

HEBREWS

Hebrews 13

Introduction

There was a problem with leadership among the Hebrew Christians. Three times - in verses seven, seventeen, and twenty-four - the writer mentioned "those who rule over you." He was referring to the pastor and any elders that God had raised-up in their fellowship.

The problem with leadership was not with the leaders, *but with those being led!* The congregation was not heeding their example or hearing their exhortations. The believers were reminded to "remember... follow... obey... [and] be submissive [to] those who rule over you."

This wasn't some sort of power-trip the pastor and elders were on. It was spiritually "unprofitable" for the believers to ignore the leadership God provided them. For one thing, there was a growing lack of love among the brethren related to their reluctance to follow their leaders. Disregard for their leaders was causing disinterest among the laity.

The writer summarized his thoughts in verses one and twenty-four. In verse one he says "let brotherly love continue," then he identified the two objects of brotherly love in verse twenty-four, "(1)all those who rule over you, and (2)all the saints."

We can get deeper into this by organizing our thoughts around two points: #1 Let Love Over-Rule You, and #2 Love Those Who Rule Over You.

#1 Let Love Over-Rule You (v1-6)

The Hebrew Christians wanted to return to Judaism in order to relieve persecution. They had not yet returned to Judaism, but they had already begun to draw back from full participation in the fellowship of the Christian Church. Earlier in this letter the writer had to exhort

them to quit forsaking the meetings of the church. In this chapter he told them they were neglecting their love for the brethren.

The overall exhortation is in verse one,

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.

"Brotherly love" is from the Greek word, *philadelphia*. It refers to a supernatural love for other believers that God implants in your heart when you are born into the family of God. It is *implanted* there but it must be *increased* by your active, practical involvement with your brothers and sisters in the fellowship of believers.

The encouragement to "continue" indicates that they had discontinued and were neglecting brotherly love. For example: they were neglecting hospitality:

Hebrews 13:2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels.

"Forget" means *neglect*. They were neglecting "entertaining strangers." In those days, when Christians traveled, they stayed in the homes of other believers. The inns were scarce and often houses of ill-repute that were offensive to Christian virtues. The Hebrew Christians were drawing-back, not opening up their homes.

"Unwittingly entertained angels" is probably a direct reference to an incident in Genesis where Abraham was visited by three individuals who turned out to be the Lord and two angels. The two angels went on to Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's nephew, a man named Lot, showed them hospitality. The men of Sodom and Gomorrah assaulted Lot's house seeking to rape these strangers!

Here's the point: Even a carnal believer like Lot understood the duty of showing hospitality - and he did so at great personal risk. To neglect hospitality would be to subject travelers to the dangers lurking outside the sanctity of Christian homes.

The writer moves on. The Hebrew Christians were neglecting prisoners:

Hebrews 13:3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them - those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the body also.

The "prisoners" were those jailed for their faith in Jesus. In many countries in the world prisoners depend upon family and friends for their daily necessities. The state doesn't provide food or clothing! First century Christians were likewise "mistreated" by their jailers and were depending upon their brothers and sisters in Christ for aid. Visiting prisoners was more than a responsibility; *it was a necessity!*

The writer reminded them of a basic Christian principle: The Church is like a body with every part connected together and each part supplying and supporting the other.

Neglecting travelers and prisoners are two examples of their lack of brotherly love toward others in God's family. It was also affecting them at home.

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

"Marriage" is always to be "honorable among" Christians. God has designed marriage for many blessings, including the physical intimacy of the "bed." Apparently both *premarital* and *post-marital* sexual sins were becoming common among the Hebrew Christians. Both always reveal a lack of God's love for the person or persons you have sex with as well as your future or current spouse.

I think this is related to drawing back from brotherly love. If you are not practicing love for others you grow inward and selfish and begin to focus on yourself. I've known a lot of folks who withdraw from fellowship to try to fix problems at home. *Usually things get worse!*

As you grow inward and selfish you become covetous:

Hebrews 13:5 *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

Hebrews 13:6 So we may boldly say: *"The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. what can man do to me?"*

Drawing back from fellowship was causing the believers to *covet* rather than *contribute* their resources. Let's face it, the Church is a place where people have material needs - and you and I are often

called upon to meet those needs. Both the travelers and the prisoners needed the believers to share their resources with them. The quote is from Deuteronomy and is a reminder that the Lord is Himself your great reward - *not* the resources He has provided.

In the end it's people that matter. Let brotherly love over-rule you. By that I mean you should be around Christians and respond to their needs.

#2 Love Those Who Rule Over You (v7-25)

"Rule over" means *lead* or *guide*. The leaders who guide you are pastors and elders. They are given to you to profit you in your Christian growth. You are to "let brotherly love continue" for them just like for everyone else in the fellowship.

Brotherly love for your leaders means you "remember... follow... obey... [and] be submissive [to] those who rule over you."

Love those who rule over you by remembering them:

Hebrews 13:7 Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you...

"Remember" carries the idea of *appreciate*. It's coupled here with their ministry of teaching. He's talking about appreciating God's gift of a pastor or elder with the spiritual gift of teaching.

Appreciation can be expressed for the leader... But I'd like to suggest that it is also an attitude toward the teaching ministry. If you truly appreciate the teaching God gifts you with you will, for example, *attend it...* You will *pay attention to it...* You will *minimize distractions* from it... You will *keep up with it...*

Love those who rule over you by following them:

Hebrews 13:7 whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct.
Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever.

"Follow" is *mimic* or *imitate*. The "outcome of their conduct" can be translated, "the end of their conversation." In other words, where do they always end up in their conversation and conduct? They end up

in the "faith" that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." They always point you to Jesus.

It's possible to follow after many other things instead:

Hebrews 13:9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For *it is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

It grieves a pastor or an elder to see folks gravitate toward the many false doctrines out there. Likewise when God's people prefer legalistic rules rather than the freedom of grace.

The writer pauses in verses ten through sixteen to elaborate on this last point regarding grace. He compared their spiritual situation as Christians to those of the Jews they were thinking about returning to.

Hebrews 13:10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.
Hebrews 13:11 For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp.

Hebrews 13:12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

Hebrews 13:13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

Hebrews 13:14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

For every earthly item a Jew could point to, the Christian had an eternal counterpart that was better. The Jews had an "altar" in the "tabernacle" on earth upon which they offered sacrifice. Christians have an altar in heaven - it's Jesus Christ Who was Himself the final sacrifice for sin.

The imagery of going "outside the camp" comes from the Jewish Day of Atonement. The sin offering would be taken outside the camp and burned completely. Jesus, **your** sin offering, was taken outside of Jerusalem and crucified.

The application for the Hebrew Christians was to turn from the earthly Jerusalem and its Temple towards the heavenly New Jerusalem where Jesus is the fulfillment of all the figures and symbols.

Hebrews 13:15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.

Hebrews 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

"Fruit of our lips" is literally, "the **calves** of our lips." Praising God *in* and *through* their persecutions would be better than offering calves on the altar; it would be true spiritual worship. Likewise doing "good" and "sharing," through hospitality and visitation, would be received in heaven as a spiritual sacrifice more precious than any offer of an animal under the ritual religion of the Jews.

Love those who rule over you by by obeying them:

Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

This exhortation always assumes the pastor and elders are in the will of God and teaching the Word of God. "Obey" means you assent to the direction set by your leaders; "be submissive" means you yield your contrary opinions.

Did you know that most problems among believers do not stem from biblical or doctrinal disputes but from personality conflicts? We find it hard to obey and submit to direction. It can be especially hard in the Church because the leadership model is just the opposite of what we do in the world. Church leadership is modeled after Jesus kneeling to wash His disciple's feet. It is a servant model... But we have a hard time as servants!

When a pastor stands before the Lord he "must give account" of his ministry. The apostle Paul gave an account of his ministry to the Ephesians; it's recorded in chapter twenty of the Book of Acts. I think the account pastors must give will contain the same elements - chiefly the declaring of the whole counsel of the Word of God.

The point here in Hebrews is that you can cause your leaders "joy" or "grief." My pastor in San Bernardino, John Miller, used to put it this way: You are either a *wing* or a *weight*. You are a weight by flaking out, being unfaithful, undependable, or argumentative. It is actually "unprofitable for you." At **your** interview with Jesus He will point out the grief you caused your leaders - men who only had your best spiritual interests in mind.

Love those who rule over you by by praying for them:

Hebrews 13:18 Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.
Hebrews 13:19 But I especially urge *you* to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

The mention of a "good conscience" and living "honorably" probably means that there were folks in the fellowship spreading rumors and lies about his motives. Instead of entering into a dialog about their motives you should "pray" for your leaders.

The pastors and elders among the Hebrew Christians were exhorting and encouraging them to endure rather than end their persecutions. The believers should *heed* their *example* and *hear* their *exhortations*.

The application for us is to love those who lead, and to show it in the sincere and genuine ways that are listed: "remember... follow... obey... [and] be submissive [to] those who rule over you."

Conclusion

The remaining verses, even though they come at the end, are a sort of cover letter that accompanies the main body of writing.

Hebrews 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,
Hebrews 13:21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

The writer gathers up the major themes we've seen in this letter: peace, the resurrected Christ, the blood, the new covenant, spiritual maturity, and God's continuing work in the believer. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ died for the sheep (John 10:11); as the Great Shepherd, He lives for the sheep and intercedes in heaven for them; as the Chief Shepherd, He will return for the sheep (1Peter 5:4).

You might summarize these thoughts, and the whole letter, by saying, "*Grow forward with Jesus.*"

Hebrews 13:22 And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.

"Few words" means that he could have said a lot more. What he did say was enough and they should "bear with" it. His exhortation to endure suffering is tough brotherly love, but love nonetheless.

Hebrews 13:23 Know that *our* brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.

Timothy was a gifted pastor and apparently well-known to these Hebrew Christians. In addition to being good news, the mention of Pastor Timothy ties together the major themes of this closing chapter. He was a brother, a leader, a prisoner, and would need their hospitality!

Hebrews 13:24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.
Hebrews 13:25 Grace *be* with you all. Amen.

The writer was either in "Italy" or some Italians were with him. You can always count on the Italians!

The theme of this last chapter is a great summary of the entire letter, "Let brotherly love continue" towards both *leaders* and *laity* as you **grow forward** with Jesus.