

Worship that Pleases God

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[0 : 0 0] So Hebrews 13. Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,!

So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper.

I will not fear. What can man do to me? Remember your leaders, those who spoke to the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods which have not benefited those devoted to them.

[1 : 2 9] 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 that acknowledge his name.

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things.

[2 : 5 3] I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. 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. I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you. This is the word of the Lord. Good morning, everyone.

For those who don't know me, I'm Sean. I'm one of the members of the congregation here. I'd like to start by thanking the elders for giving me the privilege of preaching God's word to you this morning. Some of you know how hard I found it preparing for this morning's sermon, and it's given me a much deeper respect for the work that the elders do every week to faithfully bring us God's word.

So let's pray. Lord, your word is a light unto our path. So we pray that as we read it and as we work through it, you will shine your light upon us and teach us to live in a way that is pleasing to you.

[4 : 47] In Jesus' name, amen. Well, for the last 12 chapters, the writer to the Hebrews has gone to great lengths to get us to realize that Christ is far better than anything else heaven or earth has to offer.

In fact, he's been so eager to get us to recognize the surpassing supremacy of Christ that he has used the very word better more times than the rest of the New Testament put together.

He's told us that Christ is better than all other prophets because he is the very son of God who has brought us a message of full and free forgiveness of sins for all who trust in him.

He has told us that Christ is better than all other priests because he has reconciled us to God through his once-for-all sacrifice of himself upon the cross. And he has told us that Christ is better than all other kings because he has given us a kingdom that cannot be shaken in which we can find true rest for our souls.

Along the way, he has called us to respond to what we have heard. He has urged us not to ignore it or to harden our hearts against it as the Israelites did in the wilderness, but to hold fast our confession and to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.

[6 : 05] He has warned us of the danger of turning back, of neglecting such a great salvation. And he has encouraged us to press on in faith to run the race marked out for us with perseverance, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

But now, as he draws his letter to a close, he wants us to understand that the ultimate goal of everything he has been saying is the worship of God. He hinted at this back in chapter 9, verse 14, when he said that the purpose of Christ's atoning death was to cleanse us from our sins so that we could serve the living God.

He declared that unmistakably in chapter 12, verse 28, when he called us to be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thereby to offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe.

And now, in chapter 13, he lays out what it looks like to do that very thing. But before we look at this blueprint for offering acceptable worship, it's worth taking a moment to consider what acceptable worship even means, because we could easily get the wrong idea.

After all, the word acceptable often has negative connotations in English, such as when we say that someone's performance is acceptable. But when we offer acceptable worship to God, we shouldn't picture him accepting it with a frown, saying, I guess this will do, I guess it's acceptable.

[7 : 36] Instead, we should picture him overjoyed, pleased, and delighted with us and what we're doing. That's the sense of the word acceptable. That's the sense that the word acceptable carries here.

In fact, the word translated acceptable in chapter 12, verse 28, is translated pleasing everywhere else it appears in Hebrews. In chapter 11, verses 5 and 6, we were told that Enoch pleased God and that without faith, it is impossible to please him.

And in chapter 13, verses 16 and 21, we are told that God will work in us what is pleasing to him and that we can offer pleasing sacrifices to God. So acceptable worship means pleasing worship.

And worship here is really just a broad term that means service. So if you want an easy way of remembering what acceptable worship means, just think of it as service that is pleasing to God.

But now, turning to our chapter, chapter 13, we see that one kind of service that God finds pleasing is service to God's people.

[8 : 44] Look at verse 1. Let brotherly love continue. When the writer to the Hebrews thinks of acceptable worship, the first thing that comes to his mind is brotherly love.

Christians going to the same lengths to care for each other as they go to care for members of their own families. And in verse 2, we read, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

The second thing that comes to his mind is extending that brotherly love to those we don't even know, but who come to us for help. And now in verse 3, he says, remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

The third thing that comes to his mind is being proactive in taking that brotherly love to those in need, rather than just waiting for them to come to us and ask for help. The worship that is pleasing to God involves committing to loving God's people, those we know, those we don't, and those who are suffering.

Now the encouraging thing about this is that the text assumes that we're already doing this. The force of these verses in the Greek is really something like, keep showing brotherly love, keep showing hospitality to strangers, keep remembering those who are in prison.

[10 : 13] The writer to the Hebrews is convinced that his readers are already pleasing God in all these ways, and we can have confidence that we are too. Just think of our recent support for Lincoln and Leah in Myanmar.

By raising and sending the money that we did, we showed brotherly love, we cared for strangers, and we remembered the afflicted. When the Philippians sent aid to Paul when he was imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote back to them saying that the gift was a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

He would say the same for the thing that we did for Lincoln and Leah and all those in Myanmar. Indeed, verse 16 of our passage says the same thing. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

But how is it that we were able to be so generous? Isn't it because we were worshipping God in another way that is pleasing to him? By being content with what he has provided for us?

How could we have raised so much money so quickly during a cost of living crisis if we weren't content with what we have because we trust that whatever happens, God will never leave us or forsake us?

[11 : 33] Look at verse 5. Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have. For he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. God wants us to love one another in risky ways and that is never going to happen if we love money.

If we always want to have more possessions or are always afraid of losing them, we will never commit to one another like a family. We will never show biblical hospitality to strangers and we will never go into harm's way to care for those in need.

We simply won't be able to afford it. But if we don't mind losing everything this life affords because we know that we have a better kingdom that cannot be shaken, we can risk everything in the pursuit of loving others and pleasing God.

But where do we find that confidence? Hebrews gives the answer in God's promises. When we remember that God has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you, we will be able to respond with the words of verse 6.

The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me? It's worth lingering on this promise and response in verses 5 and 6 because we really don't feel the force of it when we read our English translations.

[12 : 51] In Greek, it's extremely emphatic. In the sentence, I will never leave you nor forsake you, there are five negatives. It's really impossible to bring them across into English, but the closest thing to it is the last verse of the hymn How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes. That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

But we shouldn't misunderstand verse 6. It's not promising that nothing hard or difficult will ever happen to us if we live the life of reckless commitment to God's people and contentment with God's provision that we're being called to.

After all, the writers of the Hebrews has just given us models of faith in Hebrews 11 who were robbed, thrown in prison, tortured, killed. What he's saying is that all those things are all that man can do.

Man can only rob us. Man can only throw us in prison. Man can only kill us. All man can do is take away the things that we're going to lose anyway when God shakes the heavens and the earth.

[14 : 11] The kind of confidence we're being called to is the kind that Paul had when he said that to live is Christ and to die is gain. Or the kind of confidence the early church martyr Ignatius had when he was being taken to Rome to be thrown to wild beasts.

While he was on his way to Rome, he wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome and he said this, Now at last I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible envy me so that I may reach Jesus Christ.

Fire and cross and battles with wild beasts, mutilation, mangling, wrenching of bones, the hacking of limbs, the crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil.

Let these things come upon me. Only let me reach Jesus Christ. Neither the ends of the earth nor the kingdoms of this age are of any use to me. It is better for me to die for Jesus Christ than to rule over the ends of the earth.

Him I seek who died on my behalf. Him I long for who rose again for my sake. The pains of birth are upon me. It is pleasing to God when we take the risk of loving others because confidence in his promises has made us content with what we have.

[15 : 32] But although all this may be very encouraging it can also be very intimidating. The life we're called to live in response to Christ's work is simple but it's not easy.

I think that's why verse 7 turns our attention to our leaders. Remember your leaders those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

The leaders that we're being told to look to here are not our current leaders but past ones. These are those who spoke to us the word of God. We need to call them to mind to remember them because they're no longer with us.

We need to consider the outcome of their way of life because they have already finished the race and entered God's rest. So we should imitate their faith because they have given us examples of living lives that are pleasing to God.

If we want to please God all we have to do is follow in their footsteps. We don't have to work it out by ourselves. Paul told the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitated Christ.

[16 : 41] We're being called to do the same here. And we're given reassurance in verse 8 that doing what they did will be pleasing to God because God does not change.

Verse 8 reads Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. His character is the same. His teaching is the same.

His expectations are the same and what pleases him is the same. So if a life of faith was pleasing to him in the past it will be pleasing to him today.

But we can also find guidance in the present. The author comes back to talking about leaders in verses 16 and 17 and there he has our current elders in mind.

He reminds us that they are keeping watch over our souls to make sure that we stay faithful to Christ and offer to God acceptable worship. So he calls us to obey them, to submit to them and to pray for them.

[17 : 41] This is not a call to mindless or implicit obedience. Our elders would be the first people to tell you that. But it is a call to have an obedient disposition. When they teach us something or tell us to do something we shouldn't adopt a take it or leave it approach.

We should believe them and obey them unless we have very good reasons to do otherwise. If we don't we are likely to be led astray by false teachers and wander into trying to please God in ways that he doesn't desire.

I think that's why verse 9 suddenly turns to the idea of not being led away by diverse and strange teachings. That if we don't cling to those who have been qualified to teach us sound doctrine doctrine, we will follow those who teach unsound doctrine.

But if we live this way, if we love the way that we're called to love, if we're content in the way that we're called to be content and if we follow God's leaders the way that we're called to follow them, we should expect hostility.

Christ lived this way and he was mocked, he was ridiculed, he was despised, and he was crucified. Why should we think that it would be any different for us?

[19 : 10] In the second century, Christians were well known for living this kind of life. So well known that it was possible for a satirist, a pagan satirist, to write a novel making fun of Christians for being gullible fools, because of how hospitable they were.

In that novel he says, talking about Christians, the poor wretches have convinced themselves first and foremost that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody.

Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another because they have transgressed by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.

Therefore, they despise all things and consider all things common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So, if any charlatan or trickster able to profit by occasions comes among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk.

people who don't have to do It was thought that Christians were so reckless with their money, so reckless with who they took care of that you could make a quick buck out of them.

[20 : 30] So, there's no escaping this. If you want to please God out of thankfulness for everything he's done for you, you'll live in a way that invites ridicule. You'll be mocked for everything you believe, you'll be criticised for every decision you make.

But, the thing we're called to do is to walk into that, to bear Christ's reproach. In verse 12, Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

Christ was despised. Christ was kicked out of the world. And so, what's our response? 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. We're to follow him, to go out into that mockery, into that reproach, and we're to bear it, but not bear it sullenly, being upset, being morose.

We're to bear it. And while we do that, through him, we are supposed to continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

[21 : 52] We are supposed to live a life... We're... I think I've lost something.

But we're supposed to live a life of pain and suffering for Christ, and we're supposed to be happy about it. Because really, the only thing that we're losing are things that don't matter. pleasing God is simple.

You have to love, be content, follow your leaders. That's pretty simple. But without grace, it is impossible.

So 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 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.

[23 : 08] Amen. Amen.