

Hebrews Study Session 20 - Chapter 13

Chapter 13 brings us to the conclusion of this message. Rather than diving in deep or rehashing what was already covered, the author presses forward with his final admonitions and hopes for the beloved, little church. Much of what he says in this chapter comes in the way of reminders. It's like he's finished with the main punch of the message and now he wants to remind them of a few specific things that the audience already knows but doesn't want them to overlook.

If you recall last week ended with a harsh reminder that God was a consuming fire. He was holy and was not to be trifled with or taken for granted. This final section builds on the holiness of God and what it looks like in the world and in church life. How does the holiness of God play out in our daily lives as children of God? We're going to break this chapter down into four different sections: 1) Holiness in Christian living (1-6), 2) Holiness in Christian leadership and teaching (7-19), 3) Doxology (20-21), 4) Personal notes and closing (22-25).

We learn another thing about the author as we read this chapter and that is he was a distant ancestor of Billy T. He has way too much information to share and so this final chapter is like a shotgun, hitting as many targets as he could possibly hit all at one time to get his message across.

1. Holiness for Christian living.

[Read Hebrews 13:1-6]

The author begins this section by pointing out that Christians are to be concerned for the needs of others. To live in the love of Christ is to live in concern for the safety and welfare of other people. One of the Lord's constant reminders in Scripture is to take care of the poor, the widow, the orphan and the foreigner - those in need and often perpetual need.

[Read James 2:14-16]

This admonition in Hebrews is a call to maintain brotherly love for one another in the body. Brotherly love is the quality of love that binds a community of siblings together and it is displayed by a willingness to share one's possessions unselfishly.

Q: What are the two examples given by the author of showing brotherly love? (*v.2 - show hospitality & v.3 - remember those in prison*)

Q: How would you define "hospitality"? (*listen for answers*)

Here's how it is traditionally defined. "Hospitality connotes a delight in the guest/host relationship through the mutual exchange of unanticipated gifts that bring refreshment to another." As such it is an attitude that sets the tone for the subsequent actions. Notice that exchange of unanticipated gifts - this can be anything from ideas and emotions to solid material

things but these unanticipated “gifts” bring refreshment to both parties. Think back to Abraham being host to the three angels who visited him (Genesis 18) and promised the birth of Isaac.

In our context, God is pleased with us showing hospitality to one another and strangers. In the ancient world, showing hospitality to strangers and travelers was a major obligation. It was done because inns were not always available and were expensive when available and traveling was dangerous. Once a person accepted a traveler into their home, the host was assuming responsibility for the guest’s safety and welfare – thus - feed them and make sure they are provisioned to continue their travel.

Q: In what ways does hospitality display God’s holiness? (*listen for answers - at some level - it is like God who takes care of us along our travels through this life and shows His love for others*)

Notice that some people who had showed hospitality had actually entertained angels without knowing it. There were blessing to be had beyond the physical for showing hospitality. Yet, the reason for hospitality is not so that God will some day send an angel or group of angels to stay at your house. These ancient hosts were unaware of their guests heavenly origin. They did it because it was the right and godly thing to do.

Q: What is the reason for concern for those in prison in this passage? (*v.3 - because they were fellow church members*)

Christians are bound together, not just by a common confession but also by the common way of life we share. Remembering prisoners demonstrates a readiness to suffer abuse with them, if necessary, in order to show them love and human dignity. This was a potential danger in that identification with a criminal could often lead one to face similar mistreatment.

[I Corinthians 12:25-27]

Q: Why are we to identify with a suffering person to the point of suffering along with them? (*Because they are part of our body in Christ. It shows love and concern for them and their well-being. It showing ourselves to be like God who loves all people.*)

I want to compare vv. 2-3 with the words of Jesus in Matthew 25.

[Read Matthew 25:35 and then Hebrews 12:2]

[Read Matthew 25:36 and then Hebrews 12:3]

Notice the similarities of these two passages. Jesus was referring to the actions of the faithful “sheep” in that passage.

In v.4 the writer is instructing the church to hold marriage in honor. In the ancient world, marriage was not held in honor at all. However, God elevated the place of marriage in human institutions when He likened His relationship to His church to the relationship between a

husband and wife. The phrase, “let the marriage bed be undefiled” is an ancient euphemism for faithful sexually to one’s spouse.

Fornication is the general term for sexual immorality and covers a wide range of sins - all dealing the sexual activity outside the confines of marriage.

Adultery on the other hand is a specific sexual sin that is the sex act with a person who is married to another person. The Lord hates and judges this one because it shows the person unfaithful to the vows taken in marriage. All sexual immorality is a rejection of the presence and goodness of God who created man and woman.

Q: According to v.4, what will those who place personal gratification over their responsibility to God and the community of faith experience? (*v.4 - God as their judge*)

We often think that the world in which we live has been hypersexualized and that sexual immorality is at some historic all time high. The news is that it’s always been this way but some times it just been out of the limelight more than others. This was a very real and open problem in the ancient world as sexual infidelity and immorality was the norm and expected rather than the rule. Christianity was a revolutionary in terms of what it did for marriage and sex.

The next two verses (5-6) are a call to contentment. Remember who the audience was. They had already lost their property and were facing possible worse treatment on the horizon. Verse 6 comes from Psalm 118:5-6.

Q: What is it about contentment that honors God? (*listen to answers - it shows we trust Him and have faith that He will provide for us and our daily needs*)

In the ancient world, absence of the love of money was extolled in civic leadership as a virtue to be sought out because it meant that the leader would be incorruptible in the management of their duties. This same virtue was held in high regard in the church as well. Greed is not a virtue but rather a trait listed among the Ten Commandments to avoid.

[Read I Timothy 3:1-7] - the same phrase “free from the love of money” is used as a character trait for church leaders.

Q: Why do you think it is important for a church leader to possess a character free from the love of money? (*listen to answers - they are seeking the will of God and welfare of others over lining their own pockets*)

Q: Why is it possible for a Christian to live in a way that demonstrates that their character is free from the love of money? (*listen for answer - see v.5 - God will never leave us or forsake us*)

[I Timothy 6:6-10] - Godliness is a source of gain when accompanied by contentment.

In all of these issues concerning brotherly love, the Lord is faithful to His people. The main thrust of vv.1-6 is to summon the members of the anxious house church to assume their place within the ranks fo the community of faith as a whole. Rather than shrinking back, they

were to live out God's holiness boldly.

2. Holiness in Christian leadership

[Read Hebrews 13:7-19]

Q: Who is the author speaking about in v.7? (*past leaders of the church*)

Though we don't know how these leaders died, this is referring to leaders who have died. The phrase "result of their conduct" is another euphemism for "end of their life". These early spiritual leaders of these people died in confident faith of everything the author has been pointing out in this letter.

Q: Why do you think it was important to point out the dead leaders to these believers? (*listen for answers - may include that as leaders they were responsible for the faithful transmission of the Word of God to these people. They were reliable in their duties as founding fathers of this faith community. This is "Look at how they lived"*)

Q: Why do you think that the author admonishes the church to imitate the faith of their past leaders as opposed to "follow" Jesus? (*Listen for answers - they knew these leaders and saw them live out the life of faith. They were having trouble with believing in Jesus. The past leaders were concrete examples of the life of a Christian to them.*)

The author turns from the historical leaders of the past in the church to Jesus Himself. This is the bridge between v.7 and v.9. The nature of Jesus and His gospel are unchanging and while those leaders brought to mind in v.7 are gone now, Jesus remains with them forever.

Q: What does the author warn the listeners not to get carried away by? (*v.9 - varied and strange teachings*)

The word "varied" means multi-colored, motley, or diverse in nature. In other words, it's teaching that does not come from the source of Scripture.

The word "strange" means foreign. In most cases where this word is used, it doesn't have a negative connotation but here it does in that it means the modern teaching being presented is foreign to the gospel which was presented by the original teachers of the church and Christ. What is interesting is that Judaism is now a foreign teaching to them as they are now in Christ.

Q: What are some of the varied and strange teachings being taught in churches today? (*Anything not in line with the pure teaching of the Word of God and Christ*)

Our teaching is threatened by the varied and strange teachings of our day and age.

Q: According to the author, what should the heart be strengthened by? (*v.9 grace not food*)

In order to understand accurately the next few verses, you have to go back to ancient

Judaism and its culture. Again the author is going back, one more time, to the Jewish ceremonies and Day of Atonement. The reference to food is a reference to the Passover as well as the feast days in Jewish life. As it was commanded in the Law to partake of certain sacrifices, it was believed that the eating of the food (obeying God) was the means to strengthen one spiritually. However, all those who ate of these feasts and ceremonial dinners did not receive salvation through them. Actually, they were no advantage to the one eating them other than they got a meal out of the feast.

I want to show you the way the author put this passage together by comparing v.7 and v.9. These are the keys to translating this section of the passage.

Verse 7 - Exhortation	Verse 9 - Warning
A - Remember, imitate	A' - Do not allow to be led away
B - your former leaders	B' - strange (itinerant preachers)
C - the (one) Word of God	C' - diverse (human/ worldly) teachings
D - Consider the result of their conduct	D' - their adherents are not benefitted
E - their faith	E' - foods

These pairs of ideas unlock the meaning of what the author is saying to this house church. He's contrasting the teachings of their real leaders with those of Judaism and the world.

[Read Leviticus 6:30]

Q: What was the commandment concerning a burnt offering? (*It was not to be eaten*)

This is the Old Testament basis for v. 10. Those who served at the tabernacle had no right to eat of the altar. The priests could not eat the atoning sacrifice. These same people, those looking to the past of Judaism for their hope, cannot and do not share in the sacrifice of Christ. Grace comes by recognizing the cross as its sole source. This altar foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. If you choose to live under the old covenant, you are excluded from the benefits of Christianity, including salvation and righteousness.

Q: According to the author, why is it significant that the offering for sin was burned outside of the camp? (*Because just as the atoning sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was burned outside the camp (as it was unlawful to burn it inside the camp/community) the sacrifice of Christ also happened outside the camp (Jerusalem)*)

Christ is outside the camp of Judaism and the audience for this message are to go where Christ is - outside Judaism to find God. To remain in the camp is to be separated from Christ. However, in leaving the camp there is a cost - such as disgrace, scorn, and ridicule just as Jesus experienced on the cross.

Q: What does this passage teach believers to seek after? (*v.14 - an eternal city - don't maintain a grip on any fleeting earthly city or "camp" but instead seek that which is eternal in nature from God.*)

Q: Why do you think the author stresses heaven, the eternal city, to these people? (*they had been*

mistreated and persecuted and were possibly about to face more of the same. This gives them hope for a brighter and desirable future.)

Q: What are the pleasing sacrifices God desires from Christians? (v.15-6 - *praise, thanks, love, sharing/charity*)

Notice that it is through Him (Jesus) and not the Jewish priests that acceptable sacrifices are made to God. Since God is always working out His purposes in the world, we are to always be offering up sacrifices of praise to Him for His works.

Q: Why did the author encourage the congregation to obey their current leaders? (*they kept watch over their souls - The phrase “watch over” means to stay awake at night with concern for someone. Its like a vigil with a sick person. Leaders are to be deeply concerned about the deep needs of the people they shepherd, not just surface needs.*)

Q: What was the check that existed to keep leaders from abusing their authority? (*they would be giving an account of their leadership to God*)

Q: The leaders were to lead with joy and not grief. Why would their leadership in grief not be profitable? (*listen to answers - spiritual profit comes from joy which is our strength as believers, when a leader is joyful he spreads it to the congregation*)

Q: What did the author ask to be prayed for? (v.18 - *that he has a good conscience and live honorably*)

There is some confusion in that in v.18 the words “us” and “we” are used. Then in v.19 the word “I” is used. He is ministering with a group elsewhere but he alone plans to return to see them as soon as possible. The circumstances of his inability to come to them seem to be out of his control - whether imprisonment, distant travel, hindrances in his current work, etc. The issue is not one of desire or anything this home church has done but in the circumstances beyond his control.

3. Doxology

[Read Hebrews 13:20-21]

Q: What does this doxology tell us about God? (vv. 20-21 - *God of peace, raiser of the Great Shepherd, other answers possible*)

Q: What is the prayer expressed in this doxology? (v. 21 - *to equip the people to do God’s will, working in a way pleasing to God, to glorify Jesus, other answers possible*)

The author makes sure to put in that this new covenant, established in the blood of Jesus, is eternal in nature. It will not pass away or become obsolete like the first one.

4. Personal notes and closing

Q: What does the author consider the purpose of this message? (*v.22 - exhortation*)

Timothy, the disciple of Paul, was recently released from prison. There was a chance he'd come to visit this church and if he did it soon, the author would come as well. This lets us know that it probably wasn't imprisonment that was keeping him back for visiting this church.

Q: What was this letter written to according to these final verses? (*v. 24 - the congregation of the church - not necessarily the leaders - who may have been in jail*)

This is the third time in this chapter that the spiritual leaders of the church have been mentioned. The final greeting is that those from Italy greet this church. Since it is believed that this church was in Italy, those greeting this church were saints originally from Italy but have moved away, probably due to persecution. The closing of the letter is a customary Christian closing and it wishes them grace. By this, the author is once again reminding them that his ministry and the church is built upon the grace of God, not the Law. He wishes for them to riches and depths of grace available only from God.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?