
 HEBREWS CHAPTERS 13

This is the last in our series on the book of Hebrews. It is easy to read this book full of rich illusions to the OT and deep theology and think that is doesn't really relate to my life. We have not lived under the OT covenant. It is easy to go all academic with a book like this. But theology, spirituality that is not rooted in every day life is just theory. Unfortunately for some this is what Christianity is about.

But Christianity is centered around Jesus, which is the focus of Hebrews. And Jesus is both God and yet came to this earth in human form. Physically, historically entered this world. Christianity is not an abstract religion. It is deeply rooted in this physical world. It is not an abstract set of beliefs. It is outworked in the here and now.

Hebrews 13 is the last chapter and is intensely practical. All this stuff about the old covenant and new covenant has profound impact on how we live our lives, in four key areas.

1. Practical Love vs 1-3, 16

Faith is lived out by loving one another. Not as a feeling. But as a family that practically supports one another. Two examples are given. 1. Showing hospitality This is quite different from what we mean by this. In middle eastern culture the idea of putting people up for the night, -not just friends, but anyone – is a social obligation. Part of the reason for this was it was very expensive to stay overnight somewhere. And the places you could stay were often unsafe and pretty unsavory. So travelling business people, refugees, teachers were all potentially needing somewhere to stay. In Jewish culture Abraham was seen as the best example of this. The reference to entertaining angels is almost certainly a reference to Gen 18 where Abraham entertains 3 men, who were messengers from God or angels. There was a huge opportunity to show love and share Christ with those who were travelling.

The instruction to not forget about those in prison is very different from prison ministry as we know it. This is referring to fellow Christians who have been thrown in prison because of their faith. The only way you survived in prison in those days was if family and friends provided food and clothing for you.

Later on, verse 16, he says don't forget to do good and share what you have with those in need for such sacrifices are very pleasing to God. He is contrasting the Old Covenant system of animal sacrifices, arguing they are redundant because of Jesus sacrifice. But he says doing

good and giving thanks are the kind of sacrifices God wants now. Not to earn salvation but to show our gratitude

So how does this translate to us today? Motels are safe, no one is in prison for their faith (in NZ) . Our love for Christ is outworked in helping others practically, in a church based ministry or volunteering with one of the many organizations that help people, or individually.

We can support those in prison overseas for their faith through organizations such as Barnabus Fund and Voice of the Martyrs. Faith in God who came to earth in human form, identified with our pain, and sacrificed himself for us is outworked in practical service to others. This is how our belief is expressed. Not mental assent but in service.

2. Honoring marriage and remaining faithful v4

What does this look like today?

Getting married as opposed to just living with each other.
 # Defining marriage as the Bible does. A Man and a woman
 # Seeing marriage as a covenant that reflects God's love for us, not as a conditional contract Marriage is a life time commitment to love the other person no matter what they do and is a reflection of the new covenant that God has made with us. The ethics of sexuality span across the old and new covenants. God has not changed. V 8
 # Working to keep our marriage affair proof. We get busy and neglect our marriage: the opposite of giving it honor.

A comment verse 4b "God will surely judge those who are immoral and those who commit adultery." Maybe that is you and you feel guilt and condemnation. 1 If you repent, ie stop sinning, there is forgiveness and cleansing. 2. But you will still suffer the consequences of a broken marriage, emotional pain, economic hardship. There is a cost – a judgement - that we don't escape from. Look at example of king David. God forgave him but he saw his family unravel as a consequence.

Stay away from the love of money be satisfied with what you have. V5-6

Again this ethic spans the old and new covenant. Ie Commandments 1, and 10 How does this relate to the theology of Hebrews? The writer reminds them to fix eyes on Jesus; that his world is not all there is.

Advertising is working to create dissatisfaction We won't be happy unless we have the latest phone, the latest TV, the latest clothes. I am sure all of us have bought a newer



version of something despite the fact the old one we had worked perfectly fine. There is a growing realization that the planet cannot sustain this kind of consumption and greed. Research has shown it would take 5 earths to sustain the world to the current standard we live.

This is talking about what motivates us in terms of work. We often buy things to try to fulfill some inner need. Most people think they would be happy, not if they were millionaires but if they just had about 20% more income than what they currently have. (regardless of income)

The writer reminds them of the promises of Scripture: I will never fail you I will never forsake you. The Lord is my helper, so I will not be afraid. Josh 1:5, Ps 118:6-7

4 Church vs 7-17

V7 Remember your leaders. This is not referring to the current leaders, but the generation before and is a call to reflect on the example of their lives.

V9 Don't be attracted by strange new ideas There were a lot of false teachers around. But also a pull back to the Old covenant ways. Christians were being socially isolated because they were not taking part in public rituals and meals that went with Judaism. These were being promoted as the way to gain favor with God. The writer reminds them again of what Jesus has done.

In the Covenant, the animal was killed. Blood was used as a sacrifice for sin. The body was taken outside the camp and burned. Lev 16:27 Jesus is taken the place of that animal. His blood was shed, His body was taken outside the city gates, and disgraced. So the writer says. Identify with Jesus as the outcast from society,. You might be excluded from these social events but our homes are not here but in heaven.

People are attracted to the latest Christian sort of fad. We are very prone to be drawn to something that appears new. rather than rest of the old truth of what Jesus has done. It is very easy to find a sense of community in clubs and groups because we want to feel we belong. Nothing wrong with this, as long as we don't neglect our brothers and sisters in Christ. Also very easy to compromise our faith because we want to belong.

V15-16. We don't make an animal sacrifice but practical love and giving thanks are our offering to God. There are Old Covenant illusions to Lev 7:12-15 here.

V17. Obey your leaders. In some church cultures this verse is used to support an honor culture, where leaders are honored. I think this is very unhealthy and leads to the kinds of abuse we have seen exposed in Arise church.

Church leaders are very human. This verse does not justify some kind of slavish obedience. But I think it does mean this: Are you are pain to lead, or a joy to lead? Are you a grumbler who always points out the faults or are you someone who is part of the solution? Are you a prayer or a moaner? Are you an encourager or a criticizer?

V 18-19 Pray for leaders. I think the quality of spiritual leadership in a church and the prayer of the congregation are directly related. If ever there was a time the church leaders neededc prayer it is today. Giving spiritual leadership and church leadership today is incredibly challenging.

Take a moment to evaluate yourself in terms of working out your faith

- # Practical love for others in church and community
- # Making marriage a priority
- # Keeping consumerism at bay
- # Supporting church leaders. Prayer, money, encouragement, involvement

Which one needs attention? What actions do you need to take.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the idea that we have separated faith and spirituality from the physical realm of life.
2. What do you think about using these four areas as a check list for outworking faith?
 - Is there a danger of a works based faith?
 - Is there any other areas you would add?
3. The writer gives two examples (vs 2, 3) of how to outwork verse 1 about loving one another as brother and sisters. What two examples would you give today if you were writing to Central ?
4. What would you say to a Christian couple who are living together? How important is the "bit of paper"? How can we honour marriage?
5. How can we help each other resist the pull of consumerism? Do we want to resist the pull? What are the dangers if we don't?
6. What does a healthy church leadership culture look like? Share examples of unhealthy culture (both for leaders and members) to sharpen your ideas.
7. Reflect on these four areas and decide which one you need to give the most attention to at the moment. Then decide on one step you can take this week to begin to address it. Tell someone in the group what the step us so they can keep you accountable.



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