaders:

Christianity is not merely a set of beliefs or ideals. Our faith in Christ must permeate our entire life. As we follow Jesus, the way we behave and how we treat others should reflect His character. His response should be our response.

The Greek word translated as “love” in verse 1 is *phileo*. This general word for love includes the ideas of affection, concern, care, and hospitality for another. The New Testament is filled with passages commanding us to love our fellow Christians.

Describe what you think “love for the brothers” looks like on a day-to-day basis. Use 1 John 3:16-18 to help with your answer.

Do you meet the needs of others in your church on a regular basis? If so, how? If not, why not?

To “entertain strangers” (vs 2) refers to inviting them into our homes. We should graciously offer hospitality and refreshment to others. In the ancient world it was customary to take travelers in for the evening because it was expensive and often dangerous to stay at an inn. Traveling preachers were common and always needed hospitality from a member of the church. The author probably also had Abraham’s experience in Genesis 18:2-15 in mind when he mentions “entertaining angels without knowing it.”

Prisons in the ancient world were very different than American prisons today. Prisoners were mistreated and often had to depend on friends from the outside for food. We know that the audience had helped prisoners in the past (10:34). In fact, some of them may have even been imprisoned for their faith. The author now urges them to not shrink back from this show of love.

Think of those you know who are “in prison,” “suffering,” or “mistreated.” Who are they? What are some specific ways you can help them?

In the Greco-Roman world many felt that chastity in marriage was unreasonable. In fact, in some areas of the world, men were expected to take mistresses as confidants and sexual partners. The old argument that times are different today doesn't apply here! God and His standards do not change. What He expected then is what He expects now.

How does our western culture view sex within and outside marriage?

Reread 13:5-6. How does the love of money get in the way of our relationship with God?

Why don't Christians have to worry about our futures? What characteristics of God – found in these verses 5 and 6 – can we depend on?

After the author reminds His audience that they can depend on God to see them through hard times, he gives them a specific example to follow. “Remember those who first told you about Jesus? Think about how God sustained them and then follow their example. Jesus was there for them and He will be there for you, because He does not change!” Even though the author's audience had faced – and would continue to face – persecution, Jesus would not fail them.

How does Jesus' unchanging nature encourage you?

Praise the High Priest

Read Hebrews 13:9-16.

Christians have had to deal with false teaching since the earliest days of our faith. Here in verse 9, the author does not get specific about the nature of the false teachings his audience was dealing with. However, he could have in mind some of the Jewish practices they would take up if they returned to Judaism.

Once again, he reminds them of Christ's superior sacrifice. Ceremonial foods and animal sacrifices could never provide the forgiveness that believers receive through God's grace by the death of Christ. Those still under the Old Covenant cannot partake of the sacrifice offered on the cross, which is the altar of the New Covenant.

The "camp" in verse 13 represents the religion of Judaism and the Old Covenant. For Gentile Christians it could represent the pagan culture they turned away from when they became a Christian. The author calls them to leave that "camp" and not return.

What "camp" did you leave when you came to Christ?

Read Hebrews 11:13 and Philippians 3:20 and compare them with Hebrews 13:14. Why don't we have an "enduring city" here on earth? Where is our citizenship?

In our study of Hebrews, we have learned that animal sacrifice is no longer needed because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. He has made complete atonement for our sin. But here, the author mentions spiritual "sacrifices" that God still expects Christians to offer (verses 15-16). These "sacrifices of praise" are a believer's thankful response to the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

Even the Old Covenant made provision for an offering that would be given to God solely as an expression of thanksgiving. (See Leviticus 7:12.) This thank offering was voluntary and could only be made after all the other sacrifices for sin had been made. Based on the author's usage it seems he is using this offering as a metaphor for Christians.

The word translated "share with others," in verse 16, is the Greek word *koinonia*. It emphasizes a fellowship among believers that is lived out practically according to their needs.

Based on Hebrews 13:15-16, how can you offer God a "sacrifice of praise?" Also see Romans 12:1-2 to help with your answer.

How does God view this kind of “sacrifice?” (See verse 16).

Closing Remarks

Read Romans 13:17-25.

The author begins to wrap up his letter. Only a few last things need to be said. First, he directs them to obey their leaders. These men watch over them and care for their spiritual health. This job comes with great responsibility because God will hold them accountable. The people’s obedience will not only make the leaders’ job easier, it will also be better for them!

How can you be a “joy” to your leaders?

What kind of behavior would create a “burden” for your leaders?

Before the author takes care of a little business and closes his letter in verses 22-25, he turns to prayer. “Pray for us” in verse 18 is a present imperative. This command implies continuous action. In other words, the author wants them to pray for him and keep on praying for him. Although he wrote this letter to challenge and encourage them, he also needs their prayers and encouragement. The phrase “may be restored to you,” in verse 19, shows that the author was among them at one time.

In the ancient world, a benediction (or doxology) was an important component of an address. They expressed a wish of well-being for the readers or hearers. The author offers a beautiful one here in verses 20-21.

List the requests the author makes of God in his benediction prayer.

“Grace be with you all.” The author ends his letter with a prayer that God would bless each of them with His grace. What a fitting way to conclude such a marvelous treatise on Jesus Christ, our Superior High Priest. The author has given us more than enough reason to stand firm in our faith and not turn back.

As we end our last lesson together, pray and ask God if there is any area of your daily life that does not reflect a faithful Christian walk. If so, repent and let God control and guide you in this area.