

PRESSING ON/TAKING FLIGHT  
HEBREWS 13  
WEEK 22

When we came to know Jesus, the Holy Spirit gave us each at least one spiritual gift. Those gifts are found in Romans 12 and in I Corinthians 12.

Romans 12:3-8

<sup>3</sup> For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. <sup>4</sup> For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. <sup>6</sup> Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Grace – divine, undeserved favor – getting what we don’t deserve – from GOD. The Holy Spirit gives each believer the correct proportion of a spiritual gift – for faithful stewardship – so that each one receives what they need to fulfill their role in the body of Christ. (“Faith” is not saving faith but “faithful stewardship” – the kind and quantity required to use one’s own particular gift – for the profit of all [I Cor. 12:7]). The Holy Spirit distributes to each one individually as He wills (I Cor. 12:11).

The emphasis in each list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12 and in I Cor. 12 is the faithful use of the gifts. (gifts – God’s enablement). God has given each who has asked for forgiveness through the Messiah Jesus the best birthday – a new birth! God has given us the BEST gifts! AND, those gifts are for OTHERS – for those in the body of Christ – to equip one another!

In Matthew 25 we find Jesus’ parable of the talents. Jesus speaks of Himself as the man who goes on a journey – leaving his servants with responsibilities. Faithfulness is what He demands of them. We are to be faithful in serving Jesus – with those gifts the Holy Spirit has given us.

I Peter 4:10 - <sup>10</sup> As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”

Therefore, we each need to reach out to others. No matter what your trial, circumstance, hardship, God has given you a spiritual gift to use for the equipping of fellow believers for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Hebrews 13:1-6

*Let brotherly love continue.* <sup>2</sup> *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.* <sup>3</sup> *Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.*

<sup>4</sup> *Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*

<sup>5</sup> *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>6</sup> *So we may boldly say:*

*“The LORD is my helper;  
I will not fear.  
What can man do to me?”*<sup>[b]</sup>

We have seen throughout the study that the author is a master of both the OT and the NT. We have also seen his care and concern and love for the readers which truly shines through in Hebrews 13. These are the words of a loving parent that wants nothing less than the best for their child. God wants this for the readers of this short letter – and for us as His children.

And so we read, “Let brotherly love continue.” Ancient Greek word, “philadelphia” - love of brothers or sisters, brotherly love. Operative word – “continue.” We’ve read about evidences of love in the community of the readers of this letter.

John reminds us, “God is love” (I John 4:8).

I John 3:16-18 - <sup>16</sup> By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. <sup>17</sup> But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

<sup>18</sup> My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Hebrews 13:2 – love will entertain strangers.

In the first century, there were no motel chains. Travelers had to depend on the willingness of strangers to take them in. We can understand why hospitality was viewed as a virtue (I Peter 4:6-10). Entertaining strangers can open the door to unexpected blessing. Abraham and Lot welcomed strangers who were angels (messengers)! If we show hospitality, the one we entertain may prove to be a messenger from God to bring encouragement, strength, or assurance.

Hebrews 13:3 – What does “brotherly love” look like? It looks like identifying with the weak and oppressed. (Deut. 15:7-8; Psa. 82:3-4; Prov. 19:17). “Prisoners” – those who are mistreated.

“ . . . as if chained with them. . . .” carries the thought of both sympathy and identity. Believers are to share with the prisoner as though they themselves were prisoners.

As long as believers are confined in an earthly body, it is possible for each one to suffer either adversity or imprisonment. Therefore, they must be sympathetic.

James 2:2-6 gives us a glimpse into what was going on in the culture – that it was all too common even among believers to dismiss the poor and pander to the well-to-do.

Hebrews 13:4 – Why is the author addressing marriage and sexual intimacy within marriage? Marriage is the closest human relationship. Marriage speaks to the relationship between Christ and the Church – the Bridegroom and the bride. The author is reaffirming marriage as a divine arrangement because some of the readers might’ve drawn the conclusion that it would be wrong for a believer to marry. Some within the early church viewed celibacy to be holier than marriage.

If the readers lived in Rome or in some of the more notorious cities of the Mediterranean, they lived in a society in which chastity and honor in marriage were commonly disregarded. Sexual intimacy is only pure in the context that God intended: the context of a committed relationship between one man and one woman. Chastity in the bonds of marriage constitutes a strong witness for the Lord.

The author reminds the readers that we will all stand before God and give an account of our lives.

Hebrews 13:5-6 – being content with such things as you have. . . . This is given in light of the many readers who had forfeited all their worldly possessions for their faith. It would be easy for these believers to be discontented with their circumstances.

Rather than “without covetousness,” the Greek word means “not money-loving”. We are to bring our attitudes into conformity with the mind of Christ.

Our security is not found in material possessions, but in the Person Who promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deut. 31:6).

The word “leave” communicates the idea of loosing a hold, withdrawing the support rendered by a sustaining grasp.

The word “forsake” includes the idea of abandoning, deserting, or leaving one alone. The one forsaken would have no companion to stand beside him.

God has promised that He will neither withdraw His sustaining grasp that supports us, nor will He abandon us in conflict.

### Hebrews 13:7-9

<sup>7</sup> Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. <sup>9</sup> Do not be carried about<sup>[c]</sup> 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.*

The phrase “who rule over you” is an unfortunate translation. The Greek simply means “leaders.” We need to note how the verse describes spiritual leaders:

- They speak the word of God
- They provide an example of living by faith
- They demonstrate Christian maturity in their conduct

Here we see the description of “servant leadership.”

The author is telling the readers that they need to remember the example of those who taught them truth. These leaders presented a true message and displayed a godly example. The example of their servant leaders – and the example of the readers – is the unchanging example of Jesus.

Hebrews 13:8 – “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” He is the same in that He is eternally God; His purposes are the same; His goals are unchanging.

This unchangeableness is contrasted to human doctrine and teaching. . . .

Hebrews 13:9 – the author sounds the warning concerning false doctrines.

Allegiance to Christ, Who is unchanging, should result in clarity of doctrine.

The various and strange doctrines seem to deal with a return to Mosaic ceremonies and laws that were fulfilled in Jesus. The author warns the readers not to get caught up in externalism, in a works-righteousness, in practicing abstaining from certain foods.

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, Paul speaks to various and strange teachings as “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (I Tim. 4:1-3).

The believer’s heart is to be “established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them” (Heb. 13:9).

Believers are established by an understanding and appropriation of God’s undeserved approval of us, and not by an assumed approval gained through keeping a list of rules.

Hebrews 13:10-14

<sup>10</sup> *We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. <sup>11</sup> For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. <sup>12</sup> Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. <sup>13</sup> Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. <sup>14</sup> For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.*

These Jewish Christians had probably been branded as illegitimate by other Jewish people because they did not continue within the Levitical system. The author insists that the readers do have an altar - it is an altar to which those who insist on clinging to the Levitical system have no right. The fact that there were those who were continuing under the Levitical system demonstrated that they had not trusted in the Messiah. Jesus is our sin-bearer. He has born our sins. He is our altar. The sacrifice offered during the Day of Atonement could not be eaten by the priesthood. It had to be burned outside the camp (Lev. 16:27). Neither the priest nor the people could partake of the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement.

Jesus' sacrifice, His crucifixion was outside the camp and outside the gate. Outside the camp – the camp of Judaism. “Camp” – assembly of Israel.

God promised the Jewish people the New Covenant which is based on the shed blood of the Messiah. The copies and shadows which pointed to Messiah give way to the substance – the reality of the Messiah. In the Messiah, worship moves out of the Temple into life in the Messiah! Worship is servanthood, honoring God by caring for one another, sacrificial living and giving. It includes hospitality, identification from obsession with material things. It includes confidence in Christ's faithfulness. It is based on teaching that emphasizes God's love and blessing in the Messiah (which the OT teaches!)

The altar is Jesus!

Outside the gate – of gate of Jerusalem. When Jesus suffered death outside the gate on the cross, the veil in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The Levitical system was fulfilled in the Messiah! The author is telling the readers – and us – that as Jesus was taken outside Jerusalem to die, let's follow His example and “go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” The author is, again, telling the readers not to return to the Mosaic Covenant. Yes, they will indeed suffer persecution and reproach. If this going “outside” means experiencing rejection and reproach, we need to remember that it is the price Jesus paid for us. And, we are called to follow Him.

The word “for” in Hebrews 13:14 gives the readers – and us – another reason we are to go “outside” and separate ourselves from external rituals. The author is reminding the readers that they have the assurance of a permanent city that takes the place of the earthly Jerusalem. This is the city Abraham anticipated (Heb. 11:9-10). They are in the process of “receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28). On the basis of that expectation, they are to patiently endure.

#### Hebrews 13:15-16

*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.<sup>16</sup> But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

If the readers had been deceived by false teachers into thinking that without animal sacrifices they had nothing to offer to God and no acceptable worship to present to Him, the author reminds them that there are sacrifices which they can offer that are acceptable to God – and these sacrifices can be offered continuously.

“ . . . the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”

- We just don't praise God when circumstances are favorable – when we get a raise at work – we praise God when we're laid off from work as well. We don't just praise God when the test from the doctor comes back negative – we praise God for positive test results as well.
- “giving thanks to His name” – in the Greek it's “confessing His name. The Greek word for “confess” means “to acknowledge.” Praising God continually is acknowledging that God's hand is involved in our every experience. It is acknowledging that everything God brings into our lives is for our benefit – and for His glory!

“ . . . do good and . . . share”

- “Good” means “to make good” or “to do good.” We are to be sensitive to God's leading – to be used of Him to do whatever we can for others.
- “Share” means to “have in common.” The early Church met in homes. Believers met each other's needs.

The attitude that marks these sacrifices is – selflessness. “With such sacrifices God is well-pleased.”

#### Hebrews 13:17-19

*<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. <sup>19</sup> But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.*

In the Church it is just as important to have great followers as to have great leaders!

“Rule” should be translated “lead” or “guide”.

“Obey” means to “let yourself be persuaded or convinced.” No believer is to blindly obey. Every believer, however, is to maintain an attitude of openness to what leaders have to say – and to be Bereans – to compare the teaching to Scripture!

“Submissive” means to “submit to their authority” – to be responsive.

In the context – be eager to listen to your leaders and to learn – but take responsibility for your own choices. Leaders who serve such a flock “do so with joy and not with grief.”

Don’t forget to pray for your leaders!

#### Hebrews 13:20-21

<sup>20</sup> *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, <sup>21</sup> make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you<sup>[d]</sup> what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

The author reaffirms his confidence that the God of peace is able to meet their every need in their present trials. The reference to God as a God of peace is significant. He could have said, “The God of all power” – but he said “peace” because that was the readers’ greatest need. The God Who is able to grant them peace is the very God “Who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead.”

God created the universe. He redeemed Israel from bondage in Egypt. But, the climactic demonstration of the exceeding greatness of God’s power is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:19-20).

The words “brought up” emphasize the attaining of a glorious victory after suffering the defeat of death. He was brought up to become “that great Shepherd of the sheep.” He is a faithful Shepherd, exercising protective care over the flock to guard, to guide, to instruct, to supply every need they might have.

His work as a Shepherd is to “make you complete in every good work to do His will.” His will as revealed in this letter is to bring these believers to perfection, to maturity. And, God is at work in them, even through their sufferings, to accomplish that very purpose.

#### Hebrews 13:22-25

<sup>22</sup> *And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. <sup>23</sup> Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.*

<sup>24</sup> *Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.*

<sup>25</sup> *Grace be with you all. Amen.*

Response to any exhortation is not obligatory; it is optional. Therefore, the author closes with a strong appeal that those who have received this “word of exhortation” will not ignore it, dismiss it, or reject it; but that they will embrace it so that God, Who is at work in them to conform them to Christ, might accomplish His will in them.

“ . . . those from Italy” – this may suggest that there were many who had fled from Italy and were then in company with the author. Because of the persecution of the Jews in Rome under Claudius (Acts 18:2) – and with the persecution under Nero – many such as Priscilla and Aquila had fled from Rome and had settled in other parts of the empire. The author is making the point that there were other believers in other places who were undergoing severe persecutions.

“Grace be with you all.” God’s grace is sufficient for every need (Heb. 4:16) and is available. All believers are free to draw upon His grace to enable them to stand in the face of persecution and to progress steadily toward maturity with patient endurance. Therefore, let us cultivate in ourselves, and encourage others to strive for, a faith that endures by His Spirit.

Throughout this letter we have seen that the ultimate responsibility for bringing believers to maturity rests on Jesus and His ability to do what He has promised. The Christian’s responsibility is to forsake those things that would stand in the way of maturity and to willfully submit to Him. This two-fold formula is simple: our responsibility is to submit to Him in faith; His responsibility is to take us on to maturity.

The author of Hebrews devotes his final words to a theme he touched on repeatedly throughout the letter: love and service. He encourages his brothers and sisters in the Lord to see every relationship and every situation primarily as an opportunity to serve in the name of Jesus.

Two great problems in serving others are both problems of human nature, of focusing on our relationship with people instead of our relationship with Jesus. The first problem is that people will expect too much of you. The second problem – you will expect too much of them. Both problems are problems of unrealistic expectations. Expectations must be focused on Christ, not each other. He is the only One Who will consistently not let us down.

When we focus on serving the person, we are inevitably disappointed. And, we will disappoint them. Serving people for the sake of their gratitude is a guaranteed formula for disappointment.

The key is the personal relationship with Christ. The focus must not be on serving others or on being served. The focus must be on Jesus, on becoming so absorbed in the relationship with Him that every other thing is a response to our relationship. We don’t serve men; we serve God.

Have no expectations of men. Focus on the personal relationship with Him and there will be an overflow available for others.

Look to Christ alone for gratitude. If you serve Christ, then you will remember to look to Him for your approval, not to the milk of human sympathy. He will reward you as you labor for Him. He is the reward. The personal relationship with Jesus is the oasis



in the desert of human relations. When people begin to wear you down, let it remind you that you are not in the “overflow”. It is time to drink of Christ.

### QUESTIONS

What are some of the ways we can express “brotherly love continually”?

What is God’s prescription for contentment? Are you content? Why or why not?

What are some characteristics of a great follower?

How does the author recommend you use the benediction in Heb. 13:20-21?

What have you gained from the study of Hebrews?