



Living the Christian Life Hebrews 13

Introduction

Hebrews concludes with a beautiful chapter on living the Christian life. Love is the key to successful running of the race. We have picked up the torch from those whose race of faith is run and won. Ours can be run by a few simple guidelines, a few "Do's" and one "Don't". These are the suggestions of the writer who continues to use the gentle but persuasive tone of "let us".

Outline of Hebrews Chapter 13

- I. Sanctified Living - Hebrews 13:1-9
- II. Sacrificial Living - Hebrews 13:10-19
- III. Benediction - Hebrews 13:20-25

I. Sanctified Living - 13:1-9

Christianity is a life to be lived as well as a doctrine to be believed and a gospel to be shared. Both Christian and non-Christian life is made up of little daily actions and attitudes. Christian actions and attitudes construct a philosophy of life and a value system building a culture, which has expanded into a civilization.

A. Six "Do's" - Hebrews 13:1-7

1. Let brotherly love continue - 13:1

It is too easy to forget that love is the mark of the Christian as Jesus commanded in John 14-16 and Paul affirmed in 1 Corinthians 13. We need the admonition not to give up on each other but to love unconditionally. Who needs your love today?

2. Entertain strangers - 13:2

Hospitality is an important Christian characteristic mentioned in Matthew 25:35; Romans 12:13; Titus 1:8 and 1 Peter 4:9. Abraham was glad he entertained three strangers who, according to some, personified the Trinity (Genesis 18:1-2). As in other things, in God's economy when we give we usually receive more in return than we gave. Whom should you entertain?

3. Remember the prisoners - 13:3

Compassion and empathy are enjoined. We are to feel with them as well as minister to them, as if chained with them since you yourselves are in the body also. In church history some of the best saints have been jailed and afflicted. Our turn may come. Who needs your compassion?

4. Respect marriage - 13:4

a. Marriage is honorable

Edgar J. Goodspeed, in his 1923 New Testament, translates this, "Marriage should be respected by everyone." Yet marriage is the butt of many jokes and seems to receive as much ridicule as respect. Marriage is a sacred institution ordained by God from the beginning of mankind. It pictures the mystical relationship of Christ and His Church.

b. *Undefiled*

Furthermore, that which is impure outside of marriage, the physical love relationship, is pure within marriage, *the bed undefiled*. Let us respect every marriage and uphold the dignity of its physical love relationship.

c. Immorality

But fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Our language has undergone radical change. "Immoral" has been dropped in favor of "alternate lifestyles". No one is promiscuous anymore, they are "sexually active". People are not adulterers, they have "multiple partners". Live-in relationships are not only tolerated but increasingly perceived as "normal" whereas the chaste person is considered "abnormal". God, however, has not changed, nor will He (13:8). Furthermore, He will judge our morals. Indeed, He has judged throughout history, for immoral societies have been decimated by disease. Certain diseases accompany immoral behavior which the moral person, living by God's standard, has no cause to fear.

5. *Be content* - 13:5

Contentment, not covetousness, should characterize Christians. We are those who trust God. He knows our needs and promises to provide. Our greedy, covetous, acquisitive lifestyles are no different than the world's and offer no alternative philosophy nor attraction. Is your conversation filled with "I want's"? Paul said he had learned to be content in whatsoever state he was (Philippians 4:11). If we *hunger and thirst for righteousness* (Matthew 5:6), He promises we shall be filled, content.

He is what we need and He has promised never to leave us even as He promised Jacob. God never did leave him (Genesis 28:15). Will you boldly say, "The Lord is my helper," and live like it?

6. Remember those who rule over you - 13:7

Three times in Hebrews 13 *those who rule over you* are mentioned. The readers are to remember them, follow their example, obey them (13:17), and greet them (13:24). Church leadership is ordained of God. There is an orderly chain of command which serves us well when we observe it.

B. One Constant - Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Immutability is one of God's attributes. His character never changes. He is unfailingly loving, just, good, powerful, merciful, etc. He does not love us less today or more tomorrow. He is as omnipotent now as He was at the creation. The Jesus we read of in the gospels is the same personality He is now. We can respond to Him in the same way as did Mary, Martha, Peter and John.

C. One "Don't" - Hebrews 13:9

1. Don't be duped by strange doctrines

Consistently throughout Scripture, there is a warning against false doctrine and false teachers. In the Old Testament the warning was against soothsaying, astrology, witchcraft, magic and like things which distort trust and confuse people.

In the New Testament these are still to be avoided. In addition there is false teaching which looks and sounds much like truth. It is subtle and dangerous because it is less easily recognized.

In Matthew 16:12, Jesus warns the disciples of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. These would compare to the ultra conservatives and the liberals today. Both groups twist the truth to fit their particular viewpoints.

Paul warned of vain philosophy, of being *deceived with persuasive words* (Colossians 2:4, 8), of being *carried about with every wind of doctrine* and being deceived (Ephesians 4:14). Peter warned that there would be *false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies* (2 Peter 2:1-3). James spoke of a wisdom that is devilish, earthly and sensual (James 3:14-16). John said not to believe every "spirit" but to test them because *many false prophets have gone out into the world* (1 John 4:1-3).

Some diverse and strange doctrines today still have to do with the occult, astrology, and witchcraft. Close to them are the hedonistic doctrines, the Playboy heresy which plays into Satan's hands, and humanistic doctrines of education which deny God's existence and

attack the Bible, destroying souls. Political doctrines that are inconsistent with truth and righteousness in government are to be exposed and rejected.

2. Be established by grace

It is good that the heart be established by grace. Grace is always good. We can set our hearts upon it. Legalistic rules and restrictions, like the food restrictions of the Mosaic Law, have no place in the life of a Christian. Salvation is by grace alone and *the just shall live by faith*.

II. Sacrificial Living - Hebrews 13:10-19

A. The Sacrifice of Christ - Hebrews 13:10-13

Christ's sacrifice is the ultimate sacrifice. He gave all He had for us. *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). The cross on which He died is our altar. In its shadow we worship and it is there we meet God.

The Jewish priesthood had their altar where the slain beasts' blood was daubed and sprinkled constantly. The sin offering was then taken outside the camp and burned. In the same way as the sin offering, Jesus was taken outside "the establishment", outside the Holy City because He was considered unclean as a criminal by man and unclean as the sin-bearer by God. All this was for us - you and me. The writer warns against returning to the old system, for those performing it have no right at the Christian altar. We can, though, go outside the world's system to Jesus.

We can go outside the comfortable place where the respectable Christ-rejecting crowd goes about their business. We can be identified with Him and bear His reproach of taunts, ridicule and insults.

We may lose some friends but we will gain the comfort of His presence and the *fellowship of His sufferings* (Philippians 3:10).

B. Our Sacrifices - Hebrews 13:14-19

1. Worldly security - 13:14

Here have we no continuing city but we seek one to come. Heaven is our home, sometimes our only home. We may have to sacrifice the security of a house and a settled life for the security of doing His will.

2. Praise to God - 13:15

Praise and the fruit of our lips giving thanks to God can be a real sacrifice if we only praise Him when we

feel like it and thank Him when things are going well. The praise that most honors Him is given when it is not easy, but comes from depths of experience of His love in a hard place.

3. Doing good and sharing – 13:16

God is pleased when we put others ahead of ourselves and our comfort.

4. Submission – 13:17

Obey those who have rule over you. Accountability can be joyful when all cooperate. Otherwise it can mean grief.

5. Prayer – 13:18-19

Praying for others is a sacrifice, but it can be rewarding when we see answers, such as obstacles removed so that Christians are free to serve God.

III. Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-25

In closing, the writer blesses the readers of the letter with a prayer and an exhortation to heed all he has written.

A. Prayer for Completeness - Hebrews 13:20-21

The appeal is made to the *God of peace* and power, who in His might raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. The power of Christ's blood is also appealed to. His is the blood which sealed the new covenant. Here it is called *the everlasting covenant*, in contrast to the old covenant which was only temporary. The one who shed his blood is our *great Shepherd of the sheep*. Peter calls Him the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). He calls Himself the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). Is He your Shepherd?

The prayer is for God to *make you complete in every good work to do His will*. Christian maturity has been

the theme and purpose of the book. Mature believers do not turn back, they face forward. Their maturity is God's will for them. They seek to please God in every work and have little or no interest in works which do not directly relate to God.

B. A Plea to Receive the Exhortation - Hebrews 13:22

The final appeal is to the readers, which includes you and me. We are encouraged to receive this letter with open minds and soft hearts. This would be in contrast to those who *will not endure sound doctrine* (2 Timothy 4:3).

C. News - Hebrews 13:23

Our brother Timothy has been set free. It is a small world when you are a Christian but it is a big family. The threads cross and recross in what Edith Shaeffer calls "The Tapestry". Christians are interrelated. What affects one, affects all. Some day we will see the other side of the tapestry and know how it all fit together.

D. Final Salutation - Hebrews 24-25

Mutual greetings reinforce the Christian bond. God's *grace* is the closing word, for it makes everything else possible.

Applications

1. How many of these details of Christian living from Hebrews 13 characterize your lifestyle as a sanctified lifestyle?
2. Which sacrifice do you need most to make, praise and thanks to God, or doing good and sharing with people around you? How can you be diligent in doing both?
3. What are you doing to guard against the six dangers described in the Book of Hebrews? How has this study helped you to recognize those dangers in your life and make needed changes?