Introduction

Ben Johnson of Canada was stripped of the Olympics Gold Medal he won at the Seoul Olympics because he broke the rules about drug use. Similarly, the Christian’s faith race is much more than a sprint to the finish line. It’s a race that brings glory to God by the way the runners behave.

Some Christians may think that it doesn’t matter how they live or behave, as long as they are ‘saved’ or ‘belong to the Church’. We have learned a lot of things as we have studied the Book of Hebrews the past few months. In the concluding Chapter – Chapter 13 – the writer to the Hebrews sketches a variety of duties to God and to humanity. Together they reveal an exalted level of personal morality & duty.

We’re going to have a look at these ... but first, Let’s pray.

*Gracious God & our Heavenly Father, thankyou that your Word is true, sharper than a double-edged sword, and that you have placed your Word in our hands. May we learn from it this morning. May it transform and inform our walk with You and influence how we live until you return. Bless your people as they open & study it today, and as it points to the saviour of this world, your Son, Jesus.*

*We come today in the Holy & unchanging name of Jesus your son. Amen*
Let’s read Hebrews Chapter 13 together

Hebrews 13 contains a number of obligations – social, religious & personal obligations. Let’s look quickly at each of these.

**FIVE Social Obligations (v1-6):**

1. Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters – ‘loving one another as brothers & sisters’ is one word in Greek – ‘philadelphia’ – unique to the New Testament. Some had forgotten this and needed reminding. They needed to exercise this special love for the brethren as they were known to do (See Hebrews 6:10)

2. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers (v2) – this would’ve been important in their time of persecution. Many had houses and possessions taken from them because of their faith. One reason to love strangers is that some have entertained angels unaware. One person in this category was Abraham (Genesis 18-19). Abraham entertained what he thought were 3 men, but two of them were actually angels.

   The Greek word for angels can also mean ‘messenger’. The same word is used for both human and angel messengers. It is possible that the writer is simply saying that a stranger might be God’s messenger to the host. This verse can be interpreted either way.

3. Continue to remember those in prison (v3) – here it is saying to identify themselves with those in prison because of their faith. One example of this is Onesiphorus in II Timothy 1:16-18. To show sympathy & remember these folk suffering persecution for their faith. We are all in the One Body of Christ.

4. Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure (v4) – to be faithful to their mate. To keep the marriage bed pure sexually. The emphasis here is on sexual purity because God will judge accordingly those who are sexually immoral and adulterers.

5. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have (v5) – describes the character of the person - they must be free from
materialism. The basis of this obligation is that God promises to provide their every need (Phil. 4:19).

At the end of these 5 social obligations, the writer quotes from Deuteronomy 31:6 or Joshua 1:5 – the whole point is that God will not leave them. Then he quotes Psalm 118:6 to teach the believers that man cannot hurt them.

Then the writer gives...

**THREE Religious Obligations (v7-17):**

1. **Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you (v7)** – those leaders who in the past exercised spiritual rule over them. Remember means to observe carefully. Observe carefully those elders who had oversight over them in the past. These are the ones who spoke the Word of God to them. Consider the manner of their lives. Imitate the faith of these recent saints (as opposed to the OT saints in Chapter 11).

   There are 3 characteristics of good teachers – they proclaim biblical truth; they are men of faith; and they live a spiritual lifestyle worthy of imitation. Imitate these early rulers in their life.

2. **Give complete devotion to the Messiah** (vs8-16) – Jesus must be the centre of their faith.

Verse 8 - Jesus is the same yesterday, today & forever. This verse is often taken out of context. It is often used to teach that Jesus did certain things in the Gospels, therefore He must always do the same thing. This is not quite correct. Jesus didn’t always do everything the same way.

The correct context here is that Jesus can give the believers victory in their trials. He brought victory for the OT saints in Chapter 11, and for the more recent saints in this Chapter. He has given victories in the past, He is giving victories in the present, and He will give victories in the future.

Jesus is also unchangeable in His nature – both in His divine nature and the eternal nature of His divinity.

There are 2 ways in which Jesus is NOT the same yesterday, today & forever.

- He is not always the same in His person. Until the incarnation (coming in the flesh) He existed only in the form of God (Phil. 2:5-11). With the incarnation that all changed. He didn’t cease to be God, but in addition He also became a man. He became a God-Man. At that point He became a mortal man, subject to all the things you are I are subject to, even to death. After His Resurrection,
His person changed again. He is no longer the mortal God-Man subject to all the things we are still subject to. He is the immortal God-Man. So, in His Person, Jesus has not been the same yesterday, today & forever.

- Jesus has not been the same YTF in His program. One example – foods. From Adam till Noah, God’s will was for man to be vegetarian. From the time of Noah to Moses, anything that moved was food to eat. From Moses to Jesus, Jews were permitted to eat only certain foods. Since the death of Jesus, all foods have become clean again. His program is not the same YTF. Even in the book of Hebrews we see a change of program. In the past, blood sacrifices were necessary, but now they are no longer necessary. His program has changed. In Chapter 11 we see that Jesus didn’t treat all the saints the same. He chose to save some from death fire and lions, but others were tortured to death. Both groups were exercising faith. Both are commended for their faith. In His program Jesus is not the same YTF.

Jesus may not be unchangeable in his person or His program ... but in His divine nature He is unchangeable. Jesus has always been God & will always be God. The writer has emphasised this throughout the Book of Hebrews. In the immediate context, as I have said, the writer is emphasizing victory in persecution. That is the issue for these believers in the Book of Hebrews. Jesus will provide victory and spiritual maturity in the midst of persecution. That is unchangeable and true.

Verse 8 cannot be used to claim healing for everyone who is sick. Just because Jesus did one thing at one point it doesn’t mean that He will always do it the same way.

Verse 9 talks about doctrine and the unchangeable Jesus. Any teaching being spread that is not based on scripture or found in Scripture, no matter how spiritual the movement may appear to be on the outside, is suspect.

Spiritual maturity will come by means of the teachings of the Messiah not by means of going back to the Levitical system.

I talked earlier of the 3 characteristics of good teachers. Here, false teachers are characterised by 3 things – diverse doctrines; they emphasize the external rather than the internal (e.g. eating certain foods/meats that become the basis of their teaching); and their teaching fails to produce effective spiritual results. In other words, it doesn’t profit those who have been occupied with them.

Verse 10-12 – Jesus is the alter. In Judaism those who are still offering blood sacrifices etc. show that they are not trusting in Jesus as the final sacrifice. Normally the priests could partake of the sin sacrifices, but there was one sacrifice they couldn’t eat – Yom Kippur – The Day of Atonement Sacrifice (once a
year). But now Jesus is the final Yom Kippur sacrifice. He is our food – Jesus Himself. That’s what we do when we partake in communion.

Maybe we don’t realize it but we as believers today have a greater privilege than the most privileged person in the Old Testament.

That’s what the writer to the believers in the Book of Hebrews is trying to tell them. They have more than anything that Judaism has and more because Jesus is superior to all the pillars of Judaism.

Verse 11 – the Yom Kippur sacrifice was not burned on the later like other sacrifices. It was taken outside the camp & burned in it’s entirety. It could not be consumed as food. Taking it outside the camp portrayed the removal of sin. The present application of this principle is in verse 12. The place where Jesus suffered was outside the gate. Jesus died outside the city walls. Those who stay inside the camp of Judaism cannot eat the sacrifice. In other words, only when you go outside the camp (of Judaism) can you receive Him (Jesus).

Verses 13-16 – **There are 2 requirements that Jesus demands from the readers – commitment & service.**

**Commitment** – they should abandon the Camp of Judaism and go forth with Him. It’s present tense – so it basically means ‘let us keep going outside to Him’. They are not just to go outside the camp, but to go outside bearing His shame (the disgrace that He bore). They have to leave the camp and identify with Jesus. They have to identify with His rejection. He is always out there ready to receive His people.

What the writer is saying is that these Jewish believers need to abandon the religion that rejected the Messiah. But as long as they stay inside the camp, they cannot partake of the privileges of the Heavenly Alter.

Verse 14 – gives the reason why they must go outside the camp/city. Jerusalem was destined to be destroyed. The readers would have known of 3 prophecies that Jesus gave that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed. (Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 19:41-44; and 21:20-24).

So they need to seek out an abiding city and to have the assurance that will come. The abiding city is the Heavenly Jerusalem. It will take the place of the temporary city and its temporary system.

So, the first requirement is commitment to Jesus, even to the point of abandoning both the old Rabbinic system of law & the City of Jerusalem.

**Service** – (2nd requirement Jesus demands from the readers) – found in verse 15-16. Jesus is the High Priest, but believers are fellow-priests. The job of the priest is to sacrifice. Today, we as believers don’t sacrifice blood, but we do sacrifice two other things –
Sacrifice by word in offering up sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving (v15). We are to continually offer up sacrifices of praise to God. We are to worship God for who He is and what He does. We have received grace and now we are to be thankful to God. The way to thank Him is from the fruit of our lips. This is to be done orally & by confessing that Jesus is the Messiah.

Sacrifice in Deed (v16) – do not forget to do good. It means performing any kindly service and to share/give help to the poor and needy. By doing this they also fulfil the requirements of verse 2 – to showing love to strangers.

These two sacrifices – a sacrifice of praise and our sacrifice of deeds – these are sacrifices with which God is well pleased.

3. Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority (v17) – the 3rd religious obligation is to obey their present leaders/rulers. All the privileges we have as believers do not release us from being obligated to spiritual oversight and spiritual leadership. Submission shows obedience. The reason they need to obey is ‘that because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.’

Leaders of a local congregation are accountable to God (James 3:1). They will be able to give an account to God with joy, not grief/burden, as the congregation submits to their leadership. The congregation has a responsibility to help the rulers to rule with joy & satisfaction. The believers will have joy & will be able to watch with joy because they receive such oversight.

This means it is the sheep and not the shepherds who will suffer the consequences. The believers will end up being like sheep tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine (v9).

He then gives 4 reasons to obey their present leaders:

- The leaders are responsible to watch over the moral & doctrinal health of the congregation;
- The leaders will someday have to give an account of the stewardship of their leadership at the Judgment Seat of the Messiah;
- The leaders would like to exercise their ministry with joy, not with grief;
- A lack of submission is unprofitable for the rebels because they too, will be judged at the Judgment Seat of the Messiah.

Something for all of us to consider no doubt.
Personal Obligations (v18-25):

1. Pray for us (v18-23) – the writer now shows the readers their obligations towards him. He is confident that they can pray for him because they are rightly related to the Messiah. V18 shows 3 things about the author – he has a good conscience; he has a submissive will & he has the right goal – to live honourably before God.

Verse 19 – is a specific prayer request to pray for the release of the writer. He is apparently writing from prison, but he hopes to be released by their prayers. He hopes to be restored to them soon.

Verses 20-21 is a lengthy benediction where he reaffirms his confidence in God – that the God of peace can meet their present trials and present needs on the basis of the New Covenant, which gives them a sure standing. God will answer their need for inner peace in the midst of their trials and inner turmoil. If God can bring up from the depths his Son Jesus, then He is sure to meet their needs in their lifetime.

Verses 20-21 also show 5 features of perfection on maturity –

- There must be perfection in every good work;
- The goal of maturity is to do the will of God;
- The source if God working in them that which is well pleasing in His sight;
- The means is through the Messiah Jesus;
- The end result is to glorify God.

Verse 22 – the writer is calling to mind things that he said concerning patient endurance.

This verse characterizes the whole book of Hebrews – giving particular encouragement in their present trials.

Verse 23 – the writer makes an announcement of Timothy's release. He gives them this news to encourage them since patient endurance has paid off for Timothy. Timothy will at some point join the writer, and if the writer is released then they will work together, and eventually visit the readers of this letter.

2. Greet all your leaders and all the Lord's people (v24) – he gives the 2nd personal obligation. The believers are to greet the elders, rulers and all the saints. This letter was not being sent to the whole church, but to a group within the Church. It suggests that the rulers in the church were following sound doctrine, but a number of people wanted to depart from the rulers' sound spiritual leadership due to persecution. The reason the author writes to them is to support the rulers.
Verse 24b - He obviously has some Italians with him. We’re not sure if he was writing from Italy, or just that he had some Italians present with him sending there greetings. One thing is for sure, they were present with the writer, regardless of whether they were in Italy or not.

Verse 25 – Finally, the writer closes this epistle/letter with the inscription of grace to be with them all. This is a plea for God to grant grace to the readers and for them to appropriate the grace they need.

Grace is necessary to get through, and to receive mercy and help in time of need, and grace is the foundation of their new spiritual lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Well, we are finished the Book of Hebrews – what have we learned? What has been the big idea in this Book?

We have learned a lot about Jesus our Messiah and what He has done.

We’ve learned that these believers are being encouraged to grow into maturity in their path through patient endurance, and through persecution and suffering.

From today’s message I want to finish with a few challenging questions:

1. Sexual purity is one of God’s absolutes. How do you think professing Christians should account for sexual purity?

2. Obligations to follow our spiritual leaders are pretty well laid out in this Chapter. Do we follow these well? Or can we learn more here? How can we do this better in the Church? Do we submit or are we rebellious?

3. Is your praise a sacrifice to God each day?

4. On the basis of our study in Hebrews, what do you think God would like to ‘work’ in you that would please Him?

5. How has it changed your thinking as well as your approach to Christian living, worship & service?

Can I finish with one last question – Is Jesus simply the best in your life? Is he unequalled? Let’s Pray
Gracious God & our Heavenly Father,

We thank you for this series in Hebrews and what you have said to each one by your Holy Spirit. May we never be the same after You have revealed these things to us about Jesus, your son, our Messiah and Saviour.

Thank your for the reminder that you are the best thing we can ever encounter. We thank you for Jesus’ willingness to go to the cross and to bear our sin, so that we might go free to enjoy the blessings you have instore for us. We thank you for the cleansing blood of Jesus, without it we are doomed. We praise and adore You – you are worthy of our highest praise. Bless your people as they go in knowledge and wisdom from this series.

We pray in the unchanging name of Jesus, Amen.

**Closing Song ~ How Deep the Father’s love**
Concluding Exhortations

1 Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. 2 Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. 3 Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

4 Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

6 So we say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”

7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so. 10 We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. 12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.
15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

18 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honourably in every way. 19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

Benediction and Final Greetings

20 Now 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.

22 Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly.

23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.

24 Greet all your leaders and all the Lord’s people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.

25 Grace be with you all.