

Hebrews 13 • The Blessings of This Life

Introduction

It is important to keep in mind that the writer of Hebrews was addressing a very great problem in his day which actually still exists, that practitioners of Judaism who come to faith in Yeshua as their Messiah and Savior are threatened with the loss of everything – their friends, their material goods, their religious heritage, and even their families. To choose Christ, particularly in Eastern religions and cultures, often means being rejected by family, friends, and society. This is why after having explained the doctrinal truths of how Old Testament Judaism foreshadowed and is now replaced by New Testament Judaism (so to speak), the writer of Hebrews concludes with practical admonitions to reinforce that not only is nothing actually lost by trusting in Christ, but there are actually spiritual blessings for Christians in this life that more than compensate for worldly losses.

¹Let love of the brethren continue. ²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

⁴Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

[Read v.1-4]

Q: What is the spiritual blessing being expressed here?

A: The spiritual fellowship of love.

Q: What are the aspects of the fellowship of love that are expressed?

1. Love for God's people, or "love of the brethren". (v.1)
2. Love for others, or "strangers". (v.2)
3. Love for the oppressed, or "prisoners". (v.3)
4. Love in personal relationships, or "marriage". (v.4)

Q: Why would this be a big deal where life in this world is concerned?

A: For the world's part it hates Christians (Jn. 15:17-27), but to the world the mark of a true Christian is biblical love (Jn. 13:35; 1 Jn. 3:16; 1 Th. 4:9).

Point: Biblical love as practiced by true Believers is both a personal spiritual blessing in this life while at the same time a visible testimony to the rest of the world. This is a powerful benefit to those who face losing the love of friends and family when making a decision for Christ, those bonds being replaced in the course of their new life in Christ.

Q: What is the greater meaning that "some have entertained angels without knowing it"?

A: The literal biblical examples are Abraham (Gen. 18) and Lot (Gen. 19:1), and there are examples of entertaining Christ Himself without knowing it in the men on the road to Emmaus. (Lk. 24:15). The greater teaching is that love of others is to be taken as seriously and considered just as important as love for Christ Himself.

"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

— Matthew 25:37–40

Q: What is the greater meaning of God's judgment of marital faithfulness?

A: Throughout Scripture a faithful marriage is equated to spiritual faithfulness. Biblical love is not defined by how one feels about someone, but whether or not they uphold the truth of God's Word in the course of those relationships.

Point: Christ's new commandment to "love one another, even as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34) is the fulfillment of the whole Law. One's love for God under the New Covenant is proven by how one loves others in accordance with God's Word and ways.

Application: The first benefit of life in Christ in this life is a spiritual fellowship of biblical love as expressed in the course of personal relationships and as a visible testimony to the rest of the world.

[Read v.5-6]

⁵Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"
⁶so that we confidently say,

"THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I
WILL NOT BE AFRAID.
WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"

Q: Why is there a warning to be "free from the love of money"?

A: It is not just a warning not to be covetous nor to desire the things of this world, but for those who may have given up everything for Christ it is an admonition not to look back at what was "lost" but to focus on what is gained.

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

— 1 Timothy 6:6

Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

— Luke 12:15

Q: What might be particularly powerful to 1st Century Jewish believers in the verse quoted in v.5? (Dt. 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5)

A: It is the same promise God gave to both Moses and Joshua who left everything behind in order to gain everything God laid before them. Going from Egypt to the Promised Land typifies going from the old life to the new life, an actual process all Believers go through. The adulterous generation that was not allowed entrance into the Promised Land was characterized as longing for the old life back in Egypt.

Q: Is this a promise of material riches to come in this present life?

A: No, the admonition is "being content with what you have" (v.5) and trusting God.

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

— Philippians 4:19

Q: Is the promise just limited to physical needs?

A: It extends to attacks from people. (v.6) God not only provides for our physical needs, but our personal, emotional, and spiritual ones as well.

Application: We can expect spiritual treasures in this life in knowing that when God's children are in the will of God and obedient to His Word and ways, they will never lack anything or be irreparably harmed.

⁷Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. ⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

⁹Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. ¹⁰We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

⁷Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

²⁴Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

[Read v.7-10]

Q: Whereas the worldly needs of personal relationships and physical needs were addressed in the previous verses as having spiritual replacements, what item is next explained here?

A: Food, associated here with teaching as it is throughout Scripture.

Q: How does v.8 provide insight into the quality and authority of New Testament teaching?

A: It is absolute and unchanging.

Point: A problem every generation of Believer has faced and continues to struggle with are those who wish to redefine and reinterpret the Person and Word of Christ.

Q: What is the meaning of the altar in v.10 and the reference to those serving in the Tabernacle?

A: The word “*altar*” is not referring either to the cross or the communion table, but to Christ Himself as altar, sacrifice, and High Priest. In this case the reference to food can refer to both the offerings as well as God’s Word, the clear meaning for 1st Christian Jewish Believers that all the Old Testament shadows have now been replaced by Christ. In fact, it is a clear teaching that the Old Testament Judaism as practiced by Moses is no longer meaningful and is, in fact, cut off from the true Judaism of Christ because He is “*the way, the truth, and the life*”. (Jn. 14:6) Since 70 A.D. there has been no earthly altar and the only Altar has been Christ. Whereas the Old Testament priests ate the meat and grain from the sacrifices, these activities are now enjoyed by Believers in Christ.

Application: The greatest spiritual blessing for Believers is the unchanging Word of God, an example of eternity in the character of its absolute, unchanging nature.

[Read v.7, 17 & 24]

Observation: When the Holy Spirit repeats things in Scripture it is an indication of something especially important. In this chapter we have three commandments that refer to spiritual leadership.

Q: What are the keywords in each of these verses which indicate they are not merely suggestions, but directions to be taken seriously and put into practice?

A: “Remember” (v.7), “obey” (v.17), and “greet” (v.24)

Q: What is the first admonition when it comes to how we deal with spiritual leaders?

A: We are to “*imitate their faith*”, that is to put God’s Word into practice. The first priority of leaders is to point to Christ and the proof of their ministry is the degree to which the flock becomes the image and likeness of Christ, not that of the earthly leader.

Q: What is the second admonition when it comes to how to deal with spiritual leaders?

A: Spiritual leaders have a personal, vested interest in us “*as those who will give an account*”. If they can carry out their ministry “*with joy and not*

with grief" it means that we are living according to God's Word and way rather than our own.

Q: What is the third admonition when it comes to how to deal with spiritual leaders?

A: To "greet" is not to be polite and say hello, but indicates that we need to have a personal relationship with them.

Application: A spiritual blessing of this life is those who teach and hold us accountable to the unchanging truth of God's Word in the context of a personal relationship, both in the way we care for them and in their care for our souls.

[Read v.11-16]

¹¹For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹²Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

¹⁵Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. ¹⁶And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Q: Why is this a particularly powerful teaching for the 1st Century Christians who were being pressured to return to Old Testament Judaism?

A: By leaving Judaism for a new life in Christ, these Believers lost the Temple and its priesthood and associated sacrifices. However, they gained in Christ far more than they lost. The admonition "let us go out to Him outside the camp" for 1st Century Christians would be a way of stating not to be tempted to go back to Judaism but to press forward with Christ.

Q: How did Christ treat the Temple and Jerusalem?

A: He rejected them both by calling the Temple "a robbers' den" (Mt. 21:13) and weeping over Jerusalem's rejection of Him and declaring, "your house is being left to you desolate". (Mt. 23:37-39) There was no longer any spiritual worth to the central, physical symbols of Old Testament Judaism. Both would be destroyed in 70 AD.

Q: How does this teaching of "outside the camp" fit with that of "within the veil" in Hebrews 6?

A: The Temple has been made obsolete by Christ now that Believers can personally fellowship with Him and come "within the veil" which previously separated all but the High Priest from the Holy of Holies and are now being made into His Temple; Jerusalem has been made obsolete by Christ so that Believers are now the witness of Him, the shining city on the hill to the whole world.

Q: To what is the writer of Hebrews alluding when it comes to the sacrifices?

A: They are not longer provided in the Old Testament manner by the Old Testament priesthood, but in accordance with Believers who are now **BOTH** the Temple and the priesthood.

Q: What are the spiritual sacrifices Believers are to offer Christ?

1. "...praise to God". (v.15)
2. "...doing good and sharing..." (v.16)
3. "...psalms and hymns and spiritual songs..." (Eph. 5:18-19; Ps. 27:6)
4. "...your bodies..." (Rom. 12:1-2)
5. Offerings. (Phil. 4:18)
6. "...prayer..." (Ps. 141:2)
7. "...a broken spirit..." (Ps. 51:17)
8. Souls won to Christ. (Rom. 15:16)

Point: This is probably a very good list from which to figure out what Christians should be doing when they gather for “church” as well as the personal behaviors which identify them as exclusively devoted to Christ’s Word and ways.

Application: A spiritual blessing in this life is the Believer’s elevation to being both the Temple and the priesthood so as being able to serve and fellowship with Christ directly, their life in Christ characterized as the appropriate offering being brought to Christ the Altar.

[Read v.18-25]

¹⁸Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. ¹⁹And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

²⁰Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, ²¹equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

²²But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. ²⁴Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

²⁵Grace be with you all.

Q: According to v.18, what are true spiritual leaders concerned with first and foremost?

A: Putting God’s Word into practice personally.

Q: What is implied in the writer’s suggestion in v.19, “that I may be restored to you the sooner”?

A: That there may be a relationship between the faithfulness of a spiritual leader and the faithfulness of the flock. Each is individually accountable but mutually beneficial to each other.

Q: What are the three separate titles given to Christ in Scripture as the Shepherd?

1. The Good Shepherd who dies for the sheep. (Jn. 10:11; Ps. 22)
2. The Great Shepherd who perfects the sheep. (Heb. 13:20-21; Ps. 23)
3. The Chief Shepherd who will come for the sheep. (1 Pe. 5:4; Ps. 24)

Note how this reflects the working of salvation, justification, and sanctification as well as providing the basis for “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*” in His working in our past, present, and future.

Q: How does closing with “the God of peace...equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which pleasing in His sight” fit with the main theme of the whole Epistle of Hebrews?

A: The main theme of Hebrews is found in the repeated use of the terms “better” (13 times) and “perfect” (9 times) and articulated by Hebrews 6:1...

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

— Hebrews 6:1

Application: A spiritual blessing in this life is the spiritual power to live for Christ in a wicked world. It is the power directed by Christ the Shepherd in the work of salvation, justification, and sanctification.

Overall Application

Consider all these benefits when summarized together:

- *A spiritual fellowship of love. (v.1-4)*
- *Spiritual treasures in this life. (v.5-6)*
- *Spiritual food in the Word. (v.7-10)*
- *Spiritual sacrifices. (v.11-16)*
- *Spiritual power. (v.17-25)*

Whatever we have given up in this world is not equitably replaced by something similar, but multiplied in all the ways which build our love and spiritual character.

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

— 1 John 2:15–17

The Epistle of Hebrews is as much about leaving the old life behind as it is about practicing “true” Judaism by not returning to the practices of the Old Covenant but exclusively embracing their fulfillment in the New Covenant and Person of Christ.