

Characteristics of a Healthy Christian and Church:

Part 2 (Hebrews 13:7-25)

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Date: 02 August 2026

Preacher: Brett Sanders

[0:00] Children, we are ready for Children's Church at this time. You may make your way back to Miss Savannah there and then take a right and head to the youth room where they will be for the next few months at least.

And so again, I'm so thankful that we're able to gather here today. It's a bittersweet time for the summer to be coming to an end. For students, it's just bitter, but for parents, it's sweet.

And so, you know, it's that time of the year where things get back into a little bit more of a routine.

And we're going to be finishing our study of Hebrews today as we look at this last chapter of Hebrews, reminding ourselves of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Reminding ourselves of what it means to depend on Him, to abide with Him. And I'm so thankful that we were able to lead into this final session with that song because ultimately that's what Hebrews is trying to teach us.

Is that Jesus is better and following Him, depending on Him, abiding in Him is what we are called to do as believers. And one of the things that is often difficult to do as believers is to live counterculture to this world.

[1:15] Yet that is what we are called to do. This is something that it requires us to be intentional with. We have to be intentional with our lives to live counterculture to this world. But ultimately, it requires us to see God for who He really is and to put others in their proper place.

Ultimately, it requires us to see God for who He is and to see other people in light of that. People are important. We are called to love everyone and point them to Christ.

But we must not let others and culture tell us how to live our lives. Ed Welch wrote a book a number of years ago. The book is called When People Are Big and God Is Small.

When we see people as bigger than God. And he talks in this book about what the implications are for our lives. And in this, he gives reasons why we typically fear people.

And he gives three basic reasons why we let people have a bigger say in our lives than God does.

And he says this. He says, we fear people because they can expose or humiliate us.

[2:24] We fear people because they might say something about us. They might have something on us that we're afraid is going to get out and it's just going to ruin everything. We fear people because they can expose or humiliate us.

We fear people because they can reject, ridicule, or despise us. We fear people because they may not like us. They may reject us. And so we let other people begin to shape how we live our lives in hopes that they won't reject us.

In hopes that they won't ridicule us or despise us. And he said, and finally, we fear people because they can attack, oppress, or threaten us.

Because they can harm us. Because they can threaten us. Last week, we finished in Hebrews 13, 6. Where it says, the Lord is my helper.

I will not fear. What can man do to me? And so what we clearly see is that we are called to have a bigger view of God than we do of other people.

[3:27] From this, Welch, in my opinion, makes a very accurate reflection, a very accurate statement. He says this, When we see people as bigger, that is more powerful and significant than God, we give other people the power and right to tell us what to feel, what to think, and what to do.

He says, when we begin to see people that is as bigger, that is more important and more weighty in our lives than God, then all of a sudden we give other people the right to tell us how we should feel in certain situations, what we should do in certain situations, and we give them the authority to tell

us what is right and wrong.

This is what we are called not to do as believers. We are to see God for who He truly is and this world in light of who He is. In other words, until we see God for who He truly is, it will be very difficult for us as believers to live counterculture to this world.

If we see people as more important to us than God, then we will follow this world and not God.

Sometimes we may even think we are doing it for good reasons. We love people.

We don't want to offend them, and so we are going to just kind of go along with the flow. We are going to let them tell us what is right and wrong. And we justified our minds. We want to be loving to other people.

[4:57] We want to be tolerant to other people. We want to do all of these things when the reality and the truth of the matter is the most loving thing we can do for a lost and dying world is point them to Christ, is point them to truth, is point them to those things of God.

The author is showing us over and over again throughout Hebrews that Jesus is better. It's been a constant theme. Now he's getting to a point where all of this is coming to a head, and he begins telling us some very practical ways that we should live our lives.

And so as we continue in this final chapter of Hebrews and finishing up Hebrews this morning, we are reminded once again that Jesus is better. Throughout this letter, the author has shown us that Christ is greater than anything this world has to offer.

And because of that, our response is to be one of thankfulness and worship. But worship is not confined to what we do here on Sunday mornings. Worship is what we do with our lives.

And he's helping us see that. Hebrews 13 gives us a picture of what a life focused on Jesus looks like. Last week, we talked about these three characteristics of what a, the life of a believer and the life of a church that is focused on Christ.

[6:14] These three characteristics of a church that is focused on those things, of believers that are focused on the things of God. We talked about the fact that they love one another. We talked about they hold a high view of marriage, that they're content with what they have.

But this week, we're going to continue and seeing more characteristics of the life of a Jesus follower, the life of someone who is giving their all to Christ.

This week, we will continue in this chapter and continue to see what it means to live a life that is focused on following Jesus and living counterculture to this world.

And so if you have a copy of God's Word for one last time, let's hope, well, one last time for a little while. One last time, let's open up to Hebrews chapter 13. And let's start reading in verse 7.

This is what the Word of the Lord says. It says this. It says, It says,

[9:09] Amen. I appeal to you, brothers.

Bear with my word of exhortation for I have written to you briefly. You should know that your brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with you all. Amen.

To begin with this week, we see that believers and churches with a focus on Jesus will do four things that we see here in these last few verses.

To begin with, we see that they will remember, follow, and hold their leaders accountable. They'll remember, and they'll remember, and they'll hold their leaders accountable.

[10:17] I'm going to be honest with you. I kind of want somebody else to preach this section. I mean, which pastor wants you to, wants to teach, obey your leaders and submit to them? That's not exactly something that typically goes over very well.

But let's be, but let's look at it in the context of this chapter. Because in doing so, I think it speaks to and challenges leaders more than anything. I think it's going to challenge us as leaders more than anything.

And so there's this encouragement to challenge leaders, but then to hold them accountable. It starts off by saying, it says, remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Even though the word church is not used here, it is clear that it is the church leaders that it has in view.

It doesn't say to merely follow what they say, but it says to consider how they live their lives. To take a look at their lives. Don't just hear the words that they're saying, but take a look at their lives.

[11:20] Of course, church leaders don't get everything right. But even in the imperfection, we are called to be an example. You say, I don't claim to be perfect.

I have way too much family in this church to make that claim. They would call me out in a hurry. But what we see here is I have, we are to recognize, we are to repent of our sin and we're to follow Christ.

As leaders, we're to set an example. When we mess up, we're to recognize that. We're to own up to it. We're to see that we have messed up. We are to repent of that and we are to call to follow Christ. It's a beautiful picture of what you see in Psalm 51. Where David has messed up in this sin with Bathsheba and he is repenting. But he says, Lord, restore to me the joy of my salvation so then I can teach transgressions.

So then I can get back to following you and what you've called me to do. We're to set this example. The passage doesn't say to follow them blindly. If we as leaders are leading you down a path that is taking you or this church further away from God, then don't follow it.

[12:31] And don't tolerate it. But make sure that we are leading in a way that points to Christ. Also, this passage encourages you to pray for your leaders.

One of the most encouraging things that you can tell me is that you're praying for us. There are a number of you in this service and the next service that will on a regular basis tell me that, Hey, Pastor, I just want you to know that I'm praying for you.

I'm praying for you. I'm praying for the rest of the staff. And they tell me they're doing it on a daily basis. That's encouraging to me. Because there's so many things about this that we don't know.

That we have to be. That's one of the reasons I love that song that we just said last night. Lord, teach us to depend on you. I want to depend on you for everything. I want to abide in you.

And one of the things that I've realized in this job is that I can't do this. And that I need God. In short, I need God to help me with this. Prayer is something that I realize now more than ever is something that I depend on.

[13:38] Because in this job, you can go from being on the highest of highs of leading somebody to faith in Christ. And just in a few moments, get a call and somebody says, Hey, something tragic just happened.

Just lost a dear loved one. I'm going through a very difficult season right now. And so there's these ups and downs. And this is why we need prayer. We all need prayer.

We all have things that we go through in life where we need prayer. And what it does very clearly, it shows us that we are depending on God to work. The passage is not saying to blindly follow believers into hypocrisy, into pride, into arrogance, or any other sin.

But pray for them. And if they are striving to imitate Christ, follow them in that example. Paul, he says, very clearly says, As I imitate Christ, imitate me.

That should be the desire of leaders in the church. Imitate Christ so others can follow that lead. And so ask the questions. Do your leaders follow Christ? Do they love Christ?

[14:45] Do they love God's Word? And do they teach God's Word? All of it. Mark Dever, in one of his books, Nine Marks of a Healthy Church, he talks about the first mark of a healthy church.

And in it, he says this. He says, The first mark of a healthy church is expository preaching. It's not only the first mark. It is far and away the most important of them all. Because if you get this right, then all of the others should follow.

In other words, make sure that your leaders teach God's Word. That they follow God's Word. That they point everyone to understanding and following that in their lives.

Hold them accountable to God's Word. And follow them as they follow Christ. But then it goes on and it says, Believers in churches with a focus on Jesus will stay focused on Christ.

Believers in churches who are following Christ will not only follow Him once, but they're going to stay focused on that. We see this in verses 8 and 9. It says, If someone were to come up to you and says, You know what?

[16:04] I just heard this new teaching on Jesus. You're not going to believe this. You've never heard this. The Bible doesn't tell us this. You're not going to believe this. Then let that be a red flag. And quote right here for them.

Hebrews 13.8. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. There's nothing that is going to change that. Christianity, if rightly understood, is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

This is because Jesus does not change. And because of this, we have a great shepherd to measure everything else by. We have a standard to measure truth by. We have God's Word. If you want to see a church fail, then encourage them to step away from Scripture. To look to the world around them for truth and morality. That is a church that is failing. It may not be failing in numbers. It may not be failing in membership. But if it is failing to stay focused on God's Word, then it is failing to be a church. [17:07] It goes on to say, Do not be led away by diverse or strange teachings. You see, words themselves don't carry authority. Simply words themselves don't carry authority.

The one who speaks the words is what gives the words authority. And I think we understand this in many ways. I am sure all of us have seen movies or documentaries of things where you would see these leaders who are putting a seal on something.

Where they have written something down. And they are wanting to make sure that it gets to the right place. And they understand who it comes from. And so, after writing a letter, they fold it over. And then right where it is sealed, they pour hot wax on it.

And then they put their seal on it. That's to show where this letter came from. That's to show where it came from. Because the words themselves don't carry authority unless the one who speaks the words has authority.

And it's the same way when it comes to God's Word. 2 Timothy 3 tells us that all Scripture is breathed out by God. What Paul is reminding Timothy of is the fact that the words of Scripture are the very words of God.

[18:17] They're breathed out by God. They're theonostos. They're the very breath of God. And that is what gives this authority. The words themselves, anybody could type this down, but the one who speaks these words, the one who dictates this, is the one that gives it authority.

This truth is something that we do not shy away from. We don't hide the fact that we believe this. Because the authority of these words lies in who said them.

If we believe that these words are God's words, that they're the very breath of God, then the fact is that is what gives them authority to tell us how to view God.

That is what gives them the authority to tell us who Jesus is. That is what gives them the authority to tell us where salvation is found and where it is not found. And so may we always keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and understand Him in light of what the Bible says about Him.

Next, we see that believers in churches, with a focus on Jesus, will worship the King. They will worship the King. This is a beautiful picture here for us in verses 10 through 16.

[19:33] It says this, It says, We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood. Therefore, let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured.

For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through Him, then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

That is, the fruit of lips and acknowledge His name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Now, in this passage, there are some things that are a little bit challenging to understand. There are some things that different theologians will come down on slightly different places with. And so, today, I don't want us to get bogged down on the nuances of what this might be telling us, so much so that we miss the big picture of what it actually is telling us.

[20:46] And so, I want us to understand it in light of the context of Hebrews as a whole. In his study on Hebrews, Leon Morris, he notes this. He says, The word sin occurs 25 times in this epistle, more often than any other New Testament book except for Romans, which it appears 48 times in Romans.

But no other book other than Romans does the word sin appear more. The frequency with which the writer refers to it shows that he sees sin as the great barrier between God and man.

He writes in the glad certainty that that barrier has been demolished. The barrier between us and God that sin calls has been demolished.

Christ has opened up the way to God by taking our sin out of the way. There are many ways in which Christ has done this. Christ made propitiation for our sins.

We see that back in chapter 2, verse 17. He offered up sacrifices for sins. In chapter 10, did away with sin. In 9, bore sin. In 9, 28, because of what he has done for us, there is no longer a sacrifice for sin.

[22:01] In chapter 10, verse 18. Christ's death is a ransom to set people free from sins. Even those sins that they committed in Old Testament days in 9, 15.

By contrast, the older way could not deal with sin. We see this over and over again, especially in chapter 10. Clearly, the writer sees the salvation Christ brought about as many-sided.

Look at sin how you will. He's saying, look at sin how you will. The Son, Jesus, has dealt with it. No matter how you see sin, it has been accomplished on the cross that Jesus has dealt with it.

These verses here remind us of the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf. This is the heart and soul of Hebrews. Jesus is better. He is better because he makes a better sacrifice.

He is better because he makes a better way to the Father. Hebrews 10, verses 12 and 14 boldly says, He says, but when Christ had offered up for us all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, making from that time until his enemies became a footstool for his feet.

[23:20] For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

What beautiful words that remind us that the payment for our sin has been accomplished.

It's not partially accomplished. It's not mostly accomplished. Jesus didn't get us a part of the way there. He got us to the finish line. It is finished.

It is accomplished, but fully and completely accomplished. There is nothing left for us to do. We simply receive the gift of grace and love by placing our faith and our trust in him.

There's a song that we sing a lot of times. It's one of Clay's favorite songs. So we sing it quite often in both services. And it is very quickly becoming one of my favorites. It's called All Sufficient Merit.

And in this song, I wish we had time to read all of the lyrics. But we're going to look at the final verse here. It says this. It says, When I stand accepted before the throne of God, I'll gaze upon my Jesus and thank him for the cross.

[24:42] Yes, I'll thank you for the cross. It is done. It is finished. No more debt I owe. Paid in full. All sufficient. Merit.

Now my own. Jesus' sacrifice is final. It is sufficient. It is unsearchable. We can't add to it. We can't take away from it.

And so what do we do with it? What do we do with this good news? What do we do with this understanding? Well, verses 15 and 16 very clearly tell us here. It says, Then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

That is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have. For such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

So what do we do with this? What do we do with this understanding that Jesus is better? That he makes a better way? That he's the only one that can save us? That he's the only one that can give us hope and salvation?

[25:43] Well, we praise him. We worship him with our lips. We lift up our voice to worship him. But don't let it stop at your words, it tells us. Worship him with your life.

With the way that you love your spouse. With the way that you love your kids. With the way that you love your neighbors. The way that you love the co-workers. You know, the ones that you like. But also the co-workers that you don't necessarily like all the time.

We all have them. I have them. I'm joking. We all, and so we're to love one another with this love.

And so we're to worship God with our actions.

Not just our lips, but with our life. With everything we have. Worship God with your spending. With your giving. With how you spend your time. Be so amazed at the goodness and grace of God.

That you can't help but speak and act in a way that worships the true king. And so finally, believers in churches. With a focus on Jesus.

[26:41] Will go with confident grace. They will go with confident grace. I love how the author finishes this. It says, Now may the God of peace. Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.

The great shepherd of the sheep. By the blood of the eternal covenant. Equip you with everything good. That you may do his will. Working in us.

That which is pleasing in his sight. Through Jesus Christ. To whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. We finally arrive at the benediction of this letter.

One commentator said, He said, This prayer might be the most beautiful prayer ever uttered by a Christian. No doubt this is a beautifully encouraging prayer.

That declares absolute confidence in God. It declares absolute confidence in God that he has done everything for us. We confidently know that because of grace we have peace with God.

[27 : 44] We confidently know because of grace we have this peace with God. Ephesians 2 reminds us that because of sin it is impossible to please God. It is impossible to honor him. It is impossible to have a relationship with him.

In fact, we follow the ways of this world. The sons of disobedience. And are by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. This is a condition that has no hope of peace.

We need Jesus.

And as believers we have this confident assurance. This confident grace that we have peace with God. He gives us this by fully taking on himself the full weight of sin.

The full weight of God's wrath that we deserve. And giving us peace with God. This is what theologians often call the great exchange. Where we give Christ our sin, our shame, our regret.

[28 : 48] And in return he gives us his righteousness. He gives us his peace with God. He gives us his sonship so that we can look to God and call him father. We can be adopted into his family.

This is the beauty of God's grace. That we go from death to life. And now because of that we can have peace with God. But we confidently know that because of grace we have a good shepherd who cares for us.

It tells us that we have a shepherd who cares for his sheep. As sheep of the good shepherd we have one that cares for us no matter what it is that we're going through in this life. We can confidently know that no matter what we are going through.

That we have a shepherd who is there with us. And we confidently know that because of grace we have a loving father who equips us for service.

He confidently asks God to equip them with everything good so that they can do his will and please him. We need God's help to do his will.

[29 : 51] We can't accomplish it on our own. We can't try our best to be good enough, to do good enough, to accomplish his will on our own. Our aim as Christians ought to be to do that which is pleasing in his sight through Christ Jesus to whom glory to him be glory forever and ever.

Amen. We need God's grace to accomplish all of this. The whole book of Hebrews ends with this. Grace be with you all.

What a beautiful way to close out this book. The question that we must all ask is this. How do you need to receive God's grace today? Because we are all in need of God's grace.

The question becomes though how do we need to receive God's grace today? Maybe you need to receive it for the first time. Maybe you need to come and give your life to Jesus to say that I'm a sinner and I need your saving grace.

Maybe you need that peace with God that only Jesus can provide. If that's you this morning, then I want to encourage you do not leave here today without giving your life to Jesus.

[31 : 00] Without saying, Lord, I need you. I can't do this on my own. I need you. Give your life to Jesus if that is you today. Maybe you need to rest in the fact that you have a good shepherd that cares for you.

Maybe you're going through some difficult seasons and times in your life and you need to trust that you have a shepherd who is for you and not against you.

Who is looking out for you and not against you. That has not left you but is walking with you and leading you through those difficult times. Maybe that's the grace that you need to be depending on today.

The need to be abiding in today. Maybe you need God's grace in equipping you to follow him. We all need his grace to save us. And we all need his grace to follow him.

Maybe you need to start following what God has called you to do by reading through his word and realizing that he's called us to all be a part of making disciples. And maybe we need to start doing that and our prayer needs to be God equip me for your good work.

[32 : 07] Equip me for this. Yes I'm not qualified. I'm not. I don't have the credentials to do this but you do and you've promised that if I follow you then you're going to equip me to do the work that you've called me to do.

So maybe that needs to be your prayer today. And here's the thing. You can respond to God anywhere. You can respond to God from your seat. You can respond to God as you're reflecting, as you're singing this final song.

You can respond to this message, to God's word by thinking about it and reflecting on it this afternoon. But maybe you want to come this morning. Maybe you want to pray with me.

Maybe you want to pray right here up front. What I want to encourage you to do is respond. The only thing that I ask and pray is that you don't ignore what God is calling you to do.

So answer the question. How do you need to receive God's grace today? Father thank you so very much for who you are, for what you've done for us.

[33:10] Lord, I thank you for the book of Hebrews. A book that has challenged us in so many ways. Caused us to dive deep into what it means to be a follower of you.

To dive deep into our understanding of the sacrifice that you made for us on the cross. But Lord, it's also a book that has encouraged us. Encouraged us by the fact that there is no salvation apart from you.

That you left the glory of heaven, lived a perfect life. So that we could have a relationship with you. Lord, it's been a book that has challenged us.

It's encouraged us. And it's been a book that is calling us to live faithfully for you. So Lord, may we apply it. May we hear these words.

May we read your word. Understanding that since you gave it, it carries authority in our life. Since you spoke it, we have to listen. Since you are the one who gave it, it is truth.

[34:12] And so Lord, help us to not only know it, but to apply it. And so Lord, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he is better than anything and everything in this world.

And help us to live a life that shows that we believe that Jesus is truly better. And we ask all of this in Jesus' precious name.

Amen. I want to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation. The Lord is speaking to you this morning. Won't you respond as we stand together and sing? Thank you.