



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 29, 2008
Released on Wednesday, June 25, 2008**

"Christ as Eternal God"

Printed Text: Hebrews 13:1-16

Background Scripture: Hebrews 13:1-6

Devotional Reading: Psalms 118:5-9

Scripture Lesson Text: (Hebrews 13:1-16)

- 1** Let brotherly love continue.
- 2** Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
- 3** Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.
- 4** Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.
- 5** Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.
- 6** So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.
- 7** Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.
- 8** Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.
- 9** Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.
- 10** We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.
- 11** For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.
- 12** Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.
- 13** Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.
- 14** For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.
- 15** By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. List some of the sacrifices with which the writer of Hebrews says God is pleased.
2. Explain the significance of our giving God the sacrifices mentioned in verse 16 in light of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice.
3. Express one sacrifice of praise for Christ and His work.

Introduction

Mathematicians use a symbol for infinity that looks like this: ∞ . The idea is that if you were to travel around a track shaped like this, you would never reach the end. Instead, you would continue endlessly around the track.

Some religions view eternity in this way, as an endless treadmill from which we never escape. Yet this is not the view of the Bible. The biblical perspective is that eternity is a projection into the future that has no end point. Likewise, eternity looks to the past and sees no beginning point. It is not a repetitive cycle. A prayer of Moses expresses it like this: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psalm 90:2).

Many biblical teachings are tied to this core belief in the everlasting nature of God. God made an everlasting covenant with David that was cemented through Jesus, the Messiah (2 Samuel 23:5). God's mercy toward us "endureth for ever" (Psalm 118:1-4; compare Isaiah 54:8). We, as Christians, are partakers in an "everlasting gospel" (Revelation 14:6).

Therefore, we can take great comfort in the eternal nature of God. God is not like the boss at work who changes his mind on a daily basis. God is not like human governments that rise and fall, come and go. God is not subject to human fads, whims, or trends. As the psalmist wrote about God, "But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end" (Psalm 102:27). We cannot overestimate the value to us of God's eternal nature.

Background Scripture

The book of Hebrews compares the new covenant of the Christian faith with the old covenant of the Jewish faith. Throughout the book, the author shows that Jesus has inaugurated a new relationship with God that is both a fulfillment of the old covenant patterns and is superior at every point to them. In the final chapter of the book, chapter 13, the author moves to practical matters: relationships between believers. The backdrop of this final section is twofold.

First, there is the strong recognition of the moral expectations that come from the Old Testament. The book of Deuteronomy is an explanation of God's requirements for Israel. Moses uses the image of the Lord as a "consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24) shortly before he gets to the very basics of human relationships: the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-22). Similarly, the author of Hebrews moves from the picture of God as judge to God's expectations for humans in relationship with each other. This may be seen in the admonition of Hebrews 12:29: "For our God is a consuming fire," which comes immediately before today's text.

The second element of background is that of God's eternal nature, found in both Deuteronomy and Hebrews. One of the key standards of God's relationship with His people is that it is more than a temporary arrangement. It is intended to last forever (see Deuteronomy 5:29; 29:29).

Instructions for Christian Living (Hebrews 13:1-6)

The members of the first-century church need to have a good reputation in their communities (1 Timothy 2:2; 3:2). The gospel message will never be heard if Christians are a bunch of bickering malcontents with questionable integrity. The author of Hebrews is well aware of this issue and uses the final section of the book to give practical advice on how to live a Christlike life in the local community.

1. Why was the reminder of hospitality necessary? (v. 1-2)

A hallmark of the Christian community is that Christ's disciples are to be known by their genuine concern for one another. This was commanded by Jesus (John 13:34), and the author of Hebrews reminds the readers that the command has not been rescinded. Jesus set the example in His own life. They were to love each other in the same manner that Jesus had loved them (John 15:12). This *love* of Jesus was strong enough to cause Him to die for His beloved, and we should not be satisfied with any lesser attitude (John 15:13).

So, what does this mean in terms of showing concern for everyone in our church? How do we love the unlovely? How do we act with love toward those who seem to be ornery and mean-spirited? It is not an easy task, and the author does not claim that it is. He simply reminds us to *continue*.

2. What were some of the risks and rewards of hospitality? (v. 2)

The literal meaning of *entertain strangers* here is to "love outsiders." It is the same idea as in verse 1, but now applied to a different group. We are to love our Christian brothers and sisters, and we are to love visitors to our community too.

In the ancient world, there isn't much in the way of accommodations for travelers. To camp out in the public square is dangerous. To stay in an inn or hostelry is to put oneself at the mercy of criminals and to endure filthy, unhealthy conditions. Travelers, therefore, usually stay in private homes. The churches in the various cities are used as a network for providing hospitality for fellow believers. This can become a burdensome task, and there are other places in the New Testament where believers are reminded of their responsibilities in this area (see 3 John 5-8).

The author reminds the readers that there have been instances when the strangers seeking lodging were *angels* traveling incognito (see Genesis 18:2-10). The author of Hebrews is not telling the readers to take care of travelers in the hopes they might get lucky and entertain an angel. Rather, the idea is that caring for strangers may result in unexpected blessings, such as meeting new brothers and sisters and learning from them.

3. Why should concern for the mistreated have been important? (v. 3)

Being *in bonds* means being in prison. The author does not qualify this in terms of whether the imprisonment is the result of justice or injustice. God still loves those people, and we should too. They should receive support from their brothers and sisters outside (Matthew 25:36; Hebrews 10:34).

Prisons in the ancient world offer little in the way of care for prisoners. To visit a prisoner is more than just for encouragement. It is up to a prisoner's family and friends to bring food and clothes and to dress wounds from floggings or fights. Family might be expected to give money to the jailer in return for a higher level of protection for the prisoner.

The idea of suffering *adversity* likely refers to those in prison. It carries the idea of being tortured. It is not uncommon for prisoners to *suffer* at the hands of brutal and sadistic jailers. This is enhanced by the crude security methods of Roman jails, including heavy manacles and leg irons; these restrictive stocks clamp down on feet

and hands. If a fellow Christian is in jail for his faith, the other believers should realize that such a fate could easily be theirs in the future.

4. What are some practical ways to express sympathy for those in adversity?

Prisons may be not only physical, but social and economic as well. Many live in the prisons of poverty, illiteracy, and prejudice. The tendency is for those who are blessed to look down on those who are not. The educated might ridicule those who lack education, etc.

Sympathy and empathy should be expressed in words and actions. Those in need are to be approached with a humble realization "that could be me." First Corinthians 13:4 tells us that "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." Sympathy is expressed in taking time to be with those who are in adversity (see James 1:27).

5. What does the text of Hebrews teach about sexual purity? (v. 4)

From brotherly love the text moves to the love between husband and wife. The traditional *marriage* ceremony includes the well-known statement, "Marriage is an *honorable* estate." There is nothing shameful about being married. But marriages of Christian believers must be protected. Husbands and wives must treat each other with "brotherly love" and show the highest degree of respect for one another.

There is nothing more damaging to a couple's reputation and to the health and longevity of a marriage than to have the marriage *bed* become impure. To engage in sex outside of marriage is not just an act of selfish gratification, it is a disrespectful slap in the face of the marriage partner.

The ancient world of the Greeks and Romans does not hold to these standards. For them, it is not considered dishonorable if a man is a whoremonger (that is, visits prostitutes) or an adulterer (that is, has sex with other men's wives). Loose sexual morality is not to be tolerated within the Christian community of the first century and should not be acceptable today (1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 5:19). Christians of every generation need reminders of this absolute standard.

Because God honors marriage, He judges those who violate it (Hebrews 13:4). However lenient society may be towards these persons, God is not. He will judge them, and they will suffer the results either in this lifetime or in the life to come (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:6). While God forgives sexual sin (when one repents, John 8:1-12), the church must never condone it in teaching or practice.

6. What attitude were the Jewish believers to have about wealth? (vs. 5-6)

Covetousness in sexual relations leads logically to a warning against greed for wealth: "Let your conversation (way of life) be without covetousness." The readers of Hebrews had already lost property through persecution (10:34), and they may have been tempted to place undue emphasis on what they still had. But here they were counseled to cultivate contentment and trust God (cf. Matt. 6:24; 1 Tim 6:6-10).

He has, after all, promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). The same God who promised His presence and provision to the saints of old is still present to provide for His people. They need not vex themselves concerning daily needs (cf. Matt. 6:31-34).

Instead, they can say, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:6). It is preferable to take the last clause as a separate rhetorical question: "What shall man do to me?" The implied answer is "Nothing outside the sovereign will of God." So God is not only the great Provider of material needs; He is also the great Protector from all the devices of wicked men.

Examples for Christian Living (Hebrews 13:7-8)

7. What legacy had recent spiritual leaders left for those believers? (v. 7)

Believers have models to encourage their faith and life. Among these are the historical heroes of chapter 11. But perhaps more influential are those we have known personally and from whose living examples we have profited. The Hebrew saints were thus urged to remember such leaders and follow their faith.

"Them which have the rule over you" in Hebrews 13:7 reads more simply, "your leaders." The same Greek word is used later (vs. 17, 24). They were distinguished not so much by authority as by godly direction and example. Most likely these men had now died. This is indicated by the fact that they were to be remembered, as well as by their completed proclamation of God's Word and the lives they had already lived.

Their legacy was two fold. First, they spoke the Word of God. It was their foundation for faith and life. Second, they had left an example of steadfast, productive faith. The readers were urged to imitate their faith as they considered the outcome of their manner of life. Theirs was a faith that bore fruit.

8. How does Jesus differ from human examples believers have? (v. 8)

However valuable their recent leaders may have been, they were now gone. They had served one generation and lived only in the memory of the next. They were no longer present to guide God's people. Jesus Christ, by contrast, is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." He will never again die (Rev. 1:18); He will never change for the better or the worse, for His character is forever perfect. Thus, He is always available and always trustworthy.

Sacrifices in Christian Living (Hebrews 13:9-16)

9. What is the antidote for useless doctrines Christians face (v. 9)

Sometimes we think that false teaching is a new problem in the church. But even the apostles have to deal with teachers who want to introduce false doctrine into the church. For example, within two decades of Jesus' resurrection, a decision is made to condemn the teaching propagated by some that Gentiles are required to be circumcised in order to be saved (see Acts 15:1). Peter warns the church to be on guard for those who bring destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1).

The author warns against any dependence on *meats*, meaning sacrificial animals. As ceremonial foods, these have no value to the Christian. Our salvation is not tied to the Jewish system of sacrifices but is *established with grace*.

10. What kind of altar do Christians have today? (vs. 10-12)

The writer of Hebrews asserted that Christians have a superior altar at which they worship. It is the altar of the sacrifice of Christ.

Its advantages contrast with the limitations of the Old Testament Levitical practices. The priests had no right to partake of the meat of the sin offerings, for the bodies of the sacrificed animals were burned outside the camp (Heb. 13:10-11; cf. Lev. 4:12, 21).

But Christians, worshiping at the altar of Christ's sacrifice, enjoy not only His forgiveness but also the continuing spiritual nourishment He provides through His resurrection life (cf. John 6:48-56). This is theirs because they are sanctified by the final sin offering, who "suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). Jesus' death outside Jerusalem paralleled the disposal of the sacrificed animals.

11. How were Jewish Christians to join Christ outside the camp? (v. 13-14)

To claim the continuing spiritual benefits of Christ's better "altar" (v. 10), believers must join Him "without the camp, bearing his reproach" (v. 13). Jesus'

crucifixion outside Jerusalem signified His rejection by the Jewish religious establishment the city represented. So to take their stand with Him, His followers had to cut their ties with Judaism and shoulder the reproach this entailed.

This separation makes spiritual sense because earthly institutions, even the Jewish worship system, are headed for extinction (cf. Heb. 12:27). Permanence lies only in the city of God.

12. What sacrifices of Christians are acceptable to God? (v. 15-16)

If Christians worship at a better altar, some may ask, what sacrifices do they offer? The old animal sacrifices are no longer proper. Here we see two sacrifices that please God. The first is "the sacrifice of praise. . . the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." We come to God "by him," trusting Christ's shed blood for our acceptance. Then we may offer our praise to Him continually, in any circumstances.

This thankful praise constitutes the fruit of our lips. When Old Testament saints offered a thanksgiving offering, they included baked cakes that came from the fruit of the ground (Lev. 7:12). So also our thanks are produced by our lips.

God delights in our words of thanks, but He looks for evidences that we are truly thankful. Thus, the second sacrifice that pleases Him is "to do good and to communicate (share)" (Heb. 13:16). Those who are thankful for what they have will also do good for others. They will share both verbal witness and material goods (cf. Jas. 1:27; 1 John 3:14-18). And these sacrifices all find their source and focus in Christ, the eternal God.

Conclusion

This week's lesson text has been referred to as the epilogue of Hebrews. It is full of practical admonitions for living the successful Christian life. The author of Hebrews concludes that all the relationships and involvements of this life center around Christ, the eternal God.

Challenge your students to use this lesson text as a handbook for their relationships in church, with strangers, with their spouses, and with material possessions.

Prayer

Eternal Father, it is beyond our abilities to comprehend Your eternal nature, so we must simply believe it. We have trouble knowing what tomorrow will be, but Your Word says You "inhabiteth eternity." May we offer to You our sacrifice of praise, our humble words of reverence and adoration. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Thought to Remember

Jesus Christ doesn't change. Neither do His expectations.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Next week we move on to the Gospels, where we first view the image of "Christ as Teacher." Study Luke 4:31-37; 20:1-8 in preparation for this lesson.

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