

## Hebrews 13B (2014)

- We return to the final chapter of Hebrews 13
  - As you remember, the writer's final chapter consists of a list of exhortations
    - These are requests calling for the church to live out their faith boldly, obediently
    - Each point the writer makes in chapter 13 is rooted in the writer's call to offer God an acceptable sacrifice of service
    - He's calling the church to live in gratitude for what the Lord accomplished on the cross
    - And we show God our gratitude by living according to His commands
  - Last week, we studied the first three exhortations, all dealing with the witness of the church
    - First, the writer said remain open to receiving strangers by showing hospitality even though persecution was a risk
    - Secondly, honor the marriage bed according to God's word, especially in a culture where sexual impurity was common and accepted
    - Finally, live free from the love of money being content in a world that only seeks for more and more
  - Imagine the power of a group of believers where these things were routinely practiced?
    - How different would the church look from the world?
    - From a selfish world lacking hospitality, marital faithfulness, and contentment?
    - How compelling might a loving, faithful, content group of people appear to such a world?
    - Then you can understand why the writer is emphasizing that believers make these behaviors a priority

- And now we move forward in the chapter to consider an obligation which lies at the heart of our witness and message

[Heb. 13:7](#) Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

[Heb. 13:8](#) Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

[Heb. 13:9](#) Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.

- The writer asks the church to remember those who led you
  - The Greek word for remember means literally observe carefully
    - The writer is asking us to look at the examples set by certain men
    - And then to imitate their faith, that is the way they lived out their faith
  - We can see that the writer is speaking about a specific group of leaders: apostles
    - First, he says these led the church in the past
    - In the very beginning, the church was led only by the twelve apostles
    - In time, those men would lay hands on other leaders, who joined them in ruling over the church
    - But in the beginning, it was just the apostles
  - Secondly, the writer says these men “spoke” the word of God to the church
    - Only apostles were gifted to bring forth the word of God
    - As we’ve discussed before, the apostles were the prophets of the New Testament
    - And they spoke (and wrote) the word of God to the early church
    - The writer doesn’t say these men “wrote” the word of God but rather they “spoke” because many of the New Testament letters were yet to be written
    - The truth was still circulated largely by word of mouth

- Finally, the writer says consider the result of their conduct
  - The result of the apostles' conduct was the rapid and strong growth of the church
    - As the book of Acts records, their faithful, sacrificial life of faith produced much fruit in the early church
    - The apostles' ministry was responsible for a multitude of converts from among Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles throughout the known world
    - There can be no better pattern to follow than the one set for us by these men
  - Obviously, we never saw the conduct of the apostles nor did we hear them speak, but we do have the writings they left behind in the New Testament\
    - So for the church today, the command becomes to observe carefully the New Testament scriptures
    - Consider how the apostles lived and served the church in the book of Acts
    - Give careful consideration to the teaching they left us in their letters
    - And imitate their sacrifices
- In the centuries since these men lived and ruled the church, it's become popular to claim the apostles operated from culturally-biased perspective
  - Bible critics assert that these men were products of first century Palestine
    - Patriarchal
    - Misogynistic
    - Overbearing
  - And so as we consult their teaching in the New Testament, we must filter what we read, interpreting it in a culturally relevant way
    - Critics will tell you that Paul's instructions regarding the roles of men and women are culturally dependent and no longer relevant

- The apostles' instructions on sexuality or church leadership or family life or money or even heaven and hell are antiquated
- Therefore, we are free to reinterpret these issues based on modern values
- So though Hebrews says consider carefully the men who led and taught the early church, the biblical re-constructionists say take their example with a grain of salt
- I believe the Lord knew His word delivered through the apostles would come under assault in this way
  - So He inspired the writer to testify that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever in v.8
    - The word of God spoken through the apostles had it's origins in Christ Jesus
    - While the apostles were human beings with certain biases and a certain cultural perspective, when they spoke the word of God, they weren't speaking according to their own wisdom
    - They were speaking under inspiration of the Spirit, delivering a timeless message authored by God Himself
  - God's word never changes because truth never needs to change
    - Jesus is always culturally relevant
    - And yet He's never subject to the whims of culture
    - God delivered to the apostles a set of instructions that were prepared before the foundations of the earth
    - And those instructions will outlast heaven and earth
    - Ironically, long after all earthly culture is gone, these words will remain in effect
- Which is why the writer says in v.9 that we are not to be carried away by other teaching
  - Varied and strange teaching refers to the assortment of confusing and false teaching the enemy offers to lead people away from the truth
    - The enemy's program is not to promote a certain teaching but to oppose a certain teaching

- The enemy doesn't care which false teaching a person chases after
- Just so long as they don't follow after the truth found in God's word
- So Satan is always at work to create new, varied and strange teaching to draw people's interest away from the scriptures
- But we believers can't allow ourselves to be caught up in these things
  - Instead, we must be strengthened in our heart by God's grace
  - To be strengthened by grace means to be reinforced in our Christian liberty, resting in Christ's work
  - Not becoming slaves to works of one kind or another
  - As Paul says in Colossians

**Col. 2:20** If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

**Col. 2:21** "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

**Col. 2:22** (which all refer to things destined to perish with use) – in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

**Col. 2:23** These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

- Paul says by Christ's death, we have been set free from the principles of the world, which refers to works of flesh that try to earn God's pleasure
  - Having become partakers of God's grace, we need not concern ourselves with rules that demand we keep laws or rules intended to keep us clean
  - Paul mentions examples of do not handle, taste and touch, which are references to the laws of Israel intended to keep a man ritually clean
  - These things have the appearance of wisdom, but they merely deal with treatment of the body
  - But once your soul has been made clean by the grace of God in Christ, these rules are without purpose in our lives

- Notice at the end of v.9 the writer mentions food also, adding that foods aren't the source of a Christians' strengthening spiritually
  - The Jewish believers in the church of the writer's day were being tempted by false teachers to resubmit to the dietary restrictions of the Levitical system
    - They were being told to only eat certain foods and to abstain from non-kosher foods
    - These varied and strange teachings claimed that by abstaining from certain foods, these believers were making themselves more pleasing to God
    - They were becoming more holy, more spiritually clean
  - But this writer says that these teachings were not capable of producing the spiritual benefit their proponents claimed
    - Only resting in God's grace holds any potential to grow us spiritually
    - And since Jesus never changes, we need not depart from His word in seeking for additional advantages or secret solutions to godliness
- Some today are making the same mistakes again, returning to practicing selective parts of the Levitical laws in the misguided expectation that these behaviors please God or increase holiness
  - Today, some believers have been convinced by various Jewish or "messianic" movements within the church to submit to the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law
    - Some practice these things merely for personal health reasons or simply as a means of honoring Christ
    - In these cases, the Christian has liberty to live this way
    - Nevertheless, they must be careful to ensure their witness doesn't confuse other Christians about why they do what they do
  - On the other hand, if they practice such things thinking they are obligated or believing they are making themselves more holy or pleasing to the Lord, then the practice is wrong
    - It is a testimony to their spiritual immaturity and ignorance

- And this testimony is both false and potentially harmful within the church
- It has the potential to lead others to doubt in the sufficiency of God's grace
- Ironically, those who claim the dietary restrictions of the Law are appropriate for Christians often cite Hebrews 13:8 in support
  - They say that Jesus never changes His instructions to the believer
  - So if following the Law was necessarily for Israel in the past, then it must still be appropriate for the believer today
  - Because, as they say, the Lord never changes
- But those who say such things are misinterpreting Heb 13:8, misunderstanding the purpose of the Law and conveniently ignoring much of the New Testament
  - Heb 13:8 isn't saying that Jesus' instructions never change
    - It says Jesus Himself never changes
    - But we see God's program changing across the pages of the Bible
  - For example, in the Garden Man ate only plants
    - Then after the flood, men were told to eat anything
    - Later Israel was told to restrict it's diet in various ways
    - And now the church is permitted to eat anything
    - Each of these changes was part of God's eternal, unchanging purposes
  - We only come to understand this truth by consulting the entire counsel of God's word
    - As a New Covenant believer, we are under grace, free from preoccupation with foods and such
    - Don't let physical, passing things become substitutes for resting in God's grace found by giving careful attention to His word
- Unfortunately, the strange teachings of that day went well beyond merely enticing Christians to limit their diets

[Heb. 13:10](#) We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

[Heb. 13:11](#) For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp.

[Heb. 13:12](#) Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

[Heb. 13:13](#) So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.

[Heb. 13:14](#) For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

[Heb. 13:15](#) Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

[Heb. 13:16](#) And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

- While the writer doesn't come out and name the false teaching he is working against, we can tell what's bothering him
  - In a word, it's about sacrifice
    - The essential act of service to God has always been sacrifice
    - Sacrifice is the necessary payment for sin
    - Sacrifice appeases the wrath of God
    - Sacrifice restore fellowship
    - From Abel to Noah to Abraham to Moses and all Israel, sacrifice was the heart of worship
  - Under the New Covenant, our sacrifice is found in the body and blood of Christ, sacrificed in our place
    - And then Paul teaches in Romans 12 that we, in turn, should make our lives a living sacrifice to God in thanks for His mercy
    - He died for us, so we live our life for Him
    - We sacrifice our desires to suit His desires
    - We sacrifice our priorities to accomplish His priorities
    - That's the proper New Covenant sacrifice, upon which our fellowship with God is made possible

- But Judaizers in the church were teaching Jewish believers that there were still required to perform animal sacrifices on the altar at the Jewish temple
  - Like the dietary laws, this was one of those strange teachings that draw believers away from grace and back into bondage to law
  - This teaching was even worse, because it had the potential to erode a believers confidence in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice
  - Because if it were true that animal sacrifice were required to remain in God's favor, what would that say about the meaning and power of Christ's death?
- The writer counters that temple sacrifices are useless, and he proves his point by highlighting the
  - The role of every priest, as we learned earlier in this letter, is to represent God before men and men before God
    - But the writer points out that the priests officiating in the temple sacrifices couldn't qualify to eat from the Christian's altar
    - Eating at the Christian's altar is a reference to participating in the Christian communion meal, which pictures our Lord was crucified as our sacrifice
    - The Jewish priests in the temple were not believers, since they had not accepted Christ as Messiah
    - So they were not qualified to participate in the Christian communion meal
  - And yet Christians felt it necessary to turn to these men as ministers who could advance their relationship with the Lord?
    - So how sadly ironic that a Christian might seek the services of a priest who himself did not know our Lord and Intercessor!
    - Certainly, no Christian should seek the services of such a meaningless ritual
- In vs.11-12, the writer reminds his readers that the animals sacrificed in the Levitical system were never more than pictures of the one, true sacrifice God makes available in His Son

- The bodies of the bloodied animals were taken out of the temple and burned outside the camp of Israel as required by the Law
- Even in this detail, the writer points out that the law pictured Christ
- For in the same way, our Lord's body was crucified outside the city walls, in fulfillment of this picture
  - And that sacrifice resulted in the sanctification of Christ's people, all those who trust in His sacrifice
  - The writer is reminding his readers that the Lord's sacrifice was entirely sufficient to atone for sin and sanctify us
  - Those earlier animal sacrifices merely pointed to a future atonement with the power to address all sin for all time
- Because this church was willing to succumb to strange and false teaching about the law and sacrifices, they were in danger of undermining their witness
  - Instead of remembering the teaching of the apostles and holding to that teaching, they were drifting again
    - And by their willingness to chase after such things, they set aside their sacrificial service to God
    - They were living a lie instead of living in the truth
  - This is an ever-present danger for the church
    - The specific kind of strange teaching may change
    - Back then it was participation under the Law
    - Perhaps today it will be some strange teaching about spiritual gifts, prosperity, healing or the like
    - Whatever captivates the church and distracts us from Christ leaves the same potential for danger and disruption
    - Instead of preaching Christ and Him crucified, we begin witnessing to something false, temporary and meaningless
- Usually this transition from the true Gospel to something less is a result of misplaced affections or a desire to fit into the culture
  - In the writer's day, the motivation was avoiding persecution

- Notice in v.13 the writer calls upon his audience to be willing to suffer reproach with Christ
- That was the issue driving their willingness to return to the temple service
- If they returned, they would placate the Jewish community living around them
- From the point of view of the Jewish community, though these Christians persisted in following their discredited rabbi, Jesus, at least they kept the required temple services
- But the writer calls the church not to be afraid of suffering persecution for Christ
  - Christ suffered for us
  - So we may be called upon to suffer for His name sake
  - And if we try to hard to avoid persecution, we may be tempted to engage in some very unbiblical and unhealthy practices
  - Just as these believers were tempted to return to the temple service
- Interesting, the writer says in v.14 that the Jewish believers did not have a lasting city, referring to the city of Jerusalem of that day
  - As I covered in my first lesson, this letter was probably written in the years right before the temple and city were destroyed by the Romans
    - The writer seems to have known that the destruction of the city was coming soon
    - He says it's not going to last
    - In other words, it was futile for believers to continue showing an interest in things that were destined to pass away
    - Things including the earthly temple and even the city of Jerusalem
    - Symbols of unbelieving Israel
  - Instead, the writer says the believer must maintain a focus on the eternal city, the Heavenly Jerusalem, which is our future home

- As I like to say, living with eyes for eternity, which means considering all our actions from an eternal point of view
- When you live this way, you will come to different conclusions about so many things in life
- If you're living with eyes for eternity and are faced with a choice between suffering persecution or forsaking our witness, you'll make the right choice
- With the right perspective, you'll understand what kind of sacrifice God's desires, as the writer says in v.15
  - He says if you desire to make sacrifice to God, then let's do it in the way God receives
    - Continually we are to offer up sacrifice of praise
    - He explains that means the fruit of our lips
    - Testifying with our mouths to the truth of the Gospel
    - Naming Christ as Lord, in other words
    - Testifying publicly about God's grace and giving thanks for His mercy
  - That's the acceptable form of praise we are to offer God
    - How is this a sacrifice?
    - Because sometimes that testimony will result in persecution, hatred and rejection
    - That's the sacrifice Christ receives
- Moreover, the writer says don't neglect to do good and share with others in what you have, and these things are sufficient sacrifice
  - We don't need to return to old means of sacrifice
    - We don't need to return to the Law
    - We don't need ritual
  - Nor do we need to invent our own rituals
    - We don't need new forms of legalism

- Let's set aside various forms of strange and false teaching
- All we need is to live sacrificially for the Christ Who saves us
  - Know and follow His word
  - Follow the example of the apostles
  - Make our lives a living sacrifice
  - Live with eyes for eternity