

# Characteristics of a Healthy Christian and Church:

## Part 1 (Hebrews 13:1-6)

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Preacher: Brett Sanders

[0:00] But I am so thankful to be here today. I'm thankful for all that God is doing in this church, in this community, and I'm thankful that we get to worship Him.

Today we will be starting the last chapter of the book of Hebrews. To me, it's been a fun journey. I hope you feel the same as we've looked through the book of Hebrews.

It's been encouraging. It's been challenging at times. We have tackled some pretty deep topics of the Christian faith. And this final week, or actually this final chapter, I was hoping it was going to be the final week, but we're going to be here for one more week after this.

But this final chapter is no exception. Chapter 13 is filled with many exhortations that will be sure to challenge us, encourage us, and honestly probably offend us at some point along the way.

But that's okay. It's all right for the Bible to rub up against some of our preconceived notions, some of the things that the world tells us to believe. You see, if the Bible doesn't offend us at some point, then it's probably because we're not reading all of it.

[1:12] It's probably because we're picking and choosing the parts that we want to read and not taking it as a whole. We're reading it as Thomas Jefferson did, reading the parts that he wanted to read, and then cut out everything else that he didn't want to read, that he didn't agree with.

And so I want us to come to Scripture, all of Scripture, this passage included, and I want us to come understanding that we need to have open hearts, open minds to what God has to say for us.

The author has explained over and over again through the book of Hebrews that Jesus is better. He's better than anything and everything in this world.

His ways are better than our ways. And so let us come to this passage trusting that fact, that Jesus is better, that he is greater, that his ways are better.

And from that, be willing and ready to not only hear what he has to say to us, but also to apply his word to our lives. There's been times throughout this week and this morning, especially just going over this, that God has already been speaking to my heart and convicting me of different areas of my life.

[2:21] And so in this last chapter, chapter 13, there's a lot of statements that it can almost feel like it jumps around a little bit. It almost feels like there's bullet points that the author's going through.

They're saying, hey, here's some other things you need to remember. Remember this, remember this, remember this, do this, make sure that you look out for these people, make sure you do this.

And it almost feels like he's jumping around from place to place as we're looking through this.

So much so that some people have said, well, is this even part of Hebrews? And it absolutely is, because it ties in really well. One of the things that I would say is a little unfortunate is the chapter break that is placed here in chapter 13 from chapter 12.

Many of us realize that the chapters and verses were not a part of the original manuscripts. Those were added much later, and they're incredibly helpful. I'm grateful for them.

It helps us to be able to reference different places. It helps us to understand things. And in many ways, it is a benefit to us. But there's some places where it kind of puts in a division, where there doesn't need to be a division.

[3:32] And I think the end of chapter 12, beginning of chapter 13, is one of those places. And I think it's really helpful for us to understand how this next section ties in really well to chapter 12, but especially going back to 12:28.

Now, remember in chapter 12, we were focusing on the fact that we serve a holy and just God. And His holiness and His justice prevents us as sinful people from being able to come into His presence.

It prevents us from being able to be in His presence because He is holy, He is just, and we are not. But Jesus makes a way.

And because He makes a way, the author tells us that we begin to worship Him with thankful hearts. And so in verse 28, it says, Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaking, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

And so our response to a God who makes a way, who is perfect in His justice, perfect in who He is, He makes a way for us to be able to have a relationship with Him.

[4:49] And so our life is to be an act of worship. We began talking about this last week, and the fact that worship is not just what we do when we come into this room. It's not just singing songs, but worship is all of our life.

And so now the author, as we get to chapter 13, begins to flesh that out for us. He begins to show us how our life is to be an act of worship.

And so as we look at this final chapter, we begin to see this. The author begins to show us some examples of what a life that is focused on Jesus, that is seeking to worship Him, what that life actually looks like.

Now this is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather a great starting point to look at our lives. And so as we look at this final chapter, the main thing that the author is getting at is for us to see a number of marks, a number of characteristics of a healthy church.

And so the main thing that I want us to see this morning, as we have this time, the main idea of this sermon is for us to see these marks and not only examine our lives, but examine our church.

[6:02] to see if these marks are a characteristic of our life and to see if they're characteristic of this church. And so from this passage, we're going to bring our attention to seven different characteristics.

Now don't worry, we're not doing them all this week. It's going to be this week and next week.

Although I was going to try to get them all in this week, but it just was not possible. But we're going to be looking over the next couple of weeks at these seven characteristics that we see very clearly presented in this passage.

Today, we're going to take a look at three of them, but we're going to be looking at how believers and churches, with a focus on Jesus, what their lives will look like.

So to begin with, believers and churches with a focus on Jesus will love each other well. We'll love each other well. We'll do a good job at loving one another.

Verses one through three of Hebrews 13 says this, Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware.

[7:10] Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated since you also are in the body. Now what a great place for us to start when it comes to seeing our lives and seeing our church as an act of worship.

What better place to start than with love? And it talks about this love in several different ways. To begin with, we are to love our spiritual family well.

Let brotherly love continue. This Greek combines two words to give us brotherly love. *Phileo* meaning love, and *adelphos* meaning brother. Put them together, you get the city of brotherly love, Philadelphia.

And so this is where we get this idea of brotherly love, loving our family well. The NIV gets to the heart of the meaning of this when it says, keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

Remembering that, and reminding us that because of Jesus, we are part of God's family. If we have God as our father, then that means we have many brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are to love them well.

[8:21] But next it says, we are to love strangers well. We love those within the family, the community well, but we also love strangers well. It says, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware.

Hospitality is something that should be characteristic of all believers. It should be something that is characteristic of our lives, is hospitality. Now it's true for some that it just comes naturally and easy, but it should be something that is characteristic of all believers.

In doing this, it says, some have entertained angels unaware. Now what does this mean? I'm going to be honest with you. I don't exactly know what this means, that we have entertained angels

unaware.

Looking through different commentaries, many commentators just skipped this section completely, and just talked about loving strangers well, which means that they don't know either. Others have said that it is actual angels that we are entertaining that have come into our paths.

Others talk about it as the early church missionaries that were going around from place to place. You didn't have email, you didn't have phones, you didn't have pictures with cards of them out there that you can know who were missionaries that were coming around.

[9:40] So some of these missionary travels that Paul was on, that Titus was on, Timothy, Luke, all of these people as they're traveling from place to place, they didn't know who they were coming in.

So some believe that it could have been that they were entertaining these missionaries who were coming from place to place. We don't exactly know. But I think what does need to be addressed is the fact that we don't confuse biblical hospitality with simply entertaining.

Hospitality and entertaining are not the same thing. Hospitality is not just about hosting dinner parties, inviting your friends over to have a good time.

It's more others focused than this. Oftentimes when we invite our friends over, we do so for our benefit. We invite people that we enjoy being around and who might, in our hopes, return the favor one day.

And there's nothing wrong with this. In fact, I would say that we should do life with other believers that we enjoy being around. That will be there for us.

[10:45] That will be there when times get difficult. But I'm not sure that that's what this passage is getting at. One commentator noted, he says, this is welcoming strangers, inviting people for meals or to stay with us with no expectation that they will or even can reciprocate.

This kind of hospitality can be inconvenient and hard. It requires a whole different level of focus and effort to welcome into your home those who are not already part of your social circle.

This concept of hospitality recalibrates the way that we open up our homes. It makes us think differently about the motive behind why we open up our homes.

It's no longer just for our own pleasure, but rather in order to advance the kingdom of God. We're opening up our homes. We're showing hospitality. We're doing this with purpose behind it.

This hospitality is intentional. And finally, it says we are to love prisoners. Now, I think it's really helpful for us to understand the historical context that this is being written.

[11:55] At this time, there were many Christians who were being imprisoned because of their faith. Not because they did something actually wrong, but because of their faith that they were being imprisoned.

Now, does this, how does this apply to us today? Should we go to prisons and should we meet people there and show hospitality and love them well? Absolutely we should.

But the heart of this is talking about those people, those brothers and sisters in Christ who are being persecuted because of their faith. A lot of times, we live in a bubble around us now where we don't really think about what's going on in other places in the world.

We receive some persecution from time to time. Yes, some inconveniences in our life, but we must recognize that there are brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world who are still being persecuted for their faith, who are still being imprisoned for their faith.

What this means is that as believers, we have a responsibility to love our brothers and sisters all over the world that are experiencing persecution for their faith.

[13:05] It's really easy for us to forget about this, but in doing so, we're failing at what God has called us to do in loving the prisoner here. And so, how do we love our family?

How do we love strangers? How do we love prisoners well? Well, let me give you a few helpful things to think about. Loving well means stepping into needs and not ignoring them.

Loving well means that we step into needs and don't ignore them. Sometimes, love has to get in the weeds. Sometimes, love gets messy.

Sometimes, love is challenging. A couple of years ago, Ressie had a few friends over for a party that she was having, a few friends from school, and they were over.

And one of the things that they wanted to do was they wanted to have a bake-off. They wanted to have two groups that were making cakes and then to see which cake, and Catherine and I had to judge them and see which cake was better.

[14:07] And so, they spent all of this time making a pretty good-sized mess and making these cakes, and they put them on these plates, and you're looking at the cakes, and they're beautiful.

I mean, they are covered with icing, completely covered with icing. They have sprinkles all over them, all over the counter, everywhere. Sprinkles are everywhere. And one of them, you know, the layer was a little bit lopsided on the top of it, but they were presenting these cakes, and one of the things that they were going to do was to tell us about their cake, and so that why their cake should be the winning cake.

And I remember, I think this was back when I was in third grade or so, and this little third grade girl, one of her friends that came over, she said, this cake is like love.

She says, this cake is like love. It's messy and amazing all at the same time. And I thought, you're in third grade. How many Hallmark movies have you watched in your life?

But she says, it's messy and it's amazing all at the same time. But she's not completely wrong with that. Love that is more than pleasantries will be messy at times.

[15:20] It will require us to get close to the hurting, to meet people where they are, but the truth is, we all need this type of love shown to us at times. We all need people who will love us this way.

When times get hard, when it's inconvenient, we need people that are going to love us this way. And we need to be the type of people that will step into those situations to get messy when it's required.

Also, loving well means building up and not tearing down. James 3, 9 through 12 is very convicting with this. This is James talking about the tongues and controlling the tongue.

And he says, With it we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives or a grapevine produce figs?

[16:23] Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. Our words are powerful. And one of the ways that we love our family, one of the ways that we love strangers, one of the ways that we love those in prison are that we're careful in how we use our words.

On the one hand, there's basically two ways that we can use words. On the one hand, with our tongues, we can praise God. It tells us that as believers we praise God, which is the highest and best way to use our speech.

What greater way can we use our tongues and use our speech than to praise God? We use our speech to worship and point others to the source of our hope.

With our speech, with the things that we say, we praise God with. And I think that as believers, at least some of the time, we all get this right. At least some of the time, we all get this right.

But James calls for consistency. He calls for this to be consistent. He's saying you can't have it both. You can't praise God and put people down at the same time.

[17:32] You can't claim to be followers of Christ and praise God and then constantly be talking bad about people either in front of them or behind them. James is saying this should not be the case.

But unfortunately, we as believers do this all the time. Sometimes in the same hour. Sometimes in the same minute. Sometimes in the same conversation. We praise God and we put other people down.

This ought not to be the case. It doesn't work with plants. A fig tree is never going to produce olives. We get to go with a small group. Well, actually, it wasn't a small group.

It was three busloads of senior adults to Long Creek, South Carolina this past Friday. And we went out to eat. And Long Creek is known for its apples. Well, Long Creek community is not going to just come together this year and say, you know what?

Let's don't do apples this year. Let's tell all of our trees to produce oranges. It's not going to happen. It doesn't work that way. As believers, we praise God with our mouths and we've got to be careful that we don't use them to put other people down.

[18:38] Sometimes we do this and it's not necessarily the words that we say but the tone in which we say them. This is true for us as parents. Many times the correcting words need to be said.

They need to be said but the tone in which we say them does far more harm than the words do good. And so sometimes we need to make sure that we are careful in our tone.

Sometimes it is gossip that comes in the form of prayer requests. We try to disguise it. Well, you need to be praying for this person. You're not going to believe what they did. You need to be praying for them. You're not going to believe what happened to them.

And oftentimes we try to disguise it. And sometimes we don't even try to disguise it. We just get a kick out of somehow trying to put other people down in order to make ourselves feel better.

Why do we do this? Why do we do this? And so as we think about this, maybe instead of looking at other people and thinking what they have going on, maybe we need to take a look in the mirror and say, you know what, there's some things that need to change about me.

[19 : 45] Why is it that I need to put somebody else down in order to make myself feel better? But also loving well means pointing to Jesus and not dragging them further away.

A really great way to look at our actions to see if they are loving or not is to ask, are my actions helping people see the heart of Christ better? Are my actions, the way that I'm living, the way that I'm loving other people?

Am I pointing them to Christ? Are they able to see his heart better by the way that I am treating them, by the way that I'm loving them? Are they making, or are they making the water more cloudy and more difficult to see Jesus?

Next, as we move in through this, believers and churches with a focus on Jesus will hold marriage in honor. Believers and churches with a focus on Jesus will hold marriage in honor.

Now, I understand that it feels like we're jumping around. This is the part where I'm talking about it feels like bullet points that the author is going through, but I think they all connect and to help us understand what it means to live a life that is worshipful to God.

[20 : 58] Listen to the words in verse 13, for let marriage be held in honor among all and let the marriage bed be undefiled for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

You see, marriage has always been God's plan for the family. It's always been His plan for the family. In Genesis 2, it says, therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.

Well, Genesis 2 comes before sin has entered into the world. Genesis 2 comes before the fall. So, marriage has always been God's plan for the family and not only does He say it there before the fall, but He continues to say it after the fall repeating Himself that, therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

He repeats this multiple times throughout Scripture reminding us that marriage is God's plan for the family before the fall and it still is God's plan for the family today.

And so, we must keep a high view of marriage if we claim to be people in churches that have their eyes fixed on Jesus. In a culture that looks everywhere else to define marriage and seeks to remove God-ordained parameters on marriage, let us be different.

[22 : 21] Let us look to the one who instituted and created marriage to be the one to tell us how it is best to be enjoyed. The passage goes on to say, he says, let the marriage bed be undefiled for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

It may seem repetitive to say He'll judge the sexually immoral and the adulterous but what he's getting at is the author is getting at the immorality within the marriage and also before marriage or outside the marriage.

We must not look to the world to tell us how to enjoy sex and who to enjoy it with. There will always be those who are ready to lead us astray in this matter.

There will always be plenty of scholars today who will attempt to redefine the parameters that God has given us in Scripture. This isn't something that's new. It is something that is prevalent today but it's not something that is new.

This has been the case for a long, long time. In fact, Billy Graham talks about these teachings from these scholars who are attempting to redefine marriage and redefine the parameters in which we see marriage.

[23 : 31] He talked about their teachings as drippings from a sewer drain, drippings from a broken sewer. Now, having seen the drippings from a broken sewer in the basement of this church not too long ago, you don't want anything to do with that.

You don't want any part of that. And so we've got to be careful but at the same time, I don't want us to view all sex as bad and wrong.

It is a gift from God to be enjoyed within the covenant of marriage. John MacArthur, I love how he says, he says, within marriage, sex is beautiful.

It's fulfilling. It's creative. Thought I might get an amen there. But outside of marriage, he says this. He says, outside of marriage, it is ugly.

It's destructive and it's damning. You see, sex is a good gift from a good God to be enjoyed and explored within the good gift of covenant marriage. It is a beautiful thing.

[24 : 31] God honored marriage by establishing it. God the Father honored marriage by establishing it. Jesus honored marriage by performing his first miracle at a wedding. The Holy Spirit honored marriage by using it to picture the church in the New Testament.

The whole Trinity testifies that marriage is honorable. May we as believers have our eyes fixed on Jesus. May we do the same thing.

Finally, in this passage from our time this week, believers and churches with a focus on Jesus will be content and generous. We'll be content and we'll be generous.

Verses 5 and 6, it says, keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have. For he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear what can man do to me. You see, the love of money is a major, major pitfall in the Christian life.

[25 : 37] There's a reason that Jesus says how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

The reason this is is because money can give us a false sense of security. Money is something that can make us feel secure without actually being secure at all.

Money is something that can cloud our judgment. It's hard to see our dependence on God to meet all of our needs when our bank accounts are full. This oftentimes translates to having difficulty seeing our greatest need, salvation.

We get so used to doing things on our own, having pantries filled with food, never having to wonder where our next meal comes from. If we want something or we need something then we just go out and get it.

It's hard to live this life of abundance and then realize that there's something that money can't buy.

There's an area of our life where that does us no good whatsoever.

[26 : 47] In fact, the only way to understand the gospel and to receive it is to realize that this is something that we can't do on our own. The author of Hebrews has said this over and over again.

He's made it abundantly clear that we have this incredibly great need and that we've been trying for a long time to do something about this need on our own but ultimately we can't fix this problem that we have.

There's not enough money to buy it. There's not enough things that we can do to earn it. We have this problem. It's called sin. It's destroyed our relationship with God and there's nothing we can do about it.

And money sometimes, money can fix a lot of things. It can cause a lot of problems but it can make you where you're not worried about food. It can make you where you feel like you can do things on your own.

You can just get something else and it'll fix whatever it is that you're going on in your life. It can give you a false sense of security. But the passage is reminding us to guard ourselves with that.

[27 : 53] To make sure that we're not putting too much of an emphasis on that because we'll do so at the expense of seeing our greatest need. You see, Jesus starts the Sermon on the Mount with this.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. When you look at this, especially in the Greek, you'll begin to see and understand what Jesus is getting at. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

What he's ultimately saying is blessed are the beggarly in spirit. Blessed are those who are coming before God with nothing begging to receive his mercy.

Realizing that they have nothing to offer this. Well, they're only there just asking to receive from God. Blessed are those for theirs is the kingdom. Blessed are those who understand their need that they can't do anything about it and that they must be dependent on God to meet their need.

So we must for the sake of our souls, the souls of our children and those around us, we must keep our lives free from the love of money.

[29:00] Augustine wrote a book that some of you may have heard of before called the City of God. It's a little background. Before coming to faith in Christ, Augustine lived a very sexually promiscuous life.

We won't go into the details there but just understand that he lived a very sexually promiscuous life. And in this work he notes the contrast of the life of that of believers and of unbelievers in this world. He said this, he says, people in the world are promiscuous with their beds and stingy with their money. People in the world are promiscuous with their beds and stingy with their money. Christians, on the other hand, are stingy with their beds but promiscuous with their money. Christians, on the other hand, as opposed to this world are stingy with their beds but promiscuous with their money.

The world is generous with sex and guarded with money. Believers are guarded with sex and generous with money. This is going to set us at odds with the world. But if we do this well and clearly show to the world that Christ is our greatest treasure, then doors will be open for the gospel. We'll see lives change and this will be a part of what it means to live a life that is worshipful to God. Being intentional and generous with the way that we spend our resources is also a great way to direct our lives to worship.

[30:30] It's a great way to point our lives to worship. One of the most fruitful and challenging verses for me to apply in my life over and over again is Matthew 6 21. It says, for where your treasure is there your heart will be also. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also. And so what it's telling us is looking at our treasure is a great indicator of where our heart is. It's a great way to show us what we love, what we are affectionate for. But Jesus also takes it another step. He says, where your treasure is there your heart will be also. And so what we realize is how we use our finances, how we use what God has given us is a great way to direct our heart towards worship.

If we want our heart to be in something and not somewhere else, then let's start investing our resources in this and not somewhere else. It's a great way to direct our hearts. And just before this verse, Jesus says, do not lay up for yourselves treasures here on earth. Why? Because moth and rust, they'll destroy them. This world is temporary. Don't lay up your treasures here. Rather lay up your treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust can destroy them, where nothing will be able to destroy them. Think of it like this. Has anybody in here ever gone to a different country where you had to exchange currency before you went? Where you had to change some? A lot of us have done that.

You know, it's pretty simple. You can go to the bank and ask them and tell them, hey, I'm traveling to this place. Can you order some currency for me as I get ready to go? But I want you to think about the craziness of the situation. If you were into that bank and say, hey, I'm getting ready to go to Europe for a week. And so I need to get some euros. So here's what I want you to do. I want to be there for a week. So I want you to empty my bank account. I want you to pull all of my savings, everything that I have in my checking account, all the CDs, cash, all of those things out. I want you to pull all of that together and give me as many euros as you can possibly give me because I'm going to Europe for a week. The teller would probably look at you like you're crazy. But why would you take everything for something that is so temporary? Why would you use all of your resources for something that is only going to be for a week? That'll be over like that. This is what the Bible tells us over and over again as well. Why would we use all of our resources on ourselves in this life for something that's just a vapor, that's here today, gone tomorrow. Instead, we must use them well. For us, accumulating vast earthly treasure without kingdom-minded generosity and in light of all of eternity is equivalent to stockpiling a foreign currency for a short-term visit. It's not just wrong, but it's crazy. And so if we want to see our lives as an act of worship, and I think this passage is a great starting point of examining our lives, then we must recognize how this applies to us personally could look different for every single person in here. How this applies, now the meaning and the explanation of the text is going to be the same for us, the meanings there, but how this applies to us is and probably will be very different for each and every one of us. So I want to close this message out a little differently today. There are so many things that this passage hits on. There's a real good chance that one of these things is something that speaks to you. I know that it has spoken to my heart this week and this morning and thinking through it. That maybe God is convicting you of something that you just need to talk with him about. And you can absolutely, of course, talk to

God right where you are. In just a moment when we stand and we sing together, you can just stay seated and you can pray and you can talk to God there as well as you can anywhere. But maybe today, you want to take a step out and say, you know what, I want to take this serious.

[34:55] And I know there's nothing special about the front of this stage. I know there's nothing special about stepping out there, but maybe it's a way of saying, you know what, God, I'm serious about this. This is something that I need to talk to you about. This is something I need to pray about.

And this step out is going to be kind of that first step in moving in a different direction of reorienting my life to worship you with everything that I have. Maybe you want to come pray with me. You don't have to come down here and start confessing. You can just say, hey, Brett, would you pray with me? I'll pray with you. I know a lot of times we see this time as a time where people join the church and there's a good chance that may happen today. But this is also a time of response. And so I'm much more concerned that you do respond to God's word than where or how.

But I do want you to respond in a way that is obedient and honoring to the Lord. So let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank you so very much for who you are. We thank you for what you do for us. Lord, we thank you for the book of Hebrews that Lord is coming to a close in some difficult, passages that are challenging to us, that speak to our hearts, that pull us closer to you. And so, Lord, I pray that as we seek to honor you, that as we seek to live lives that are worshipful to you, to give our lives over to you, Lord, that you would open our eyes, open our hearts to your word, and not just seeing it on a page, but applying it to our life. And so, Lord, I pray that you give us the boldness and the courage to respond in a way that brings your name, honor, and glory. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation. The Lord is speaking to you. Won't you respond as we stand together and sing?