



Hebrews 13 Let Faith Transform You Pt 2

Summary: In Christ we have a better priest, covenant, form of worship and access to God, therefore, we must let faith transform and strengthen us.

This morning we finish our study of the book of Hebrews, a book that emphasized one truth to us over and over again: Jesus is Better. As we wrap up, we find a lot of practical instructions for the Christian life. If you're new or just visiting and it sounds like a lot of rules to keep, you need to know that before we got to these things we should do for God, we spent *months* noticing how much He has already done for us.

So, things might feel a little lopsided, this morning, but even still, we end our study of Hebrews with a brief reminder of what Jesus' sacrifice was all about before we celebrate His resurrection and our renewal next week at Easter.

We've got a lot of ground to cover this morning, we're going to touch some hot-button, and it's going to seem a little scattered at times as we let the text direct our attention, but the one theme we'll keep coming back to is an emphasis on Christian community enabled by God's grace. So let's jump right in:

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.

A key part of the Christian faith is community – it's not just God's love for you and your love for Him, it's your love for other people and their love for you as well. In a healthy church, people will care about you.

The problem is, we're not all healthy, and some people don't feel loved or connected, even at church, which is why we're told to [let brotherly love continue](#), but sometimes we just need to [let brotherly love start](#) and that's a two-way street, so do what you can to get the ball rolling and then keep it rolling. And:

2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels.

For me, this has always been one of those "wait, what did that say?" kind of verses. It says there are angels around us and we don't even know it, which is all the more reason to be kind to all people. I know some of you have more questions about this and what it means. The problem is, this short verse is all we get. But remember, we spoke about Abraham in Hebrews 11, he provided lunch for two men who turned out to be angels on their way to rescue Lot and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. And some of you might even have a story of interacting with someone you thought was an angel. I'm telling you, this is one of those things I'd love to know more about, but this is all we have.

So before we move on, I'll point out something else interesting to me – notice we're told to [let brotherly love continue](#), but we're also told to reach out to [strangers](#). Meet new people. Both are important and the person you reach out to is either an angel sent from God or a person made in the image of God. Either way, you can't go wrong by reaching out.

You go wrong by drawing in. You go wrong by being so busy or shy or proud that you don't have time for other people – whether they're [brothers](#) or [strangers](#). God wants us to spend time with other people, to be connected; to care about them and care for their needs and receive the same from others whether they're angels or ordinary.

Notice how that theme continues:

[3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.](#)

It's referring to Christians who have been imprisoned and who are mistreated, and notice why: because [you yourselves are in the body also](#).

And so, we need to point out that the main emphasis here is on caring about and caring for fellow Christians who are mistreated or jailed as a consequence of their faith. We need to find ways to remember our brothers and sisters in the faith while we enjoy the relative peace and prosperity of our daily lives in the suburbs in one of the wealthiest counties in the country. We need to remember those who suffer because we are connected to them. They really are part of us, and we are, really, a part of them. It's easy to forget, but it's true. And this is a great reason to continue praying for Ukrainian Christians.

We move on to another form of community, the most intimate we know:

[4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.](#)

Now, I'm aware of what the culture says about marriage, sexuality, and gender. I'm aware of what local, state, and federal governments say. But I stand before you this morning as nothing more, nor less, than a representative of God in heaven, the creator of life and inescapable judge of eternity to tell you: God He created man. He created woman. He created them to be together in lifelong partnerships. He says that is honorable. It is undefiled. And He will judge *everything* else.

You need to know that. You need to know I didn't make it up. Your parents didn't make it up. The Church didn't make it up. Old white men sitting in seats of power didn't make it up in order to control society. God's standard has been found in Scripture for millennia, it's the basis of human life on the planet. One biological male pairing up with one biological female, having children, and remaining committed to each other for life – according to Scripture, the two actually become one.

So, you need to know that according to God, issues of sexuality, gender, marriage, faithfulness, and family are not primarily questions of attraction and desire, they're issues of authority and submission.

Every human being will experience desires, attractions, feelings, and then has to determine: should I give in to them and decide what's best for myself, or should I submit those desires to the authority and instruction of a divine and holy God?

That's actually the question at the root of our entire lives – you can swap out the issue of sexuality and put in anything else you choose – the question, at the end of the day, is: do I do whatever I feel like doing, or do I submit to the authority of a holy God? That's not an easy question to answer, but it helps if you know this: that God is not only a holy and righteous judge, who establishes boundaries for our behavior, He calls us into a relationship with Him where our needs will ultimately be met and satisfied in a way nothing and no one else can. Read with me:

5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we may boldly say:

*"The LORD is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?"*

To **covet** is to want something you don't have. Maybe someone you don't have. And what does Scripture say? Don't live that way – look to God. The whole point of the passage is to say, when you feel an emptiness, when you feel a desire – *because you will* – seek fulfillment from God who promises He **will never leave you or forsake you**. He'll actually help you discover contentment. Be governed by God and not your desires.

Look at your situation, look at your desire, look at your need, and say boldly:

*"The LORD is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?"*

Speaking of being governed:

*7 Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct.*

Remember, this text is almost two thousand years old, this is the message of God to all Christians, at times in history all around the world. And it says – whether you attend City Gates Church, or First Baptist, or some Community Church, you should have spiritual leaders in your life who put tremendous emphasis on the Word of God and attempt to live

out the things they teach, and you should evaluate their lives and conduct – and if everything is in order, you should follow them.

Jesus gives leadership to the Church and their mission to help you – to equip you, for the work that God has called you to. Consider this:

Ephesians 4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ

So, once again, we're back to this idea of a Christian community. The God we worship individually calls us together corporately, into a body, into a family, where we receive leadership *from Him through* other people who point us to Jesus, tell us about Jesus, and serve as the hands and feet, the eyes and ears, of Jesus in our lives.

Now, sometimes leaders get that wrong – because they're human beings too, they're works in progress and sometimes they go astray. Sometimes they stumble. Sometimes they fall. So, listen to what they're saying – are they speaking the Word of God to you? And, look at the way they're living, **consider the outcome of their conduct** – do they live out the things they teach? If both of these line up - then, **follow their faith**, let them lead, let them rule over you because you believe this is the structure God established for His glory and for your good.

We'll come back to submission and leadership in a moment, but first we take a bit of a side step to remember why we're doing all of this – why we prioritize community, why we submit our individual desire to the authority of God, why we follow the leadership of the church, and it all comes back to this: Jesus.

8 Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever. **9** Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For *it is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. **11** For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. **12** Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

You have to remember the bigger picture of the book of Hebrews, you have to remember that the message is: Jesus is better. Jesus is the only reason to live this way. If there is no Jesus, or if He's not really the Son of God, if He's not really a sacrifice for the sins of those He calls, if He's not really the only way to escape the righteous judgment of a holy God, then there's no need to do all the other stuff we've talked about this morning; Jesus is the only justification for this way of life.

But here's the problem, you have to accept Him, receive Him, submit to Him entirely. And people don't want to do that – many people would prefer a hybrid religion instead. We want a religion that fills us spiritually, that gives us a connection to something transcendent and divine, something supernatural, without interfering with our wants and desires on earth.

This is why there's such an emphasis on spirituality over religion today. You can be a spiritual person, open to things that are bigger than you, but it's all very you-centric. Your spiritual experiences are things that help you and fulfill you, they never control you or constrain you – people today are not looking for a religion or a God that tells them no, they're looking for spirituality that gives them goosebumps, comfort, and help.

Scripture calls that, in vs 9, [various and strange doctrines](#). In the days when this letter was written, it took the form of people saying you could have Jesus and still enjoy other religious ceremonies – not because you saw Jesus as the fulfillment of those other things, but because Jesus could take care of some of your needs and these religious feasts could help with others.

But God says no, you don't need anything else in addition to Jesus. If you really have Him, you have everything you need. There's no reason to add anything else to your spiritual experience, there's no need to customize.

You just have to know and believe this: Jesus suffered and died on the cross of Calvary, for you.

You have to know and understand that His death was an intentional act of sacrifice. He died *so that* [He might sanctify people with His blood](#).

So, you also have to know that *you need sanctification*. What is that? To [sanctify](#) something means to set it aside for a special purpose. Maybe your mom or your grandma has special soap that you can't use every day, it's for guests or special occasions. Maybe you have special dishes that only come out when it's a holiday, or big event, or you guests. They're set aside for a special purpose.

Well, God wants to give *you* a special purpose, to bring you into a relationship with Him. Our whole society is looking for purpose, looking for meaning, looking for identity, meanwhile God is calling people to Himself to give them all those things. But you don't naturally have them, you don't automatically have them, because, by nature, we resist and rebel against God.

Which makes us law breakers. Whether it was accidental or intentional, it doesn't really matter how or why you broke the law, at the end of the day all that matters is that you broke it. And those who break the law deserve punishment.

Fortunately, God is both just and merciful. Because He is absolutely and completely committed to justice, He has to say you're guilty of breaking the law, no matter why you

broke it. But, because He is merciful, He then offers to be the sacrifice that suffers your penalty for breaking the law. First justice, then mercy, this is always the pattern.

That's what happened on the cross – that's why Jesus came to earth, to be the sacrifice you needed for breaking God's laws, whether you did it ignorantly or intentionally. And once that sacrifice is offered, you are given the chance to identify with it. To agree with it. To say, yes, I have sinned, I have broken God's laws, I need help to escape His judgment. If you do that, if you say that, if you identify with Christ's sacrifice on your behalf, you are then sanctified – set apart for something special, set apart for God's purposes over your own personal desires.

And as a result, you live differently, you value new things, you seek new things which leads you to go against the flow of the dominant culture around you. Look with me at:

Hebrews 13:13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. **14** For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

In the middle of all the culture wars that are raging right now between conservatives, liberals, and libertarians, Christians would do well to consider and remember these two verses.

It is good to serve in government, it is good to vote, it is good to advocate for policy, but the early church needed to be reminded not to look to Jerusalem for all its answers and fulfillment, and the church in America today needs to be reminded not to look to Washington, or New York, or Hollywood, or anywhere else, other than the New Jerusalem for our ultimate and final fulfillment.

Christian, do you **seek the city to come**? Do you put your greatest hope there while doing the greatest good here? Do you understand that it will get better one day, but until then there will be **reproach**, because people don't like God? They don't like His laws. They don't want His leadership. They want their own way. And you do too. I do too. But I'm fighting it, I'm trying to submit and surrender and identify with Christ my Lord. And here's what that looks like:

15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.

Now, I feel like I'm spending a lot of time telling you what to do this morning, and yet, that's what we find in Scripture: God telling us how to live life focused on Him, putting Him at the center of all we do. And that involves **praising** Him – giving Him **thanks**, seeing the good that comes from knowing Him and following Him. We do that through singing songs, but also just in our ordinary speech – giving God thanks, telling others of the good things He has done for you, praising Him out loud.

And, as a result of all that you have received from God, reflecting that to others, notice:

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

Again, this is your purpose, this is your identity, this is your reason for living: it's to do good to other people in Jesus' name. To share your time, talents, and treasures with them. Which brings us back to this theme of community – you belong with other people you can affect for Jesus. That is why you breathe.

17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

I said we would come back to the issue of submission and authority, and here we are. Personally, I find it fascinating that it comes up again. I think it's because we really are that resistant to submission. We really, really, want to be autonomous individuals, we really want to do our own thing. We don't want to be told what is right, what is wrong, what to do. But when we submit, to God and the leadership He establishes in the home, in the church, and even in the state, the ultimate goal is that it would go well for us. Notice the repeated pattern - submit, for your own sake:

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: 3 “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

1 Timothy 2:1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

There is a principle at play here that repeats over and over again – things go well for us when we submit to God-established leadership, because we've first, and ultimately, submitted to God.

18 Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. 19 But I especially urge *you* to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

22 And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. 23 Know that *our* brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.
24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.
25 Grace *be* with you all. Amen.

There are so many things we could pull out and say here, but I just want to emphasize two.

First, we see again an emphasis on community – the author asks the church to pray *so that* he can be **restored to them sooner**. There’s a desire to be together again. He hopes to see **Timothy**, and to bring him too. He wants them to be **greet each other**, both the leaders and the people, and he sends them greetings from Christians in **Italy** emphasizing the global nature of the local church.

Second, all of this community is made possible through the grace of God, who sent His Son for us. The Lord became a lamb, the **great shepherd** became a sacrificial **sheep**. He hung on a wooden cross outside the city of Jerusalem and suffered and died two thousand years ago for us. His body was laid in a grave but He rose three days later and ascended to Heaven. Now, He offers a new **covenant**. A covenant based in mercy because He has already fulfilled justice.

He offers a new life to anyone who will receive it, as a gift of **grace**. At the very center of the gospel is the good news that you can change. There really are fresh starts and new beginnings. You can be born-again and receive, from God, the guidance and strength you need for that new life. To be a Christian is to say: I choose to follow God’s ways instead of my own, and when I mess up or when I am weak, I come to Him for help instead of trying to fix it on my own.

To be a Christian is to believe that God is going to (vs 21) **make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever.**

To be a Christian is to believe that Jesus is better. Do you believe that? Do you live that?

Every Christian began as someone who came to the point in their life where they told God, “I’ve been doing this wrong and I need Your forgiveness, I need Your help.”

This is how you actually become a Christian, you confess your sin, your shortcoming, your rebellion, your need to God, and you ask Him for help.

There are no special words to use and you don’t have to walk down the aisle, but it has to happen. You have to come to the place where you can say, no matter how I feel, no matter what desires and attractions or ambitions I find in my heart and mind, I believe that Jesus is better and I want to know and follow Him.

Let’s pray that now.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Hebrews 13 Let Faith Transform You Pt 2

Summary: In Christ we have a better priest, covenant, form of worship and access to God, therefore, we must let faith transform and strengthen us.

Pastoral note: There are a lot of hot-button political and cultural issues in this chapter. If you are discussing the passage as a group, begin by establishing a common goal to stick close to the text and not go too far astray in political and cultural commentary. Work hard to make things personal: ask how can I obey this, *not* what does our culture need to do? Remember, this was written to Christians and we, as Christians, need to consider how it applies *to us* personally and congregationally before we move on to what it means about this or that situation.

- How have you experience brotherly (or sisterly) love in the church? Where and how do you attempt to show it to others? Is love easier for you to give, or receive?
- Has there ever been a time when someone reached out to you as a stranger and included you or helped you? Is that something you're good at doing for others? How can self-professed introverts show kindness to strangers?
 - Do you think you've ever interacted with an angel?
- How can Christians living in America remember Christians who are jailed or mistreated for their faith? What can we do for people we've never met or who live so far away?
- What are some reasons why God says marriage is honorable? Why should Christians pursue and esteem marriage even more than other people? What good have you seen come from marriage?
- How does knowing that the Lord is our Helper assist us in fighting covetousness? What is one area where you could make an immediate, practical application of this passage?
- How can you evaluate the conduct and faith of your spiritual leaders? What should you look for? What are warning signs? Consider the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.
- How does knowing that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (vs 8) help you endure the challenges and struggles of life?
- How can you do good and share (vs 16) in an intentional effort to please God?