

Hebrews - A Letter Addressed to Modern-Day Christians

Part 19

Hebrews 13:1–25

Hebrews 13:1 [NIV] *“Keep on loving each other as brothers.”*

As the writer of this letter comes to a close, he turns to practical things.

Brotherly love – the very circumstances of the early Church sometimes threatened brotherly love. Most were taking their religion very seriously and hence there was always two threats to brotherly love.

Heresy-hunting – in the deep desire to preserve the faith clean and pure.

Unsympathetic treatment – any person who lost their nerve under persecution or whose faith had failed, faced fault-finding, condemning and harsh attitudes from others, destroying brotherly love.

Hebrews 13:2 [NIV] *“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”*

In the ancient world inns were filthy, ruinously expensive and of low repute, so the offering of hospitality was a great blessing to any traveller.

Hebrews 13:3 [NIV] *“Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow-prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.”*

It often happened that a Christian landed in prison because of their faith, or for debt, most early Christians were poor people.

This is where the Christian fellowship went into action to render aid and even pay for their redemption to set them free.

Hebrews 13:4 [NIV] *“Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”*

Marriage is the God-ordained type of love between Jesus Christ and His Church.

This holy union has been abused and defiled.

Christianity raised marriage out of this deep degradation and made it, with the home that gathers around it, into the physical example of the holy union God intends it to be.

Hebrews 13:5-6 [NIV] *“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”*

A Christian must be content with what we already have, and why should we not be content for we have the continual presence of the Creator God. The writer of Hebrews quotes two Old Testament scriptures.

Joshua 1:5 [NIV] *“No-one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

A promise made to the newly-appointed human guide to Israel.

Psalms 118:6-7 [NIV] *“The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies.”*

With God as our helper and defender we need **not** fear anything this world will hurl at us.

Hebrews 13:7-8 [NIV] *“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.”*

Blessed is the church fellowship where the spiritual life and manifest faith of their leaders can be pointed to, even more than their teaching.

There may be the loss of those leaders who have taught us by words and example, but One who will never be lost or change, is our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our goal has to be to attain a life that is the same unchangeable life of perfection.

Matthew 5:48 [NIV] *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

When Jesus Christ commanded this of His disciples, what He was saying is, follow my example, as I have my Heavenly Father.

All that Jesus Christ did as the Son of God, but also as the Son of Man, a physical human being, was a reflection of the Father’s life and love.

All that Jesus Christ expressed in His physical life, can be in us today, His compassion, patience, mercy and love.

Hebrews 13:9-14 [NIV] *“Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”*

Apparently some were teaching that the keeping of Old Testament ceremonial laws [such as not eating certain foods] was important to salvation.

Colossians 2:20-23 [NIV] *“Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”*

To many deluded Christians the discipline demanded by these false teachers seems good and legalism, in its many forms, still attracts people today.

Following a long list of religious rules requires strong self-discipline and can make a person appear and feel moral.

But religious rules **cannot** change a person’s heart and human spirit, **only** the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can do this.

What is the “altar” that the Jewish priests have no right to minister?

The cross of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice, a expression of the love of God for all humanity, that the Jews will **not** accept.

The Old Testament and the New Testament form of worship are utterly different.

Romans 12:1 [Message Bible] *“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: take your everyday, ordinary life, your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking about life, and place it before God as an offering.”*

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

What is acceptable worship by our Creator God, under the New Covenant, is our complete surrender of our total life to Him to use as He wishes.

What the High Priest, under the Old Covenant, once a year and every year, was to take animal blood into the Holy of holies as an act of Atonement, on the Day of Atonement.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, shed His life blood on the cross and at His return to God’s throne presented His blood as an atonement for all humanity.

Those who were unclean under the Old Covenant had to stay outside the camp.

Jesus suffered humiliation and uncleanness for us, by being crucified outside the city of Jerusalem.

The Christian Jews needed to move outside the safe confinement of their past, their traditions and their ceremonies, to live for Jesus Christ in a new life.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

We as Christians have to leave behind our old life and its way of doing things if we are to follow Jesus Christ our Saviour.

We also have to move outside this present day culture, and religions that are linked directly to it.

The world we live in at present is **not** one that will endure much longer, all Christians need to look for a new world that Jesus Christ will set up on His return and we can be a part of. [**Revelation 21:1-5**]

Remember that the city outside of which Jesus Christ was crucified was **not** Rome, with its heathenism, but Jerusalem with its religion and its Old Covenant revelation with God.

Jesus was rejected by the Jewish leadership because He condemned their self-righteousness and formality.

It is not the irreligious but the religious world from which we must go out.

That is everything that is not in harmony with the cross and the self-sacrifice spirit it depicts.

No we go out to Him, Jesus Christ, to a closer fellowship. To a more entire conformity to Him, the cross-bearer, to His meek and patient loving spirit.

Not casting reproach on those we leave behind, but bearing the reproach of Jesus Christ.

The more we enter into the spirit of the One [Jesus Christ] the more we will release the other.

The boldness we find in the presence of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, the more boldness we will have to witness for Him in the world.

Hebrews 13:15-16 [NIV] *“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*

Notice that the writer of Hebrews **never** mentions the sacraments that Jesus introduced with the New Covenant, they do **not** seem to come into his scheme of things at all.

It is likely that, even this early in Church history, there were those who took a mechanical view of the sacraments, forgetting that **no** sacrament avails anything by itself, its **only** use is, that in it the grace of God meets the faith of humans.

It is not the bread and wine that matter, but the grace and faith.

What sacrifices are acceptable that the non-priest can offer?

Continual thanks and praise – some have argued that a thank-offering was more acceptable to God than a sin-offering.

The sin-offering is seeking something from God, forgiveness, while the thank and praise-offering is giving something to God.

We can offer our confession of faith in our Saviour Jesus Christ to others who do **not** as yet know Him.

Never be ashamed of the Gospel Message that Jesus Christ brought to humanity.

We can offer, as a sacrifice to God, deeds of kindness to and sharing with other human beings ourselves and our possessions. [**Ephesians 2:9-10**]

Hebrews 13:17-19 [NIV] *“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honourably in every way. I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.”*

Obedience to and prayers for leaders is **not** given in order to gratify their sense of power or prestige.

Obedience is given so that at the end of the day the leaders may be seen to have lost none who are committed to their care and charge.

Hebrews 13:20-21 [NIV] *“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*

This great prayer is the perfect picture of God and of Jesus Christ.

God is the God of peace – even in the most troublous and distressing situation God can bring us peace of mind. [**John 14:27**]

It is **only** the God of Peace who can make us at peace with ourselves, our fellow humans and with God Himself.

God is the God of life – God first imparted life to human beings and continues to sustain that life. [**Colossians 1:16-17**]

Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, all humans are offered eternal life. [1 John 5:11-12]

God is the God who both shows us His will and equips us to do it –

Matthew 28:18-20 [NIV] *“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

It is God’s Will that every Christian has an involvement in this expansion of His Kingdom, God’s created family.

John 7:38-39 [NIV] *“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” by this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”*

It is the Holy Spirit flowing through us who will be equipping us to fulfil the work we have been given by our Creator God, that will be pleasing to God the Father.

The letter finishes with personal messages.

Hebrews 13:25 [NIV] *“Grace be with you all.”*

The final sentence sums up the letter’s theme, grace, **not** law or religion.