

Hebrews 13:1-25

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[0:00] Hebrews 13, page 1009, if you're following the Black Church Bibles, and we are hopefully going! to bring the plane into land this evening. You know that experience when somebody has been telling you! what you shouldn't do, and they're super clear, they're really clear about what you shouldn't do in this situation, and they might even give you reasons why you shouldn't do it, but you find yourself at the end of the conversation thinking, well, what should I do? I know what I'm not supposed to do, well, what should I do? And there's a bit of that feeling, I think, when you get end of Hebrews 11, halfway through Hebrews 12. Don't give up. I get it. Okay, don't go back to your old religion. Right, super crystal clear. You've explained that to me. Don't wander away. Okay, I get it. The saints of old who line the way. There's a lot of people that have gone before you, and they are cheering you on.

So don't go back. Get off the floor and keep going. And here's the reason. Jesus is better, way better.

Okay. Okay, I get it. I've taken 12 and a bit chapters to tell me that. But what do you want me to actually do? What does it look like to get back up off the floor and keep going? What will keeping going look like? What will not wandering away? I get the not wandering away bit, but where do I wander to?

What should my wandering now look like as I go in the right direction? As one, well, as our founder once famously asked, how shall we then live? We get it that we're not supposed to walk away. We get it that Jesus is better, way better than any of the alternatives we might look to. But how shall we then live? Well, that's where we come to this evening. As our author signs off his word of exhortation to these beleaguered and disillusioned Hebrew Christians, he tells us how we are to live. He left us last week, if you were here, with the charge to go and live for Christ wholeheartedly, chapter 12, verse 28. And here in chapter 13, we see what this life of acceptable worship. Go and live wholeheartedly a life of acceptable worship. Well, here is what this life devoted to God looks like. And he says, it is a life that is marked by four distinct qualities, four distinct qualities. And the first one is love.

Point number one, love. Verses one to three, let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

[2:51] The Christian life is a self-giving, not a self-centered life. And the author calls us to put this into practice with three groups of people. Do you see that? Brothers and sisters in Christ, strangers, and those who have been imprisoned for their faith. Brotherly love in the New Testament isn't, first of all, something we feel. So Paul will say in Romans 12, show brotherly love with affection.

And the apostle Peter calls for brotherly love with sincerity. Brotherly love is a posture towards others expressed in sharing what you have. It is an active thing. It is not an emotional thing. It is sharing your life and your possessions with others. And the author says that this starts here in the church, brothers and sisters. Now for the first hearers, it was already happening. Do you see, let brotherly love continue. It's already going on. Keep going. They had their property plundered. We were told that back in chapter 10, verse 34. And so because of that, you have your property plundered. Well, the brothers and sisters come in and do what they can to help you get by. Come and stay at my house. You've had all your property taken. You've had the place looted. Come and stay at my house. I'll give you some food. I've got spare clothing. You can have that. I'll help you get back on your feet. This is a basic Christian value. Do good to everyone, says Paul in Galatians 6, verse 10, especially those who are of the household of faith. There is to be an order to our loves. And top of that list is to be the brothers and sisters. Let brotherly love continue.

[4 : 37] I want to say it's striking to me how much I see this going on here at IPC. Without comment, without fuss, without anybody talking about them doing it, a need arises and people just step in and sort it out.

And what's interesting to me is if I was foolish enough to go to the person that had done that and said, why did you help that person out? Just out of interest. Why did you do that?

The person would say, I'm sorry, I don't actually even understand the question. It's what you do. Let brotherly love continue.

I see it across the congregation in lots of different ways where people recognize that when someone in the body has a need, if I can meet that need, I do. I step in. I put myself out in order to help them. It's very encouraging to see. So let me say, let this kind of love continue.

But then this should spill out to others, verse 2, in hospitality. That is opening your home to strangers. That's what hospitality is. Hospitality is an act of love and grace that extends kindness, expecting nothing in return. Opening your doors to others, not expecting that they will pay you back in some way. And this should mark the home of a follower of Jesus. Come and eat with us.

[6 : 02] Come and stay at ours. It's just a sofa, but you're welcome. We'll provide a roof over your head. We'll give you what you need until you're back on your feet. And you see, verse 2, you never know who you might be entertaining. Look at verse 2. Don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. I don't know. Maybe one or two. I don't know.

I can't tell. Now, of course, this may be a reference to Abraham's hospitality to the three men at Mamre back in Genesis 18, verse 2, one of whom turned out to be the angel of the Lord.

But the fact is, the point is, Christian love expresses itself in hospitality to strangers. Our author returns to this theme of love down at verse 16. Can you see verse 16, where he connects it to our love for God in verse 15? So look at 15. Through him, then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. That is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. He brings them together. Doing good and serving others please the Lord. The Christian life involves sacrifice. We don't offer animals anymore because the ultimate sacrifice has come. That's there in verse 12. The Lord Jesus has been sacrificed for sin once for all. But for those who have put their faith in Jesus, who come, verse 15, through him, there are two sacrifices that we do offer. One is a sacrifice of praise. We offer him thankful hearts full of gratitude. That's a sacrifice of praise. We're grateful to him. We praise him for all that he has done for us. And secondly, we offer the sacrifice of love for brothers and sisters and strangers alike. This is what pleases God. Do you want to bring a smile to God's face?

Love and praise him and love others as well. It pleases God. So you can see why this kind of love that the writer of the Hebrews is asking for, calling for here is more than sentiment or emotion. In fact, as the author continues, we see that it will actually need to be steely. Biblical love, New Testament love requires us to be courageous. Look at verse 3. Back up at verse 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.

Bear your brothers and sisters who are in prison. In mind, he's saying, because we belong to the one body. They're in prison. We're out of prison, but we all belong to the same body.

[8 : 51] Now, what's interesting to me is that the people here that he's referring to would have been in that first category, the three categories. They would be brothers and sisters in Christ. So why then does he especially single them out? Let brotherly love continue. Don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers. Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them because you're part of the same body. Those are brothers and sisters. They're the ones that he's talking about initially.

So why single them out? Because of the courage that it will take to do so. When members of the church fall foul of the authorities, it will be costly to identify with the motor. If you visit someone in prison, you get vetted by the authorities. And if that person is in prison, because they have done something that you do, it could land you in the same predicament. It's the same in the case of real crime. That's true for real criminals. But it's also true when the state decides that saying what the Bible says is worthy of custody. And then, of course, there is the social sentence as well of being canceled. That's perhaps where we see that most clearly at the minute in our day. A few years ago, a friend of mine retweeted on his Twitter, on his ex, he retweeted a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 6. Within minutes, his employer told him to delete it. His business associates cut him off. And the thing that he said was hardest of all was that his Christian friends evaporated. They vanished.

They were nowhere to be seen. Nobody came to his aid. We can't do that. Love requires courage. And look at verse 13. This is actually regular discipleship. This isn't top-level discipleship. This is basic following Christ. Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

[10:59] If we identify with Christ and we want to follow him to glory, the only way to get there is along the same path that he walked. And just as he was killed outside the city in the place of ignominy and rejection and disgrace, our love for him demands that we are willing to share in that same contempt.

For these first hearers, that meant walking away from the respectability of their religion and their culture. It meant leaving the security of all that that represented. And the fact is that it's no different for us.

The cultural expression is going to be different, but the opposition is the same. All those, the Apostle Paul says, all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Now we see the reality of this is beginning to hit home for more and more people in our day. And we're discovering that we can't make our Christian faith fit with the orthodoxies of the culture anymore.

So we have to make a choice. And it's a choice that shows up what you actually really love. It shows where your heart really is.

[12:17] Christ or your reputation. Christ or the acceptance of the cool crowd. And you define the cool crowd according to the people you want to be in with. Christ or your professional success.

Christ or your credibility. It's a choice. We all have to make it. The pressure is on more and more. And it's a choice that's going to require courage.

Love for God and for others. That is to mark the life of the Christian. Requires courage. Well the second quality. Then we need to see. The second quality that the Christian will embody.

The first is love. The second. Point number two. Contentment. Contentment. Verses four to six. Let marriage be held in honor among all. And let the marriage bed be undefiled.

For God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from the love of money. And be content with what you have. For he has said I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say the Lord is my helper.

[13:22] I will not fear. What can man do to me? At first glance here. We think about well how are we supposed to live. We can think that he's talking here about purity and greed.

Those are the issues that he seems to be raising. But if you go under there. If you go deeper than that. The root problem is a lack of contentment with what God has given you. That's really what's going on here.

In ancient literature these two areas are often taken together for this reason. It is discontentment that leads to immorality and adultery. It is discontentment that leads to you wanting and longing for more than what you have.

No one sleeps around if they are content with God's plan for sex. No one cheats on their spouse if they are content with them. No one is greedy for more money if they are content with the level that they are living at.

Immorality and greed flow from a discontented heart. And the author says there is no place for this in the Christian life. But he also says that we can easily reject it. And we can be content because we have God.

[14:29] Our discontented and covetous hearts want what other people have. Whether that's a spouse or their spouse or a certain lifestyle or a particular quality of life.

We want those things. We set our hearts on those things. Because we're convinced that contentment comes from having them. We think that contentment comes from having something that is out there.

Not in here. It's about what's out there. And if we can get that thing. Well then we'll be content. And of course we're up against an absolutely massive advertising super industry that knows our hearts better than we do.

And it is promising on us in all kinds of ways that we can have the dream that they are selling. If we just buy their product that discontentment will evaporate.

If we just choose the way of life that they are selling to us. And it usually means, it always means money, pay here, sign here, do this. And that will take you down the path to contentment. [15:36] That's what advertising is. It's promising you contentment via their product. And we're up against that. And they know our hearts better than we do. And despite the fact that we have consistently gone down that path.

And our hopes have been dashed a hundred times out of a hundred. We keep believing them. We keep believing that we will get contentment if we get something that is out there sorted out.

If I just had a husband or a wife. If my husband or wife was like him or her. If we could have that house. Those holidays. That bit of tech.

That car. That upgrade. Whatever it might be. Then life would be good. Then I'd be content. That is not a Christian way to think. I hope I don't need to tell you that.

That is not a Christian way to think. Because the Christian knows that whatever we are missing. We have all we need. Look at verse 5. Be content with what you have.

[16:38] For. Because. Here's the reason you can be content with what you have. He has said. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Some of this first audience were in dire straits.

They had everything taken from them. And he's saying. You can be content with what you have. And the reason they can be content is because they have God. He will never leave them.

He will never forsake them. In verse 6. He is their helper. Their strength. Just as he was for Israel when he rescued them out of slavery in Egypt. Just as he was for the psalmist.

54 verse 4. When he prayed. The Lord is my helper. The Lord is the sustainer of my soul. To talk about God as helper is to talk about his power and his control.

Whatever you are missing in life. You have all you need. You have all you need.

[17:37] The powerful sovereign Lord who is working out his good. If sometimes hard to understand plans. In his perfect timing. Is with you.

He's with you. And he will not leave you. If you don't have it. You don't need it. And whatever you don't have.

You do have God. The only one you really need. When you worry that you're missing out in some way. Or if you worry.

Or get yourself all twisted up about the fact that if. Because you've convinced yourself. If you had this thing. Whatever this thing out there is. And it could be anything. Remember that God is your helper.

Not that thing. Remember that God will never leave you. Nor forsake you. And what then happens. When you feel that discontentment growing. And you remind yourself that he is your helper.

[18:36] And that you have with him. All that you need. What happens? As you trust him more. Your contentment will grow. The discontentment will evaporate. And the contentment will grow.

One. Love. Two. Contentment. The third quality. Faith. Point number three. Faith. This is what ties together. Verses seven to fourteen. Remember your leaders.

Those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life. And imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away. By diverse and strange teachings.

For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace. Not by foods. Which have not benefited those devoted to them. Starts by looking back to their past leaders. Those who first preached the gospel to them.

Perhaps those that established the church of which they were a part. And he calls them to consider the way they lived. And to imitate their life of faith. Just the same way that those guys came preaching the gospel of grace to you.

[19:41] And they were living by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Imitate that. And even though they have died. Or will in time die. Their savior. The one in whom their faith was placed most certainly hasn't.

Do you see that verse eight? It's a favorite memory verse. It is what you could call a classic of the coffee cup genre. It has graced a million calendars down through church history.

Speaks of the unchanging nature. The immutability of Christ. It is. It's beautifully true. But the author puts it here to remind his hearers. That just as their former leaders look to faith in Christ.

So must they. And while verse nine. There are other teachings. Doing the rounds as there always are.

And the references here refer it seems to me. To the ceremonies of the old covenant. That have been the draw for these hearers. He's saying. Just like the leaders did before. You also need to stick with the gospel.

[20 : 39] That's what the author means when he compares being strengthened by grace. Rather than ceremonial foods. It's be strengthened by the grace of the gospel. Not the religion of the ceremonies that you're looking back to.

And then he points them forward to the basis of their hope. Verse 14. For here. Where we do ceremonies and all that kind of thing. We have no lasting city. But we seek the city that is to come. So can you see what the author is doing here. Is pulling together the different aspects of the life of faith. It is a life that is founded on Christ.

His life. His death. His resurrection and history. For our salvation. Our faith is faith in him. And this life is then lived. In the power of God's grace.

Not our efforts. Whether those efforts are religious or otherwise. Whatever they are. We live in the power of God's grace. As we hold fast to Christ.

[21 : 37] And then. It is driven. This whole thing. It's founded on Christ. It is lived by grace. And then it is driven by the hope of the future. The city that is to come.

The heavenly Jerusalem. The home of righteousness. That's the life of faith. It's founded on Christ. It is lived by grace. Not by religious ceremonies. And it is driven by the hope of the future.

Now I hope this evening. You're not surprised to hear. That the Christian faith requires us to live by faith. I hope that's not a revelation. Like those who have gone before us.

The great cloud of witnesses. In chapter 11. Our leaders that taught us. The gospel. Whoever it was that you heard the gospel from. And they persevered to the end in faith.

We are to sit light. To the things of this life. With our eyes fixed. On Jesus. We are to take him at his word.

[22 : 37] However unpopular. That makes us. And we are to live according to what is unseen. And we do that. Knowing. That whatever we have or don't have here.

There is. Unfathomable glory. In the future. Love. Contentment.

Faith. And then finally. Point number four. Accountability. Verse 17. Accountability. The author closes out his letter.

With some teaching on what it means to be the church. So it's fitting that we affirm these questions from the Heidelberg Catechism. Earlier on. Obey your leaders. And submit to them.

For they are keeping watch over your souls. As those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy. And not with groaning. For that would be of no advantage to you. He's talking here about an accountability.

[23 : 33] Accountability. That exists within the community of the church. And he's saying first of all. That members of the church are accountable to church leaders. Elders. In the plural.

Elders. Have authority in church life. Not. The minister says it. That settles it. Kind of authority. In fact. Verse 18. Makes clear that leaders are also church members.

Who need the prayers of the church. Do you see that? Pray for us. For we are sure that we have a clear conscience. Desiring to act honorably in all things. Elders have authority.

Just because authority can and has been abused in churches. Doesn't remove the command.

Church members are accountable to their elders. And notice. Members are to make this oversight a joy.

See that? Do you ever think about that? What. Could you do. To make leading you. In church life. A joy? I'll tell you four things.

[24 : 33] That make elders rejoice. Here you go. First of all. Number one. You turn up. And play your part in church life. The ministry of turning up. Is very encouraging. To church elders.

You're not merely a consumer. And you serve where there's a need. That's number one. Elders rejoice. When they see that in church life. And again. As we look around here.

At IPC Ealing. See it all the time. There's huge amounts for us to rejoice in that regard. Second one. You're hungry to be fed the word of God. And God in order to grow.

You're dialed in during the sermon. You're not asleep. Nope. Good. Number three. You sing. Well.

When we worship. That brings joy to everyone. Not just elders. But it's a very simple thing. That brings joy. To elders. Number four. You join us to pray.

[25 : 31] Join us to pray at our monthly prayer meeting. When the church prays. You come and you pray. And you especially pray. Look at verse 18. You pray for us. However difficult.

Church leadership might get. To know that the church are praying for us. Brings joy. Because it means. That we know. That we've linked arms. And we're in this thing together. There you go. There are four things. If you'd like to be a joy. Turn up and play your part in church life. Be hungry to be fed the word of God. Sing well. And pray. Easy peasy.

Second thing. If members are accountable to church leaders. Leaders are accountable to God. Do you see that? Obey your leaders and submit to them.

For they are keeping watch over your souls. As those who will have to give an account. Elders. In the church of Jesus Christ. Have to answer to almighty God.

[26 : 31] For how they have shepherded those under their care. And those of us who serve as elders. Must never forget this. Brothers. Would you be happy. To offer that conversation. Or that pastoral advice.

That you gave to God. It's worth us thinking about it. Because one day we'll have to. We'll have to give an account for it all. I just want to push this a bit more. And say that there are two implications. For us all. With regards to this. Leaders are accountable to God. That should encourage members. That there is safety. In your submission to their leadership.

If they are godly. Because they understand this. Those leaders will lead in the fear of God. And that will be for your benefit. If they are ungodly.

And I can hand on heart say. That's not the case here. But if they are. You can trust that God knows. And God will deal with it. The fact that leaders will answer to God.

[27 : 29] Should encourage members. That there is safety in submission. Secondly. This accountability presupposes. A knowledge of the leaders. On the part of the members. And a knowledge of the members. On the part of the leaders.

How can Christians do what is required of them. In this verse. Without knowing. To whom they must submit. And how can elders do what is required of them. In this verse.

If they don't know who is under their care. That's why we have church membership here. If you are a member of this church. You can do Hebrews 13.17.

You know who the elders are. And the elders know who you are. We pray for you by name. And we seek to shepherd you towards growth and grace. Because we take it very seriously. That we will have to give an account for your progress.

While you are under our care here. And we expect you to submit to our leadership. Not because it's perfect. Not because there's a sense in which. We can lord it over you.

[28 : 26] Quite the opposite. We do it because this is how God has ordered things. Can I say if you're a baptized Christian. And you're not a member of a church.

Doesn't have to be this one. But another Bible teaching church. Where you know the elders. And they know you. I don't see how you can fulfill Hebrews 13.17. And let me ask you.

Who is keeping watch over your soul? Even regular attendance at the same church doesn't work.

Because unless you recognize this submission in some formal way. When or if you get off track.

Who has the permission to call you back to repentance? If you know your heart. And you know the deceitfulness of sin. When you're deceived by sin.

Who will speak truth into your life? Who has the authority to do that? Meaningful church membership helps provide the accountability we all need.

[29 : 21] That's why we take seriously what we did this evening. That's why it's a vital part of our church life. Second. That everyone is duty bound to use these gifts readily and cheerfully. For the benefit and well-being of the other members.

We're in this together. Love. Love. Faith. Hang on.

Contentment. Love. Contentment. Faith. Accountability. There we are. You had missed one. So we come to the end of the letter. But when we land.

As we do at the end of this letter. It's not really a conclusion is it? With an instruction that says.

Okay. Don't wander away. Do now go and live a life of love.

Faith. Contentment. Love. Contentment. Faith. And accountability. It's pushing us on. It's not really drawing things to a close at all. It has a feel of that Churchill quote doesn't it? Now this is not the end.

[30 : 28] It's not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning. He's pushing us on. It's not. It's. I want to say to you. Don't just not give up. But pursue lives that are marked by love.

Contentment. Faith. And let's do it together as the church. Spurring one another on. As look at verse 21. As God equips us with all that we need.

To do this. May he help us. By his goodness and grace. Let's pray. Or for a night.