

13. Concluding Exhortations

Chapter 12 ended with what is, perhaps, a summary exhortation for the entire book in Heb 12:28-29, "28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our 'God is a consuming fire.'" Our power in Christ rests on our knowledge that his kingdom is eternal. In that kingdom, we must worship only as he dictates and with the attitude that he requires. That God is a consuming fire should forever caution Christians that they should not take God casually in matters of faith and practice. A series of admonitions aimed at keeping Christians from falling away follow.

Exhortations to Do and to Think Righteously

Heb 12:1-3. 1 Keep on loving each other as brothers. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

This first series of exhortations aims at the Christians' attitude to one another and to strangers. To keep on loving one another harkens back to the statement in Heb 10: 24, "24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." In Gal 6:10, Paul speaks of our obligation to do good to all men, "10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." These strangers maybe angels. Finally, he admonishes us to remember those in prison and mistreated as if they were we. The writer has elaborated on this idea early in Heb 10:34, "34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions." The point made here is that those not imprisoned must empathize with those in prison.

A Moral Perspective

Heb 13:4-6. 4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

6 So we say with confidence,

"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

It is not enough for a Christians to be active in well doing, but they must avoid immorality and the things forbidden. Marriage is sacred, and all must honor it. To make this very clear, he speaks of the pure marriage bed. The sinful include adulterers and sexually immoral. The comparison with modern life is evident.

We must be free from the love of money. God gives us everything that we need. Paul expands this idea in 1 Tim 6:6-10:

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

As many have said, it is not money that destroys us but the love of money. With the Lord as our helper, what else can we need, and what can man do for me?

Remembering your Leaders

Heb 13:7. 7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

The leaders to be remembered here are most likely the preachers and evangelists, since they are

described as the ones “who spoke the word of God to you.” Consider the outcome of their life alludes to the necessity for preachers. Paul wrote in Rom 10:14, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” The Christian obligation toward preachers is also clear. Gal 6:6 teaches, “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.”

A Continual Sacrifice to God

Heb 13:8-15. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them. 10 We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. 12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

That Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever shows that the teaching never changes. Old timers used to say, “If anything is new, it is not true; if it is true, it is not new.” With this certitude of the gospel, strange teachings should never carry away Christians who hold to the single, unwavering truth of the gospel. Just as Jesus, we are out side the camp or city gate where Jesus suffered and shed his blood. But we, as he, have an enduring city that is to come.

Through Jesus we offer a sacrifice of praise, confess his name, do good to others, share with others, thus pleasing God.

Obeying Your Leaders

Heb 13:17. 17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The leaders spoken of here are the elders who are also bishops and pastors. These are those ordained to shepherd the flock of God. Paul speaks of the esteem owed to elders in 1 Tim 5:17, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching, “17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” The elders only message is the one that has been taught. Titus 1:8-11 teaches: “9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

Mutual Prayers and Final Requests

18 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. 19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

22 Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.

23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.

24 Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

25 Grace be with you all.