

CHAPTER 13

The apostle, having treated largely of Christ, and faith, and free grace, and gospel privileges, and warned the Hebrews against apostasy, now, in the close of all, recommends several excellent duties to them, as the proper fruits of faith (v. 1-17); he then bespeaks their prayers for him, and offers up his prayers to God for them, gives them some hope of seeing himself and Timothy, and ends with the general salutation and benediction (v. 18 to the end).

HEBREWS 13:1-17

VARIOUS DUTIES

The design of Christ in giving himself for us is that he may purchase *to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*. Now the apostle calls the believing Hebrews to the performance of many excellent duties, in which it becomes Christians to excel.

I. To brotherly love (v. 1), by which he does not only mean a general affection to all men, as our brethren by nature, all made of the same blood, nor that more limited affection which is due to those who are of the same immediate parents, but that special and spiritual affection which ought to exist among the children of God.

1. It is here supposed that the Hebrews had this love one for another. Though, at this time, that nation was miserably divided and distracted among themselves, both about matters of religion and the civil state, yet there was true brotherly love left among those of them who believed on Christ; and this appeared in a very eminent manner presently after the shedding forth of the Holy Ghost, when they had all things common, and sold their possessions to make a general fund of subsistence to their brethren. The spirit of Christianity is a spirit of love. Faith works by love. The true religion is the strongest bond of friendship; if it be not so, it has its name for nothing.

2. This brotherly love was in danger of being lost, and that in a time of persecution, when it would be most necessary; it was in danger of being lost by those disputes that were among them concerning the respect they ought still to have to the ceremonies of the Mosaic law. Disputes about religion too often produce a decay of Christian affection; but this must be guarded against, and all proper means used to preserve brotherly love. Christians should always love and live as brethren, and the more they grow in devout affection to God their heavenly Father the more they will grow in love to one another for his sake.

II. To hospitality: *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers for his sake*, v. 2. We must add to brotherly kindness charity. Here observe,

1. The duty required — *to entertain strangers*, both those that are strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to our persons, especially those who know themselves to be strangers here and are seeking another country, which is the case of the people of God, and was so at this time: the believing Jews were in a desperate and distressed condition. But he seems to speak of strangers as such; though we know not who they are, nor whence they come, yet, seeing they are without any certain dwelling place, we should allow them room in our hearts and in our houses, as we have opportunity and ability.

2. The motive: *Thereby some have entertained angels unawares*; so Abraham did (Genesis 18), and Lot (Genesis 19), and one of those that Abraham entertained was the Son of God; and, though we cannot suppose this will ever be our case, yet what we do to strangers, in obedience to him, he will reckon and reward as done to himself. ⁴⁰⁵⁶ Matthew 25:35, *I was a stranger, and you took me in*. God has often bestowed honours and favours upon his hospitable servants, beyond all their thoughts, *unawares*.

III. To Christian sympathy: *Remember those that are in bonds*, v. 3. Here observe,

1. The duty — *to remember those that are in bonds and in adversity*.

(1.) God often orders it so that while some Christians and churches are in adversity others enjoy peace and liberty. All are not called at the same time to resist unto blood.

(2.) Those that are themselves at liberty must sympathize with those that are in bonds and adversity, as if they were bound with them in the same chain: they must feel the sufferings of their brethren.

2. The reason of the duty: *As being yourselves in the body*; not only in the body natural, and so liable to the like sufferings, and you should sympathize with them now that others may sympathize with you when your time of trial comes; but in the same mystical body, under the same head, *and if one member suffer all the rest suffer with it*, ⁴⁹²⁶1 Corinthians 12:26. It would be unnatural in Christians not to bear each other's burdens.

IV. To purity and chastity, v. 4. Here you have,

1. A recommendation of God's ordinance of marriage, that it *is honourable in all*, and ought to be so esteemed by all, and not denied to those to whom God has not denied it. It is honourable, for God instituted it for man in paradise, knowing it was not good for him to be alone. He married and blessed the first couple, the first parents of mankind, to direct all to look unto God in that great concern, and to marry in the Lord. Christ honoured marriage with his presence and first miracle. It is honourable as a means to prevent impurity and a defiled bed. It is *honourable* and happy, when persons come together pure and chaste, and preserve the marriage bed undefiled, not only from unlawful but inordinate affections.

2. A dreadful but just censure of impurity and lewdness: *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*.

(1.) God knows who are guilty of such sins, no darkness can hide them from him.

(2.) He will call such sins by their proper names, not by the names of love and gallantry, but of whoredom and adultery, whoredom in the single state and adultery in the married state.

(3.) He will bring them into judgment, he will judge them, either by their own consciences here, and *set their sins in order before them* for their deep humiliation (and conscience, when awakened, will be very severe upon such sinners), or he will set them at his tribunal at death, and in the last day; he will convict them, condemn them, and cast them out for ever, if they die under the guilt of this sin.

V. To Christian contentment, v. 5, 6. Here observe,

1. The sin that is contrary to this grace and duty — *covetousness*, an over eager desire of the wealth of this world, envying those who have more than we. This sin we must allow no place in our conversation; for, though it be a secret lust lurking in the heart, if it be not subdued it will enter into our conversation, and discover itself in our manner of speaking and acting. We must take care not only to keep this sin down, but to root it out of our souls.

2. The duty and grace that is contrary to covetousness — being satisfied and pleased *with such things as we have*; present things, for past things cannot be recalled, and future things are only in the hand of God. What God gives us from day to day we must be content with, though it fall short of what we have enjoyed heretofore, and though it do not come up to our expectations for the future. We must be content with our present lot. We must bring our minds to our present condition, and this is the sure way to contentment; and those who cannot do it would not be contented though God should raise their condition to their minds, for the mind would rise with the condition. Haman was the great court-favourite, and yet not contented — Ahab on the throne, and yet not contented — Adam in paradise, and yet not contented; yea, the angels in heaven, and yet not contented; but Paul, though abased and empty, had *learned in every state, in any state, therewith to be content*.

3. What reason Christians have to be contented with their lot.

(1.) *God hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*, v. 5, 6. This was said to Joshua (~~GEN~~Joshua 1:5), but belongs to all the faithful servants of God. Old-Testament promises may be applied to New-Testament saints. This promise contains the sum and substance of all the promises. *I will never, no, never leave thee, nor ever forsake thee*. Here are no fewer than five negatives heaped together, to confirm the promise; the true believer shall have the gracious presence of God with him in life, at death, and for ever.

(2.) From this comprehensive promise they may assure themselves of help from God: *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me*, v. 6. Men can do nothing against God, and God can make all that men do against his people to turn to their good.

VI. To the duty Christians owe to their ministers, and that both to those that are dead and to those that are yet alive.

1. To those that are dead: *Remember those that have had the rule over you*, v. 7. Here observe,

(1.) The description given of them. They were such as had the rule over them, and had spoken to them the word of God; their guides and governors, who had spoken to them the word of God. Here is the dignity to which they were advanced — to be rulers and leaders of the people, not according to their own will, but the will and word of God; and this character they filled up with suitable duty: they did not rule at a distance, and rule by others, but they ruled by personal presence and instruction, according to the word of God.

(2.) The duties owing to them, even when they were dead.

[1.] “*Remember them* — their preaching, their praying, their private counsel, their example.”

[2.] “*Follow their faith*; be stedfast in the profession of the faith they preached to you, and labour after the grace of faith by which they lived and died so well. *Consider the end of their conversation*, how quickly, how comfortably, how joyfully, they finished their course!” Now this duty of following the same true faith in which they had been instructed the apostle enlarges much upon, and presses them earnestly to it, not only from the remembrance of their faithful deceased guides, but from several other motives.

First, From the immutability and eternity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though their ministers were some dead, others dying, yet the great head and high priest of the church, *the bishop of their souls*, ever lives, and is ever the same; and they should be stedfast and immovable, in imitation of Christ, and should remember that Christ ever lives to observe and reward their faithful adherence to his truths, and to observe and punish their sinful departure from him. Christ is the same in the Old-Testament day, in the gospel day, and will be so to his people for ever.

Secondly, From the nature and tendency of those erroneous doctrines that they were in danger of falling in with.

a. They were divers and various (v. 9), different from what they had received from their former faithful teachers, and inconsistent with themselves.

b. They were strange doctrines: such as the gospel church was unacquainted with foreign to the gospel.

c. They were of an unsettling, distracting nature, like the wind by which the ship is tossed, and in danger of being driven from its anchor, carried away, and split upon the rocks. They were quite contrary to that grace of God which fixes and establishes the heart, which is an excellent thing. These strange doctrines keep the heart always fluctuating and unsettled.

d. They were mean and low as to their subject. They were about external, little, perishing things, such as *meats and drinks*, etc.

e. They were unprofitable. Those who were most taken with them, and employed about them, got no real good by them to their own souls. They did not make them more holy, nor more humble, nor more thankful, nor more heavenly.

f. They would exclude those who embraced them from the privileges of the Christian altar (v. 10): *We have an altar*. This is an argument of the great weight, and therefore the apostle insists the longer upon it. Observe,

(a.) The Christian church has its altar. It was objected against the primitive Christians that their assemblies were destitute of an altar; but this was not true. *We have an altar*, not a material altar, but a personal one, and that is Christ; he is both our altar, and our sacrifice; he sanctifies the gift. The altars under the law were types of Christ; the brazen altar of the sacrifice, the golden altar of his intercession.

(b.) This altar furnishes out a feast for true believers, a feast upon the sacrifice, a *feast of fat things*, spiritual strength and growth, and holy delight and pleasure. The Lord's table is not our altar, but it is furnished with provision from the altar. *Christ our passover is sacrificed for us* (~~and~~¹ 1 Corinthians 5:7), and it follows, *therefore let us keep the feast*. The Lord's supper is the feast of the gospel passover.

(c.) Those who adhere to the tabernacle or the Levitical dispensation, or return to it again, exclude themselves from the privileges of this altar, from the benefits purchased by Christ. If they serve the tabernacle, they are resolved to subject themselves to antiquated rites and ceremonies, to renounce their right to the Christian altar; and this part of the argument he first proves and then improves.

[a.] He proves that this servile adherence to the Jewish state is a bar to the privileges of the gospel altar; and he argues thus: — Under the Jewish law, no part of the sin-offering was to be eaten, but all must be burnt without the camp while they dwelt in tabernacles, and without the gates when they dwelt in cities: now, if they will still be subject to that law, they cannot eat at the gospel-altar; for that which is eaten there is furnished from Christ, who is the great sin-offering. Not that it is the very sin-offering itself, as the papists affirm; for then it was not to be eaten, but burnt; but the gospel feast is the fruit and procurement of the sacrifice, which those have no right to who do not acknowledge the sacrifice itself. And that it might appear that Christ was really the antitype of the sin-offering, and, as such, might sanctify or cleanse his people with his own blood, he conformed himself to the type, in suffering without the gate. This was a striking specimen of his humiliation, as if he had not been fit either for sacred or civil society! And this shows how sin, which was the meritorious cause of the sufferings of Christ, is a forfeiture of all sacred and civil rights, and the sinner a common plague and nuisance to all society, if God should be strict to mark iniquity. Having thus shown that adherence to the Levitical law would, even according to its own rules, debar men from the Christian altar, he proceeds,

[b.] To improve this argument (v. 13-15) in suitable advices. *First, Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp;* go forth from the ceremonial law, from sin, from the world, from ourselves, our very bodies, when he calls us. *Secondly, Let us be willing to bear his reproach,* be willing to be accounted the offscouring of all things, not worthy to live, not worthy to die a common death. This was his reproach, and we must submit to it; and we have the more reason because, whether we go forth from this world to Christ or no, we must necessarily go forth in a little time by death; for *here we have no continuing city.* Sin, sinners, death, will not suffer us to continue long here; and therefore we should go forth now by faith, and seek in Christ the rest and settlement which this world cannot afford us, v. 14. *Thirdly, Let us make a right use of this altar;* not only partake of the privileges of it, but discharge the duties of the altar, as those whom Christ has made priests to attend on this altar. Let us bring our sacrifices to this altar, and to this our high priest, and offer them up by him, v. 15, 16. Now what are the sacrifices which we must bring and offer on this altar, even Christ? Not any expiatory sacrifices; there is no need of

them. Christ has offered the great *sacrifice of atonement*, ours are only the sacrifices of acknowledgment; and they are,

1. The sacrifice of praise to God, which we should offer up to God continually. In this are included all adoration and prayer, as well as thanksgiving; this is *the fruit of our lips*; we must speak forth the praises of God from unfeigned lips; and this must be offered only to God, not to angels, nor saints, nor any creature, but to the name of God alone; and it must be by Christ, in a dependence upon his meritorious satisfaction and intercession.
2. The sacrifice of alms-deeds, and Christian charity: *To do good, and to communicate, forget now; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*, v. 16. We must, according to our power, *communicate* to the necessities of the souls and bodies of men; not contenting ourselves to offer the sacrifice of our lips, mere words, but the sacrifice of good deeds; and these we must lay down upon this altar, not depending upon the merit of our good deeds, but of our great high priest; and with such sacrifices as these, adoration and alms thus offered up, God is well pleased; he will accept the offering with pleasure, and will accept and bless the offers through Christ.
2. Having thus told us the duty Christians owe to their deceased ministers, which principally consists in following their faith and not departing from it, the apostle tells us what is the duty that people owe to their living ministers (v. 17) and the reasons of that duty:

(1.) The duty — to obey them, and submit themselves to them. It is not an implicit obedience, or absolute submission, that is here required, but only so far as is agreeable to the mind and will of God revealed in his word; and yet it is truly obedience and submission, and that not only to God, but to the authority of the ministerial office, which is of God as certainly, in all things belonging to that office, as the authority of parents or of civil magistrates in the things within their sphere. Christians must submit to be instructed by their ministers, and not think themselves too wise, too good, or too great, to learn from them; and, when they find that ministerial instructions are agreeable to the written word, they must obey them.

(2.) The motives to this duty.

[1.] They have the rule over the people; their office, though not magisterial, yet is truly authoritative. They have no authority to lord it over

the people, but to lead them in the ways of God, by informing and instructing them, explaining the word of God to them, and applying it to their several cases. They are not to make laws of their own, but to interpret the laws of God; nor is their interpretation to be immediately received without examination, but the people must search the scriptures, and so far as the instructions of their minister are according to that rule they ought to receive them, *not as the word of men, but, as they are indeed, the word of God, that works effectually in those that believe.*

[2.] They watch for the souls of the people, not to ensnare them, but to save them; to gain them, not to themselves, but to Christ; to build them up in knowledge, faith, and holiness. They are to watch against every thing that may be hurtful to the souls of men, and to give them warning of dangerous errors, of the devices of Satan, of approaching judgments; they are to watch for all opportunities of helping the souls of men forward in the way to heaven.

[3.] They must give an account how they have discharged their duty, and what has become of the souls committed to their trust, whether any have been lost through their neglect, and whether any of them have been brought in and built up under their ministry.

[4.] They would be glad to give a good account of themselves and their hearers. If they can then give in an account of their own fidelity and success, it will be a joyful day to them; those souls that have been converted and confirmed under their ministry *will be their joy, and their crown, in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

[5.] If they give up their account with grief, it will be the people's loss as well as theirs. It is the interest of hearers that the account their ministers give of them may be with joy, and not with grief. If faithful ministers be not successful, the grief will be theirs, but the loss will be the people's. Faithful ministers have delivered their own souls, but a fruitless and faithless people's blood and ruin will be upon their own heads.

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CONCLUSION

Here,

I. The apostle recommends himself, and his fellow-sufferers, to the prayers of the Hebrew believers (v. 18): “*Pray for us; for me and Timothy*” (mentioned v. 23), “and for all those of us who labour in the ministry of the gospel.”

1. This is one part of the duty which people owe to their ministers. Ministers need the prayers of the people; and the more earnestly the people pray for their ministers the more benefit they may expect to reap from their ministry. They should pray that God would teach those who are to teach them, that he would make them vigilant, and wise, and zealous, and successful — that he would assist them in all their labours, support them under all their burdens, and strengthen them under all their temptations.

2. There are good reasons why people should pray for their ministers; he mentions two: —

(1.) *We trust we have a good conscience*, etc., v. 18. Many of the Jews had a bad opinion of Paul, because he, being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, had cast off the Levitical law and preached up Christ: now he here modestly asserts his own integrity: *We trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. We trust!* he might have said, *We know*; but he chose to speak in a humble style, to teach us all not to be too confident of ourselves, but to maintain a godly jealousy over our own hearts. “We trust we have a *good conscience*, an enlightened and well-informed conscience, a clean and pure conscience, a tender and faithful conscience, a conscience testifying for us, not against us: a good conscience *in all things*, in the duties both of the first and second table, towards God and towards men, and especially in all things pertaining to our ministry; we would act honestly and sincerely in all things.” Observe,

[1.] A good conscience has a respect to all God's commands and all our duty.

[2.] Those who have this good conscience, yet need the prayers of others.

[3.] Conscientious ministers are public blessings, and deserve the prayers of the people.

(2.) Another reason why he desires their prayers is that he hoped thereby to be the sooner restored to them (v. 19), intimating that he had been formerly among them, — that, now he was absent from them, he had a great desire and real intention to come again to them, — and that the best

way to facilitate his return to them, and to make it a mercy to him and them, was to make it a matter of their prayer. When ministers come to a people as a return of prayer, they come with greater satisfaction to themselves and success to the people. We should fetch in all our mercies by prayer.

II. He offers up his prayers to God for them, being willing to do for them as he desired they should do for him: *Now the God of peace*, etc., v. 20. In this excellent prayer observe,

- 1.** The title given to God — *the God of peace*, who was found out a way for peace and reconciliation between himself and sinners, and who loves peace on earth and especially in his churches.
- 2.** The great work ascribed to him: *He hath brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus*, etc. Jesus raised himself by his own power; and yet the Father was concerned in it, attesting thereby that justice was satisfied and the law fulfilled. He rose again for our justification; and that divine power by which he was raised is able to do every thing for us that we stand in need of.
- 3.** The titles given to Christ — our Lord Jesus, our sovereign, our Saviour, and the great shepherd of the sheep, promised in ³⁰¹Isaiah 40:11, declared by himself to be so, ³⁰⁴John 10:14, 15. Ministers are under-shepherds, Christ is the great shepherd. This denotes his interest in his people. They are the flock of his pasture, and his care and concern are for them. He feeds them, and leads them, and watches over them.
- 4.** The way and method in which God is reconciled, and Christ raised from the dead: *Through the blood of the everlasting covenant*. The blood of Christ satisfied divine justice, and so procured Christ's release from the prison of the grace, as having paid our debt, according to an eternal covenant or agreement between the Father and the Son; and this blood is the sanction and seal of an everlasting covenant between God and his people.

5. The mercy prayed for: *Make you perfect in every good work*, etc., v. 21. Observe,

(1.) The perfection of the saints in every good work is the great thing desired by them and for them, that they may here have a perfection of integrity, a clear mind, a clean heart, lively affections, regular and resolved

wills, and suitable strength for every good work to which they are called now, and at length a perfection of degrees to fit them for the employment and felicity of heaven.

(2.) The way in which God makes his people perfect; it is by working in them always what is pleasing in his sight, and that *through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever.* Observe,

[1.] There is no good thing wrought in us but it is the work of God; he works in us, before we are fit for any good work.

[2.] No good thing is wrought in us by God, but through Jesus Christ, for his sake and by his Spirit. And therefore,

[3.] Eternal glory is due to him, who is the cause of all the good principles wrought in us and all the good works done by us. To this every one should say, *Amen.*

III. He gives the Hebrews an account of Timothy's liberty and his hopes of seeing them with him in a little time, v. 23. It seems, Timothy had been a prisoner, doubtless for the gospel, but now he was set at liberty. The imprisonment of faithful ministers is an honour to them, and their enlargement is matter of joy to the people. He was pleased with the hopes of not only seeing Timothy, but seeing the Hebrews with him. Opportunities of writing to the churches of Christ are desired by the faithful ministers of Christ, and pleasant to them.

IV. Having given a brief account of this his letter, and begged their attention to it (v. 22), he closes with salutations, and a solemn, though short benediction.

1. The salutation.

(1.) From himself to them, directed to all their ministers who had rule over them, and to all the saints; to them all, ministers and people.

(2.) From the Christians in Italy to them. It is a good thing to have the law of holy love and kindness written in the hearts of Christians one towards another. Religion teaches men the truest civility and good-breeding. It is not a sour nor morose thing.

2. The solemn, though short benediction (v. 25): *Grace be with you all. Amen.* Let the favour of God be towards you, and his grace continually

working in you, and with you, bringing forth the fruits of holiness, as the first-fruits of glory. When the people of God have been conversing together by word or writing, it is good to part with prayer, desiring for each other the continuance of the gracious presence of God, that they may meet together again in the world of praise.