

# **Bible Study April 26, 2023**

## **HEBREWS 13 (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION)**

### **Concluding Exhortations**

***<sup>1</sup> Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. <sup>2</sup> Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.***

Three Old Testament people “entertained angels without realizing it”: (1) Abraham (Genesis 18:1-33), (2) Gideon (Judges 6:11-40), and (3) Manoah (Judges 13:2-25). Some people say they cannot be hospitable because their homes are not large enough or nice enough. But even if you have no more than a table and two chairs in a rented room, there are people who would be grateful to spend time in your home. Have there been recent visitors to your church with whom you could share a meal? Do you know of anyone who would enjoy an evening of conversation? In what ways could your home meet the needs of traveling missionaries? Hospitality simply means making other people feel comfortable and at home.

***<sup>3</sup> Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.***

We are to have empathy for those in prison, especially for—though not limited to—Christians imprisoned for their faith. Jesus said that when his true followers visit those in prison, they are visiting Jesus himself (Matthew 25:36). Prisons are a mission field; believers can send in evangelists and Bible teachers. Prison systems are political projects; Christian voices are needed regarding justice and mercy in funding, staff training, and rehabilitative programs. Prisons are an international problem; through multinational Christian agencies, believers can help victims in other countries. Compassion for suffering people demands no less. Even in situations when visiting prisoners is impossible, we can still pray for them and find ways to work through others. We have a wide open field of ways to obey this command to “remember those in prison.”

***<sup>4</sup> Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.***

Giving honor to marriage requires the utmost in Christian conviction and sensitivity. Modern social theories and policies have redefined marriage and the family. These new definitions stray far from their biblical foundation. What can you do? If you are married, witness to the depth of God’s love for you by keeping your marriage happy and strong, and make marriage enrichment one aspect of your small group discussions and study. Pray for your spouse. Remain faithful—in body and in mind. Honor biblical marriage by resisting political pressure to recognize and legalize marriages that are not between one man and one woman. Teach children in your life the biblical meaning of marriage, and pray early for their own possible spouses and families. Encourage married couples around you to stay strong.

***<sup>5</sup> 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.”***

Real love for others produces tangible actions: (1) hospitality to strangers (13:2); (2) empathy for those who are in prison or who have been mistreated (13:3); (3) respect for marriage vows (13:4); and (4) contentment with what we have (13:5). Love that pleases God runs deep enough to affect our hospitality, empathy, fidelity, and contentment.

***<sup>6</sup> So we say with confidence,***

***“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.  
What can mere mortals do to me?”***

How can we learn to be satisfied with what we have? Strive to live with less rather than desiring more; give away out of your abundance rather than accumulating more; relish what you have rather than resenting what you’re missing. We will feel satisfied when we realize God’s sufficiency for our needs. Some Christians who accumulate wealth may be saying by their actions that God can’t take care of them—or at least that he won’t take care of them the way they want. Whether we feel rich or poor, anxiety and insecurity can lead to the love of money and a lack of compassion for others. Trusting in God to meet all our needs will dissolve and wash away discontentment. Express thanks to God for what he has provided, and remember that every treasure and possession will pass away. (See Philippians 4:11 for more on contentment and 1 John 2:17 on the futility of earthly desires.)

***<sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.***

As Christians, we owe much to others who have taught us and modeled for us what we have needed to learn about the Good News and Christian living. Be sure to contact those who have spoken into your life and thank them for what they mean to you and how they have influenced you. Continue following the good examples of those who have invested themselves in you by serving others through evangelism, service, and biblical education.

***<sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***

Though human leaders have much to offer, we must keep our eyes on Christ, our ultimate leader. Unlike any merely human leader, he will never change. Christ has been and will be the same forever. In a changing world, we can trust our unchanging Lord.

***<sup>9</sup> Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so.***

Apparently, some were teaching that keeping the Old Testament ceremonial laws and rituals (such as not eating certain foods) was important for salvation. But these laws were useless for conquering a person’s evil thoughts and desires (Colossians 2:23). The laws could influence conduct, but they could not change hearts. Lasting changes in conduct begin in us when the Holy Spirit lives in us and we follow his prompting.

***<sup>10</sup> We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.***

***<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. <sup>13</sup> Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.***

The Jewish Christians were being ridiculed and persecuted by Jews who didn't believe in Jesus the Messiah. Most of the book of Hebrews tells them how Christ surpasses the sacrificial system. Here the writer drives home the point of this letter's lengthy argument: It may be necessary to leave the "camp" and suffer with Christ. To be "outside the camp" meant to be unclean—in the days of the Exodus, those who were ceremonially unclean had to stay outside the camp. But Jesus suffered humiliation and uncleanness outside the Jerusalem gates on his people's behalf. The time had come for Jewish Christians to declare their loyalty to Christ above any other loyalty, to choose to follow the Messiah, whatever suffering that might entail. They needed to move outside the safe confinement of their past, their traditions, and their ceremonies to live for Christ. Make a clean break from whatever holds you back from complete loyalty to Jesus Christ.

***<sup>14</sup> For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.***

Christians love their families, spouses, jobs, and churches—but their sights should be set ahead, beyond the horizon. Christians are activists, invested in witnessing to a world in need, but they take frequent glances toward a promised community still to come. Christians enjoy gardening and building, shaping environments, turning weed pits into floral splendor, painting and patching and clearing, but they know that God promises something far more beautiful and breathtaking just for them. Christians should be characterized by looking forward to the future. Do not be attached to this world, because all that we are and have here will pass away. We should not love our present home so much that we lose sight of God's future blessing. Don't store up your treasures here; store them in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

***<sup>15</sup> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.***

Sacrifice, as spoken of here, does not imply negativity or giving up something. It refers to a voluntary offering, an outpouring of thanks and joy. One way we can make such a sacrifice of praise to God is to openly declare our allegiance to his name or to the name of Jesus. This is the opposite of using God's name profanely. Yet in our typical daily lives, how often do we hear God's name used casually and profanely? How are we to respond? Praise God early in the day before the rush, then again in the hurried middle, and at the end as the busy day winds down. Offer Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise.

***<sup>16</sup> And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.***

Because of their witness to the Messiah, these Jewish Christians no longer worshiped with other Jews, so they could consider praise and acts of service as their sacrifices—ones they could offer anywhere, anytime. This must have reminded them of the prophet Hosea's words: "Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us, so that we may offer you our praises" (Hosea 14:2). A "sacrifice

of praise” today would include thanking Christ for his sacrifice on the cross and telling others about it. We should also thank him for daily blessings of food, friends, and family. Our acts of kindness also please God, even when they go unnoticed by others.

***17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.***

The task of church leaders is to help people mature in Christ. Cooperative followers greatly ease the burden of leadership. Does your conduct give your leaders reason to report joyfully about you?

***18 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. 19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.***

The writer recognizes the need for prayer for a clean conscience and honorable service. Christian leaders are especially vulnerable to criticism from others, pride (if they succeed), discouragement (if they fail), and Satan’s constant efforts to destroy their credibility and undermine their work for God. The leaders in your church have been placed in that position by a loving God who has entrusted them with the responsibility of caring for you. They need your prayers! For whom should you regularly pray?

### **Benediction and Final Greetings**

***20 Now 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, 21 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 benediction reminds us of three depictions of God: (1) As the God of peace, he promises harmony and heals disunity among believers. He also wants us to make peace with those who persecute us (see 12:14). (2) As the one who brought Jesus back from the dead, God empowered Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation. (3) As the great Shepherd, Christ is the caring guide, the greatest of all the great leaders (including Moses, Joshua, and David, who were also called shepherds).

This passage also highlights two significant results of Christ’s death and resurrection: (1) God works in us to make us the kind of people that please him, and (2) he equips us to do the kind of work that pleases him. Let God change you from within and then use you to help others.

***22 Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly.***

***23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.***

We have no record of Timothy’s imprisonment elsewhere in Scripture, but we know that he was in prison because of the reference here to his release.

***24 Greet all your leaders and all the Lord's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.***

***25 Grace be with you all.***

Hebrews calls us to have utmost respect for Jesus and his great sacrifice for us by living in peace and serving others. This book was addressed to first-century Jewish Christians, but it applies to believers of every age and background. Since Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God, we must regard him as the beginning and end of our faith. We must center our lives on him, not depending on religious ritual, not falling back into sin, not trusting in ourselves, and not letting anything hinder or turn us away from following him. Christ is sufficient in every way and superior to all.