

## DAY 7: LIVING OUT OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH

### Hebrews 13:1-25

**GENERAL CHRISTIAN OBLIGATIONS** “*Let brotherly love continue*” (13:1). The primary Christian virtue is love. The particular *love* named here is *philadelphia*—*brotherly love*. Loving fellow Christians pleases God, demonstrates obedience to Christ’s commands, and offers proof of belonging to Him. Jesus said, “*By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35). As parents are delighted when they see their children caring for each other, so God is pleased when mutual love exists between His children. Believers are urged to express this love by opening their homes to visitors and being generous.

**THINK ABOUT** the gift of hospitality. According to Hebrews, the strangers we welcome into our homes might actually be angels. These days the art—the gift—of hospitality is largely neglected. Yet wonderful times of fellowship often result from inviting someone to share a simple meal or an evening of conversation with you. What if the stranger you’ve intended to reach out to is really an “angel in disguise”?

Brotherly love must also extend to those in prison. Many were in prison because of their faith. “*Those who are mistreated*” may refer to prisoners, but probably includes neighbors or family. Secular records from this period note that Christians visited fellow believers in prison and brought them food and necessities.

How should love affect marriage? Everywhere in Scripture marriage is guarded against harm. In 13:4 its protection is emphasized by one word—“*honor*.” The author wants to preserve the rightful place of marriage as an ordinance of God because it is fundamental to social stability. Jews and Christians stood out in 1<sup>st</sup>-century Roman culture for promoting sexual purity and monogamous commitment. Marriage and sex within marriage are approved in Scripture. Adultery and fornication, however, are impure and come under God’s judgment because they are violations of genuine love.

Another false love is the love of money. A materialistic society values money above spiritual, moral, and ethical standards. Therefore, the author recommends that believers “*be content with what you have*.” Scriptures are quoted to remind the persecuted Hebrew Christians that God had not forsaken them; they had no need to fear what men might do. No one could rob them of true, lasting possessions.

**A CALL TO CONSTANCY** Their former leaders’ commitment to the Lord—the way they lived and perhaps even died—is held up as a pattern to follow. “*Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith*,” the author says (13:7). These teachers surely spoke of Jesus Christ, who “*is the same*” for all time. “*Yesterday*” includes offering Himself to God as the atoning sacrifice. “*Today*” He represents and intercedes for His people in God’s presence. “*Forever*” includes His work in the consummation of history, and His faithfulness to those who follow Him, now and in the future.

Christ has not changed; therefore the readers should not abandon the truth for strange new doctrines that are contrary to basic New Testament teaching. God’s divine power works by grace, through solid teaching, to establish one’s heart in the truth, and by grace believers are enabled to stand firm in that truth. The reference to “*foods*” may include the Old Testament practice of priests eating sacrificial animals, the distinction between clean and unclean food, or pagan food ceremonies.

To symbolize the removal of Israel’s sin, the bodies of the animals sacrificed on the Day of Atonement were burned outside the camp. Being “*outside the camp*” also symbolized being outside the fellowship of God and His people. To show that Christ’s blood sanctified the people and that He bore their sins, He, too, suffered “*outside the gate*” of Jerusalem, on Calvary. The people rejected Him, and God temporarily rejected Him when He became the sin-bearer. His death outside the city walls symbolized that rejection. Followers of Jesus are to “*go to Him outside the camp*,” making a complete break from the old camp of Judaism. They share the disgrace of the Savior’s expulsion. No longer should they engage in symbolic cleansing, but instead receive benefits



from the living, interceding Savior. Believers are pilgrims and strangers on earth, as they anticipate the eternal city that is coming.

**THINK ABOUT** how Jesus' ministry began among the Jews, but His death on the Cross was for the whole world. The church is commanded to "go ... make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). That is risky. Being identified with Christ may bring disgrace or the loss of personal comfort. Nevertheless, the call to be His witnesses, to "go to Him outside the camp, and bear the reproach He endured" is not an option.

**THE CHRISTIANS' SACRIFICES—PRAISE AND SERVICE** Just as Christ offered Himself as a better sacrifice than animals, His followers may also offer a better sacrifice—a sacrifice of praise and service. The sacrifice of thanksgiving for Christians is now a spiritual offering. Every believer senses the desire to respond in praise or thanksgiving for all Christ has done and continues to do. For the Word, the beauty of His creation, and the way He transforms the inner man, adoration should pour from our hearts to His. "The fruit of lips that acknowledge His name" describes our audible gratitude that comes before God.

"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have" (13:16). Out of a proper response to God comes a proper response to people. Ministry to the needs of others was characteristic of the Hebrew Christians and an important part of New Testament doctrine.

The author asks for prayer on his behalf, continuing in a "clear conscience" and "desiring to act honorably." Most importantly, the writer believes that prayer can make a difference in matters beyond his control and now places his confidence in the Lord.

**CONCLUDING PRAYER AND FINAL EXHORTATIONS** The author concludes with a prayer for his readers. The precise content, the poetic form, and the evidence of deep care are striking. God is described as one who creates peace among and in His people. Verse 20 contains the only direct reference to the Resurrection. The covenant sealed by Jesus' blood, unlike the covenant of Law, is eternal.

The phrase "the great Shepherd of the sheep" is modeled after Isaiah 63:11. Jesus taught that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. The author asks God to prepare the readers to do everything their commitment to Christ requires. Doing God's will is the highest ideal of human life and requires divine grace and power. Glory belongs to both Father and Son "forever and ever."

The benediction and prayer is finished; common-sense admonitions follow. Then the letter concludes with a prayer for grace, which is appropriate because grace is its major theme. The author realizes the importance of the doctrine of grace, but his emphasis demands more than an intellectual understanding. It reveals an emotional and spiritual experience of the grace he emphasizes.

**PERSONALIZE** this lesson. The emphasis of Hebrews is on Jesus—who He is, what He has done, and what He is doing now. What He lived and died to do is completed. Then "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3). Jesus Christ is still equipping the saints for service and serving as our High Priest. In Hebrews, He is uniquely portrayed as our High Priest. He bids us come to Him with confidence to receive mercy and grace; He will always be there for us. How has your view of Jesus as your High Priest changed in this course? Will you regularly go to Him for the forgiveness, grace, and help you need to live for Him more fully? He continually pleads for us in the heavenly sanctuary. So ask Him for what you need! He longs to bring you into full maturity, which means joy for both Him and you!