

Hebrews 13C (2014)

- Our study of Hebrews is at the end
 - We reach the end of the letter with still a few exhortations remaining to consider
 - But as we come to this point, it's appropriate we take a few moments to review the main points this writer has made in his letter
 - And naturally, the main points center around the five, distinct warnings the writer issued along the way
 - The letter began in Chapters 1 & 2, with proofs from the Old Testament on the pre-eminence of the Son of God
 - He was the fulfillment of all OT prophecy
 - All OT prophecy spoke of a Messiah Who was more than merely prophet or king
 - The Messiah has always been described in Scripture as God Himself
 - God taking the form of man to live and die in our place because we couldn't save ourselves
 - From there, the writer launched into his first warning, which is the danger of drifting by this truth
 - Like a person floating by a dock without latching on to it, there were some who had an outsider's curiosity of the faith
 - They saw Christ at a distance, but never seriously considered Him to be God, much less did they worship Him
- Next, the writer moves closer into the gathering, focusing on those who have associated themselves with the gathering, yet without belief
 - The writer used the example of the generation of Israel in the desert, who saw the wonders of God, yet never experienced faith in the heart
 - They were an unbelieving generation
 - And from their experience, the writer issued the second warning

- For those who fail to believe, will be barred from entering into God's rest
- We must accept the truth of the Gospel in its full form if we are to be saved
 - We are sinners, and if we die in our sin, we will live eternity in torment as exile from God
 - But this does not need to be our future, not if we accept Jesus' death on the cross in our place
 - The Father has poured out the wrath we deserve upon His Son on the cross instead
 - If we believe that Jesus is God, dying in our place and that the Father resurrected Him from the grave, we will be saved
 - And we enter into His rest
- The three remaining warnings moved closer and closer to the heart of God's people, to the issues facing believers
 - In Chapter 6, the writer warned the church of the dangers of not pressing on to maturity through study of God's Word
 - Without maturity, we will not have the capacity to please the Lord
 - And if we don't please Him, then we will not see our full reward
 - In Chapter 10, the writer turned to warning the church over willfully sinning
 - When we knowingly and repeatedly choose sin over obedience, we risk a hardened heart
 - We also risk bringing the judgment of God upon ourselves
 - For the Lord has said He will judge His people
 - Even though we are saved from the penalty of our sin, we remain accountable to the Lord for our actions
 - Then, in Chapter 11, we studied the incomparable chapter known as the Hall of Faith, where the writer used example after example of OT saints to illustrate faith

- The common feature for every example was living with an expectation that the rewards of faith await in the Kingdom
- We can't rush the plan of God
- We can't take our rewards early
- We must be prepared to suffer at times, while we await the glory that we have been promised
- This led to the final warning in Chapter 12, that we not shrink back from our walk of faith, even in the face of trials
 - We must anticipate and accept the discipline of the Lord
 - And as we encounter His discipline, we must endure in our faith
 - We can't allow any one of us to fall, to grow bitter and weak
 - To retreat from their walk of faith
 - For in the end, if we pass up the opportunity to serve God in the midst of trials, then we also pass up the potential to receive a full inheritance
 - Like the proverbial Esau, who complained bitterly when he realized what he had lost
 - But by then, it was too late to change the past
 - Let's not allow any one of us to reach that same point
- And then, we came to Chapter 13, to the exhortations for how to live-out our witness successfully
 - We've studied how to love the brethren and strangers
 - How to identify with those who are persecuted and ill-treated
 - Not to let the fear of persecution silence our witness of Christ's love
 - To live free of love of money and with respect for the sanctity of marriage
 - To respect the teaching of the apostles and the authority of Scripture
 - To rest in the once and forever sacrifice of Christ, not returning to a life of dead works

- As we prepare to finish the letter, consider once more the power of a Christian life lived according to these principles
 - Ask yourself how brightly will my light shine in this dark world if I lived this way?
 - If I was known as someone who held Scripture as the authority in my life?
 - If I loved both those inside and outside the Body of Christ with equal sacrifice and devotion?
 - If I was faithful both before and after marriage?
 - If I lived in contentment with all I have been given by God?
 - If I rested in the grace of God?
- Who could ignore a witness like that? And how greatly might the Lord reward a saint who lived in those ways, obedient to His commands?
 - That's what's at stake in this letter
 - Godliness in serving God and pleasing Him
 - A witness He can use for great purposes
- So with that review, we come to the final exhortations for the church

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- I've been looking forward to this verse for the entire book (joke)
 - The writer says, the Body of believers must obey and submit to their leaders
 - Let's begin by acknowledging an obvious, but important truth
 - The Lord did not organize His Church as a commune or democracy
 - Christ rules His Church
 - And He has appointed human leaders to administer over the affairs of the Body

- According to Scripture, Church leaders come in two forms
 - First, we have men called “elders” or “overseers”
 - These two titles are used interchangeably in the New Testament
 - In Titus 1, Paul uses these two terms interchangeably to describe those who rule over the Church
 - Elders rule over all matters in the Church
- The second form of leader is called “deacon”
 - Deacons are men or women who come under the authority of elders or overseers, who are always men
 - They lead through service to the Body, assuming responsibility for organizing and executing the work within the Body
- Interestingly, the New Testament never names a pastor as a leader of the Church
 - Paul only uses the term “pastor” once in all his letters
 - And that mention in Ephesians occurs in the context of a list of service gifts to the Body
 - So pastoring is a gift of service to the Body, according to Paul, not a position of leadership
 - They serve through shepherding the flock, by feeding them the Word of God, counseling, encouraging, exhorting
 - Obviously, a pastor can also be an elder or even a deacon
 - But they don’t necessarily have to hold a position of authority
 - If a pastor is not an elder, then they submit to the authority of the elders, like the rest of the congregation
- Therefore, a church should be led by elders and served by deacons, and these positions are filled by those who can meet the qualifications given in Scripture
 - We can find those qualifications in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1, and I invite you to look over them in your own time, later
 - We can summarize them in two statements

- Elders must be men who know the Word of God well enough to teach it to others
- And both elders and deacons must possess personal testimonies that reflect the Word of God lived-out
- We are told to seek leaders with these qualifications, because we want those who lead us to model what following Christ looks like
 - To inspire us to do the same
- And a healthy church should have both elders and deacons working together to serve and lead the Body
 - As we see in the first church in Acts 6

Acts 6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

Acts 6:2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

Acts 6:3 "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

Acts 6:4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Acts 6:5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

Acts 6:6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

- The twelve apostles were effectively the first elders of the church
 - They served the church primarily through the teaching of God's Word and praying for the needs of the Body
 - Their teaching was essential to the development of the Church
 - They were building up the Body in the commandments of Christ, according to the great commission
 - Remember, Christ said these men were to teach the Church to obey all that Christ commanded
 - And they prayed for the Church, which refers to more than simply personal prayer

- These men prayed over others
- Praying for healing, praying for guidance and equipping
- In certain cases, their prayers were essential to the work of the Spirit in coming upon new believers
- So by teaching and prayer, these men ministered to the most essential and important needs of Christ's Body
- But there were other needs, and when it came time to meet those other needs, the leaders didn't substitute other duties for their primary responsibilities
 - They couldn't neglect the duties of elders, because if they neglected those duties, who would fulfill them?
 - So they turned to other men of good character and appointed them to serve the needs of the Body
 - These men were the first deacons of the Church
- This should be our pattern, as well
 - We have leaders, called elders, who oversee the church
 - These men, along with pastors and teachers, build up the Body in the Word and in prayer
 - And around them, we find others serving the Body
 - Sometimes, we will give these servants the title "deacon", or we may not
 - But the role of deacon is essential to the Church, if the elders are to be free to teach and pray and lead
- So back to Hebrews, what does the writer mean when he directs us to obey our leaders?
 - Most certainly, he is speaking of the elders of the Church
 - Those who direct and lead us are to be respected as men the Lord has appointed to that purpose
 - The writer says we are to submit to their authority
 - Obedience is a heart attitude, while submission is the behavioral evidence of obedience

- We might claim to be under authority, to be in obedience to authority
- But until we submit to that authority, we have not demonstrated obedience
- The requirement to submit is true both corporately and individually
 - As our elders make decisions for the Body, we are obligated to submit to those decisions as a Body
 - We work in good faith to carry-out those requirements
 - We see these leaders as an extension of Christ's authority
- Only in the case where their decisions come into conflict with the Word of God, would we have a cause to contend with their authority
 - And even in such cases, the Scripture still prescribes a process for challenging an elder's authority (1 Tim. 5:19)
 - We are to hold elders in high esteem and give them the benefit of every doubt
- But the requirement to submit is also an individual requirement
 - When elders give us personal counsel, exhortation or rebuke, we are commanded by Scripture to listen to them and heed their direction
 - This is never more true than when we receive correction for personal sin
 - Should an elder or elders confront us over sin, we are commanded by Scripture to obey these concerns
 - Pride and personal opinion have no place in obedience and submission
 - And to be clear, we're not suggesting that elders are always right in their judgments
 - The command to submit and obey is never conditioned on a personal assessment of the correctness of the authority
 - Slaves don't submit to masters only when they are right
 - Children don't submit to parents only when the parent is asking for the right thing

- Wives aren't called to submit to husbands only after carefully examining the husband's logic and reasoning
- Submission isn't truly submission until we're asked to do something we don't want to do
- Notice, the writer explains that submission to our leaders is in our own best interest
 - He says leaders keep watch over our souls, as those who will give an account
 - The leadership of the Church exists to guard your soul, in the sense of guarding you against yourself
 - We all need help from time to time
 - We need the advice, counsel and even correction of others to help us move away from sin and toward sanctification
 - The Lord loves us so much, He's seen fit to appoint shepherds over His flock
 - And so, we only hurt ourselves when we elect not to listen to their counsel and direction
 - It's unprofitable for us to object to their wisdom and leadership
 - The "profit" the writer is speaking about is the eternal profit for those who please Christ in their service
 - If your leaders give godly counsel, and if you listen and obey, then you stand to profit greatly from their positive influence
 - In the same way that a child will profit from the good advice and counsel of godly parents, so will we profit from listening to our elders
- Finally, notice this is a two-way street
 - The writer says the leadership of every church will be called to account for those they led
 - This is a sobering reminder to leaders that we must be prepared to face our judgment over how we led the Church of God
 - Were we diligent, selfless, sacrificial and honorable in our leadership?

- Did we speak the truth, or hold back the Word of God?
- Did we live it out, or perform our responsibilities in hypocrisy?
- Let's agree we will always seek leaders who exemplify the high standards of Scripture, while also committing to following their lead
 - Let's not make their job any more difficult than it already is
 - Let's submit to their leadership and counsel
 - Let's be mature enough to appreciate that failure to submit will only hurt us in the long run
- Part of that responsibility extends to praying for these leaders to be successful

Heb. 13:18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.

Heb. 13:19 And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

- The writer asks his readers to pray for them to have a good conscience
 - A good conscience means having a testimony that is guilt-free, without cause for condemnation
 - If we are to respect and follow our leaders under all circumstances, then clearly, we want godly leaders to follow
 - Who wants to be submitted to a scoundrel?
 - And yet, sadly, in many places today, that's exactly the situation believers are facing
 - Their leaders are dishonest, unqualified men
 - And so the writer asks the church to pray for its leaders continually
 - Pray that leaders will remain godly, honest, sincere, dedicated and of godly character
 - Understand that the enemy loves nothing better than to disgrace and disqualify leaders in the Church
 - And these moments are harmful for all of us

- Our hearts must be directed in support of our leaders, even if we're not particularly pleased with their decisions or preaching
- We need them to conduct themselves honorably, for their sake and for the sake of the entire Church
- Pray for that outcome
- This writer also asked for prayer so that he might be restored to the church sooner than later
 - The words in Greek are a subtle reference to captivity
 - In other words, this writer was writing from prison, it would seem
 - How much more remarkable is this man's letter to the church, when we realize he has been writing it from the center of persecution?
 - He is one of those witnesses suffering for the faith
 - And while he's in that position, his concern is for the rest of the Church to live-out an acceptable witness as well
 - This is the kind of self-sacrificial witness we want to see from those who lead us
 - Men and women who assume positions of leadership for personal gain or ego will be seen for who they are sooner or later
 - The Lord has a tendency of testing His under-shepherds so as to expose their motives
 - Men who serve for decades without compensation and selflessly giving their time to the Body of Christ are the exception
 - And yet, they are the exactly the kind of leader we want to emulate
- To close his letter, the writer reminds us that our earthly leaders are merely temporary substitutes for the True Shepherd, and it is that Shepherd we seek to serve

Heb. 13:20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,
Heb. 13:21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

- This is the writer's benediction, which is a blessing at the end of a religious teaching
 - He ends, reminding us of Who we serve and why we serve Him
 - Christ is our Great Shepherd Who has saved us by His blood
 - How must service and devotion and obedience do you owe the one who spilled His blood for you?
 - The answer is, everything
 - And yet, His love for us doesn't stop at our salvation
 - He continues to bless His children by equipping us to works of service, according to His will
 - We work to please Him, and He has prescribed both the means and the ends of that process
 - He gives us the spiritual power to complete works that glorify Him
 - And He's created the opportunities in which we accomplish that service
 - All of it done to the glory of Christ
- Friends, that's the reason we sit here this morning
 - We're here because we've been saved, not in order to be saved
 - And we serve Christ, because He died for us first
 - We serve in His power, power He gives us by His spirit
 - Wisdom, energy, and a heart to love others
 - Things we could never find in our own power
 - And we seek to please Him, not ourselves, because we have died to self
 - If only we decide to live our lives for Him
 - If only we take advantage of the opportunity
- Finally, the writer ends the letter

[Heb. 13:22](#) But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

[Heb. 13:23](#) Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.

[Heb. 13:24](#) Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

[Heb. 13:25](#) Grace be with you all.

- In v.22, the writer asks that we might bear with this word of exhortation and a footnote about Timothy's release and a personal greeting end the letter
 - The writer asks us to give careful consideration to these words and to hear, or obey, what's been written
 - He says these things must be considered carefully because he's written briefly
 - The letter isn't very long, not in comparison to all that could be said on these matters
 - So all the more important not to overlook what's here
 - The writer has given us a recipe for great joy and great reward
 - He's explained the sufficiency of grace in Christ
 - He's woken us up to serious threats
 - And to great examples of faithfulness
 - Let's not study without application
 - Any Scripture you read but don't apply stands as witness against you, rather than as a tool to bring you closer to Him
 - Let's not just be hearers of the Word – let's become doers