

New Covenant Worship

Living It Out

- 1 "Let brotherly love continue.
- 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
- 3 Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.
- 4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.
- 5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
- 6 So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"
- 7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.
- 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.
- 17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

¹⁸ Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.

Hebrews 13:1-7, 16-18

Living Out Our Faith

THERE IS A KIND OF CHRISTIANITY that is quite widespread. It is called **nominal Christianity**. Nominal Christianity is Christianity in name only, having no true nature of the real thing. It has the head but not the heart. Heart but no head. Paul tells Timothy about what the “**last days**” will look like (**2Ti 3:1ff**). They will have a form of godliness, but deny its power (**5**). They will be always learning, but never able to arrive a knowledge of the truth (**8**). Meat without milk.

What is interesting about the context of this is that he is talking about **behavior**. Christian behavior vs. pagan behavior. Godliness vs. sinfulness. Among other things they are lovers of self, lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure. At the same time, they love to welcome bad teachers into their houses, people who burden them with sins and lead them

astray with passions, people who tickle their ears with new and exciting doctrines, but who just don't care much about godliness. This is the nominal Christian.

These are people who take the name of Christ, run around saying "Praise God" to people, cross themselves, frequent churches—at least when it is convenient, go to conferences, and head up church committees. They have the show part down. They are "Sunday Christians." They look good on the outside one day a week. They never let anyone see that they struggle with sin. You would think that they are the most spiritual people on planet earth. They want you see this.

But come Monday—even Sunday afternoon, they are very different people. Get to know their friends. Look at their children. See what kind of fruit they bear in themselves and in others. They are the essence of hypocrisy, acting one way in one place and a totally different way in another. Thing is, people know. It isn't really all that hard to figure out. Nominal Christians fool no one but themselves and others like them.

Hebrews begins the book by telling us that "in these last days" God speaks through his Son (**Heb 1:2**). So what Paul

describes of the “last days” has been true since the days of Hebrews until today. Thus, like most of Paul’s letters, Hebrews begins with lots and lots of doctrine, but ends with principles. Like Paul’s “last days” behavior, Hebrews concludes with several commands on how the flock is to behave now that they know the truth. This is head knowledge moving the heart, the mouth, the hands, and the feet. This is integration of theology and ethics. It is Christian integrity. It is not merely knowing what is right and wrong, but desiring to do it for the right reasons.

This desire comes, amazingly enough, not from self-knowledge, but from the Holy Spirit instructing you on the inside. There is a love of God that leads to love of his commandments, a person who is not just a Christian in name only, but in spirit too. Through all of the warnings of this sermon called Hebrews, the pastor is confident that his hearers are not nominal Christian, and he now finishes his homily with a series of moral instructions. They were for them. They are for you.

Living Out Our Worship

There is a **context** to these commandments. Hebrews 13 does not start a completely brand new section, unrelated to what has come before it. What is that context? **Worship**. “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (12:28-29).

Gratefulness is the same as thankfulness, and it is an inward condition that waters the fruit of the Spirit. It is the start of all true worship, for without it, one is thankless and therefore apathetic, complacent, uncaring, and hardened towards God. Romans 1 says that “they did not give thanks to him” (Rom 1:21) and therefore God “gave them over” (24) to do what ought not be done. Then he begins listing a host of sinful behaviors. Sound familiar?

But thankfulness is only the beginning of acceptable worship. True worship has to also be given in reverence and awe. God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29), which in the OT context means that he is jealous and will not have any gods before him. His bride is not to take any lovers for herself, but she is to fear and love her husband who has taken her to be his treasured possession. So everything that follows

teaches us about how to worship God with reverence and awe outside of our meeting together. What he describes is essentially obedience to the commandments done out of thankfulness.

In thinking about the passage, it is difficult to find any kind of order in the barrage of ideas. There is some repetition. For example, he tells them to “remember” in Heb 13:3 and vs. 7. “Leaders” come up in vs. 7 and again in 17. He brings up some past themes such as the lasting city (14) and the death of Christ (15). Thoughts of prison start (3) and end (23) the chapter. Most of all, this is a chapter of imperatives.

Hebrews actually has relatively few imperatives for such a long letter. The imperative mood is the mood of verbal command in both English and Greek. There are 17 imperatives in chs. 1-12. There are 13 of them in chapter 13,¹ so nearly half of the commands in the entire letter are found here.² Clearly, he wants us to do things now.

¹ I took this list from Aaron Meares, “Imperative Verbs in the Letter to the Hebrews,” Oct 25, 2012, at <https://diligentsoul.wordpress.com/2012/10/25/imperative-verbs-in-the-letter-to-the-hebrews/>. Last accessed Aug 18, 2016.

² There are other moods that we can translate as imperatives into English. The subjunctive mood (for example, “let us worship” in 12:28) is an example. Participles (‘ing) can also be translated as commands in English. But for purposes of illustration, we’ll stick with the imperative mood alone here so that we can see the emphasis in the chapter.

When thinking about God's law and his commands, your mind probably goes to language like, "You shall not..." But this is not the language of our chapter. Listen to the list of commands in our chapter:

Continue (13:1)	Do not (17)
Do not (2)	Do not (17)
Remember (3)	Do not (18)
Remember (7)	Do not with (22)
Do not (7)	Do not (23)
Do not (9)	Do not (24)
Do not (16)	

Most of these are put positively, with only a couple of negative warnings. Perhaps this is because he expects that because we are Christians who now know what Christ has done for us, that we will want to do what he commands. Therefore, the chief purpose here is **to remind us** of what we already know, as he moves our hearts to do God's will. And yet, that is exactly what the Bible does again and again, isn't it? It reminds us of what we already know, especially when it comes to God's holy law. It doesn't assume you

remember. It calls to your mind what you know because of your forgetfulness and neglect of his holy ways.

So then, what are you supposed to do as Christians? Most of these commands deal with behavior, though some of them also deal with proper thinking. Proper thinking is essential for proper behavior, as we will see (for example **vs. 4**). But proper thinking by itself is not enough. God really does care about how you behave outwardly, and for a variety of reasons. Your sin is bad for you. Your sin is bad for others. Your sin reflects poorly upon God and the Name that you have taken up as a Christian. Your sin is wrong.

We are to be holy people who go out of our way to do what God tells us to do. Here, I am reminded of Jesus' **Golden Rule**. "**Do to others what you would have them do to you.**" Virtually every religion has a mantra that *sounds* similar. But are they? Wicca says, "**Do no harm,**" for example. But look at how passive that is. Jesus on the other hand tells you to go out of your way to do something to someone that you would want them to do to you. This is how you are to think about these many commandments. They are not passively obeyed. They don't just come to you and you obey them without even thinking about it. They

call you to go out from here and deliberately do something that will not just happen on its own. You have to be intentional in your obedient behavior.

Living Out Our Worship in Brotherly Love

It begins in **13:1**, “**Let brotherly love continue.**” He assumes that you (and they) have already been showing brotherly love to one another. This is because you are Christians and this is simply what Christians do. You aren’t a Christian if you are not showing brotherly love. John and others could not be any clearer about this.

The commandment is to “**continue.**” The word is the famous *philadelphia* love: *ē philadelphia menetō*. His focus is on the brothers, not on everyone; on fellow Christians called by the Spirit. But what does this brotherly love look like? In my opinion, that is what the rest of the chapter tells you. Jesus said that the law is summarized by love. Love is the law. And so all laws when they are obeyed are laws of love—love of God and love of brother. This command is to love. For this reason, I see vs. 1 here as a kind of **summary statement** for the rest of the commands. You want to know

how to continue in brotherly love? Here, let me show you...

Hospitality

It starts with, of all things, showing **hospitality**. If you were going to talk about the first way to show brother love, would hospitality even make the top ten? How often do you offer it? Hospitality is a lost art in the west, if we ever had it at all. Down south, they are known for the “Southern Hospitality.” But we are rugged individualists out here. We don’t impose on others. We don’t want to be imposed upon. We like our land, our space. We like to be left alone. It can often frustrate people who come from cultures not like ours.

The thought is probably **a bit different** than how you might immediately think to apply it in our church. The situation in the letter had to be an urban setting. People would travel, but couldn’t make it very far and so it was common to have visitors, especially since inns were not the safest places to spend the night. We, on the other hand, make it to our destination or not at all most of the time. So our situations are different.

If we think of it at all, we think of showing hospitality to our own friends. But Hebrews uses the word “strangers.” Someone writes, “To open one’s home to a travelling stranger evidenced brotherly love and was considered a high virtue by Jews and Gentiles alike. Mutual support among the early Christians would have been vital for maintaining the solidarity of new believers as well as aiding in the missionary expansion of the church.”³

So what would this hospitality have looked like? If someone came to your door, you were to not only invite them in, but be abounding in grace and kindness and generosity and giving. Abraham is a good example of this in Genesis 18. Three “men” come to his property and he immediately goes and tells Sarah to kill the calf, for they are having a huge dinner that night. He welcomed them in and washed their feet. He fed them. He talked to them. They spent the night. This isn’t just having someone over for dinner, though that is, of course, a start. It is going out of your way to show them that you think of them more highly than yourself.

³ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 607.

In our day, people don't usually just show up at our doorsteps. So we have to think of hospitality in different ways. We have to go out of our way to even get to someone else's home, especially in our own church where we have people separated by sometimes scores of miles. But I would suggest that this is a place to start, even if it is not exactly what Hebrews has in mind. Perhaps the closest idea would be to come to church on Sunday prepared to have visitors over to your house after church. Do we even think that way? How about Christians who are in need of shelter because things are going terrible at home or they have no home? Maybe even something like foreign exchange students for something more long term? Do thoughts like these enter your mind? Hospitality is something that all Christians are to show, not just some. It is one way to love our brothers.

One of the things to point out here is [how the verse ends](#). What is fascinating to me is that it gives [a reason for showing hospitality](#). This is interesting not just because of the actual reason given here (which we will talk about in a moment), but because he gives reasons for virtually every command spoken here. In other words, this isn't just a list of

things to do. He wants to impart to you that each thing you do to show love to your brother has very good reasons behind them. These are not just arbitrary commandments. They are deeply personal and for your own benefit. Those who give will receive.

The reason stated here is rather stunning and it is probably the most memorable of all that are given in this chapter. “For thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” What in the world does this mean? Most since the earliest days, most think it refers to [Abraham and the three angels](#) of Genesis 18 or Lot a chapter later or similar instances like Gideon or Manoah. But it says they did this “unawares.” The implication is that they didn’t know who they were welcoming.

I’ll grant that perhaps some of them may not have known these were angels. However, it seems beyond belief to me that Abraham did not know he had invited Yahweh to his house, given that he had talked with him many times and had seen him in visions to boot.⁴ Throughout Genesis,

⁴ **Going Deeper:** Augustine has a discussion of this in *City of God* 26.29.1. He begins with the recognition that some believe Abraham was welcoming Christ to his tent. He then argues that this cannot be established on the basis of Abraham calling him “Lord” (Adonai), which he does, because Lot calls the others *adonai* as well. Fine. Adonai is a title for any lord, which includes The LORD. But later in the text is specifically calls this Angel Yahweh. Augustine does not

the Patriarchs seem to know full well they are talking to both God and angel (cf. **Gen 48:15-16**). For this reason, but because I think it probably does refer to the Abraham story, I don't think the idea here is on the "who-ness" of angelic beings, but on the "**why-ness**" of their coming or the "**what-ness**" of what they are coming to do. In other words, it has to do with the meaning of the word "angel."

The word "angel" simply means "messenger," and it designates a function. Properly speaking, any creature with a brain and a mouth that can deliver a message can be an angel. This includes heavenly or earthly beings. The emphasis in Genesis 18 is clearly on **the message** that the Angel of the LORD is delivering. "**I will return in a year and you will have a son.**" This is his message. It is the angel's *aggelos*, his message, his good news. It just so happens that in Abraham's case, it was the LORD himself who delivered this message—as only he could.

seem to have grasped this point, and thus he seems to think that Yahweh was not one of these angels and merely "recognized God in them."

As for the idea that Abraham recognized them, the ancient world almost always describes heavenly beings in shining terms. This is consistent throughout the Bible. Sometimes, the equivalent of the sons of God (which these may have been) are also described as being very tall and even serpentine in appearance (we see this in the Dead Sea Scrolls for example). It is obvious that the moment he sees them, Abraham recognizes something very regal about them. The idea that he did not recognize the Angel of the LORD is simply too difficult for me to believe.

But Hebrews', in pointing out the idea of a messenger, is really focusing your mind to a great benefit that may very well come from your hospitality. If you invite strangers in unaware, you may very well be rewarded by God with a message from him that you need to hear. Who knows that God did not send them just for you, rather than you for them.⁵ I'm not referring necessarily to some kind of grand prophecy for your life like Abraham received. The message could be anything from a blessing to encouragement that you just happen to need to who knows what. As far as I'm concerned, I suppose the one delivering it could even be a heavenly angel. But it could also be a human angel. Thus Calvin says, "They are not mere angels received, but Christ himself, when we receive the poor in his name." Do not neglect hospitality. That is the commandment.

Remembering Those in Prison

⁵ "The point for the hearers of the discourse is that strangers to whom they show hospitality may 'prove to be true messengers of God to them, bringing a greater blessing than they receive'." Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 507. On a sad note, this past week Eerdmans posted that they are pulling this commentary and two more by the same author as they were found to have large portions of plagiarism in them.

A second way to show brotherly love is **to remember**. The command is to remember. But remember what? “**Remember those who are in prison**” (**Heb 13:3**). This is another one that can’t really be applied in the same way today as then. At least not here. Let us pray it never will in our lifetimes.

The thought is not of a pastor or lay person going to a jail to start a prison ministry, though there is nothing wrong with that. The idea is of Christians being **imprisoned for their faith**. In this way (and others), they are being “**mistreated**.” Back in **ch. 10**, we saw that these very Hebrew Christians were among those who suffered in similar ways. They endured great sufferings (**10:23**), were made public spectacle (**33**), but had already showed sympathy to prisoners (**32**), even as they joyfully accepted the seizure of their own property. Now he is telling them, remember how it was with you and how it is for them right now and go and do something about it.

To apply this is difficult. Perhaps it would mean a prison ministry, though probably getting involved in affairs of Christians wrongly imprisoned in other lands, if we have to the means and ability to do such a thing, is closer to the heart

of the commandment. Perhaps closer to home, it means remembering those who are suffering for their faith in lesser ways. A spouse is mistreated in their marriage because they are a Christian. A co-worker is being treated unfairly because of their faith. Perhaps you could even show them hospitality and kill two birds with one stone.

As with the former, so here. He gives a reason for remembering them. Do it “as though in prison with them.” Why? Because if it wasn’t for God’s grace, that could very easily be you. There is nothing better about you for not suffering and nothing worse in them. In fact, it might be the very opposite. Second, they are being “mistreated.” This is unfair and unjust and Christians are called to enter into this kind of injustice among their brothers for the sake of Christ. We must help one another when things like this happen. It helps not only them, but protects our own faith, knowing that we must undergo suffering to be like Jesus. It actually helps us not not apostatize by remembering and seeing and helping our brothers who are afflicted. Finally, “you are also in the body.” This harkens to the first thought. If you are in the body, you could easily be thrown in prison and be mistreated just like they are. You are not yet in heaven. You

are here. So remember those who are suffering for Christ. Go out of your way and do something about it. It probably isn't going to come to you.

Remember and Honor Marriage

The third command is perhaps the first that might come to our minds if we were writing a list of things to do as Christians. Especially in our day when this thing is under attack in ways that have not been heard of since Adam and Eve walked the earth. “**Let marriage be held in honor among all**” (13:4). Is anything more plain than that marriage as an institution ordained by God in Genesis 2 is mocked, ridiculed, dishonored, and in the process of utter deconstruction?

Let's begin by not kidding ourselves. Marriage has never been held in honor by most, though it has always been regarded as between men and women, by everyone on earth until just the past 10 years or so. Remember King Henry VIII and his many wives? Obviously, if it was being held in honor or if that was an easy thing to do even 2,000 years ago, there would be no need for the command here.

We are rightly dismayed and disgusted at the extreme insanity of the deconstruction of marriage in our day. Homosexual “marriage” is only the latest among ever greater perversions to come. But we didn’t just “get” at this point in a vacuum. Rather, Christians have tolerated, looked the other way, and justified plenty of heterosexual misbehavior to make us stink of hypocrisy in the eyes of the world to get us to this point.

Poll after poll shows that the behavior of Christians is almost identical to that of the rest of the culture in this regard. Christians live together, sleep around, cheat on spouses, and think there is absolutely nothing wrong with any of it. Now, the focus of the verse at first is indeed marriage, and thus the idea of **adultery**. “**Let the marriage bed be undefiled.**” This means, don’t cheat on your spouse. Do not commit adultery. It is the seventh commandment. Thus, it says “**God will judge the ... adulterous**” at the end of the verse. Its not like God only cared about this in the OT.

But he uses another word here that is **broader than adultery**. It is the famous word *pornos* , from which we get pornography (i.e. writings of immorality, be they visual or

literary). The translation here is “**sexual immorality**” or in the NAS, “**fornication**.” It refers to all kinds of sexual sin, not just adultery. Homosexuality, sleeping around, living with someone you are not married to, prostitution, polygamy, and even in some circumstances divorce are all outward activities of fornication done with and to others. Of course, there are many more besides.

Our Confession (ch. 25) teaches that marriage is between one man and a woman (it has the idea of polygamy in mind, but it is equally applicable to homosexual non-marriage), and it sanctifies the idea of marriage as the only proper expression of sexual intercourse. When we preach against one form of sexual sin, we must beware that God judges it all. He looks with no more with favor upon winking at that cute girl in the office while your wife is home with the kids, or looking at some magazine than he does homosexual sin. “**God will judge the *sexually immoral and the adulterous*.**” This is the reason given for holding marriage in honor. God is a judge. God will judge.

Technically speaking, there is **no verb of command** in this verse. Literally it is, “**Honorable [is] the marriage in all, and the bed undefiled, and whoremongers and adulterers**

God shall judge” (YLT). This is written in such a way that you already know it is true. Therefore, while the command is usually written as something like “let marriage be held in honor,” it could just as easily be “Remember that marriage is honorable to God and the bed is to be undefiled.” Therefore, do not forget this. Teach it to your children. Behave towards your spouse the way God commands you to behave. This is how you love your brother and sister in Christ, the one who is closer to you than all others in the flesh.

Be Content, Do Not Love Money

The fourth way you love your brother is by “keeping yourself free from the love of money, and being content with what you have” (13:5). What would this have to do with loving your brother? Maybe I’m getting off track with my theory that these are all about showing brotherly love?

Well, first, the love of money (as Paul says) is a root of all kinds of evil (1Ti 6:10).⁶ In other words, what other

⁶ It is literally “a root” rather than “the root,” as if the only sin at the end of the day in all the world is the love of money.

things are done to people because of the lustful craving of money? One only need think of certain famous politicians to see the utter havoc they wreak upon people as they destroy countries, embezzle, break laws, trample on the poor, commit murder, and become more and more out of touch with ordinary people. The rich are simply able to show their love of money in more overtly dangerous ways. But everyone can have it.

So what is the love of money? This is the second part, “be content with what you have.” The love of money begins with a lack of contentment at what God has given to you. Lack of contentment does not give rise only to the love of money, but you can’t have a love of money if you are content. It is simply not possible.

Now, we can get ourselves into all kinds of trouble when we start to tell one another exactly what the love of money looks like in practice. “You have too much stuff. That is the love of money.” “You shouldn’t want to buy that new item at the store. That is the love of money.” Rather, that kind of thing is judgmentalism passing itself off as holier-than-thou. It works great in certain political ideologies, but you can’t tell if someone has the love of

money just by the stuff they own. Very rich people may not have it at all, and very poor people can be filled with greedy hearts.

Thus, perhaps the person who is affected more than any other by the love of money is *yourself*. Love your neighbor *as yourself*. You are supposed to love yourself. Not in an evil way, but in a good way. That is brotherly love too. To love money is to not love yourself. It is obviously to not love others either. It is also very forgetful of God, and therefore not loving him.

The *reason* given in this commandment: “*For he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’*” If you think you don’t have enough stuff, then what do you make of this promise of the gospel? You might ask, how is “stuff” related to God leaving or not leaving? If you are desperately poor, to the point of you can’t even eat and are dying, you can imagine the thoughts that might come into your mind. “*Where is God while I am suffering like this?*” People might think, if I only had means, I could get food and live. And so forgetting that God does not leave you can start as a very small thing—indeed with a root of the love of money that it will solve your problems when God has left you.

On the other hand, the love of money can **make you forget God** completely. You don't need God, because you have money. Or, greed can so consume you that you never bother to think about God. This is why it is so hard for the rich to enter heaven. What need to they even think they have for God? Often the love of money reveals a deep unseated discontentment with God and his promises. So the promise stands, **"I will not leave you. You don't need that stuff. I am your reward."** Remember to keep yourself from the love of money, especially in our greedy consumeristic culture. This is a heart command. It is how you love your brother.

I'm not certain is vs. 6 rightly belongs just to this command or can be a summary of all that we have seen thus far. **"So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"**" This comes from **Ps 118:6 LXX**. From the Psalm, you could make the argument that it summarizes them all, as the Psalm thinks about love (2-4), distress (5), being satisfied (7), and fidelity to the LORD (8-9). The point is, in whatever command you are seeking to obey, the LORD is your helper. Do not fear the power of the sword, the estranged lover, the power of

money, the stranger in your midst. God is your helper. He makes you stand. This is how the gospel empowers the law.

This command seems to have a corollary in **vs. 16**. “**Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have.**” If you are free from the love of money, but God has still blessed you materially, then you will **desire to share** what God has given to you. You will be consumed by it. Sharing is the opposite of loving money. One sure way you know if you love your money more than your brother is if you are unwilling or hesitant to obey this command.

This is why **giving is an antidote to greed**. The more you give, the more you come to realize that God does not leave you and even helps you. Giving is commanded towards brothers and in the church as the basic place to start. Why should you do this? The reason is given, “**For such sacrifices are pleasing to God.**” Giving of your wealth is considered **a sacrifice to God**. It is an act of **worship** to him. Thus, we have never really left that theme of worship at all. Giving to God’s people is your NT “thank” offering or freewill offering, trusting that God will use it for your brother’s sake and for your own as well.

Remember and Obey Your leaders

Paul often attaches giving with the churches leaders. He was in constant need of support and told the churches that the workman is worthy of his wages, though he never forced anyone to do it. Though I don't think Paul wrote Hebrews, I think whoever it was (probably Luke) knew Paul very well. So perhaps this thought is what leads him to the next. The fifth way you love your brother is by “remember[ing] your leaders” (Heb 13:7). It always interesting to have to preach about yourself and your relationship to those you are preaching to. God help me.

The leaders he has in mind are not government officials or teachers or bosses. He says, “Those who spoke to you the word of God.” He is talking about the evangelists (who might come to your door as a stranger), the elders, the pastors in your midst. Again, things are different in some ways here than they are for us. The first century church suffered great persecution, and we've already seen how many were imprisoned. In fact, Timothy—one of the great leaders of the second generation, was in prison at that very moment (13:23).

Thus, life was difficult for them as they spread the gospel. One need only read Paul's list of sufferings in **2Co 11** where he was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, adrift, always on the road, in constant danger from rivers, robbers, his own people, the Gentiles, in the city, in the wilderness, at sea, from false teachers, and on and on he goes. Money was scarce. Death was a real possibility.

Your leaders, by God's grace, do not suffer in these kinds of ways here. "The outcome of [our] way of life" (**Heb 13:7**) is not like theirs. Again, pray to God that it never will be. Nevertheless, leaders are to be remembered. How? Well, the end of our section today gives more specifics. After leaving the topic for several verses, he returns to it in the end of his list of main commandments. He lists several ways to remember them.

First, "Obey your leaders" (**17**). The word is unpopular in our day because it smacks strongly against our egalitarian sensibilities. "We are all equal! What do you mean 'obey'? How dare he suggest such a thing!" This kind of thought drastically fails to understand that biblical leadership is servanthood, not iron-rule. This is why at the end of **vs. 7** he says, "Imitate their faith." This refers not merely to their

beliefs, but their actions. When leadership is godly, people know it. When it isn't, people know it. If your leaders are imitable, then obedience should not be hard. Nevertheless, as far as the church order proper is concerned, there is a hierarchy for the sake of the gospel.

I think what he says next helps explain this a little better. “Submit to them.” For some people, this is worse than obey them. “Submit! Just who does this guy think he is?” But it shows that God has set leaders over his church for the good of the sheep. Why? “For they are keeping watch over your souls.” What they teach you, how they guide you, their instructions, their challenges, their discipline, their prayers, many things they do, they do it for your good. Yes, they make mistakes. Who doesn't? Nevertheless, submission and obedience to leaders is a sign of submission and leadership to Christ. Wisdom needs to be used here, of course. Utterly corrupt and wicked church leaders are not in view. But so also does humility. Your first impulse is not to distrust and be suspicious of your leaders so that you can justify to yourself disobeying God here.

Second, and many leaders and not a few laity forget this, they must “give an account” on judgment day for how they

have lead. A true leader of a church is in constant prayerful thought about not only what is right for a flock and a sheep, but for whether or not God would approve of what they are doing. God's leaders are, after all, under the Chief Shepherd. In their relationship to him, they must obey, they must submit. If they are doing it properly, their leadership will take this into account. If they are not, then woe to them, for they know not that God will judge them for their actions. Children, when you get profoundly frustrated with your leaders, keep this thought in your mind. It is so easy to retaliate or lash out or sulk in anger at your leaders. But do not not know that God will judge us? Do you think this an easy burden to bear? Would anyone wish this on themselves? This is why I always advocate to anyone, if you can do anything else with your life, do it.

Finally, you do this so that **it might be with joy** that they serve you, not with groaning. The dropout rate of pastors in America is at epidemic proportions. The average pastor stays at a church less than two years, and in ministry less than five. We've all suffered through joyless times and have groaned on more than one occasion because people refuse to do what

is said here. It is profoundly tiring. But when things are right, there is no greater joy.

Now look at the last thing he says. “For that would be of no advantage to you.” He doesn’t just say it for the leader’s sake, but for your own. Implicit here is that you and the leadership belong together, in a way that is analogous to husband and wife. Implicit is not that you will just flee First Baptist and go over to Second Baptist as most people do when they become disgruntled with their leaders. The idea is that you will stay and will have to be in the midst of leadership that has no joy and is no longer able to even do their job because of “the people,” as Moses might put it. Can you see the wisdom here?

Finally, he says, “Pray for us” (13:18). You love your leaders by obeying them, submitting to them, and praying for them. Prayer is the best way to keep your heart from bitterness against your leaders, and the best way to keep your leaders from leading you astray. I’ll never forget the first time we were in an assembly of prayer in our church and people actually prayed for their leaders. I had not seen that before. Notice the end of this verse, which coincides with what has just been said. The reason: “For we are sure

that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.” Your leaders what to do what is right according to God and for you. So pray for them.

As you can see, we have skipped several verses that we will take up next time, as they are really **the heart of these commandments** and as they focus on our Savior, the Lord Jesus. They include one more way of loving the brothers, which is to not be lead away by diverse and strange teachings (9). What I want you to take away today is that Hebrews wants you to obey God, and to do so by loving your brothers. You can do this with **strangers**, with **those in need**, with your **spouses**, with **yourselves**, in the **church**, and towards your **leaders**.

It is a full range of application in your day to day lives outside of Sunday morning. These things are **not just works, but they are worship**. We worship God by doing what he commands. He commands us to love our brothers. He assumes we are already doing it. Let’s strive to do it better than we did prior to coming into God’s presence this morning. For Jesus has died for our sins, as the passage goes on to tell us. God will not leave us, we have been told. This is for our own good, he said. We are here in the body, he

explained. God will be our helper, he reminded us. So many reasons given. Because God loves his children, and he wants them to be conformed to the image of his Son. This is what it means to be a real Christian, one not just in name, but in essence.