

Hebrews 13:1-17

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Just a brief prayer as we make our way. Father, we hear your words. We are to wash ourselves, make ourselves clean.

We are to remove the evil of our deeds from before your eyes. We are to cease to do evil. We are to learn to do good. We are to seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless. We are to plead the widow's cause. We hear your invitation to come. Now let us reason together, says the Lord, though our sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. And Father, we come to you stained in sin.

And in the great mystery and kindness and grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ, we are white as snow, white as wool.

[1 : 10] And so, Lord, we thank you for the forgiveness of sins in Christ. We thank you that it has been made clear to us in your word. And so we come to your word this morning.

And we pray that you would assure us of that forgiveness and remind us of the joy that is ours in serving and pleasing and worshiping you in all of life.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. This morning we arrive at the final chapter of this letter. The closing chapter is a compilation of short, pointed exhortations and remarks to the listeners. Having heard it read now, and having me personally read it repeatedly this past week, you may sense that the writer is writing in haste, as if his ink were drying up or papyrus was running out. It has a disjointed sense. Some have even claimed it was appended to the letter. One can sense some level of urgency and haste in the writing.

[2 : 17] So how are we to understand this final chapter? This morning I want to propose that this final chapter should fall under the governance of how chapter 12 has previously concluded.

He has urged his hearers to offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe. Since the conclusion of his argument from chapters 1 through 10, verse 18, the writer is moving to the hope and the aim of his letter, namely that the reader, you and I, would do God's will for God's pleasure. Chapter 13 is a picture of what a life that is pleasing to God resembles. What is a worship-filled life? If you and I are asking the question, to borrow the Pauline phrase, to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, what does it look like?

What are some distinct markers of this life? I'm not only speaking about what should happen corporately here within these walls, but what does it look like to have this continual posture once we leave these doors?

[3 : 38] What does it look like to do God's will, to do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight? Chapter 13, verse 21.

Since the end of chapter 10, we have been given insight on what a faith-filled life looks like, particularly one that would please him.

You may remember the phrase, it is impossible to please God without faith. This morning, these final few chapters, and this last one especially, is given to us to show what a pleasing life before God looks like.

It's a template. It's a stencil of sorts. We are to use it for our lives. It's not complete. It's not exhaustive or comprehensive. But it is accurate once we begin to sketch it out.

It is enough to convey genuine marks of being a Christian. See, chapter 13's primary concern is not what we are to believe, but it is ultimately concerned with how you and I are to behave.

[4 : 48] The first 10 chapters of Hebrews have already laid out the sophisticated reasoning of what you and I are to believe. But it is not simply enough to believe the right things as a Christian.

Our faith is not merely cognitive and intellectual. It's not a faith confined to the head. It is an all-encompassing faith. Yes, we are to love the Lord with our minds, but we are also to love Him with our hearts, our souls, and our strength as well.

The Christian faith lays claim to all of you, of all of you, your will, your affections, your efforts, your time, your energy, your labors. Our faith is therefore visible.

We are able to demonstrate it. It's testable. It's embodied by those who believe it. If you and I are simply to turn the pages, one page into the epistle to the letter of James, he has this argument where some are trying to separate faith and works.

He asserts that faith by itself without works is a dead faith. He says, I will show you my faith by what I do, by my works.

[6 : 04] You see, demons believed rightly, cognitively, intellectually, but they behaved wrongly. And that is proving this very point. An exclusive cognitive faith is unlikely to be a saving faith.

An exclusively cognitive faith is unlikely to be a saving faith. This is an indictment on me personally. I tend to be a faith teller.

I can tell you what I believe. I can tell you all about it. Frankly, because it's easier to tell you and explain to you than show you. It's far easier to speak directions to an unknown location than it is to spend the time and the effort to walk someone or drive someone there.

It's far easier for me to say the words than to do the actions. This is where the notion of hypocrisy arises.

We become people who simply play the part and fail to live it. See, the writer wants to protect us from this. A life of acceptable worship, a life that is pleasing to God, is not a solitary life.

[7 : 22] It's not an isolated, a monastic life. Rather, it's a life of faith in community. It's a communal life in relation to others. Therefore, this morning, we will see three things that demonstrate acceptable worship that is pleasing to God.

And they are all defined in relationship. Firstly, it is reflected in our relationship with others.

Secondly, we please God in our relationship to our leaders.

Thirdly, and ultimately, we please God in our relationship with Jesus Himself. These three things will mark our time this morning.

Firstly, we please God in our relationship with others. Summarizing verses 1-6 of chapter 13, the writer is urging brotherly love must continue.

Hospitality to the stranger and the outsider must be shown. Concern and care for the imprisoned must be remembered. They are to esteem marriage highly and choose fidelity over licentious living.

[8 : 32] They are not to be hoarders of wealth. Rather, they are to be those contented in circumstance and means. They are to be those who are ever aware of the abiding presence of God in their lives.

Aware of His help. Aware of the strength that He imparts. Aware that He accompanies them through all the circumstances and challenges. See, the writer is confronting an issue that is far too common in our world today.

We are told to privatize faith. Hide it. Keep it to yourselves. You may have been told that faith should only stay in the home, in the confines of the home. Faith and belief should not proceed from our front doors.

It doesn't belong in the public realm of things. But the Christian faith by nature is concerned with both what we believe and how we are to behave publicly.

It is a social faith. Meaning, it is intended that what we believe transforms how we interact throughout this world toward others.

[9 : 33] It's actually a sign of genuine faith and belief. There is a distinct ethic for the Christian. Genuine faith has a social concern.

It has a particular concern for others. A heightened concern for the marginalized and the displaced. It's interesting that the scope of this ethic is not limited.

The writer does not say only treat those in your faith family or even immediate family with care.

Don't only show hospitality to those in this building. Don't only show hospitality to your friends and your neighbors.

Show hospitality actually to the stranger. The one you don't know. For in doing so, you might entertain an angel of sorts. Reap a blessing that was unintended.

They are to show particular care for those who are mistreated and in prison, likely for their faith since they are in one body. These are acceptable forms of worship for God.

[10:34] They are pleasing in His sight. It's no coincidence that these same two exhortations emerge from Jesus Himself. Remember in the last, that picture in Matthew 25 where Jesus returns and He comes and He divides people in half of sorts.

And on the one hand, there are those who will be ushered into eternal life and the others into eternal death.

And to one side, He says, Come, you are blessed by My Father. Chapter Matthew 25 verse 34. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Verse 35, For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me.

And then the righteous will answer Him, Lord, when did we see You in these circumstances? And the Lord replied, Truly I say to you, as you did it for one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.

[11:44] And then He looks at those who are religious and He tells them, Depart from Me. You cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

And His indictment of them is not for believing wrongly, His indictment is because they behaved wrongly.

They neglected the hospitality for the stranger. They neglected those in prison. They neglected the marginalized, oppressed, suffering, displaced.

See, the Christian ethic is, see, to believe as a Christian is not enough. We must behave as a Christian.

The early church actually embraced these ethics. Being distinct to the first century, they sought out to live out their faith publicly. Earlier this week, I'm thankful for all the theological libraries that reside in Hyde Park.

[12:50] There is a book that I wanted to get my hands on, and thankfully one of the libraries had it, and so I made my way there. It's by a New Testament historian, Larry Hurtado, recently published a book titled Destroyer of Gods, Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World.

In this book, he records these fascinating accounts, but he even records Christians going to great lengths to care for those imprisoned. He documents Christians bribing guards so that they could serve those in prison.

He speaks of letters, there's early Christian writings that attest to Christians having a common table, but not a common bed, translated as those who share their food, but not their wives.

Hurtado goes on to argue that this distinct Christian ethic actually influences the entire Western world, unbeknownst to most of us. Sociologists of religion have even asserted that aspects of this distinct ethic are what contributed to the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

You see, early Christians were to have a distinct ethic, and in so doing, they not only served as a witness to those around them, but they pleased God by upholding this ethic.

[14:19] Likewise, we're to do the same. These instructions 2,000 years later are strikingly relevant. We are to please God in our relationships with one another.

Secondly, we are to please God in our relationship with our leaders. In verse 7, they are urged to remember their leaders. They are to consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. At the end of the passage, verse 17, the hearers are charged to obey their leaders and submit to them. Again, at the conclusion of chapter 13 and 24, the listeners are to greet their leaders on behalf of the writer of the letter.

It seems unusual that this topic would all of a sudden surface in the letter. Why would the writer include verses like 7 and 17? Well, within the text, there's a few clues, particularly in the roles and the descriptions of the leaders.

Namely, there were those, according to verse 7, who spoke the word of God. And there were those, according to verse 17, who were keeping watch over their souls.

[15:37] New Testament commentator F.F. Bruce has proposed that what was happening in this context were new cultural leaders emerged. Not of the gospel sort, rather those that possess this gravitas, this dynamism, luring readers away.

They brought a new fad, possibly a new trend to show that was now threatening the church by diluting or skewing the gospel message. They may have been promoting a different way of living, one which subverted the lives of their former leaders.

Therefore, the hearers of this letter were to remember their former leaders who have now passed. Not in a sentimental way, but in a particular way. They were to remember them in the ways they demonstrated faith and an outcome of their way of life.

And in so doing, it would prove to be a safeguard for the listeners to combat the strange and diverse teachings that were emerging. See, in some sense, the writer of the letter is telling the readers, be steadfast.

Don't get caught up in the changing times, new and obscure teachings. Whether there are food and sacrifice rituals, maybe dietary restrictions, don't get tossed to and fro by these waves of bizarre new doctrines emerging.

[16:55] Whether they come out of human cunningness or deceitful schemes. Instead, remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. And this is not an irrelevant word, but according to earlier in the book, it's a reliable message that they've received.

It's not a wavering message. It's not a changing message. It's not a transforming message. It's not a dated message. It's not an irrelevant message. It's not an insufficient message.

It is the eternal message. That's why the writer says, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever more. The gospel that you received historically is the gospel that we preach today, and that you preach and submit to tomorrow.

It's a timeless gospel, and it's the same gospel message you'll find in the end. Do not get conned into thinking you need something new.

You don't need something new. You need what was once and for all delivered to the saints. The same Jesus that was preached yesterday is the same Jesus that was preached today, and he will be the same Jesus preached tomorrow.

[18:13] Succinctly summarized in verse 12, Jesus, who suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify his people through his own blood. That is the message, eternal message.

See, these leaders are not only the ones who not only spoke the gospel, but they lived in commendable ways, and they endured to the end. They were to remember not only their former leaders, but they were also exhorted to obey and submit to their current leaders, who are continuing the work of not only speaking the word, but also keeping watch over their souls.

The metaphor employed here is one of a night watchman. Some have actually translated this keeping watch over your souls as it's a sleeplessness. It's highlighting the tireless and vigilant work of their leaders.

The metaphor is vivid. Possibly someone stationed on the wall of a city. The watchman is to survey the perimeter of the city from possible attack.

It is for the city's well-being that the watchman exists. And so that is why the leaders existed in those days. Whether it was charismatic cultural leaders telling them to say, hey, no, come here.

[19:31] We have a better movement, a new movement. Introducing strange and diverse teachings. The writer is exhorting the readers to submit and obey their leaders because they are actually keeping watch over their souls.

people. And so here at Holy Trinity, our prayer is that you find those serving as pastors, elders, deacons, community group leaders, those who speak the word of God to you and keep watch over your souls.

We are to please God in our relationship to others. We are to please God in our relationship with our leaders. And lastly, we are to please God in our relationship to Jesus.

The writer has mentioned that there is a divergent form of worship taking place. These were diverse and strange teachings, somehow deriving significance from foods.

It probably refers to the old sacrificial system, according to chapter 9, verse 9. There may have been some ritualistic element, legalistic element, ceremonial element, that the readers were tempted to go back and practice.

[20:56] Regardless of what exactly is happening, we can affirm that it is pitted against the heart that is strengthened by grace. Being students of the Bible, you may find, or you may know, that anything pitted against divine grace is more often than not anti-Jesus, anti-gospel.

He goes on to elaborate, the writer, on the act of grace that Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. He's referring to the day of atonement, where once a year, on behalf of the nation, an animal will be sacrificed for the sins of the nation.

But it would happen outside the city. It would happen outside the camp. Because that which was cursed was sentenced to be outside the camp.

Carcasses were to be disposed of outside the camp. Capital punishment took place outside the camp. To be outside was a place of rejection and shame. So what we see in chapter 13, verse 12, is that Jesus is the rejected one that actually is sacrificed on behalf of the people.

But what happens in verse 13 has to be one of the most shocking, staggering, and challenging statements in the Bible. It reads, therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach that he endured.

[22 : 34] Upon reading this many times, I said, it would make a lot more sense to just read, so Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood, and then just jump to verse 15.

Through him let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. Because after he has sanctified the people, of course, the next thing to do is we are to sacrifice the fruit of our lips, the attesting to the gospel, we are to do good to others and serve others.

It makes sense. God did this and we respond to thankfulness by doing this. But instead, the writer summons the reader to one of the most challenging thoughts or even practices of the Christian life. the author, the writer is saying, you Christian, you go outside the camp. Wait, why do I need to go outside the camp?

Jesus suffered, so I don't have to suffer, right? Jesus bore the reproach, so why should I need to bear the reproach? Isn't that the gospel? That in my place, he took all the punishment, so I have this incredible life of ease and comfort.

[24 : 03] I'm saved because of what he's done. Yes, but the writer invites you and I to do something so weighty, so alarming, so striking.

Jesus went outside the camp. You go outside the camp. Wait, he was rejected. Why am I to pursue that same rejection?

perfection. It's so staggering and shocking. What does it mean? What did it mean? And what does it mean for you and I? See, the reader up to this point has been summoned to, exhorted to approach Christ boldly in his throne of grace.

You are exhorted to approach with great confidence. The reader is to draw near with full assurance of forgiveness. Now the reader all of a sudden is exhorted to go out. Go out to Christ in order to bear reproach.

See, for the reader who received this letter, they have been charged to go outside the camp. Most likely they were charged to go outside of the established Judaism at the time that was tempting them to return.

[25 : 15] It is a summons for them to sever social and relational ties with those causing them to stumble. They were to be those who were to serve not in the man-made tent of religious ritual, but they were to serve Christ.

It was a call for them to go to Jesus. It would have significant social ramifications. They would probably be ostracized by society. They would likely lose social status and standing.

They would certainly lose economic, they would suffer economic loss. They would suffer reproach in the same manner Jesus did. One writer puts it this way, the call to go to him, Jesus, bearing the disgrace that he bore, involves a shift from a safe position to a threatening one.

And so Jesus, the writer, is summoning the reader to move from safety, a position of safety, to a position of threat.

See, for us to go to Jesus outside the camp is a summons to embrace rejection, the suffering it may entail, being outcast by the majority camp.

[26 : 36] It is a move from a position of privilege to a position of disadvantage. It is a move from power to weakness. It is a move from worthiness to worthlessness. It is the willing departure from the safety of home to the uncertainty of the land yet unseen.

It is a denial of earthly heritage for the exchange of heavenly inheritance and reward. In the eyes of the world, it is a move from life to death.

But in the eyes of the gospel, it is a move from death to life. This is the life of faith, is it not? Is this not the life that the gospel summons you and I to?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has aptly said, when Christ calls a man, he bid him come and die. And he continues, when Jesus summons the rich young ruler to sell his possessions and follow him, he continues, Jesus' summons to the rich young man was a calling for him to die because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ.

In fact, every command of Jesus is a call to die. Well, what does it look like? Chapter 11 is seasoned with these stories who demonstrate such a move, joining Jesus outside the camp.

[28 : 01] We see Moses, all grown up, refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God, enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He considered reproach, of Christ greater than all the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to a reward. See, a hint is given.

Moses is looking for a city that he cannot find here on earth. It's not a strange thing for him to give up what he gave up. It's actually a normal thing.

If you've ever had the chance to travel abroad internationally, one of the things that you first do getting out the plane, besides retrieving your bag, is probably go to the local currency exchange. You need to find money or currency that is accepted at the country that you've arrived in. Why? Because, I mean, well, a lot of places accept the dollar, but for most places, you need local currency, because foreign currency is unacceptable.

[29 : 10] And you enjoy your vacation, your business trip, whatever has brought you abroad, and at the end of your trip, if you've planned well, you have no local currency left.

If you've planned poorly, you have a whole lot of yen, francs, euros, pounds, you have a whole lot of it left.

And so, you either go on a shopping spree, you either save it for some other time, you may come back to this country, or you reconvert it to get your American dollars back.

But your goal is to get rid of it. Why? Because you're going home. And that local currency is no good in the United States of America.

You see, Moses would have said something along these lines. He's given up his rank, he's given up the pleasure of sin. He's given up the riches in Egypt.

[30 : 15] And you would ask him, hey, was it worth it? Oh, yeah. Because all that, for where I'm headed, is fake currency.

Bring all the treasures of Egypt with you. Bring all the accolades of the world with you. Bring all the rank of the world and you walk up to the door of heaven.

And you will stand next to a person, destitute, impoverished, with nothing. And you know what? In that world, in that heavenly city we anticipate, bring all you can from this world and you walk up there.

Its value is zero. Where you're headed, build up currency for your destination where you're headed. You see, Jesus had offered up the necessary sacrifice already.

[31 : 22] There was no need for the believer to continue to do the same. Instead, the proper sacrificial response is twofold. One, we are to offer the sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of our lips that acknowledge his name.

And two, we are not to neglect doing good. We are not to neglect doing good to others and sharing what you have. Perhaps these are the signposts we are to seek, we are to follow as we seek that city to come.

As you journey to Mount Zion, we live by faith. You, like me, I want direction. Where to next? What's it going to look like next year or the year after that?

We want the next steps. We want to know the twists and the turns. We want to know the sequence of events and how they transpire. Yet, that's not the life of faith. Instead, as you go to Christ, in expectation of reproach, possible suffering, certainly marginalization in some degree, may your life be marked by these two sacrifices, namely the sacrifice of praise, the utterance of your lips professing allegiance to your Lord and along the way doing good and sharing what you have.

The road ahead, I hope I'm not the first to tell you, is hazardous, is arduous, it's scorn-filled and not easy. The journey to Mount Zion, the heavenly city, is one filled with great difficulty.

[32 : 43] The cost of your salvation is nothing. The entrance fee to heaven is paid, but it is sure hard, according to Pastor Helm, to get there.

It is sure hard to get there. It's the narrow road. It's the difficult road. It will prove in the end the road less traveled. Do not be deceived.

As you approach Christ, this is a costly road, for He has laid claim on your life. He has spared not His only Son. May we not spare any of our best efforts.

May we not reserve any of ourselves. May we not withhold any of our resources from Him. If you thought becoming a Christian was to receive a life of ease, you're wrong.

There's actually a great cost in being a Christian. I just want to close with probably my favorite writer. I named my son's middle name after him, Ryle, Bishop J.C.

[33 : 51] Ryle. It has no meaning. It means like wheat field or something. But one day I hope to give him all these books. it's from J.C.

Ryle's classic holiness. And in a chapter he has a chapter entitled The Cost. It will cost a man his love of ease.

Speaking of discipleship. He must take pains and trouble if he means to run a successful race towards heaven. He must daily watch and stand on his guard like a soldier on enemy's ground. He must take heed to his behavior every hour of every day, in every company, in every place, in public as well as in private, among strangers as well as at home. He must be careful over his time, his tongue, his temper, his thoughts, his imagination, his motives, his conduct in every relation of life.

He must be diligent about his prayers, his Bible reading, his use of Sundays with all their means of grace. In attending to these, he may come far short of perfection, but there is none of them that he can safely neglect.

[35 : 10] He concludes, I grant it costs much to be a true Christian, but who in his sound mind can doubt that it is worth any cost to have the soul saved?

When a ship is in danger of sinking, the crew thinks nothing of throwing overboard all the precious cargo. When a limb is mortified or diseased, a man will submit to any severe operation and even to amputation to save his life.

Surely a Christian should be willing to give up anything that stands between him and heaven. A religion that costs nothing is worth nothing.

A cheap Christianity without a cross will prove in the end to be a useless Christianity without a crown.

Therefore, we go to Christ outside the camp and we pay the cost.

[36 : 19] we may pay a lifetime of suffering and some do in our world for Christ.

they happily exchange it for a crown that they wear for all of eternity.

Let's pray. Father, Father, Lord, I do not want to belittle the challenges that we face as people.

I do not want to overlook the fact that sin has marred our world and as a result, we suffer all the pains that this world suffers.

But Lord, give us eyes to see these are light and momentary afflictions. These are temporal things that will pass. And Lord, if it would be our lot in life to carry burdens of reproach and scorn and ridicule because we've chosen to go out to you outside the city gate, strengthen our hands and our knees, give us endurance so in that last day, we would receive that glorious crown, eternal crown, and we would look back and see that all that we have endured for the gospel's sake and for Christ's sake is worthwhile.

[38 : 18] God, Father, help us to live unto you, to live rightly with others, to please you in how we interact with our leaders, and ultimately to please you as we go to Christ outside the camp.

we ask all these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.