

Jesus and the Last Word

Pastor Marc:

Hebrews 13:1 ESV Let brotherly love continue. **2** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. **3** Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. **4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. **5** 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." **6** So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

Church:

Hebrews 13:7 ESV Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. **9** 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.

Pastor Marc:

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

Church:

Hebrews 13:17 ESV 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. **18** Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. **19** I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Pastor Marc:

Hebrews 13:20 ESV 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, **21** 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. **22** I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. **23** You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. **24** Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. **25** Grace be with all of you.

- I. Many of you may be aware that the books of the New Testament were not produced by a publishing house that was trying to capitalize on the formation of this new thing called “the church”.
 - A. The 27 books of the New Testament were not considered to be potential best sellers, but rather letters to encourage, instruct and correct the New Believers.
 1. Some were written to house churches in specific cities like Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, etc.
 2. Some were written to specific individuals, like Timothy, Titus and Philemon.
 3. Still others were written to be shared among many churches, like the writings of Peter, James, and John, the Gospels (Mathew, Mark, Luke and John) and Revelation. We call these letters “epistles” (some translations use “epistle”, others “letter”).
 - B. Because of the original intent, you will often find very personal, and sometimes tender and intimate messages within these letters; usually, but not always, in the closing chapter. Most of Paul’s letters end with familiar sentiments and final instructions.
 1. Some of these are very personal. For example, in the closing chapter of Romans, Paul has 29 greetings for specific individuals or groups.
 2. Some of the instructions are very tender and intimate.
 - a) While they don’t seem to have a lot of theological depth, they do a great service by humanizing the text. They show us that these were real people in real situations.
 - b) **2 Timothy 4:13 ESV** When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.
 - (1) Paul was writing to Timothy from his prison cell in Rome.
 - (2) From this we learn that he was probably cold in a damp, drafty prison (thus the request for the cloak), that he wanted to study and meditate even while incarcerated (books and parchments), and that he trusted Timothy to faithfully serve him by bringing his possessions to him.
 3. Some of the things written in the closing chapters of various books, while not having to do with the main theme of the book, are vitally important instructions to the believers who may not have had opportunity for consistent teaching because the church was so new.
 - a) **1 Thessalonians 5:12 ESV** We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, **13** and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. **14** And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. **15** See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. **16** Rejoice always, **17** pray without

ceasing, **18** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. **19** Do not quench the Spirit. **20** Do not despise prophecies, **21** but test everything; hold fast what is good. **22** Abstain from every form of evil.

- b) Here are 15 or 16 points of instruction that could be developed into an entire sermon, and yet Paul presents them as admonitions; giving his audience some rapid-fire instructions so they will know how to rightly respond to his teaching in the letter.
- II. Though we don't know the identity of the author, we see all of this happening in the final chapter of Hebrews as well.
- A. He begins with rapid fire admonition:
 - 1. He speaks of the need for brotherly love, hospitality, and the importance of remembering those who are suffering for Christ.
 - 2. He speaks of avoiding sexual immorality and greed and reminds his audience of how Jesus is ever present to help.
 - 3. Twice He challenges them to respect and submit to their leaders, and tells them to be on guard against the introduction of false doctrine that would contradict what they had learned from the apostles.
 - B. What is the purpose of these final, seemingly random instructions found in almost every letter in the New Testament? Simply this: The writers of the New Testament knew that when theology does not include a transformed life, it amounts to nothing more than empty religious practice.
 - 1. Don't misunderstand! Theology (the study of God) is very important! Some people don't like theology. They attempt to make a goal of simply "loving God" instead of getting bogged down in what **they think** is only for academics.
 - a) But you **can't** truly love what you don't seek to understand! What if I brought my wife flowers every day, because it made me feel like I was being a loving husband, but I never took time to discover that she suffered from chronic hay fever, and my "gift" was making her miserable? Would that be a loving act?
 - b) You cannot truly love God if you don't do the hard work of getting to know him: what he is like, what he loves and what is abominable to him, as well as what he expects of his children. And the only way you get to know him is by meeting him in his word.
 - (1) You may need to seek some help in the form of digging into books, or getting a wise mentor, or consistently listening to gospel-centered teaching, or fully wrestling with hard questions, but God **expects you** to pursue the knowledge of him.
 - (2) People who say that this is not necessary, may simply be proving themselves not to be lovers of God, but rather lazy towards him.
 - 2. That being said, all the letters of the New Testament offer tremendous theological insights into the character of God and the nature of his covenant with mankind. But without a life that is transformed by the message, their theology is rendered meaningless.

- a) **1 Timothy 1:3 ESV** As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, **4** nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. **5** *The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.* **6** Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, **7** desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.
- b) Paul's instruction to Timothy was to correct the doctrinal failings of the believers in Ephesus. But it wasn't for the sake of crossing their "t's" and dotting their "i's" theologically, but rather the goal was "love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith".
3. This is why we see this pattern of practical instructions given in the final chapters of the various books of the New Testament.
 - a) The writers of the various letters say in the beginning chapters, "This is what God is like. This is what he has provided for you because of what Jesus has done".
 - b) And they conclude by saying, "In light of all that Christ has done, live like this", giving instructions on what kind of fruit to cultivate in their lives.
4. They are not saying "Live like this **to earn** God's favor or acceptance" but rather, "Live like this **because** you have been granted God's favor and acceptance."
- C. The writer of Hebrews is no different. He says, "Because you have a far better covenant and a greater High Priest, whose "once and for all" sacrifice has saved you to the uttermost, therefore...
 1. "...let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, and remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body."
 2. Because God is not ashamed to be called our God, and has prepared for us a city, let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have.
- D. This is our 38th and final message in our series on the book of Hebrews. During the year that we have dug into this book together, I hope that you have been educated and inspired. I hope that your appreciation for all that Christ has done in the New Covenant has increased dramatically.
 1. But if you have not been **changed** then you have missed the purpose of this and every other passage in scripture.
 - a) It may be that I preached it poorly, or it may be that you failed to receive what was preached; but if you were not changed, something was wrong because the word of always affects change!
 - b) **Isaiah 55:10 ESV** "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, **11 so shall my**

word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

2. The purpose of God’s word is never **primarily** education (the accumulation of information).
 - a) There is certainly wisdom, knowledge and understanding to be gained from the word of God, the book of Proverbs makes this very clear.
 - b) But knowledge is useless to a man who does not have a transformed heart because of the word of God! Romans 12 doesn’t tell us to **become smarter** by the renewing of our minds, but rather...
 - c) **Romans 12:2 ESV** Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
 3. Nor is the purpose of God’s word mere inspiration (making us feel better or more empowered).
 - a) God’s word should never be reduced to a collection of memes, cliches, helpful hints, or positive self-help affirmations. This is a dangerous habit of American Christians, especially in the days of social media. It is dangerous because diminishes the purpose that God has for his word.
 - b) **Hebrews 4:12 ESV** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
 - (1) There is no doubt that we will find comfort and encouragement in God’s word, and there is much written in it to provide those things.
 - (2) But if you are never laid bare by God’s word, if your heart is never challenged and your tendency toward sin convicted, you are using his word improperly. The words, “sword” and “pierce” were not placed in there to give you a sense of the warm fuzzies!
 - c) It could be that you have “cherry-picked” easy passages, and divorced them from their context; or that you have blatantly assigned meaning to scripture that isn’t there, or that you are actually ignoring the harder things the Bible says. But the result of our time in God’s Word should always be growth and transformation.
 - d) The point is this: don’t ever read God’s word without letting it read you!
- III. The writer of the book of Hebrews also requests prayer for himself that his ministry would be effective.
- A. **Hebrews 13:18 ESV** Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. **19** I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.
1. At least 16 times in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul either asks for prayer, or acknowledges that people are praying for him.
 2. The writer of Hebrews also asks the recipients of his letter for prayer for two very specific reasons:
 - a) That their actions would correspond to their teaching, saying that they desire to act honorably in all things.

- b) That they would be restored to one another soon, regardless of distance and persecution.
 - B. As your pastor I can tell you that there is nothing that I want more from you than your prayer. The things that are required of me on a weekly basis sometimes feel overwhelming.
 - 1. I can only hope to succeed in dealing with people's grief, and sin, and relationships, and questions if I have a faithful covering of your prayers.
 - 2. The elders and I can only make wise decisions for the mission, direction, and finances of the church if someone is praying for us.
 - 3. I can only preach the gospel effectively and clearly if you are praying for me.
 - 4. City View will only become what God has ordained because of a relentlessly praying congregation.
 - C. Now keep that in mind as I ask you, "Do you pray for me? Do you pray for Pastor David? Our elders? The mission of our church? Do you pray that everything we need to accomplish God's will will be provided (People, leaders, wisdom, and finances)?
 - 1. Think about the covering of prayer that you are providing to Ginger and I and City View. What if everything that God wanted to do here was dependent on your prayers alone? Scary thought, right?
 - 2. Because we know God is gracious and that there are people who are willing to shoulder the burden of prayer, we often pass the baton to those we assume are "prayer warriors".
 - 3. But time and time again the bible calls us to be hidden away in the work of prayer.
 - 4. Why? All religions pray, what makes Christian prayer so different?
 - a) Prayer alone is what makes Christianity *personal*. It is the way we get to know a God who wants to know us.
 - b) Prayer is the single greatest way to live a Christ following life to the fullest.
 - c) "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of His willingness." — Martin Luther
 - D. Let's ask God to make this the year that we really discover the joy and transforming power of a life of prayer.
- IV. Lastly, the writer calls his listeners to a life of sacrifice. **Hebrews 13:10 ESV** We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. **11** 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. **12** So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. **13** Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. **14** For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.
 - A. He points out that life in Jesus is superior to the life the Jews had under the Old Covenant. Though the priests had bread that was only for them to eat, "we have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat". That bread is Christ himself, the bread of Heaven (John 6).
 - B. But then he almost flips his message, pointing out that we have this "bread" because Jesus bore our shame and our reproach.

1. And just as the waste from the sacrifices under the Old Covenant were discarded and burned outside the camp of the Israelites, so Jesus was sacrificed and discarded so that we could know real life.
 2. And now we are called to go and identify with him in his place of reproach outside the camp; and in so doing, we show that he is our treasure.
 3. **Hebrews 13:14 ESV** For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.
- C. Will you join me by going to Jesus outside the camp? In bearing his reproach? In seeking a different city and a better country?
1. We do this by letting the word of God uncover all of our idols and our sin.
 2. We do it by refusing to treasure what this world calls valuable.
 3. We do it by willingly accepting the loss of everything if we may only gain Christ.
- D. This is the goal. That is where I want to go. Will you join me?