

**Introduction:** This is the final lesson in our study of Hebrews. The author ends the letter with admonitions and exhortations calling believers to live in a manner pleasing to God. If they do that, they will avoid learning by experience the truth that God's wrath against sin is a consuming fire.

**Hebrews 13:1-6:** *"Let brotherly love continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. <sup>3</sup> Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. <sup>4</sup> Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. <sup>5</sup> Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." <sup>6</sup> So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"*

Brotherly love is a natural characteristic of believers. All believers are adopted into the family of God and stand together. That truth should lead to love and respect for all believers. Jesus said that having love for one another would be the mark by which His true disciples would be known (John 13:35). Jesus is speaking of love based on shared relationship, not love based on personal liking. All believers share in the life of Christ and are related to one another through that relationship. As brothers and sisters in Christ, they are to value and care for one another even when don't naturally like each other.

The second exhortation is to be hospitable and generous, first to those of the family of God, but strangers. The age-old Christian ministry of hospitality to strangers is a reflection of the undeserving mercy believers have received from God. As an added incentive, the author mentions that in giving hospitality to strangers, some have entertained angels unaware. What a pleasant possibility to contemplate.

The third exhortation is to actively remember those in prison and others suffering in difficult circumstances. Even people justly imprisoned are to be helped. Jesus came to meet the needs of sinners. Believers are to do likewise.

The fourth exhortation shifts from considering the heavenly family of brothers and sisters in Christ to relationships within our natural family. The marriage relationship is the origin of all human relationships. The purity of the marriage relationship is indispensable to all social well-being. Allowing marriage to be degraded will tend to bring corruption to all spheres of life. Believers are to ***“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”***

Honorable marriages cannot exist where sexual infidelity is tolerated. Christian counseling, understanding, and a willingness to forgive help when infidelity occurs. The guilty need to confess and truly repent. God views infidelity as very serious, and if unconfessed and repented, will allow the natural consequences of pain, hurt and guilt to take their terrible toll.

The fifth exhortation is about contentment and its opposite discontentment. The author says discontentment is often a consequence of covetousness. Genuine Christian living exhibits a contented, greed-free attitude (vv. 5-6). Contentment is grounded in God's promises and belief in His ability to supply the necessities of life (Matthew 6:25-34).

“Love of money” is especially to be avoided. Love of money and things often becomes a substitute for trusting in God's loving care. There are many warnings in Scripture against loving money. It is the “love” of money, not money itself, that is the problem. Jesus said it is impossible to serve both God and money. Paul wrote to young Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:9-10, ***“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”*** Be content with what God grants. God has promised to never leave or forsake us.

**Hebrews 13:7; 17:** ***“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”***

**Godly Leaders:** In verse 13:7, the past tense of *“leaders who spoke to you the word of God”* seems to refer to past leaders whose good leadership continues to have impact. The faith exhibited by godly leaders is an inspiration to be emulated. Most Christians have had at least one mentor who shaped their faith by godly example.

Believers should even more confidently and fervently look to our divine mentor, Jesus Christ. Earthly leaders are temporary and new ones must come along. Jesus our Lord never needs a replacement. He is permanently available to all who love Him. The instruction to emulate the faith of leaders assumes Christian leaders will be godly in their beliefs, their thoughts, their actions, and will be devoted to the best interests of their followers.

Verse 13:17 deals with the appropriate response to good leaders. They deserve and should get respect and support. As for this group’s current leaders, the author says, *“Obey your leaders and submit to them.”* That injunction, if taken the wrong way or if enforced by ungodly leaders, can result in “blind” obedience. That can lead to harmful authoritarianism in which pastors become autocrats viewing the congregation as their personal domain rather than God’s flock entrusted to their care for which they are accountable.

Christian leaders, who seek authority for personal reasons and gain ignore Jesus' words about leaders in Mark 10:42-43, *“And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.”* Warnings against "lording it over the brethren" are given in 2 Corinthians 1:24 by Paul, in 1 Peter 5:3 by Peter, and in 3 John 9-10 by John. Obedience to the spiritual authority of godly leaders in the church is proper and so is imitation of godly lives.

A position of Christian leadership creates an inherent danger for the one who holds the position. The higher the position, the greater the danger. The power accompanying leadership tends to become addictive and is easily abused. The desire to seek ever greater power is overwhelming.

Commitment by believers to godly spiritual leaders (13:17) is right and good, but all leaders are subject to accountability and are held accountable by God. Urging

believers to willingly respond to their leaders is grounded in the assumption that those leaders will be godly and recognize they are under-shepherds working under Christ's authority. Godly leaders accept responsibility to lead wisely and lovingly *as men who must give an account to God*.

Questions should be asked about all potential leaders which need a "yes" answer if obedience to their leadership is expected. Does the potential leader faithfully teach and adhere to the Word of God? Does their life exhibit faith worth emulating? Do they know and understand Scripture? Do they know how to lead biblically?

Examine the evidence. Compare with what Scripture teaches. From what you know about the lives of your leaders and their families, do they exhibit the virtues of verses 13:1-6? Are their family lives worth imitating? Church leaders are responsible to God for their actions. Help them so that their work might be a joy, not a burden.

**Hebrews 13:8-16:** *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. <sup>13</sup> Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. <sup>14</sup> For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. <sup>15</sup> Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. <sup>16</sup> Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."*

**Jesus Christ the Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever:** Think about it! For hundreds of years, the church of Christ has endured fierce attacks from without and within and continued to expand. Empires have come and gone. Human institutions are inherently unstable. But the church of Christ is indestructible because Christ is

unchangeable. He is the Rock of ages (Isaiah 26:4) upon which the church stands and defies the tempests of time. Today, once again the threat to the church is great.

Even as the letter to the Hebrews was being written, teachings were spreading which were foreign to Christ's truths. In the ensuing years there have been many divergent doctrines within the Christian church, but the truth of Jesus and His redemptive actions continues. Because Jesus Christ is unchangeable, teachings concerning Him or His life which are new and strange, things not consistent with the New Testament cannot be true.

Jesus is the supreme leader for believers and the supreme example to all Christian leaders. Our Lord Jesus is holy and unchanging. He is the One with overall authority over the lives of all believers. Follow Him and His example. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings. Diverse and strange teachings contrary to the apostolic doctrine, both from without and within the earthly church, repeatedly attempt to draw people away from the Christian faith.

In Acts 20:30 Paul says, ***“and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”*** Commitment to sound doctrine is vitally important. Know and be committed to the Word of God. Sound doctrine is derived from the Bible alone. Every age has strange teachings which threaten the church.

Verses 13:9-12 address the tendency to think approval from God or higher status before Him can be earned by doing special things. An example is eating, or refraining from eating, certain foods. Eating fish on Friday would be a case in point. Many appeals are made today for vegetarianism, special diets, and even the use of marijuana, peyote or other hallucinogenic drugs, which are designed to enhance spiritual vitality. The author calls such practices ***“diverse and strange teachings”*** and warns against being involved in such beliefs. Let the heart be strengthened by grace, fervent study of God's Word, and the good words of fellow believers.

Teachers of these strange philosophies think that, by people adhering to strict dietary regulations or special physical and mental exercises, they are able to advance spiritually. In Romans 14:16-17, Paul tells his Roman readers who are judging one another based on eating habits, ***“So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of***

*as evil.* <sup>17</sup> *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*” Paul in Colossians 2:23 comments on all such strange practices, *“These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”* Attention should be focused on the strengthening by grace brings through trust in the living Christ.

In the absence of an understanding of historic Judaism, verses 13:13-14 are enigmatic. Because sin pollutes, sinners punished by death were executed outside the boundaries of the camp in the desert and later, in the promised land, outside city walls. An Israelite woman’s son, who blasphemed the name of the Lord, was taken outside the camp and stoned to death (Leviticus 24:11-16, 23).

In the battle for Jericho, Achan disobeyed Joshua’s directive *“all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the Lord and shall come into the treasury.”* Achan pillaged an ingot of gold, a quantity of silver, and a beautiful Babylonian garment. Achan was stoned, as well as his sheep, other livestock and his children. Their remains were burnt, and stones piled on top.

Because of our sin, Jesus was accused of blasphemy. He was crucified and suffered outside the city gate, enduring God’s wrath on our behalf. He paid for our sins suffering the agonies of crucifixion and the Father’s withdrawal from Him. The agony of the Father’s withdrawal was so great that Jesus cried “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). The shame, suffering, and shedding of His blood completed Jesus’ mission of satisfying the Law. He removed the sin of those who believe, and made it possible for them to be made holy as God is holy.

Believers are to be willing to follow God’s path for life wherever it leads. Commitment to good works (13:15-16) is a commitment to sacrifices pleasing to God and appropriate to today. The day for sacrificing animals has passed, but there other kinds of sacrifices which please God. Paul highlights the presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1). Offering continual praise and thanksgiving, good deeds in general, being generous in sharing with others, and always exhibiting our love for God through obedience!

Israel's religion in the past utilized material expression through rituals and sacrifices. The time for those rituals and sacrifices has passed. Verse 13:14: "***For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.***" Ornate buildings, special ceremonies and elaborate ritual are not necessary. Like Abraham, believers are pilgrims and strangers in the world, "***looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God***" (11:10).

This is not intended as a prohibition against money (Abraham was rich) nor a prohibition against being involved in politics or business (Abraham was involved in both). The perspective is that believers are to avoid coveting material benefits.

Believers have spiritually reached the heavenly city with foundations. "***But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.***" When Christ returns, believers will receive their resurrection body and enter the heavenly Jerusalem in the company of Christ (Revelation 21:2-4).

Verses 13:15-16 depict proper manifestations of faith. Believers are to genuinely praise God and all He has done, is doing, and will do. Believers are to worship God together. They are to compassionately share with and help others. Worship and service to others are fruits of the spirit. All is to be done through Jesus. Such sacrifices (not empty rituals) please God (Isaiah 58:6-9 and Hosea 6:6). James says, "***Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.***"

**Hebrews 13:18-19:** "***Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. <sup>19</sup> I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.***" As the letter reaches its end, it becomes more personal. The author has been quite blunt in his approach to these Hebrew-Christian whom he fears are drifting from the faith. He well may expect resentment from those receiving the letter. Though blunt, he is confident his conscience is clear. Having made comments about leaders and their need of support from those they lead, the author asks for prayer for himself (13:18-19). He hopes to be able to soon come for a personal visit.

**Hebrews 13:20-21**: *“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,<sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”* This is a beautiful dramatic benediction.

God’s greatest display of divine power was at the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. God established peace with sinful mankind through the blood of the cross. Colossians 1:19-20, *“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”* By the blood of Jesus’ cross, God made the eternal covenant (Ezekiel 37:26; Zechariah. 9:11). The blood of our Lord satisfied the wrath of God and is eternally powerful (unlike repeated, temporary Old Covenant sacrifices). God’s incredible power enables us to do His will. 2 Corinthians 3:5, *“Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.”*

**Hebrews 13:22-25**: *“I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.<sup>23</sup> You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.<sup>24</sup> Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.<sup>25</sup> Grace be with all of you.”* The final verses (vv. 22-25) are addressed to “brothers” continuing the note of affection which has been present throughout the letter. The author has demonstrated a passionate concern throughout the letter for the spiritual welfare of these believers. He wants them to understand his exhortations are intended for their benefit. Given the importance of what needed to be said, the letter itself is relatively short. There were many more things which could have been said and themes more fully developed. The author stuck firmly to the high ground, saying what must be said, and leaving other thoughts for another time.

The brotherly reference to Timothy indicates Timothy is known and respected by both the author and the readers. The author wants the Hebrew converts to know Timothy has been released from prison and may be able to join him on his planned visit to their area.



The author sends greetings to the group's leaders and to the whole congregation. The request to greet their leaders indicates the letter was addressed not to the leaders themselves, but to the church as a whole. He also passes on greetings from those who come from Italy, perhaps indicating that the group to whom he writes is in Italy or simply that some Italian Christians were with him and sent their greetings.

He ends with a simple conclusion in which, knowing that his readers are wrestling with besetting issues, he asks God to grant grace. For what it is worth, this conferring of grace is in fact Paul's habitual way of closing his letters. Did he write the letter? No one knows for sure, but I think he did.

The letter to the Hebrews contains a powerful message that continues pertinent for all believers. May God bless His message to our hearts today.

**Brief Summary of Hebrews:** This letter was written to a group of Jewish converts to Christianity at time when Rome was changing the way considered Christianity for the worse. In the beginning, Christianity was considered as a sect of Judaism. Christians were welcomed to Synagogues and the Temple.

That was good for Christians. Judaism was an approved religion of Rome and not subject to requirements of Emperor worship. Jews then stopped allowing Christians to use their Synagogues, and Rome declared Christianity to be a separate religion, subject to the requirement of Emperor worship. Christians could not and would not worship the Emperor. That made them breakers of Roman law.

By simply returning to Judaism, Hebrew-Christian converts (who were by birth Jews) could avoid conflict with Rome. The author wrote this letter to convince this group that they had made the right choice in choosing to follow Christ. For their benefit, they needed to stick to their choice no matter what the Jews or Rome said.

The author calls the converts to confidence in Christ, who is the mediator of a new and better covenant. As Christians, they no longer could claim the earthly Temple as their own, but Christ was their heavenly Temple. As Christians they no longer had the Levitical Priesthood, but Christ is their Great Heavenly High Priest who always is in the presence of God. As Christians, they no longer had access to sacrifices at the Temple, but Christ's once-for-all-time sacrifice of Himself had made the sacrifices of Judaism superfluous.

In every spiritual way they are better off as Christians – a better hope, a better testament, a better promise, a better sacrifice, a better substance, a better country, and a better resurrection. There resurrected and ascended Jesus dwells in the heavenlies and believers are “in Him.”

Christ lives today and ministers in heaven on behalf of all believer’s. Christianity is focused on the living Christ who for a time became a man, died completing His task of salvation, was resurrected and ascended to heaven. There He lives and continues to work on behalf of believers. Though in heaven, He is not far from us. Every believer has immediate access to the throne of grace. The living Christ meets us there.

The author discusses the incarnate Christ, the heavenly Christ, the heavenly calling of Christ, the heavenly gift, the heavenly country, and the heavenly Jerusalem. Everything is new and better than under the Old Covenant. Judaism was preparation. Christianity is the realization of what the preparation of Judaism was about.