

LIVE OUT YOUR FAITH

Hebrews 13:1-16

In today's world of the possible and the practical, we often want to concentrate on the heart of the matter or how a certain situation impacts the final outcome. Many times that is referred to as the "bottom line." In a financial statement, the important thing is whether there is a profit or loss and how much – that's the bottom line.

We have been studying the letter to the Hebrews and looking at the superiority of Jesus to all previous things related to God's dealing with man. We have seen that Jesus is greater than the prophets, the angels, that His New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant, that His sacrifice of Himself is greater than any animal sacrifice, that He is a greater priest than any of the descendants of Levi, and that He is greater than anything that could come along in the future. We have looked at the necessity of faith and the fact that we can have complete confidence in this "Superior One" who demonstrated that victory is possible in this life by being the pioneer of our faith. So today we come to the "bottom line" of how all these things work out in daily Christian living. This is where it is happening – in the everydayness of our lives. Many people keep waiting for the big opportunity to demonstrate that God is working in their lives and then they can provide a good testimony of their salvation. The opportunities are there every day.

On the surface this final chapter of Hebrews appears to be simply dealing with daily living as a Christian. We get an improved concept of the message when it is viewed in the overall context of the rest of the messages regarding the superiority of Christianity to other approaches to living. For example in the final two verses of the previous chapter we find encouragement to show our appreciation for being a part of a kingdom that has a firm and unshakeable foundation by offering to God acceptable (well pleasing) service. The word for service used here is different from the Greek root words related to *dulos* (slave) or *diaconia* (servant or minister). It is a word that is related to the idea of a "service of worship" as we find mentioned in Romans 12:1 where the appeal was to present our bodies as a living sacrifice which is our reasonable (acceptable) service of worship.

Under the Old Covenant, worship was centered around rites and rituals, animal sacrifices, ceremonial washings, and grain offerings. That should raise a question in our minds that since so many things had been changed with the New Covenant, what would be acceptable New Covenant worship that would be a genuine expression of our thankfulness for God's salvation in Jesus Christ? We find the answer to this in Chapter 13 where we see worship being expressed in the way we live rather than being confined to a temple with prescribed rites and rituals. In *Worship by the Book*, D. A. Carson stated that "worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator – God precisely because he is worthy delightfully so." Our tendency is to think of "worship" in terms of some formalized and ritualized scheduled activities rather than worship being a part of everything that we undertake. This is not to depreciate the rituals of formal worship but to realize that, for example, it is more important to honor God's word through obedience rather standing up when it is read. The first is meaningful and the other is a contrived show of piety which may have some benefit as a witness to others.

In the first sixteen verses of this chapter we find several areas of daily life experiences where we can do things that we can know are "well pleasing" to God. These are not necessarily things that we put on our agenda to "go do them" but are situations and happenings that we are likely to encounter that give us opportunities to offer to God an acceptable service of worship.

Personal Interactions with Others – 13:1-3

¹ Let love of the brethren continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. Hebrews 13:1-3 (NASB95)

Relationships! You cannot escape dealing with other people if you are to live a normal human life. Since we will have relationships with other people, then we should consider how we can make these most successful. In other words, how can we make the fact that we are “saved” have an impact on those relationships and glorify God at the same time?

The first area to consider is with those who are very close to us – our fellow Christians or brothers and sisters in Christ. From the accounts given in Acts of the early church which was mainly made up of converted Jews, they were diligent in sharing and taking care of the needs of each other. The first word of encouragement to the initial readers of this letter was to keep on doing this good work.

The Greek term *philadelphia* which is rendered as “brotherly love” in verse one could be more literally translated as “brotherly friendship.” We could argue that genuine friendship with those with whom we have something in common comes somewhat naturally. This same term was used by Peter in his second letter in 1:7 where it is generally translated as brotherly kindness. There Peter encouraged them to add “agape” to brotherly kindness. In John 13:34 Jesus gave us a new commandment to go with the New Covenant in that He said that we should love one another even as He loves us. The word He used was “agape” which implies love that we say is “self sacrificing” and would apply to the general well-being of the object of that love.

While showing kindness and friendliness to those in our local church is a natural interaction, most of us need a reminder to extend that same kind of concern to strangers or other Christians who might be traveling through the area. This was a ministry opportunity and was very needful in that first century since there were not readily available motels and hotels. While most translations use the words “entertain” or show “hospitality,” the literal translation would be to “befriend” these people or to show kindness in the same way we would treat those in the local body.

The same thing could be said regarding Christians who were in prison and those who were undergoing persecution. The danger of neglecting those “brethren” is increased since we don’t encounter them on a regular basis and reminders are helpful. The importance of ministering to these who were remote is enhanced when you realize that prisoners were not treated well and their needs for nourishing food and warm clothing had to be provided by their friends and family. The admonition was to empathize with them. In other words, they were to imagine that we were in prison or being abused or persecuted with them. For some of these readers, they could readily do that since they had been persecuted and jailed unjustly.

Why do we do things that would be considered beneficial or helpful to fellow Christians? The textbook answer is because “we love them.” However, when we get into the specifics of showing love for those whom we would put in the category of “brethren,” what really is the immediate motivation? In some cases we might have a sense of obligation as in “that is something that we should do.” That could be a result of a need to “repay” a kindness shown or to assuage guilty feelings. We might even do so because it makes us feel good about ourselves. All of these are perhaps “less than stellar” reasons for helping each other. The bottom line is that others receive benefit from such actions regardless of our motives. A better motive would be simply that we really do care for those being helped and we have the resources to do something. We may not even realize that showing compassion in this way is a practical act of worship that

honors God since we are following His example of the gracious and compassionate way He deals with us. If imitation is the sincerest form of praise, then walking in the same way that Jesus walked (imitating Him) is really an act of sincere worship.

Marriage – 13:4

⁴Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage* bed *is to be* undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Hebrews 13:4 (NASB95)

The idea of faithfulness in marriage being an act of worshipful service to God is not usually emphasized. Typically, we come up with a lot of reasons to remain faithful. Some of these might be related to our love for each other. If that “love” does not go much beyond infatuation, then it can fade and then the basis for faithfulness becomes weakened. Just as Peter encouraged the readers of his second letter to add “agape” or self-sacrificing love to brotherly kindness, those who are married need to add agape to their infatuation.

Another stated reason to remain faithful is that each participant in the marriage vowed to remain faithful and this would be a testimony of their individual integrity. Nowadays, individual integrity (saying what we mean and meaning what we say) doesn’t always seem to be very important. When integrity is weak, then the basis for fidelity in the marriage is weak.

When we can view such faithfulness as a practical service of worship of God, then our faithfulness would not depend on what the other person does or does not do but is based on a realization that we are acknowledging and being thankful for God’s salvation as we honor marriage. Since God views marriage as a type of the kind of relationship between Christ and the Church, then we should view marriage as sacred and holy also. Failure to do so will bring God’s judgment.

Materialism – 13:5-6

⁵Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,”⁶ so that we confidently say, “THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?” Hebrews 13:5-6 (NASB95)

Some of the older translations of Scripture render these verses as a reminder to not get caught up in covetousness or a lifestyle that is dominated by acquisition and accumulation of “things.” We are bombarded on every side by advertisements trying to get us to get the latest gadget, dine at a particular restaurant, buy a newer car, or visit a popular theme park. For some people there is an addictive “feel-good” nature to getting something new.

The Greek text is literally more closely related to the specifics of not “loving” silver which we and they understood to be money. This could have been a play on words in the Greek where the readers were encourage to befriend brothers and strangers and to not befriend silver. The concern as we can see from the second part of verse five and verse six is that we should not view wealth as our security. Such an attitude is bordering on idolatry. This was what Jesus was talking about when He said that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. The human tendency to focus on the physical and material rather than the spiritual is the basic problem. As Christians, we have experienced the new birth and our outlook is to be transformed from this present physical world to the reality of the spiritual realm.

Role Models and Messages – 13:7-9

⁷Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. ⁸Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who

were so occupied were not benefited. Hebrews 13:7-9 (NASB95)

We hear a lot about role models with regard to what teenagers are doing. They get exposed to various cultural icons such as entertainers and sports figures. Most of these characters are such that they represent the complete opposite of godliness in their lifestyles and the message they are communicating. How many kids do you know who would look to Billy Graham as a person that would be a good example for them to emulate?

We would think that adults would not be influenced by such cultural icons, but all of us are subject to being influenced by someone. These early Hebrew Christians did not have TV or the internet but they could remember influential persons from Judaism such as various teachers and rabbis and they also had their then current church leaders who had brought the gospel message to them.

We would hope that they could find good examples among the elders of the church. Even if they did not have strong local leadership, they had the ultimate example of Christ and His life teachings which were not going to change. This stability was needed because local elders may change and they were also confronted by those who were making an argument to go back to Judaism that was more structured in religious practices even to the point of telling them what they could and could not eat. The argument against going down that old road was that eating kosher foods and observing all the religious rites and offering animal sacrifices on an altar did nothing for their spiritual well being.

Contrasting the Old with the New – 10-14

¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest *as an offering* for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³ So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking *the city* which is to come. Hebrews 13:10-14 (NASB95)

In Christ Jesus we have a new altar on which the ultimate sacrifice was presented to God. That altar was the Cross and God provided the Lamb in His own incarnate body as the suitable sacrifice that redeemed mankind and took away the sin of the world.

We can identify with Jesus when we are criticized and scorned. The non-Christian Jews saw Jesus as being “cursed” since he died on a tree. They criticized and scorned Him as being simply as a leader of a sect that was trying to discredit their approach to God. It is not surprising that they treated the followers of Jesus the same way. What is our attitude when the world rejects, ridicules, scorns and persecutes us for our stand of Godly principles with regard to widely accepted practices such as drug abuse, prostitution, abortion, homosexual behavior, debauchery, profanity, etc? Are we tempted to let our views evolve on these matters or do we find further evidence and confirmation that we are different from those of the world?

What do we consider to be “home?” Most people think about a certain geographical place associated with home. The concept of “home” is associated with belonging, being comfortable with what is happening; a place where love is sensed perhaps more than it is expressed. It should be a place of security. For the first readers of this letter, they would likely have been thinking about the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem. They would soon discover that was not to be a lasting city. They could even identify with the Jews who (centuries earlier) were in captivity in Babylon who desperately wanted to return to their ancestral homeland. They needed to have the attitude of Abraham who looked for a spiritual city of God.

Acceptable Sacrifices – 13:15-16

¹⁵ Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks

to His name. ¹⁶ And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Hebrews 13:15-16 (NASB95)

Since the first readers were familiar with offering sacrifices on an altar, they were pointed to the kind of sacrifices with which God is pleased under the New Covenant. The idea of praising God being a sacrifice should not have been a new concept since we see in Hosea 14:2 this same idea. It is a sacrifice consisting of praise, publicly acknowledging the character of God. This might take place when Christians meet together to encourage one another, or when they confess Christ before unbelievers in the world.

To “do good and to share with others” is also acceptable worship, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. The motivation for doing good and sharing with others is not to cultivate God’s favor since we already have that since we are His children. Christian worship is meant to be an expression of gratitude for the love that he first showed us. Although the writer is obviously concerned about practical expressions of fellowship among believers, there are also many opportunities for ministering to the needs of those outside the Christian fellowship.

While it is good to recognize that praising God, doing good and sharing with others are acts of worship, it is even better when we do these things without having to think about it. That will happen as we are continually being transformed into the image and character of Christ.