

Study 14: Chapter 13

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He again builds on what has already been said (remember that there were no chapter divisions in the original letter) at the close of the last chapter:

Because of this, what should we do?

How is doing good and sharing a sacrifice, and what is it compared to?

What is the altar referred to in verse 10?

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What are some of the key things that the writer uses in his conclusion?

What does the conclusion tell us about the writer?

Homework:

Read the notes, as a review of the study.

- *What are some of the practical ways that we can apply the Hebrew lessons to our lives?*
- *How do we show our lives as a sacrifice to God? What does it mean in practice?*

Re-read the introduction to each study, and then do a skim read of the whole book in preparation for next week.

Study Notes for: Study 14 – Chapter 13

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He again builds on what has already been said (remember that there were no chapter divisions in the original letter) at the close of the last chapter:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our "God is a consuming fire." (12:28-29 NIV)

Because of this, what should we do?

The writer brings us a range of things that we should do (because of what Christ has done for us). Particularly note where he puts *brotherly love*, in the first – and most important – position.

Instruction	Verse
Brotherly love	1
Entertaining strangers	2
Remember prisoners	3
Those mistreated	3
Do not covet	5
Be content with what you have	5
Remember the elders and obey them	7, 17
Follow their faith and conduct	7
Hold on to the truth	9
Do good, and share (= sacrifices)	16
Pray for others	18

Each one of these things is worthy of a study in itself. But the point that the writer is making, is that we have been placed in the exalted position because of Christ. This is not an academic exercise. We need to grasp the practical implications of what it means. We cannot belong to Christ and just go about living a life as if He didn't matter, and He did nothing. That would be exactly the same thing as continuing on with the Jewish religion

Study of Hebrews by Graeme Offer

and ignoring the sacrifice that Jesus made, and would amount to saying that Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies was purely co-incidence!

The writer has spent a long argument about Jesus fulfilment of the Jewish practices, and shown them to be better, complete, and accomplishing things that they were not able to do. **IF** what he has been saying is true, **THEN** there are actions that we need to take.

In computer programming, there is a common logical operator “IF – THEN – ELSE” which goes along an argument that IF the argument is true, THEN the operation is to be performed. However, if the argument is not true, then the ELSE operation is to be performed. The writer is making a similar line of reasoning here. **IF** what he has said is true, **THEN** we need to turn our faith into action, but there is an **ELSE** consequence – and that is that we deny Jesus. The consequence of that he has already talked about in 12:29 – that we will meet head on the severity of God, as a consuming fire. Fire can be a good and wonderful thing. It keeps us warm on cold nights, can cook our meals, and can clean up long grass and scrub very effectively. But a bushfire is a terrible thing, and is to be feared. Paul says:

“Consider therefore the kindness and sternness (KJV goodness and severity) of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.” (Rom 11:22 NIV)

“The goodness of a fire is in its severity. If you take away the severity, you also take away the goodness. And so it is with God. We cannot have the goodness of God without having His severity also” – Les Burgin

How is doing good and sharing a sacrifice, and what is it compared to?

If we are selfish, we want to have everything to ourselves. We don’t want to share what we have with others. Great examples of sharing can be seen in the early church:

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.” (Acts 2:44 NIV)

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.” (Acts 4:32)

The early christians were prepared to give up the things that they had and share them with their brothers and sisters in Christ. They had to *give up* their possessions. It was a sacrifice, to give away the things that they had worked for. But importantly, they recognised that the things of this world are temporal, and our possessions can prevent us from being in a proper relationship with God. It will do us absolutely no good in eternity if we have made and kept millions of dollars worth of possessions, but neglected to conform our life to Jesus.

And it is exactly this point that the writer is making. Look at what Jesus did. Look at His sacrifice. He had everything. Everything in the world rightly belongs to Him. He gave up all of the riches of heaven so that He might come here to give the gift of eternal life to us. **THAT** is what sacrifice is all about.

We should not be concerned about our possessions “*If I give this away, what if I need it tomorrow?*” because Jesus has said that He will never leave us or forsake us. Our relationship with Him is secure and cannot be taken away. *If God is for us, no-one can do anything to us.* This may not be true physically – for many of the early christians suffered

persecution, and many of them even lost their lives and were tortured – but the writer is relating to our spiritual condition. ***THAT*** can never be taken away from us, even if we are tortured and killed. And just ***how*** do our physical possessions compare to our blessings in Christ?

What is the altar referred to in verse 10?

The writer now discusses the last *doctrinal* issue in the letter, and interweaves that into the argument for steadfastness. The argument goes:

- Don't get carried away with false doctrines
- Such false doctrines are those concerning what kinds of food can and can't be eaten
- Our hearts are right with God through His grace, not because of what we do and don't eat
- Those who keep the Law of Moses by eating the right food haven't profited from it, because they don't have God's grace.
- Those who keep the Law at the tabernacle – even those who actually serve at the tables in the Temple – do not have any rights in the kingdom of God, and this is where we meet Jesus. Our fellowship is with Jesus, and worshipping Him, which is far and above the worship in the tabernacle.
- Jesus also fulfilled the perfect pattern in His death.

Under the Law of Moses, the bodies of the animals that were sacrificed in the Tabernacle and the Temple were taken out side of the camp or the city, and they were buried there (Lev 16). Quite specifically, this referred to the Day of Atonement, and it was at Christ's death that He made the atonement of man to God.

The Day of Atonement was only a foreshadow of the reconciliation that Jesus was to make between man and God. This was the most awesome holy day in the Jewish calendar and is still practised by Jews today (Yom Kippur). *Kippur* comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to cover", as *atonement* also means "to cover".

It was on this day that the High Priest went into the Holy Place to offer the yearly sacrifice for sins. The writer has already dealt with the action of the sacrifices, but he now points out that even in the death of Jesus, the pattern of the Old Covenant follows. The bodies of the animals were to be taken out of the camp and burned (Lev 16:27). In fulfilling even this, Jesus was killed and buried outside of the city at the place called Golgotha (Jn 19:17).

Because of this, what should we do?

The writer is continuing to weave in the doctrine into practical applications. "***Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.***" (13:13 NKJV)

There is a double meaning in what is said, in that Jesus was the one who suffered outside of the camp. But Jesus is also outside of the Jewish worship camp. Israel did not (generally) recognise Jesus as the Messiah. To follow Jesus meant leaving behind the practices of the Jewish religion and (practically) leaving the Jewish community. Those who did so were outcast by the Jews, and ostracised. When we look at verse 13 in this way, it brings a whole new shade of meaning to what the writer is saying, and why he is encouraging faithfulness on their behalf.

We need to recognise that this life is transient (vs 14), but we are seeking a permanent place with God in heaven. As the old gospel song says *"This world is not my home, I'm just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue..."* We need to keep our lives in perspective, and not get caught up in the worldly things that will distract us away from God.

This is a clear message to the Hebrew Christians who could so easily be caught back into the Jewish religion from which Christ had set them free. **EXACTLY** the same message is for us, having been made free from sin by the blood of Jesus, we can so easily slip back.

Just as the Jewish priests, and the people through the priests, made sacrifices of worship to God, so too do we offer sacrifices to God (vs 15). Firstly, our lives are to be a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2). But even our worship to God is sacrifice, and like the Old Testament sacrifices it is to be offered continually (10:1). We have already discussed other examples of sacrifice in doing good, and sharing with others.

What are some of the key things that the writer uses in his conclusion?

Writing requires *structure and format*, and the New Testament writings are no different. When we look at the introduction to the New Testament Letters, and the conclusion to the New Testament letters, we usually see key thoughts that the author wants to bring out mentioned. We can get a very good idea of what are the important things that he wants the readers to know. (This idea is further discussed in my study notes on Ephesians, study 2). As we look at the letter to the Hebrews, we can see some clear and important ideas being mentioned in the conclusion.

*"20 May the God of peace, who through the **blood of the eternal covenant** brought **back from the dead** our **Lord Jesus**, that **great Shepherd of the sheep**,
21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he **work in us** what is **pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ**, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen". (Heb 13:20-21 NIV)*

We can see how the writer highlights some of the key ideas that he has been telling the Hebrews in his letter.

What does the conclusion tell us about the writer?

He writes (vs 23) about "...our brother Timothy..." who was obviously well known to the readers. Timothy has been "set free", which is to say that he has been in prison somewhere and has now been released, or that he has been released from an obligation and is now free to move on. Timothy was going to come and visit the writer, and then the writer was planning to visit the Hebrew Christians together with Timothy. We have no other record of this in the New Testament.

The greetings from "*those of Italy*" could mean that the writer was in Italy, or it could mean that it was a greeting from Italian brethren who were where the writer happened to be.

It is obvious that the recipients of the letter knew who the author was, and he knew them – or at least was familiar with them by reputation.