

## Hebrews 13 - A Pot Pourri of Closing Admonitions

[Although I do not believe Paul to be the author of Hebrews, I readily admit that this series of rapid fire, disjointed, closing admonitions sounds quite Paul-like, cf 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28.]

1. “Let \_\_\_\_\_ love \_\_\_\_\_.”

[The love of these brethren had already been manifest in their actions toward their fellow saints (6:10) and to the author personally (10:33-34). The author commends the continuation of this love moving forward.

Of all the apostolic admonitions, the admonishment to love one another recurs with great frequency, particularly as the church moved beyond her infancy into maturity. John wrote of such repeatedly in his first epistle. Perhaps there is a warning for us not to become complacent in stoking the fire and bond of love between brethren. In his opening warnings to the churches of Asia, John warned of leaving one’s first love (Rev 2:4) and of allowing our love to grow lukewarm (Rev 3:15-16), against which Jesus Himself also warned in Matthew 24:12-13.]

2. “Do not forget to entertain \_\_\_\_\_, for by so doing some have \_\_\_\_\_ entertained \_\_\_\_\_.”

[In ancient times, and still today in many places around the world, the practice of hospitality is held in the highest regard as one’s privilege and duty.

It bears noting that the latter portion of this text is not given as an inducement or motive to expect miraculous guests, but rather as an encouragement to consider that those who engage in hospitality as their usual practice often receive unexpected blessings. Paraphrasing the text, Lightfoot wrote, “You never know... what hospitality might bring” (Jesus Christ Today, p 247)].

This text usually brings to mind the several visits to Abraham who, practicing hospitality, received heavenly guest into his home and with them the blessed news of the coming of Isaac. However, there are other instances of hospitality involving non-angelic guests that also brought blessings to the practitioners. Among them: Abigail (1 Sam 25); the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-24); the Shunemite family (2 Kings 4:8-37), those of Melita (Acts 28:2ff)]. It also bears noting that to receive those in need is to receive Christ Himself (Matt 25:31-46).]

3. “Remember the \_\_\_\_\_ as if \_\_\_\_\_ with them – those who are mistreated – since you yourselves are in the \_\_\_\_\_ also.”

[The idea of “remembering” here means more than simply thinking of those imprisoned saints; it means to have compassion on them, to empathize, thus provoking to action to alleviate undue suffering. It may be used positively as here and elsewhere (cf 2:6), or negatively (cf Rev 16:19).

This very idea was previously given to the epistle's recipients as a commendation in Hebrews 10:34, "For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession in heaven." One would also do well to recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:36, "I was in prison and you came to Me."

This text also brings to mind 1 Corinthians 12:25-26, "That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it..." It also brings to mind Galatians 6:1-2, wherein we are to restore brethren overcome in sin with meekness and self consideration, lest we later find ourselves in a similar predicament.

Finally, it should be noted that these imprisoned ones are Christians who have done nothing worthy of bonds, "those who are mistreated." While prison ministries have and continue to be quite effective in many areas, passage like this one, Matthew 24:36-45, and other admonitions to remember those in prison (e.g., Col 4:18) are not the impetus behind such works, as evidenced by the word "saints" and the phrase "those who are mistreated."]

4. "Marriage is \_\_\_\_\_ among all, and the bed \_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ God will judge."

[This verse reaffirms the Divinely given right to marry by all persons. Catholicism has denied this right to its clergy (1 Tim 4:3) to great difficulty and heartache. The word here for "bed" is koite (Strong's #2845), and speaks to the physical relationship that is granted to married couples. Moreover, the text grants the fullest extent of sexual expression within the confines of marriage, restrained only by Paul's decree of mutual consent, and even this is regulated (cf 1 Cor 7:1-5). Details of this ordained relationship should be kept within the privacy of the couple for reasons of decency and decorum, not because there is anything inherently sordid or defiling within it.

It is the height of tragedy that it has now become necessary to make clear that marriage is defined by God and not by the civil government. God never permitted or ordained homosexuals to enter into this sacred arrangement. The gender-specific language of Matthew 19:4-6 and 1 Corinthians 7:2 makes it abundantly clear that God's ordination and blessing upon marriage requires two people of the opposite sex or gender.

All fornicators and adulterers shall fall under the judgment and condemnation of God. This theme is found repeatedly throughout both covenants (cf Leviticus 18, 1 Cor 6:9-11, Gal 5:19-21). Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:2 makes clear what constitutes fornication, namely any sexual relationship between any two people who are not rightfully married. This covers adultery and homosexuality, irrespective of the laws of civil government, which recognize as legal both types of unions. But we must remember that God's law supercedes that of man. What man may call legal and proper, God may call sin (e.g., abortion, gambling, drunkenness, et al.)]

5. “Let your conduct be without \_\_\_\_\_; be \_\_\_\_\_ with such things as you have. For He himself has said, I will never \_\_\_\_\_ you nor \_\_\_\_\_ you.”

[Covetousness is always a threat to the eye and heart of the Christian. Warnings against it are many in the New Testament.]

- a. Jesus warned against it in Luke 12:15, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s \_\_\_\_\_ does not consist in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the things he \_\_\_\_\_.”
- b. Paul equated covetousness with \_\_\_\_\_ in Colossians 3:5.
- c. Though never expressly mentioned, covetousness is at the heart of Jesus’ statements in Matthew 6:19-34. Read that text and answer the following questions:
- i. What focus helps protect us against covetousness (vv 19-21)? \_\_\_\_\_
- ii. What must we guard to keep covetousness at bay (vv 22-23)? \_\_\_\_\_
- iii. What is often a source of covetousness (vv 25-30)? \_\_\_\_\_
- iv. What reassurance does Jesus give us in verses 32-33 to help protect us against covetousness? \_\_\_\_\_
- d. How does Jesus’ statement in Matthew 6:32-33 correspond to that of the Hebrews author at the end of Hebrews 13:5? \_\_\_\_\_

6. “So we may \_\_\_\_\_ say: ‘The Lord is my \_\_\_\_\_; I will not \_\_\_\_\_. What can \_\_\_\_\_ do to me?’”

[Consider how the author makes a connection between contentment, the presence of the Lord, and the fear of persecution. Learning to be content in whatever state in which he found himself was Paul’s anchor, especially when he was in prison for the gospel’s sake (Phil 4:11-13). Paul gladly suffered the loss of all his earthly goods, counting them as dung, that he might win Christ (Phil 3:7-11).

This connection should not be overlooked or shallowly dismissed. It was the threat of the loss of the ability to sell one’s goods that marked the persecution of the early church. The trade guilds forced Christians out of the local markets by requiring proof of sacrifice to local deities as requisite to participate in the local markets. Many, including me, believe this is the meaning of Revelation 13:16-17. Hunger and want are powerful motivators (cf 2 Kings 6:24-29). Tyrants and despots still use them today to keep the masses under their control. Our commitment to contentment may one day be critical to our ability to remain faithful under the weight of persecution.]

7. “Remember those who \_\_\_\_\_ you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose \_\_\_\_\_ follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”

[When I first entered full-time ministry in 1991, I was confronted by the false doctrine that elders lacked any authority in the local church outside of the power of example. This verse and 1 Peter 5:3 were always cited in defense of this error. However, in verse 17 of this same chapter (and in 1 Peter 5) we find a statement regarding the authority of the eldership in the local congregation:]

- a. Hebrews 13:7 - Obey those who have the \_\_\_\_\_, and be \_\_\_\_\_, for they \_\_\_\_\_ for your \_\_\_\_\_, as those who must \_\_\_\_\_.”
- b. 1 Peter 5:4 - “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as \_\_\_\_\_.”

[Note the imperative in Hebrews 13:7 to “be submissive.” How can one be submissive to example without any obligation to authority? Who ever ruled solely by example?

The word here translated “serving as overseers” is the verb form of the noun rendered “bishop” in 1 Timothy 3:1-2, and identifies the work of the eldership. One of the requisites of elders is to rule his house well so that he might be qualified to take care of the church. Moreover, what shepherd is there who does not make decisions and take actions on behalf of the flock? And how could one give an account of his stewardship regarding the flock if there were no means other than example to incite godly behavior among the flock?]

8. “Jesus Christ is the \_\_\_\_\_ yesterday, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.”

[Modern day charismatics have wrenched this single verse from its context to teach all kinds of errors, particularly regarding their claims of modern miracles. For example, on the official website of the Assemblies of God (USA), under “Miracles,” one will find this opening statement:

The Assemblies of God believes unequivocally that God still performs miracles today... There is no indication in Scripture that miracles have ceased or will cease in the present world order. Because there are confirmed instances of miracles happening today, we must conclude with certainty that God still performs miracles. Jesus Christ, the greatest worker of miracles, is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).” <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Topics-Index/Miracles>

This particular statement is a bookend to that found in Hebrews 1:12, where, in speaking of the unchanging essence of Jesus, the author quoted Psalm 102:25-27. Hebrews 13:8 cannot be understood in the most absolute, literal sense (cf John 1:14). Rather, it is a final encouragement to the Hebrews to continue living in faith in and according to the covenant of the One who never changes (cf Heb 7:24-25). It hearkens to the entirety of chapter 12, wherein the author warns his readers to prepare themselves for persecution.]

9. “Do not be \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by \_\_\_\_\_, not with \_\_\_\_\_ which have not \_\_\_\_\_ those who have been \_\_\_\_\_ by them.”

[The identity of these false doctrines is unknown other than to associate them with some form of food. There were many errors involving food mentioned in the New Testament.

10. Read 1 Corinthians 8:8-13 and Romans 14:14-23. What are some things we should learn about the foods we eat?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_
- e. \_\_\_\_\_
- f. What seems to be the most important lesson concerning food? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. “We have an \_\_\_\_\_ from which those who serve the \_\_\_\_\_ have no \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.”

[In the initial reading, Christians might be inclined to think this exclusive altar is a reference to the Lord’s Supper. However, such an interpretation does not fit the context. The sacrifices here contrasted are not those that were eaten, but rather those which were burned outside the camp (v 11), or as Christ was, carried and offered outside the camp/city (v 12). In respect to the Old Covenant, this would have been the offering on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

The conventional identification of this altar is the use of metonymy to refer to the sacrifice which is on the altar. Thus, “those who serve the tabernacle” refers to those still worshiping under the Mosaic system. As rejecting the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, these have no right to be partakers in the blessing of His sacrifice.

This verse should be understood in light of the context and statement of verse 9 concerning the contrast of the now unprofitable foods of Judaism. Several commentators believe these Christians were being reviled because they had no visible sacrifices or fleshly ordinances, to the point that the Jews claimed Christians were void of any sacrifice at all. In response, the author says, ‘We not only have a sacrifice, we have a better sacrifice, one in which they have no right to partake.’]

12. “Therefore let us \_\_\_\_\_ to Him, \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_, bearing His \_\_\_\_\_.”

[In view of Jesus’ suffering on our behalf, let us also be courageous enough to endure whatever things are necessary to be partakers of His suffering (cf Phil 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13-14).]

13. “For here we have no \_\_\_\_\_ city, but seek the one to come.”

[As those great heroes of faith embraced the Divine promises given to them and looked for a heavenly dwelling place (cf 11:8-16), so also do Christians embrace the same promises and look for an eternal city.]

14. “Therefore by Him let us \_\_\_\_\_ offer the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ to God, the \_\_\_\_\_ of our \_\_\_\_\_, giving thanks to His name.”

[Unlike the terminal sacrifices of the former covenant which were offered by the hands of a human intermediary, the Christian offers to God the continual sacrifice of praise through the eternal and spiritual mediation of Christ. Additionally, should their Jewish detractors claim they had nothing to offer, the Christian was assured that his offering was greater and more enduring than that of Judaism.

One other textual note - the rendering of “giving thanks” in this verse is not accurate. The original word is homologeo (S# 3670) and appears 24 times in the New Testament, appearing as “confess(ion)” more than 20 times. The word for giving thanks is eucharisteo (S# 2168) and appears in some form of “giving thanks” nearly 40 times in the New Testament. Thus, the “fruit of our lips is the continual confession of our faith in Jesus.

In my opinion, this makes the author’s statement even stronger, as it reminds those beleaguered to stand by and continue to make confession of their faith in Jesus Christ (cf 10:23; Matt 10:32-33; 1 Tim 6:12-13; as opposed to John 9:22, 12:42-43)]

15. “But do not forget to \_\_\_\_\_ and to \_\_\_\_\_, for with such \_\_\_\_\_ God is well pleased.”

[The author continues by giving an additional warning, namely that our deeds must match and accompany our confession (cf Titus 1:15; Jam 2:14-20). Of note here, the word for “share” is the same as that found in Galatians 6:6, and means to give of one’s goods.

Note how this doing good and sharing is described as sacrificial. “Sacrifice” appears 15 times in this epistle, more than half of all New Testament usages. This verse corresponds to Galatians 6:6-10.]

16. “\_\_\_\_\_ those who have the \_\_\_\_\_, and be \_\_\_\_\_, for they \_\_\_\_\_ for your \_\_\_\_\_, as those who must \_\_\_\_\_. Let them do so with \_\_\_\_\_ and not with \_\_\_\_\_, for that would be \_\_\_\_\_ for you.”

[The word here translated “obey” is quite interesting, as it has a number of usages. Among them include: persuaded (Matt 27:20); trusted (Matt 27:43); to agree (Acts 5:40); have confidence (2 Cor 2:3). How well all of these renderings fit into the context of the Christian and his responsibility to his overseers, especially in light of the final charge in the verse!

Also, the word translated “watch” means to keep awake” or to “be sleepless.” Any good shepherd sacrifices his rest and comfort as he considers the needs of the sheep and how to protect them.

“The rule over” comes from a word that is elsewhere translated “Governor” (Matt 2:6) and “chief” (Acts 14:12). This is the second of three appearances of this work in this chapter (cf v 7, 17, 24). “As those who must give account” - Think Luke 16:2 and the parable of the unjust steward, who was called by his master to give an accounting and defense of his stewardship. Think also Matthew 18:25-34 and the parable of the unforgiving servant. In this text, there are repeated references for payment of debt to be made. One must not take lightly the responsibility of serving as overseer, for each one will stand before God and answer for his oversight of the Lord’s heritage.

However! This is not a one way street or burden simply to the overseers. Each sheep is also commanded to make sure that his actions make the shepherds’ job as pleasant as possible. The final statement of “for that would be unprofitable for you” necessarily implies that we will also give account of how we conduct ourselves in the midst of the local flock. The word here translated “unprofitable” appears only here in the Greek New Testament. Literally, the author says that those who grieve their elders will gain nothing by their rebellion.]

17. “Pray for us; for we are \_\_\_\_\_ that we have a \_\_\_\_\_, in \_\_\_\_\_ desiring to live \_\_\_\_\_.”

[The appeal to a good conscience was one often made by Paul (Acts 23:1; 2 Cor 1:12, 4:2). Some appeals to conscience have to do with personal conduct, as this one is; other are in regard to a sense of fulfilling one’s duties to God.]

18. “But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be \_\_\_\_\_ to you the \_\_\_\_\_.”

[Some believe that this statement implies the author is himself in prison. FF Bruce believes, and I think rightfully so, that the author’s statement in verse 23 concerning Timothy’s release is indicative that the author himself was not in prison. The author’s stated intent to travel with Timothy shortly would not make sense if the author was imprisoned.]

19. “Now may the God of peace who \_\_\_\_\_ our Lord Jesus from the \_\_\_\_\_, that great \_\_\_\_\_ of the sheep, through the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ covenant, make you \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ good work to do \_\_\_\_\_, working in you what is \_\_\_\_\_ in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

[This is a beautiful and moving statement to the work and relationship of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Moreover, there are repeated statements that hold up and extol Jesus and the new covenant as far and away superior to the shepherd Moses and the covenant ministered through him.

The closing section of this statement declares the blessings extended to those who embrace this great Shepherd, His blood and His covenant. The author concludes with a doxology, to whom be glory forever and ever.” Thus the “Amen” at the end. “Doxology” is not a Bible word, but an English word that comes from a combination of two Greek words, namely doxa (Strong’s #1391) = glory/praise + logos (Strong’s #3056) = word/message. So, a doxology is a statement of praise.]

20. “Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.”

[These are the third instructions given in regard to the local congregational rulers. The first was to “remember” (v 7), the second to “obey” and “be submissive” (v 17), and the third here to “greet.”

The phrase “They of Italy greet you” is most ambiguous. It’s construction in the Greek is of no more help than the English translation. It could mean one of two things: 1) The author could be in Italy and is sending greetings to brethren abroad; or 2) there could be brethren from Italy present with the author, and these send their greetings back to their brethren in Italy, or those who whom the epistle is addressed.

I believe the former understanding to be the correct one. First, Acts 18:2 says that “Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome.” This is not to say there were no Jews in Italy after that, or in Rome for that matter, for we know Paul that made an immediate defense of himself to Jews living in or near Rome on his first journey to that city (Acts 28:17ff). Second, the entirety of this letter appears to written to the larger Jewish community, not just a small group of Jews living in or near Rome. The intent of the letter for Christians not to return to Judaism doesn’t fit well within the historical narrative of Jews in Italy. Paul’s letter to the saints at Rome doesn’t contain any statements or markings of Christians of Jewish descent considering abandonment of their faith in favor of Judaism.]