

Well Pleasing in His Sight through Jesus Christ Hebrews 13

Hebrews 13 Introduction

- We come today to the end of a first-century sermon written by an author trained in Jewish rabbinical tradition.
- He wrote this to a congregation of Jewish Christian believers, probably residing in Rome.
- He has encouraged them to remain faithful to Jesus no matter what.
- He wants their lives to be consistent with their faith in Christ.

- And he wants them to understand that knowing and following Jesus is far and away better than any religious tradition they can ever find anywhere else.
- Jesus is the total fulfillment of the Judaism they were raised to believe and practice.

- Only Jesus Christ has died to redeem us, setting us free from sin and death.
- He is the only Mediator between God and the human race.
- And Jesus Christ is unchanging.
- Further, Jesus Christ is eternal God and thoroughly deserves to be worshiped.
- Jesus Christ will receive glory forever and ever whether we acknowledge His Lordship or not.

- Let's read the concluding chapter of this letter – or sermon – to the Hebrews.
- And notice all the things our writer tells us to do – things that will make us well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ.
- Read Hebrews 13.

Hebrews 13 Outline

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| I. | Marks of a God-Honoring Life | 13:1-6 |
| II. | Marks of a God-Honoring Church | 13:7-17 |
| III. | Grace Be with You All | 13:18-25 |

Marks of a God-Honoring Life 13:1-6

- 13:1 Brotherly love is *philadelphia*, from which “the city of brotherly love” gets its name.
- Christians should enjoy a “family” or brotherly kind of loyalty and affection for one another.
- Sadly, some families are very dysfunctional and so are many ties among Christians.
- This will not be true of us if we continue in brotherly love.

- 13:2 Back in Genesis, both Abraham and Lot invited guests into their home who turned out to be literal angels sent by God.
- In the early church it was essential for Christians to allow travellers, sometimes missionaries or evangelists, to stay with them.
- So we are encouraged to practice hospitality.
- The word is literally “the love for strangers” or “the love of foreigners”.

- 13:3 At the time of this writing, many Christians were beginning to suffer for their faith and many were in prison.
- This still happens today, so it is important that we are mindful of those Christians who are persecuted for their faith.
- We are to remember them as if we were imprisoned – as if chained – with them.

- 13:3 Personal illustration:
 - Ginger & I met because she was both hospitable and remembered Christian prisoners.
 - I was serving in Eastern Europe with a ministry that encouraged letter writing to Christians imprisoned for their faith in the old USSR.
 - Ginger got involved with this ministry and began writing letters.
 - Then when I came to Vermont one winter as doing work for this ministry, she arranged a meeting for me at her home.
 - And when I came through the following winter she invited me back to a meeting again.
 - Remembering prisoners, practicing hospitality, the rest is history. Segue to 13:4.
- 13:4 Marriage is a good thing biblically.
 - This includes the marriage bedroom.
 - In the early days of the church, marriage was under attack from two directions.
 - The first side deemed marital faithfulness to be unrealistic; sexual freedom was the norm.
 - The other side deemed celibacy preferable to or holier than marriage.
- 13:4 Biblically, both of these sides are wrong and out of balance.
 - Marriage, including the marriage bed, is a good thing and not at all less holy than celibacy.
 - But the holiness of the bed is defiled when people remove sex from the only context in which God intended it to be enjoyed.
- 13:5-6 Covetousness is often the result of insufficient trust in the Lord.
 - “Will He really give me what I need?”
 - “Will He really provide that job, that spouse, that encouragement?”
 - When we stop looking to Him, we easily start looking at what everyone else has and begin to want it. This is covetousness and it is harmful – a form of idolatry. (Colossians 3:5)

Marks of a God-Honoring Church 13:7-17

- This section focuses on three aspects of a healthy church:
 - Proper Respect for the Leaders
 - A Right View of Jesus Christ
 - Christian Sacrifice
- 13:7 This verse might be clearer in a couple of other versions:
 - *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (ESV)*
 - *Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith. (NLT)*
- 13:7 This congregation in Rome would have known Peter, Paul and some of their associates.
 - Possibly, at the time of this writing, these leaders had already been martyred.
 - So our rabbi encourages them to remain faithful even in the face of adversity, following the example of their leaders.
 - We should express the same kind of loyalty.
- 13:8 This is probably one of the most direct statements of the deity of Christ in the New Testament.
 - Christ is unchangeable – and *immutability* is an attribute of God.

- 13:9 Remember that the first readers of this letter were coming straight out of ancient Judaism with all of its dietary laws.
- If they began drifting away from Christ, a focus on foods might have been one of the first directions their religious sentiments would go.
- But this is contrary to grace, which is truly effective at establishing our hearts in Christ.
- 13:10 The altar the rabbi speaks of is the cross – on which Christ was sacrificed.
- The mention of priests serving in the tabernacle (in the present tense) indicates that this letter was written before the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D.
- We partake of Christ’s sacrifice by faith, not through sacrifice on an altar.
- 13:11-12 On the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) no one would eat of the sacrifices.
- They were burned outside the camp – or outside the city of Jerusalem.
- Similarly, Christ suffered on the hill of Calvary – outside the gate of the city.
- 13:13 This congregation was tempted to return to the rituals of Jerusalem, but needed to follow Christ “outside the camp” of Judaism.
- This was a somewhat shameful thing for them as they forfeited a measure of status among their fellow Jews.
- But bearing the reproach of Jesus will always be worth it in the end.
- 13:13 If you are ever ashamed of your faith, you are facing a similar dilemma.
- Whole churches now frequently abandon historic doctrines of the Christian faith in order to seem more relevant.
- They may deny the deity of Christ or consider his blood atonement for our sins an outdated thing to believe.
- 13:13 So perhaps we seem hopelessly old fashioned for believing the Bible is true.
- That’s OK.
- Bearing the reproach of Christ will always be worth it in the end.
- And besides, if Christ is unchanging – and He is – then so are all the major Christian doctrines about Him.
- 13:14 Believers in Jesus will never be fully at home - in Rome, in the earthly Jerusalem, or here in Indianapolis.
- We seek a continuing city – the Jerusalem that is to come.
- We are citizens of heaven. (Philippians 3:20)
- And we need to be fully established in heaven in order to influence earth.
- In the 3rd century B.C., the Sicilian-Greek mathematician Archimedes of Syracuse did a lot of thinking and some writing about the principles behind the lever.
- He realized that if his feet were firmly planted in the right spot he could use a lever to move almost anything.
- And he famously said this:
“Give me but one firm spot on which to stand, and I will move the earth.”
- Similarly, we Christians, if we are firmly grounded in heaven, obtain the leverage to have influence upon the world rather than being influenced by it.

- Here we have no continuing city; we seek an eternal city that is to come.
- Heaven is a firmer place to ground ourselves than earth.
- 13:15 Christian Sacrifice:
 - Sometimes we simply feel like praising and thanking God – spontaneously.
 - But God is worthy of our thanks and praise whether we feel like giving it or not.
 - We need to train ourselves to praise and give thanks to God even when we don't feel like it.
 - A true sacrifice need not be spontaneous.
- 13:16 More Christian Sacrifice:
 - We should also be generous in our giving and sharing with others.
 - This is simply part of the Christian life.
 - It is a sacrifice that pleases God.
- 13:17 The words “rule over” that the NKJV uses in 13:7, 17 & 24 are unfortunate as they can sound a bit too strong.
- These verses are simply referring to the leaders, the pastors or the guys in charge of the church.
- Perhaps our writer heard about some disunity in this congregation in Rome.
- 13:17 It's possible that the pastors, elders or overseers of this church were faithful men who taught the word of God.
- Strange teachings were permeating the congregation and these were drawing people away from sound doctrine or right living.
- So the rabbi, perhaps a well-known, well respected teacher, is offering support for the guys in charge.
- 13:17 Warren Wiersbe put it like this:
- *“When a servant of God is in the will of God, teaching the Word of God, the people of God should submit and obey ... Some church members have a flippant attitude toward pastoral authority, and this is dangerous. One day every pastor will have to give an account of his ministry to the Lord, and he wants to be able to do it with joy.”*

Grace Be with You All 13:18-25

- 13:18-19 I would have to word this a bit differently than our rabbi:
- “I'm more or less confident that I have a good conscience ...”
- Or, “I'm pretty sure my conscience is clear, but I need to ask God's forgiveness quite often ...”
- So I probably need your prayers even more than our writer.
- Please make good use of that handout!!
- 13:20-21 Jesus as the Shepherd:
 - Jesus Christ is our Great Shepherd.
 - He is also the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14)
 - And He is the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4)
- 13:20-21 Results of the New Covenant in Christ's blood:
- As we submit to God, He will:
 - Make us complete in every good work,

- Empower us to do His will,
 - Work in us what is well pleasing in His sight.
- He does all of this through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
- 13:22-25 The details of this closing show us that this is a real sermon from a real rabbi, writing back in New Testament times.
- The congregation was probably in Italy, most likely in Rome, which had a large Jewish population and where the Christians were experiencing persecution.

Hebrews Conclusions

Major Themes in Hebrews:

- The Superiority of Christ, even to a completely biblical Judaism as practiced prior to His coming.
- Christ is our High Priest and, as such, is the only perfect Mediator between God and the human race.
- Christ's death functioned as a sacrifice for our sins. His blood was shed with a purpose.
- Christ's ministry is the fulfillment of God's promises. As such, He is the goal and the focal point of the entire Bible.
- Faith. The Old Testament was full of heroes of the faith. Having Jesus, our faith is better informed than theirs. They had the promises while we have the reality.
- Endurance. Don't ever give up on Jesus. Don't compromise your faith in Him for something less biblical, even if that means serious difficulty or personal cost. Perseverance in Christ is the mark of a genuine believer.

And some themes from today:

- For a God-Honoring Life:
 - Love one another.
 - Be hospitable.
 - Remember our brothers and sisters who are mistreated for their faith.
 - Stay sexually pure.
 - Refrain from covetousness.
- To Make This a God-Honoring Church:
 - Give proper respect to the leaders.
 - Keep a right view of Jesus Christ.
 - Practice Christian forms of sacrifice.
 - And pray for your pastor.
- All of this will help us to be well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.