

Let Brotherly Love Continue



Week Thirteen

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Hebrews 13

ONE ANOTHER

Hebrews 13 presents the apostle's concluding admonition: "Let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1). He has affirmed throughout the epistle that we are of the household of the King—the brothers and sisters of the High Priest Jesus. The author does not conceive of the audience only as a group of individuals who work on their salvation in a one-to-one relationship with Jesus, but as a family, or household, saved together. Paul has characterized the work of Jesus for us as "brotherly love": He was "not ashamed to call them brothers" (Heb. 2:11, ESV). Thus, believers should do for one another what Jesus did for them.

Throughout the letter, brotherly love involved "exhorting one another" so that no one would fall short of the grace of God (Heb. 3:13; 10:24, 25; 12:15–17). In chapter 13 it involves numerous elements: hospitality (Heb. 13:2); visiting and supporting prisoners and those who have been mistreated (Heb. 13:3); honoring marriage (Heb. 13:4); avoiding covetousness (Heb. 13:5, 6); remembering and obeying the leaders of the church (Heb. 13:7–17); and praying for the author himself (Heb. 13:18, 19).



inScribe

Write out Hebrews 13 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Hebrews 13:1–8. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.

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Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?



Memorize your favorite verse in Hebrews 13. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

What more can we do for those who are in prison, whether church members or not?

In what practical ways can we strengthen our defenses against the two threats to brotherly love?



Read more at www.inverseible.org/heb13-3

OF VICES AND VIRTUES

Christianity was a wandering movement that often depended on the hospitality of both Christians and non-Christians. The instruction to “not forget” to show hospitality probably does not simply refer to the failure to think about taking someone in but about willful neglect.

Paul does not have in mind hospitality only for fellow believers. He reminds his readers that by entertaining strangers some have unwittingly entertained angels (Heb. 13:2). He probably had in mind the visit of the three men to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:2–15). Offering hospitality implies sharing possessions with another person and suffering with others, which is what Jesus did for us (Heb. 2:10–18).

Brotherly love toward those in prison implied not simply that believers remembered prisoners in their prayers but that they also provided relief through material and emotional support. There was a risk of willful neglect of prisoners. Those who provided material and emotional support to those condemned by society identified themselves with them. In some sense they became “partners” with them and made themselves vulnerable to social abuse (Heb. 10:32–34).

Paul’s exhortation uses images and language to encourage the readers in regard to prisoners. First, the author evokes the readers’ own support for their incarcerated brethren in the past. They had become “companions” (NKJV) or “partners” to those who had been “publicly exposed to reproach and affliction” (Heb. 10:33, ESV). Second, the language of “mistreatment” echoes the example of Moses, who chose “rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Heb. 11:25, ESV). Finally, Paul captures the ideal of brotherly love. He reminds the readers that they “also are in the body” (Heb. 13:3, ESV). They share the same human condition and should treat others as they would like to be treated if they were in the same circumstances; that is, in prison. The people should, then, provide material and emotional support to prisoners, showing them that they are not abandoned.

Paul also warns the readers against sexual immorality and greed because they are two grave threats to brotherly love. In fact, New Testament authors and ancient moralists noted a connection between them.

Paul’s call to honor marriage implied the avoidance of anything that would belittle it. This avoidance included abstaining both from violation of the marriage oath and from unbiblical divorces (compare with Matt. 19:9). The exhortation to keep the marriage bed undefiled refers to avoiding the profanation of marriage through sexual relationships outside of marriage. The expression “fornicators” refers in the New Testament to every form of sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:9–11; 6:9; Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). In addition, Greco-Roman society was lax in regard to sexual ethics. A double standard was common; this allowed men license in their sexual relationships as long as they were discreet. Paul warns, however, that God will judge adulterers. Believers should not let social conventions establish their own ethical standards.

“Love of money” was one of the main categories of vices in the Greco-Roman world. In fact, in another letter Paul referred to “love of money” as the source of all evils (1 Tim. 6:10).

The defense against this vice is an attitude that Paul encourages in several epistles. First, they should “be content” with the things they have (also 2 Cor. 9:8; Phil. 4:11, 12). Furthermore, Christians should believe and embrace God’s promise that God would “never leave . . . nor forsake” them (Heb. 13:5). This promise was given at several places and moments to His people and is available to us today (Gen. 28:15; Deut. 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5; 1 Chron. 28:20). Believers, then, are invited to respond to God’s promise with the words of Psalm 118:6 (ESV): “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” This reference to Psalm 118 is appropriate because the psalmist expressed there his confidence in God, despite the suffering inflicted upon him by unbelievers.

BEWARE OF THE STRANGE

Hebrews 13:7–17 contains an exhortation to respect and obey church leaders. It begins with an invitation to “remember” those leaders of the past who spoke the word of God to them, and it closes with a call to “obey” the leaders in the present (Heb. 13:17). The leaders of the past are most likely those who first preached the word and established their faith. The call to “remember” them does not simply refer to a mental exercise of recollection nor to an external tribute honoring them. Paul explains that they are to “remember” them by considering the outcome of their conduct and by imitating their faith.

For Paul, the greatest act of remembrance and praise is emulation. In this way, Paul has added these leaders to the list of faithful heroes whom believers should carefully consider. This list includes the heroes of faith of Hebrews 11 and Jesus, the consummate example of faith, in Hebrews 12. The author further notes that Jesus is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8, ESV). He stands in stark contrast with false teachers who change with time and whose teachings become “various” and “strange” (Heb. 13:9).

The call to remember the leaders in Hebrews 13:7 is restated in more forceful terms at the end of the section. Believers are exhorted to obey the leaders, because they watch out for their souls. The leaders are described here as pastors who are in charge of the spiritual well-being of the congregation, their flock, and who will give an account to God for their spiritual state (see also 1 Pet. 5:1–4; 1 Cor. 3:10–15). Certainly, too, the idea should apply to all our church leaders, as well as to all levels of the denomination today.

The context also suggests that these leaders are under-shepherds who serve under Jesus, “the great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20). The combination of care and faithfulness from the leaders and obedience or trust from the members will result in joy. This may mean that the leaders will be able to serve the congregation with joy, or that they will give an account of the congregation to God with joy and not with grief.

Paul continues to describe the relationship between false teachings and foods, touched on in Hebrews 13:9, which probably does not refer to the distinction between clean and unclean foods. Why?

First, Paul does not seem concerned in the epistle with the distinction between clean and unclean foods. We know from Acts 15 that the early Christian church affirmed both that believers are saved by grace (Acts 15:7–11) and that they should continue to observe some food regulations (Acts 15:19, 20). The distinction between clean and unclean foods and other biblical regulations are not opposed to grace. In fact, Paul argues that the new covenant has put the law in the heart (Heb. 8:10–12). What the author makes very clear, however, is that animal sacrifices and the Levitical priestly mediation in the sanctuary have been superseded by the superior sacrifice and priestly mediation of Jesus (Heb. 8:4, 5; 10:1–18).

Second, the context suggests that Paul is criticizing the audience for not abstaining from certain foods but for partaking of them with the hope of somehow obtaining grace or merit (Heb. 13:9). He is probably warning against participating in Jewish ritual meals that were celebrated as an extension of the animal sacrifices in the temple and which were supposed to provide spiritual benefits, or grace. But grace is not mediated through these meals; grace and salvation comes only through the sacrifice and priestly mediation of Jesus Christ. Believers “have an altar” (Heb. 13:10), the cross of Christ, from which they alone can eat (John 6:47–58).

According to Hebrews, grace comes from the throne of God (Heb. 4:16). This grace, mediated through Christ, is an “anchor,” “sure and steadfast,” which is the basis of the Christian’s hope (Heb. 6:19, 20; compare with 4:16). It is this grace that we receive through faith in the sacrifice of Christ, which provides stability and assurance to our hearts. When the heart has been “established” in this way, it will not be “carried about” by strange new doctrines (Heb. 13:9), that would cause it to “drift away” from God (Heb. 2:1).



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

Why is the idea of anything that we do “adding” to this sacrifice contrary to the gospel and the grace that is found in Jesus?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/heb13-4

Let Brotherly Love Continue



What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Genesis 18:2–15

Romans 12:13

Ephesians 5:3–5

1 Peter 5:1–4

Titus 1:8; 1 Peter 4:9

Luke 16:10–18

1 Corinthians 5:1



What other parables come to mind in connection with Hebrews 13?

Review your memorized verse from Hebrews 13.

GO TO JESUS OUTSIDE THE CAMP

The place outside the gate was the most impure of the whole camp. The carcasses of the sacrificial animals were burned there (Lev. 4:12). Lepers were also excluded from the camp (Lev. 13:46), and blasphemers and other criminals were executed there (Lev. 24:10–16, 23; 1 Kings 21:13; Acts 7:58). These regulations presupposed that the presence of God was within the camp. Anything that was impure was cast outside, because God was unwilling to see any “unclean” or “indecent” thing in it (Num. 5:3; Deut. 23:14).

Jesus suffered on the cross outside Jerusalem (John 19:17–20). This emphasizes the shame that was cast upon Him (Heb. 12:2). He was officially condemned as one who had “blasphemed the Name” and therefore was repudiated by Israel and executed outside the wall (Mark 14:63, 64; see Lev. 24:11, 16). Jesus was cast outside the camp as a “shameful,” “unclean,” or “indecent” thing (Heb. 12:2). Paul, however, exhorts believers to follow Jesus outside the gate, enduring the shame that He endured (Heb. 12:2; 13:13). This was also the path Moses followed, who chose to bear “the reproach of Christ” instead of the treasures of Egypt (Heb. 11:26).

Paradoxically, Hebrews suggests that God’s presence is now outside the camp. The action of following Jesus outside the camp means not only “bearing His reproach,” or shame, but also going “forth to Him” (Heb. 13:13), just as those Israelites who “sought the Lord” went “outside the camp” in the desert when Moses removed God’s tent from the camp after the golden calf controversy (Exod. 33:7). This account suggests that the rejection of Jesus by unbelievers also implies the rejection of God, as Israel did in the golden calf apostasy (Exodus 32, 33). Thus, the path of suffering and shame is also the path to God and true worship.

Paul invites readers to follow Jesus as “the author and finisher” of their faith (Heb. 12:2), implicitly inviting them also to consider their present sufferings as a momentary discipline that will yield “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11). They are leaving behind a rebellious city or camp in search of “the city that is to come,” whose architect is God (Heb. 13:14, ESV; 11:10, 16).



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Meditate on Hebrews 13 again
and look for where Jesus is.



What does it mean for you
to follow Jesus “outside the
camp”?

How do you see Jesus
differently or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to
seeing Jesus in this way?



Read more at
www.inverseible.org/heb13-6

Let Brotherly Love Continue



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

—————→
After this entire lesson's study, how
can you apply its principles?

Which specific people must you
manifest this divine love to?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
www.inverseible.org/heb13-7

LOVE DIVINE

“After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the disciples went forth to proclaim a living Saviour, their one desire was the salvation of souls. They rejoiced in the sweetness of communion with saints. They were tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth's sake. In their daily association with one another, they revealed the love that Christ had enjoined upon them. By unselfish words and deeds they strove to kindle this love in other hearts.

“Such a love the believers were ever to cherish. They were to go forward in willing obedience to the new commandment. So closely were they to be united with Christ that they would be enabled to fulfill all His requirements. Their lives were to magnify the power of a Saviour who could justify them by His righteousness.

“But gradually a change came. The believers began to look for defects in others. Dwelling upon mistakes, giving place to unkind criticism, they lost sight of the Saviour and His love. They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies, more particular about the theory than the practice of the faith. In their zeal to condemn others, they overlooked their own errors. They lost the brotherly love that Christ had enjoined, and, saddest of all, they were unconscious of their loss. They did not realize that happiness and joy were going out of their lives and that, having shut the love of God out of their hearts, they would soon walk in darkness. . . .

“Divine love makes its most touching appeals to the heart when it calls upon us to manifest the same tender compassion that Christ manifested. That man only who has unselfish love for his brother has true love for God. The true Christian will not willingly permit the soul in peril and need to go unwarned, uncared for. He will not hold himself aloof from the erring, leaving them to plunge farther into unhappiness and discouragement or to fall on Satan's battleground.

“Those who have never experienced the tender, winning love of Christ cannot lead others to the fountain of life. His love in the heart is a constraining power, which leads men to reveal Him in the conversation, in the tender, pitiful spirit, in the uplifting of the lives of those with whom they associate. Christian workers who succeed in their efforts must know Christ; and in order to know Him, they must know His love. In heaven their fitness as workers is measured by their ability to love as Christ loved and to work as He worked.

“‘Let us not love in word,’ the apostle writes, ‘but in deed and in truth.’ The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within. It is the atmosphere of this love surrounding the soul of the believer that makes him a savor of life unto life and enables God to bless his work.

“Supreme love for God and unselfish love for one another—this is the best gift that our heavenly Father can bestow. This love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power. The unconsecrated heart cannot originate or produce it. Only in the heart where Jesus reigns is it found. ‘We love Him, because He first loved us.’ In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the ruling principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, and ennobles the affections. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the life and sheds a refining influence on all around.” (White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 547, 548, 550, 551.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



What is true brotherly love—its characteristics, causes, and results?

How would you differentiate it from false brotherly love?

How are our hearts strengthened by God's grace?

What are the ways that contemporary society undermines sexual purity and, at the same time, feeds the human love of money?

What can you do to strengthen or improve the leader-member relationship in your church, as well as with leaders around the world?

Why is it important to remember that God is leading us as a group? What are my responsibilities to the group? What can I expect from the group?