

bear, bear, bear

hebrews 13

Hebrews chapter 13 this morning.

As the letter comes to a close, the author sums up the thoughts he's been developing over these chapters. From all these different perspectives he's been explaining that *this* is who Jesus is, *this* is what He has planned for His people and *this* is how you take hold of the Christian life in the way that Christ really wants.

As chapter 12 closed, there was that statement that we are to serve God acceptably with reverence and Godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.

That's an interesting visual. He's a consuming fire. He's not a flashlight. It's not that we go to Him when the power is out and grab Him off the shelf to help us flip our breakers back on. We don't use God for our benefit and pleasure. He is a consuming fire. His right is to completely envelop all of who we are and light us up.

Since He is a consuming fire, the Lord should consume our lives by controlling everything. How we act, what we say, how we think, what our habits are, what our goals are. That's what you would expect of a life that was engulfed in the flame of God, as if we were the bush Moses saw burning but not destroyed in Exodus chapter 3.

That's the theological image we're given at the end of chapter 12, and in chapter 13 we see how our lives are supposed to look practically.

Hebrews 13.1-25 - Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

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." So we may boldly say:

"The Lord is my helper;

I will not fear.

What can man do to me?"

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. 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.

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for

sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. 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. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

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.

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

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, 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.

And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.

Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace be with you all. Amen.

There are a lot of directives in these verses. That's a good thing because directives help us evaluate areas where God is working in our lives.

In this dispensation of grace, we're not under a legal code like believers in the Old Testament were, but that doesn't mean that there aren't things that should make us identifiable as separate people. Much the contrary.

The Bible shows us directions and gives us directives because that will demonstrate where we're in step with God and where we're not. A person who is following Jesus and walking by the Spirit is going to bear certain kinds of fruit, because God says that's what will happen.

So, in a passage like this, where we see directives or commands given, we understand that they are there to show us how a God-fearing, faith-filled Christian will behave in ways that are profoundly different than a person who has not been saved and sanctified. These sorts of differences are natural and expected of us.

Differences like loving people, even strangers and prisoners. Differences like treating your marriage the way Christ treats the Church, rather than serving self in marriage the way the world does. Differences like not coveting things that other people have. These are profoundly different mindsets than what we have as natural, unsaved men.

In fact, these sort of directions that a Christian is supposed to walk in are so foreign to the world and to the flesh that it makes them stop and stare. It makes them wonder. That's what happens when a Christian lives the Christian life. They're like the burning bush. Consumed with

the fire of God, yet not destroyed. It demands people's attention, and that's what God wants. So that they too can be illuminated by the Gospel.

Now, we look at some of these commands in this chapter and, though they're all well and good, we have to stop and think, "Ok, how am I *possibly* going to do that?" How can we completely stop coveting or continually offer sacrifices and praises to God?

The key is there in verse 6 and it's very simple: Go to Jesus Christ for the help that you need to live a consumed life. The Lord is my helper the text says. He wants to help us live a holy life by redefining everything we think and do and say and completely change the trajectory and direction of our lives. He wants to set our lives on fire.

We've seen in all these chapters what kind of life a Christian is called to, and here we see some practical callings and directives, but if we don't connect our lives to Jesus, allowing Him to accomplish these things by controlling our hearts, then we're going to fail.

We have to go to Him and let Him set our lives on fire. We have to let Him help us do what He's commanded us to do.

I remember when I was little I started helping set up and tear down the sound gear for church at the YMCA. We had all these cords that need to be put away after service and if you didn't know how to wrap them properly, you ended up just making a huge mess. If you don't coil a cord the right way, it's going to just unravel as soon as you set it down, or it's going to kink or make a knot.

But the cords need to be put away. So, the fix for my inexperience and lack of understanding was not just for me to keep forcing myself to do it. Someone needed to show me the proper way to coil a cord. Once they did and once I got the hang of it, what seemed so hard and daunting became very simple and natural.

That's a simplistic example, to me, of many directives in the Christian life. When we're first presented with them they seem really daunting or confusing. Sometimes they seem downright undoable. But if we go to Jesus and allow Him to show us, by His Spirit, how to do these things, and then if we'll *exercise* our faith the way we're called to in the Scriptures, then the Christian life doesn't seem as daunting or confusing. In fact, as we go to the Lord and allow Him to set our lives on fire, these things become more and more natural. Because He's conforming us and completing us and staying with us to help us.

So we're to go to Jesus in order to receive the life He has for us. Where? Well, our passage says we're to go outside the camp. Outside the city. Outside of this world. God's plan and His ways are not found in conventional wisdom or cultural trends. He calls us out of the camp to meet with Him. And that's fine, because as Christians we have no continuing city here on the earth anyway. We can love our communities and our country and we can even love our heritage, but, on a Biblical level, those things are not continuing. We're passing through on our way to our real home in heaven. And everything around us in this life is either a distraction from the will of God, or circumstances for us to proclaim the Lord and do His will within.

The key to spiritual success is going to the Lord, taking up the cross and, as verse 13 says, bearing His reproach. Trading our lives for His and living it out each and every day.

Bearing His name, bearing His Word as verse 22 says and choosing to walk with my cross faithfully toward my eternal city, because I know that's the way to go so that God can make me complete in every good work to do His will.

We can't treat Jesus like a flashlight. We've got to recognize that our God is a consuming fire and He wants to light up every part of our lives.

If I don't get that, then I'm going to drift and shut down fruit production and live a spiritually incomplete life, which is the opposite of what God wants.

He wants to consume us like the burning bush in Exodus 3. Fully ablaze, but not destroyed. Drawing the attention of people in the wilderness. Speaking through our lives and making us holy. That's what God wants and we want what God wants.

But, the message of Hebrews is that this kind of Christianity doesn't happen on its own. It takes attentiveness. It takes a purposeful faith. We don't do it ourselves, but we allow God to do His work in us so that He can take us where He wants us to go.

Let Him continue His work today and ignite every corner of your heart and life.