

Some Final Instructions and the Conclusion of the Letter

Hebrews 13:7-25

Hebrews 13:7-25 – “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. ⁹ Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

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 sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³ Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. ¹⁵ Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. ¹⁶ But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

¹⁷ Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. ¹⁸ Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. ¹⁹ But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner. ²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

²² And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. ²³ Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. ²⁴ Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. ²⁵ Grace be with you all. Amen.”

Background Notes

The great theme of Hebrews is the High Priesthood of Christ. He is superior in His **Person** as our High Priest (chapters 1-7). He is superior in His **functions** as our High Priest (chapters 8-10). And He is superior in His **resources** and **power** as our High Priest (chapters 11-13).

In chapter 13 the author of Hebrews listed the social duties of responsible and mature believers in the Christian community and spiritual duties in the Christian church. Verses 1-6 included some of the social “dos” and “don’ts” for the believer in the Christian community, and verses 7-17 covered some of the spiritual “dos” and “don’ts” for the believer in the Christian church.

Verse 23 says, “...our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.” So it seems that Timothy had been arrested for his faith, but he had been released and would shortly join the author of the epistle. Verses 18-19 may indicate that the writer himself was in prison, and he requested prayer for that situation.

Doctrinal Points

There are spiritual “dos” and “don’ts” for the believer in the Christian church.

In verses 1-6 we looked at five social “dos” and “don’ts” for the believer in the Christian community. Now verses 7-17 list six spiritual “dos” and “don’ts” for the believer in the Christian church.

a. Do remember the “faithful fathers.”

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (v7). Christians then and today are to remember the “faithful fathers” (and “faithful mothers”) in the church.

The “faithful fathers” were not only the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. They are faithful men and women of Church history, and those whom we’ve have personally known who have taught us in the past. We all have memories of godly men and women who were models of faithfulness and endurance when they were with us here on earth. I especially think of my own father and father-in-law in this connection. **“Whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” Do you remember the “faithful fathers”!**

The supreme example of faith for us to follow is, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (v8).* We change. Even the greatest of Christians have their ups and downs. But **Jesus does not change.** He is the same yesterday, today, and forever! Aren’t you glad about that?

b. Don’t fall for false teaching.

“Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them” (v9). The particular false teachings that the author had in mind were the rituals of Judaism – especially the rituals involving clean and unclean foods (v9), and the rituals involved with the sacrifices (v10-11).

Remember the occasion of, or reason for, this letter to the Hebrews. Some members of the congregation were Jewish people who were tempted to return to Judaism. Some had already stopped attending the fellowship (10:25). It seems that Christianity was too simplistic for them, especially when compared to the elaborate rituals of Judaism. In New Testament Christianity there is no earthly central sanctuary, no altars, no priests, no clergy, no special robes, no liturgy, no candles, no incense, and no elaborate rituals.

The purpose of all the sacrifices and rituals in the Old Testament was to point forward - to illustrate, and to typify the Person and work of Christ. He is our Altar and our Sacrifice (v10). Just as the bodies of the sin offerings were burned outside the camp on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), so Christ was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem.

So, wrote the author of Hebrews, if you want to follow God's program, you must stop sharing in the sacrifices of the Old Covenant. You must "go outside the camp" of Judaism with all of its rituals, and follow Christ, the true and ultimate Sacrifice. **Don't** fail to grow in the Christian faith. **Don't** fall for false teaching!

c. Do go "outside the camp."

"Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come" (v13-14). For the Hebrews, "the camp" was the religion of Judaism. But Judaism had rejected Jesus as Messiah. To be a follower of Jesus, they had to leave "the camp" or the establishment of Judaism.

This is still true today. Established religion has a lot of ritual and ceremony, but often it does not recognize the Lord Jesus as the Son of God and the only means of salvation. Therefore, we must "leave the camp" of established religion and bear the reproach of Christ. There are many so-called Christians who are unwilling to go outside the camp and bear the reproach of Christ. What about you? **Do** go "outside the camp"!

d. Do offer the sacrifice of praise.

"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name"(v15). Do you think of praise to God as a sacrifice? Or do you think of your praise as spontaneous? Well, praise is not always spontaneous, and God regards it as a sacrifice. Sacrifice involves time, and effort, and cost.

We can understand sacrifice of service - but what about the sacrifice of **praise**? We need to offer praise to the Lord more often. We need to structure our lives so that our lives include the sacrifice of praise. **Do** offer the sacrifice of praise!

e. Don't forget to do good.

"But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (v16). Doing good works, such as helping others and sharing with those in need, is not automatic. We need to sacrifice to do it. We must work at it – even plan out the "what" and the "when" and the "where" of our good works. We all have our personal schedules – but do any of us actually plan and schedule the good deeds we intend to do?

God is pleased when we remember to do good and share with others. He sees it as a sacrifice - and He is well pleased with this mind of sacrifice. So **don't** forget to do good!

f. Do obey your leaders.

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account” (v17). In the context here, the “leaders” are church elders and leaders. This verse is speaking about obedience to spiritual authority. Just as God ordains the authority in the home and the authority in the state, so God ordains the spiritual authority in the New Testament church. Leadership in the local church is not man-made – it is God-ordained.

So it’s a serious matter to disobey the elders in the local church. We should obey our church leaders as we obey God! And we should obey without griping! Remember, elders and church leaders watch out for the welfare of our souls. This is very important work. Verse 17 indicates that these leaders must give an account before the Lord for how well they function: *“for they watch out for your souls as those who must give account.”*

Do you give your elders trouble and grief? I hope not - because verse 17 says that it will be unprofitable for you, both now and later. **Do** obey your leaders!

Practical Application

Remember, there are two aspects to the work of the Lord.

Hebrews 13:20-21 is one of the most beautiful benedictions in all of Scripture. *“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, equip you for every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

There are two aspects of the work of the Lord in verse 21. One aspect is the good work that we do for the Lord, and the promise is that **the Lord will equip us** to do every good work that He’s called us to do - to accomplish His will. What a promise!

The other aspect is the work that the Lord does in us, and the promise is that **the Lord will work in us what is well pleasing in His sight**. What is the work that the Lord is doing in us? It’s the work of sanctification. His work for our salvation is finished, but His work for our sanctification is ongoing. The goal of His work of sanctification in our lives is to make us more like Jesus, so we will be pleasing to Him.

The Lord is working in us, and for us, and on us, and through us to accomplish that good end result! Remember, there are two aspects to the work of the Lord.