

Hebrews 12 And 13: Advice For The End Time

Advice for End Time

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I think that few of us doubt that we are living in the end time. Do I hear anybody saying that we are not? Some in other groups may think we have twenty, fifty, or a hundred or more years to go, but I do not buy it. I do not think world conditions are such that it could go on that long. I think we would end up blowing ourselves up one way or another. It could break loose just about at any time as far as I am concerned, and the Day of the Lord and the Tribulation fast on its heels. It is almost like we are just waiting breathlessly for the other shoe to fall, as we can see so much out there and just waiting for that one little piece that brings it all together.

But what do we do in the meantime? We have to wait patiently for several more years. I do not think any of us doubt that, but it may be two, three, five, seven years maybe. I do not know. It does not seem like it. But even one year means that we are still going to have to wait patiently. What should we be doing to insure that we make it into God's Kingdom? What should our conduct be so that we will be counted worthy to escape all those terrible things that will come to pass upon this world in the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord?

Does the Bible give us any advice about what we should be doing now? Well, you know it does. I do not think there is any doubt about that either. The Bible was written for us. We have been preaching that for a long time in this church, that this Book, this Holy Bible that we hold in our laps, was written specifically for us *now*, that it was useful for those in the first century, but they were part of the process that put it all together for us, and the things that are written there. Their experiences in the first century, and of the experiences of the Israelites throughout history, are for *our* admonition upon whom the end of the ages has come. This Book contains all we need to know, to choose, to pursue, and to hold onto such great salvation that God has offered us. We do not need anything else. It is all there. It shows us the path that we should be walking.

As I studied in preparation for this sermon I was searching for a framework upon which to hang the instruction that the Bible gives us about the end times. You go into your computer, your concordance, and punch in "end time," or "time of the end," or "the last hour," or "the last time," and you will find many scriptures that give you advice about what to be doing in the last time. The apostles and the prophets gave us quite a bit of instruction about what we should be doing with the "time of the end" upon us. But I finally found it in the last chapters of the book of Hebrews. The more I looked into it, the more it fit us like a glove. I mean, I could not believe some of the things that I was reading in there that just shocked me, because it was so current.

I have always known that Hebrews was written for the church. There was never a doubt in my mind about that, but I never connected chapter 13 especially to us in such a concrete way. It is really amazing. You go into the commentaries and they will tell you, "You know, chapter 13 looks like it was just stuck onto the end here, because the writer felt that he should give some moral encouragement, some practical advice, because he spent most of the time talking about a little bit more theological matters proving that Jesus is better than so many of these that have gone on before, and that he felt that well, he needed some practical encouragement." They really think that well, maybe it was added by somebody else, or that it just does not seem connected somehow.

No man put this book together. God put this book together. He knew what the end-time church would need. He knew that there would be a church at the end time that would have the same character traits as these people who were being spoken to in the book of Hebrews, and he knew what practical instruction they would need to overcome problems that they were having, and so *God* tacked on chapter 13, because it fits perfectly with our situation today.

Let us get a little background to the book of Hebrews. We are not going to spend a lot of time on this because I want to get into chapters 12 and 13, because that is where the nitty-gritty is we need to understand.

From internal evidence in the book of Hebrews, it is pretty clear that it was written a few years before the city of Jerusalem fell to the Romans in 70 AD. This is significant because it was the end of an age. It was the end of the Temple ritual. It was the end of that period of time in which God was approached through the priesthood. After that time the Levites had no purpose. It was gone, and the Jews had to face that. A world without Jerusalem, a world without a temple. As a matter of fact the Romans, when they finally razed the city of Jerusalem, named it something else. It was not called Jerusalem anymore. It was called something like Hail-owena, or Capital Wena, something like that, some Latin word that I cannot pronounce right now.

This was a time when there was an adjustment from the way things always had been, to a new way. Is that not what we are facing? The destruction of this world is only a few years ahead of us, and we are in the process of adjusting our minds and our thinking to the way it will be when the Millennium comes, when we inherit the Kingdom of God. But we also face the same problems as those people faced. It is not just that we are looking forward to the Kingdom of God, but we have got the same problems facing us, because it is an end of an age.

Now my personal feeling, my personal opinion is that the apostle Paul had a hand in writing this book. So when I talk about the author, I will probably call him Paul. I do not know if he was really the author. I think his mind was behind this book one way or another. It may have been written by one of his scribes after he died. Paul maybe died about 65 AD, or somewhere around there, and it could have been that he left notes, or maybe it was a sermon. I do not know. But somehow, somebody got a hold of these thoughts, inspired by God obviously, and wrote them down, and they became part of the Bible.

The reason why I say that is because the Greek in the book of Hebrews is far better than the Greek in the letters that we know Paul wrote. So there is a pretty good chance that this was written by a person who was quite a gifted Greek speaker, whose Greek was maybe his first language. Someone like Apollos maybe, who had a much better command of cultured Greek than Paul did. Nobody knows. It could have been Silas. It could have been Barnabas. Some have even thought that Priscilla, . . . you know, of Priscilla and Aquila fame, had a hand in this. But it does not matter, because God wrote it. The hand that wrote it is not as important as the mind from which it sprang, which was God.

Who wrote it is less important than whom it was written to, because whom it was written to makes a difference in how we approach it, how we study it. Traditionally it is believed that the audience was Jews living in Jerusalem or possibly elsewhere in the Roman empire. It does not have to be specifically Jerusalem, but it fits Jerusalem better because they were the ones who were going to be facing the Roman armies and the destruction of the Temple most closely. It is more than probable

that it was converted Jews that it was written to. Once again, the book does not name them. The original manuscript did not say "To the Hebrews." It could have been written to the entire church. It might have been written to the church at Jerusalem, but we do not know for sure.

It is more than probable that it was written to Jews because of the subject matter. They were the ones that were most affected by the coming change. Even more important than that is, what kind of people were they? I do not mean what race of people were they, but what was their ethnic background. What was their *spiritual* condition? That is the more important thing. What was their problem that Paul felt constrained to write them such a letter?

The first chapter shows that these people were Christians, and the author takes pains to prove that Jesus, as God's Son, is superior to the angels. Now this is a problem that the Jews had. They had questions about angels, and they had a great angel-ology, or whatever. I do not know quite the theological word for that, but they had at this time come up with various ranks of angels, and all these things, and God wanted them to know that all that was just plain poppycock. It did not matter one whit, because the Son had come, and the Son was much superior to the angels. So let us get off this angel kick. Then in chapter 2 he begins some indication of what the problems were. In chapter 2 of Hebrews, verses 1 through 4, we are just going to go through their problems very quickly here.

Hebrews 2:1-4 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

Did you catch the problem? They were drifting away from God through neglect. Their salvation was not really very important to them anymore. It had been at one time, but they were not now making very much effort to solidify their position before God. That position was their relationship with Him. They were letting that all just drift away. It was slowly seeping away. That is what the picture is here, of a man with a full waterskin over his shoulder, but it has a pinhole at the bottom of it, and the water that he needed to sustain him was drip, drip, dripping away, and he was not noticing it, and pretty soon he was going to have to reach back there and get something to drink, and his skin was going to be empty. They were drifting. They were dripping away. They were resting on their oars, no longer resisting the pull of the current, which in this world is directly away from God. If we drift, we lose, we die spiritually—and this was their problem. One of them.

Hebrews 3:12-13 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

A-ha! Another problem. They were giving in to the deceitfulness of sin. They were being distracted from God's way, and they were allowing themselves to get "hooked," and they were slowly, area by area, sin by sin, going back into what they had come out of. And what this sin was doing was pushing them to desert God. It was hardening their hearts, just like the Israelites coming out of Egypt hardened their hearts against God.

This is a very serious problem. God had provided them so much, and they had gotten so far on it, and now they were letting it drip away. More than that, they were getting hooked by the sins that were

around them, and it was hardening them. So not only did they have no spiritual reserve over their back, they were getting a hard heart, and you know where that leads. It says in chapter 4, "Beware, lest any of you fall short of the rest that God has promised us." They could *lose their salvation*, because sin was creeping back into their lives.

Hebrews 5:12-14 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Another problem. They had lost their spiritual understanding through lack of practice. Now what does this tell you they were doing? They were no longer even doing what God said. And if they were, it was only to meet the requirement. They had so much stopped, quit, doing the things of God that their understanding had slipped away. You know what it says back in the Psalms. I believe it is in Psalm 111. I want to go to that. It popped into my head. Hopefully that is an inspired thought, so I want to read it to get it right.

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments.

So if you do not *do* His commandments, you lose your understanding. That is what happened to these Hebrews. They were no longer exercising spiritually, and they were turning to flab. They had gotten to the point where they were babes in Christ. They had gotten back, they had regressed all the way to the point that now they were just like they were when they were first called. They were carnal again. We have heard a lot about that lately. They had begun to *lose* their spirituality. Now they were carnal.

There were other things, but these are the major ones that Paul stresses. Question: Do they sound in any way familiar to you? A church drifting, slowly giving in to sin in several areas, losing its spiritual vitality and understanding so that it can no longer discern true from false? It makes chills go up and down my spine. Sounds to me very similar to some of the criticisms that Christ makes of the churches in Revelation 2 and 3; especially that one at the very end, the Laodicean church.

It sounds like us. I am speaking the "us" being the whole church of God, at least the way we were just a few years ago before we were awakened through God's mercy. But just because we were awakened to the problem a few years ago, it does not mean that it does not still linger, because the pulls of this world are so strong. The pulls of Laodiceanism, which is exemplified in the world, can snatch us back at will unless we are really exercising ourselves, exercising our spirituality to resist it. When we start exercising, we are no longer drifting, we are no longer giving in to those sins that want to deceive us into doing them.

I do not want to spend too much time on this because I think you understand the parallel. The problems in Hebrews are very similar, if not the same, to the church's problems today. If the problems are the same, then the solutions are also the same, because we are talking spiritual principles here that are at work. They always work the same. "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today, and forever." God does not change. His purpose does not change, and the manner of life and the instruction does not change ever. His advice is consistent. So what Paul advises these Hebrews to do, we should also take to heart and apply.

Paul uses the first ten chapters to show how superior, how much better the new way is than the old way. He goes through and talks about how Jesus is far superior to Moses. Jesus is far superior to Aaron. Jesus' sacrifice is far superior to animal sacrifices. Everything about the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant. Everything is *better*. And then chapter 11 illustrates faith, which is the basis for the way of life that we live. Habakkuk 2:4 says, "The just shall live by faith." And then Paul quotes that again here in Hebrews 10:38, "The just shall live by faith," and then he expands on that by showing us examples of faith from the Old Testament, encouraging us, that "Look! These guys did it. They applied faith in their lives, and God has reserved them for the first resurrection which we too are striving for, and if we also live by faith, we can have the same reward. We will make it to the same goal they were striving for with all their being."

Then we have the encouraging word in Hebrews 11:39-40, that they have not yet reached their ultimate goal, because God has provided for us, that they should not reach it before we do. We will all reach it at the same time in the resurrection. They are waiting in their graves for us to complete our course. You get the impression as we leave chapter 11, the ideas in the mind or in the air, just kind of just floating there, that it is up to you now to make it. God has done everything that He can, and now it is up to you.

Then he gives this advice in chapters 12 and 13. Before he gets to the specifics of his advice, Paul uses chapter 12 to show the stakes and the parameters of our mission here at the end. He reminds us of the ones who have already proven themselves. He describes how God works with us. He also describes how some have fallen. He describes too some of the glories that are there before us, and he does not want to leave this out. He also describes some of the penalties that are ahead if we fail. So he wants to remind them of these things, and we must be reminded of these things if we want to finish our course. As is typical of the apostles, he gives it to us straight; does not mince words.

Let us read chapter 12, verses 1 and 2 and get a start into this.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Very inspiring words to begin his advice to us. From the examples that we have just seen in chapter 11, not to mention of course what Jesus Himself went through—His life and His death—we can see that success is so possible. These were men and women just like us, that we are assured that they made it. They completed their course, and now they are like a cloud, a gathering of witnesses around us; not literally, but that is the figure, that they are just waiting there for us to cross the finish line, and we are to be encouraged by them, like they are shouting in the stands, "Come on! You can make it! It's only a little while longer."

Of course, there is Jesus there waiting there at the finish line. He not only started the race, He finished the race, and He is part of the package of Him and His Father, that are going to make us able to finish that race. We are supposed to look up to Him at the finish line. "You made it. Your servants made it. I can make it too, because of the joy that's there at the finish line." He saw that too, that His Father did the same for Him, and He was willing to go through *anything* to get there, even the death of the cross, and the shame of the cross.

So He says, "Since success is so possible, what's holding us back? Get rid of whatever that is that's tripping us up, that's weighting us down—that baggage that we have." The idea here too is that in those days they ran naked in the Olympics. They had *nothing* to hold them back, or entangle their feet. They ran in the "altogether." So we too must strip ourselves figuratively—please!—of anything that would cause us even to slow down, and let us run it. Run as fast and as hard as we can, because we can finish.

What this is talking about is repentance. Let us repent of those sins that are causing us to turn aside from the course. Let us get back in the race. This is getting back to square one. Let us strip it off, get rid of it, and start chugging. Or as they used to say, "Keep on truckin'."

Hebrews 12:3-7 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

Obviously it is not talking about today. There are lots of fathers who do not chasten their sons.

Hebrews 12:8-10 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few day chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

He has a much *higher* reason for doing this to us.

Hebrews 12:11-13 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore [because we have been trained by this chastening] strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Question: Have we not been chastened? Is that not what this scattering is? The chastening of God to bring us back to repentance? To bring us back to Him, that we have not had to face real physical persecution? And it is a good thing, because we have not been able to handle it. We were too weak. We would have given in. We would have recanted. So God had to chasten us, toughen us up, give us discipline, spank our fannies, so that we can endure what is ahead.

These are the end times, remember? Remember all those terrible things that Jesus said would come to pass at the end of the age? There would be *GREAT* tribulation, as Mr. Armstrong would say, and it is not going to be a cake walk. Now not all of us will face physical persecution, or martyrdom, and I sincerely hope none of us will. I would much rather hope that God counts us worthy to be spared it.

But, we all have to be ready to face it just in case He wants us to witness for Him, and say, "My beloved son [or daughter] did what Jesus did," because what Jesus did means that we may have to do the same thing. It says earlier in the book that He was made as a man so He could suffer as a man, so

that He could go through all the things that we have to go through, so that He would be a faithful High Priest. So if He had to do it, we may be called upon to do it too.

Now we look at this scattering as some terrible thing, and yes, it is very unfortunate that God had to bring it upon us, but if we can see beyond it like God does, it will produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness. It has brought us up short and awakened us. It has made us reaffirm our beliefs, and made us commit to living them purely, hopefully once again. It has made us "walk the walk," not just "talk the talk." It has made us recognize what is truly important, which is our relationship with God. It has brought us up short from drifting.

These are all good things, are they not? Good things, that they have brought us back to God, and hopefully the fruit of that will be salvation, because we were in danger of losing that, neglecting it, hardening our heart. So God's discipline is good, is it not? That is what Paul says here. Knowing that God is behind this chastening should make it a little easier to take. It should make all the difference in the world. Chastening is not to defeat us, but to strengthen us, to heal us, to invigorate us, to motivate us, and set us back on the straight path to His Kingdom.

Hebrews 12:14-17 Pursue peace with all men, and holiness without which no one will see the LORD, looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Once we are headed in the right direction we can begin to start doing these things, pursuing peace with all men, learning to live at peace with each other. And then once we are on the right path, we can strive to be holy. If we do not do these things like he says, we will never qualify—"without which we won't see the Lord." So we have got to be doing these things. But while we are at it, we have to watch, to be careful, or to see to it. Some translations put it, "for looking diligently." We have to see to it that nothing distracts us from the goal. We have to be careful that we do not let some offense or disagreement derail us or defile us and make us lose out on eternal life.

I personally think that this is one of the most common problems that we have in the church today. So many are letting a slight offense, or an opinion on something, a pet doctrine, maybe a pet twig would be a better way of putting it, become so big that they lose all sense of proportion. What does it do? It eventually drives them away from fellowship and from God.

Do you realize that this is what Esau did? He did not see the importance of the birthright in comparison to one measly pot of beans. We look at that and just shake our heads and say, "How could he be so dense? He had billions of dollars, millions of square miles of land. Billions and billions of dollars worth of blessings just from the natural resources that he could have handed on to his descendants, and he gave it all up for a cup of soup."

So which is more important? Eternal life? Or an apology from one of your brethren who you claim has offended you? Are you going to let the lack of an apology put you in the Lake of Fire because you get a root of bitterness in you? Now it is important that if there is an offense, that the other person apologize. But that is out of your hand. Jesus says, "Forgive seventy times seven," which means *always forgive*.

Which has more value? The Kingdom of God? Or being absolutely correct as to when the new moon starts? I am serious. Is that really important? Is it so important that you would drive yourself away from the rest of the church? Think about it. There are twigs that the Bible does not make any stand on, and it is *your* opinion versus somebody else's opinion. Are you going to let an opinion stand between *you* and the Kingdom of God? I do not care if you are right! It can cause a root of bitterness in *you*. "Nobody will listen to me. I'm going to go and sit in the corner."

I am serious. People act like this, and God *hates* it, because it is driving His church apart. It is not worth a hill of beans. Why do we let things like that get between us and each other? Us and God? It is terrible, brethren. We think we are so important. We think what we think is so right. It is all a bunch of baloney! It does not square with the truth of God.

I did not mean to spend so much time there, but I want you to see it. Laodicean means "Judgment of the people." Did you know that? They think their judgment is *higher* than God's, and it is stupid. They do not have His priorities. They do not understand what is important. He says, "I'll *drag* you through that tribulation unless you repent of your highmindness." He spits them out of His mouth. So do not let your opinion or your feelings get in the way of God working out your salvation.

Do you know what it says here about Esau? He let his stomach get between him and the birthright, and even though he cried his eyes out, there was no changing history. The deed was done. If we allow our opinions to get too high and mighty, if we allow our feelings to drag us into the ditch, we may make our situation irrevocable. Do not be like Esau, a profane person. He could not tell what was holy from what was unholy, and he lost it all for a cup of soup. Pretty idiotic. So get your priorities straight.

Hebrews 12:18-24 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or thrust through with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

Do you understand the difference? It is not like it was. Those people that surrounded Mount Sinai when the law came were terrified at the power of God. But it is much greater for us. We come to Mount Zion, to the very throne of God. The stakes there at Mount Sinai was physical death if they touched that mountain. The stakes for us is eternal death. The goal is much higher, but the penalties are much higher too.

This comes right after this thing about Esau. He did not get the priorities straight. Did not see the difference between the way it was and the way it is, because we are under the New Covenant. There is no comparison between how the people under the Old Covenant could *not* approach God, as compared to how we can approach right to His very throne. Now we can freely come before Him in

prayer. We can have a relationship with Him based on love and reverence and faith; not sheer terror. Do you understand how much we have been given? This is what we are supposed to compare with that pot of soup.

Hebrews 12:25-29 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. [And listen to this whammy:] For our God is a consuming fire.

Let us put the cap on what I have been saying here. Do not reject God, because if you do you are going to get shaken. The only thing that is not going to be shaken is the Kingdom of God—and you had better be there. It is our only place of refuge. And so he says, "Let us have grace." Maybe the better way of saying that is, "Let's be grateful for what God has given us," and in this thankfulness, in this appreciation, we can then serve God with the appropriate attitude, with reverent and godly fear.

Let us just summarize quickly. Chapter 12. There are four points here. Here is general advice.

Point 1. Remember that others have qualified before us, so get rid of sin. Get back in the race. This should be an encouragement.

Point 2. Remember that God's discipline is for our ultimate good, to strengthen us for the times that are ahead.

Point 3. Remember that God has given us every advantage for success, especially a relationship with Him. That is the most important thing, and so do not get distracted by something that is not of that priority.

Point 4. Remember the consequences, should we fail.

These are the things that should be going through our minds. It is practical advice.

So once he has laid the groundwork and reminded us of a few fundamental principles, he can now go on to the more practical things. These are things that we can do, actions that we can take, but I want to give a caution on this as well. Just because you do these things it is not enough. How many people have served in the church only to become a deacon? What was their reason for doing it? They coveted the office of a deacon. I do not know. There is an attitude that can go along with these practical things that can get in the way of them actually doing us any good.

Let us go to Matthew 23. This is probably best seen in the Pharisees which Christ castigated up and down because they did all those things that they were instructed to do, but their heart was not right. That is why Paul, in chapter 12, said those things, so that we could get our heart right, so that when we do these practical things we are doing them for the right reason.

Matthew 23:27-28 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

See what I mean, by doing is not enough? The attitude has to be right in order for the action to produce what they are supposed to produce, the fruit that will lead to righteousness, and eventually salvation. These actions can become mere rituals, mere hypocritical works if they are not accompanied by real character and humility. As it says in another place, all our works must be done out of a pure heart; not for gain, not to feel good about ourselves, not because they are required, but because we want to do good and to help, because they are part of our character. All these things are aspects of *agape* love, which is entirely selfless and outgoing. There is not anything in it to get for the self.

Ten Points on Hebrews Chapter 13:

Point 1: Show Brotherly Love to One Another

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.

This is *philadelphia* love. Love of the brethren. In many ways all the rest of these pieces of advice stem from this one command. They are all facets of showing love for one another.

I Peter 1:22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.

I Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 15:12-13 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

John 15:17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

How many times does He have to tell us, brethren? This love is warm and affectionate, but it has an edge of sacrifice on it, just putting others ahead of ourselves and looking out for *their* good before our own. Only if we do this will we make a true witness for God. Only by this will men see that we are truly Christian, that they will know that we are His disciples.

Point 2: Be Hospitable

Hebrews 13:2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

I Peter 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

Some people can do it out of a sense of requirement. "Well, I've gotta have them over. Well, if we have to, I might as well get something ready. Maybe they don't like hamburgers. I don't know."

Be hospitable, even to strangers. You have to be careful. This is not God's world. In the Roman world people avoided the inns if they could, and so they would go to peoples' houses if they were traveling. This is what happened in Genesis with Abraham and the three angels. He entertained them "as they were traveling through." He was hospitable to them. Lot did the same thing when the angels came to Sodom, and he brought them in and had them stay with him.

I am not saying that angels will be around testing you whether you are hospitable, but the idea is, get to know the brethren. They are strangers to you in many cases, because we have been scattered all over and brought together in a different mixture this time, and we need to get to know one another as well as we can before we can really start loving one another. So get to know each other outside of just Sabbath services. Be hospitable. Serve.

Point 3: Remember those who are undergoing trials, as if you are in their moccasins.

Hebrews 13:3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also.

Not only be sympathetic to them, but have empathy for them. See, sympathy is one thing. Empathy is actually *feeling* their pain, knowing what they are going through, and the idea here is that you may be going through something soon, because you are in the body also, are you not? This could both mean that you are in the church, and trials are going to come upon those who are God's and Christ's disciples. It could also mean that you are physical too. You are in a body now, and the same aches and pains and trials and things come upon you just as easily as it comes upon those people who are going through them now, so you should be emphatic toward them, because what you give is what you are going to get.

It could be those who are sick, those who are alone. We are scattered. They do not have chances to fellowship very well, at least. Look at Sylvia Donahue all by herself up there in New Hampshire. Erwin is up there in Quebec. Many others, ones and twos, around the country that you could pray for, that you could fellowship with, to help them through this trial of scattering. Whatever it is, sacrifice a little time or money or effort, or whatever it takes, for their good, because you could be in their shoes very quickly.

Point 4: Strengthen Your Marriage

Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

My synopsis of this is *strengthen your marriage*. Love your neighbor as yourself. Who is your closest neighbor? Your mate. It may be that God will judge us more by this relationship than by any other, because now your true colors are going to show with the one that you have been shackled to for so many years. They know you inside and out.

Is your marriage a God-plane relationship? It should be. Are you laying down your life for your mate? If you will not do it for her or for him, you are surely not going to do it for the person down the road, because supposedly you love that one next to you more than that one down the road. Does your mate see God forming in you? Oooh! Scary question. When your mate looks at you does he see the characteristics of Jesus Christ transforming you even now? Good question. Is your marriage any more close to Ephesians 5:22-33? A good standard to check out. Get this one right—No. 4, and your other relationships will fall right into place.

Point 5: Watch Out for Materialism

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Revelation 3:17-18 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' [And God says, *Whoa, Nellie!*]*—*and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire; . . . and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see [how wretched you really are]."

This is a particular weakness of the Laodicean condition, simply because we live amid so much wealth. It is so easy to become wealthy in our society. You may not think so, but we just found out this week that there are just hundreds of millionaires in Charlotte. They were broadcasting it on the news—"You'd be surprised. Your next door neighbor may be a millionaire." They do all kinds of things, from janitorial work to banking. If you work hard in the United States of American, you can get rich beyond your wildest dreams, and the people in the church say, "Oh boy! I'd like for myself a piece of that! And you know what happens? It drives them right away from God, because they want it so much. Ah! the money. We can have so many good things. We can repair the house. No. Let's dump this house and get a million dollar one up on Lake Norman."

No. This admonition does not mean remain poor. It is back to where Esau was again. Understand the value, the relative value between wealth and the Kingdom of God. What is more important? It is more important to be content with the blessings that God has given us, because God knows what is good for us, whether it is food, or clothing, or a house, or protection, or whatever it is. God has given us what we need. So let us be content with that, and work with what we have got, and what He says here, we can base our contentment on the absolute surety of God's faithfulness toward us.

God will not forsake us. He has told us, He has promised us that He is going to be there for us. We do not have to worry about raiment. We do not have to worry about food. Remember, Jesus says, "Well, God takes care of the fields. He takes care of the sparrows." Will He not do the same for us who are His very children? Since He has promised us these things, and we know that God is faithful, we can be content that God has given us exactly what we need.

So let us not get caught up in covetousness or materialism. That is why we can boldly say, "God is with me. What harm can come to me that God and I can't handle together, that isn't good for me in the long run? And if it happens, it happens. We'll work on it. We'll solve it, because God is looking out for me, and only good can happen to those whom He loves and whom He has called."

Point 6: Obey the Ministry and Be Submissive

Hebrews 13:7-8 Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Hebrews 13:17 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.

Today many people argue over these two verses, verses 7 and 17, because they do not like the words *rule over*, *obey*, and *submit*. They sound harsh and dictatorial to our modern sensitivities. However, if you look at the sense of the passages rather than the specific individual meanings of the Greek words, you will see that it means, "Consider the lives of your leaders, and follow them, trying to make their job just a little bit easier." Is that so difficult? I will concede that the word *rule over* means *leader*. If you look it up in a modern translation, most often it says *leader*, not some harsh dictator that is cramming whatever down your throat. His way of doing things.

But the idea here remember, is "love of the brethren." Your leaders are brethren too, and so Paul is saying, "Look to them for an example. Follow their conduct. Jesus Christ hasn't made a mistake in putting them there as your leaders. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. Right? His law is the same. The way that He works is the same. So if you see a leader doing what Jesus says, then follow him, and submit to the teaching, because it's not him saying "Do this," and "Do that." It's God saying, This is My way. Walk ye in it." He is only a mouth for God, and he represents what God is trying to teach.

Let me explain this by going to I Peter 5. The Bible always explains this better than I do.

I Peter 5:1-4 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers [leaders; those who watch over everybody], not by constraint but willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

The same thing, but from the other angle. Now we have both sides of the coin here. The laity is to be submissive and considerate of the leaders. They are supposed to consider what the leaders are doing, and follow that which is good. Pretty simple. Submit to the teaching, because it is not the minister teaching, it is God teaching. Right? If it squares with "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever," it is right.

And then the ministers have to make sure that from their end they' ae doing it right, serving as overseers, not by constraint, not because they have to, but willingly. Not for dishonest gain. Not to

line their pockets; but eagerly wanting to help, for whatever reward that comes. It does not matter. Not to lord it over people, but to be an example. So we have both sides here. The minister's job is difficult enough without it being made tougher by intransigent brethren. On the other hand, the minister's job should try to make it as easy for the brethren to do what's right, by their own example.

Point 7: Avoid Strange Doctrines

Hebrews 13:9 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.

II Timothy 2:14-26 Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their sense and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Here you find that Paul had the same problems there, that he admonished Timothy not to get involved in them. It is useless. It is vain. It distracts us away from the good things—the faith, the love, and the serving one another. So food here may stand for any physical work by which someone hopes to gain God's favor. He says that is not it. It is not these physical works that are going to save us. It is God's grace. So do not get entangled in these things where there is disputes over this and that, like sugar. Food's spiritual value is not very high, and what he is talking about here is that this piece of advice covers anything that distracts us from the real meat of salvation. It is not worth it.

Point 8: Come Out of This World

Hebrews 13:10-14 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

There is a definite division between us and the unconverted, and he uses the idea of the church versus Judaism. Judaism in this case stands for the world, and Jesus repudiated Judaism, and was sacrificed

outside the city of Jerusalem, which in this case stands for the Judaistic system. So Paul says, "Let us go where Christ went, and repudiate that system from which we're coming out," or supposedly have come out. So, let us leave the world.

Zechariah 2:6-10 "Up, up! Flee from the land of the north," says the LORD; "for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven," says the LORD. "Up, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon." For thus says the LORD of hosts: "He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. For surely I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me. Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the LORD.

This tells us to flee from Babylon. He does say here that if we do go about this, we will probably end up being abused for it. But that is part of the program, just like Jesus was abused. He died, because He went outside the camp.

Point 9: Pray Without Ceasing

Hebrews 13:15 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.

Hebrews 13:18-19 Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

I Thessalonians 5:17-18 Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

I Thessalonians 5:25 Brethren, pray for us.

This is a common theme running through Hebrews, that we have access now to God, and this access, through prayer, gives us such an advantage and will give us such power and help when we need it. So use this tool, because we need it. "Be watchful in your prayers," it says in one place. I want to go to that one.

I Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

Prayer is a major spoke in the wheel here. It is even more important as we draw closer to the end.

Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

This says pretty much the same thing. It gives us so many benefits, not the least of which is peace, which as we draw closer to the end of this age we're going to need. Peace between your ears I'm talking about. Contentment, and knowing that we are on the side of a faithful God.

Point 10: Do Acts of Kindness and Charity

Hebrews 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Love the brethren. This gets back to the first one.

Doing good and sharing is a primary aspect of showing love for one another.

Acts 2:42-47 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

This shows that right after the day of Pentecost this was the attitude that they had, and the behavior they showed. This is the ideal we are trying to get back to. They had everything in common and they shared with one another. They were not grasping onto their worldly possessions, but willing to divvy them out as needed.

Let us conclude now:

Hebrews 13:20-21 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, 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.

If we do these things, God will be able to work in us and complete us for the entering of His Kingdom.