

A Study in Hebrews

Study Eleven

Hebrews 12:14-13:5

Day One

14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.

17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

v. 14 – It is hard to be at peace with others; it takes effort. We have to do very little for war to break out and work hard to maintain peace with other people, even those closest to us. Paul wrote:

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom 12:18).

In regards to peace with others, Jesus said:

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24).

We must also work at being holy if we want to see the Lord. Remember what Jesus said:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt 5:8).

v. 15 – Bitterness is poison, pure and simple. Bitterness affects not only the one bitter, but also many others around that person. Are you bitter? Are you around anyone who is? What affect is this having on you right now?

vs. 16&17 – You must not interpret these verses to mean that Esau was sexually immoral. But rather he sold his birthright was next to nothing: a pot of stew (see Genesis 25:29). When he realized what he had done, he didn’t really repent of his ways; he simply wept over the consequences of what he had done. There is a difference between being “sorry” and repentance. Do you agree? What is that difference? Can someone cry over what they have done and not be repentant?

The lesson here is that you should not sell or forfeit your spiritual heritage and privileges for something that is here today and gone tomorrow. We must learn to sacrifice the temporary pleasure for the eternal reward.

Day Two

18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm;
19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them,
20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned."
21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

vs. 18-21 – The Law was an awe-inspiring and often terrifying thing. Of course this reference is to Exodus 19:12-13 and refers to the mountain where Moses received the Law. Even Moses, who was intimate with God, was fearful when he faced that scenario. The writer has returned to the theme of comparing the Law with the dispensation of grace under Jesus. Remember that some reading this letter were believing Jews who were considering a return to Judaism. The writer was simply telling them that the Law was a serious and fearful entity, but that the new Law of the New Testament is more awesome still.

I have noticed that people who are tired of the unpredictability of faith long for the more predictable ways of a previous religious experience or system. Are you tired of faith? Don't romanticize the past; it probably wasn't that good. But compared to the difficulty you are in now, it may seem to have provided a better, more stable way of life. I want to move on, not move back. I hope you feel the same.

Day Three

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly,
23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect,
24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

v. 22 – The Law is compared here to the new Law under Jesus. The Law was represented by a group of people at a mountain; the Gospel is a new city. I would rather live in a city than at the base of a terrifying mountain, wouldn't you? Then there are thousands of angels as opposed to the few angels who instituted the Law (see Galatians 3:19).

v. 23 – The firstborn of the gospel have their names written in heaven. The firstborn of Israel had their names recorded in their family genealogy. I would rather have a good

name registered in heaven than one registered on earth. You and I are heavenly citizens. If someone wants “more” than that, they will have to settle for an earthly religious system that gives honor now as opposed to a heavenly, invisible one that gives honor to its members later. Which one do you want?

v. 24 – Jesus’ blood is superior to any blood of the Old Testament. And Jesus is a superior mediator of a new covenant, which is also better than the old. What could there be in any religious system that is superior to Jesus and His “system?” There is none, yet men and women regularly choose the inferior to Jesus because of the stigma of faith.

Day Four

25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."

27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

v. 25 – Notice the present tense, “who speaks.” Jesus is always speaking. God is a great communicator. He speaks every language; can talk through circumstances or His Word; can use a believer or non-believer to communicate; and can even speak through a donkey if He wants or needs to. God is speaking to you right now. It is always important that you focus on what He is saying or else you will look for some old religious experience or system to lead and guide you.

Can you summarize what you think God is “saying” to you at the present time? It is important that you pay attention and honor what He is saying. The writer was trying to impress upon the readers that, if the Law had serious penalties for those who refused to listen, there are even more serious ramifications for those who ignore what God is saying now through Jesus.

I have gone to writing down what I think God is showing me. In fact, these very studies are an attempt to pay closer attention to what I think I am seeing and learning from God’s word. I have never been a good journal-er, but I am trying to improve so I can listen more effectively.

vs. 26&27 – Any man-made system has been, is being or will be shaken so that the only system that cannot be shaken—the Gospel—will remain. Have you experienced any shaking in your life lately? If you haven’t, you will. It is so easy for us to put our trust in some man-made system, even a system that had its roots in the gospel. But God will shake anything in which we can put our trust so that we learn to put our trust in ultimate reality, namely Jesus.

I was in southern California and felt an earth tremor. That experience was a bit unnerving. But it is much worse to endure the spiritual shaking that can occur when God is proving what is unshakable by shaking everything else. While the shaking isn't always pleasant, it is very helpful in allowing you to take refuge in that which will stand forever.

Day Five

28 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."

v. 28 – The implication here is clear: Why would any reader consider living in a kingdom that can be shaken (the Law) when the unshakable kingdom is available (the Gospel)? When the shaking comes—and it will come—we need to be thankful that ultimately we have an unshakable reality in Jesus. Are you thankful for this fact? Does it lead you to worship? If not, it should!

I have found that the shaking can far exceed my expectations, so it is critical that I be grounded in God. If you are going through some shaking, don't be surprised. Run into Jesus, for He is the only refuge. Don't think you have necessarily done anything wrong, for God may just be showing you just how firm your grounding is in the shaking.

v. 29 – Without proper protection, those who approach God can be burned up. God is always looking to burn up that which isn't holy or righteous. I wonder if hell isn't some expression of this truth. If we allow God to burn away our impurities now, we have hope. If we wait, then we meet eternal fire that punishes but never purifies. I would rather the fire consume my sin and not me, wouldn't you?

Remember what Peter wrote:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:3-8).

The shaking comes to prove the reality of God's unshakable kingdom in your life.

Day Six

13:1 Keep on loving each other as brothers.

2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

v. 13:1 – I have often said that the Bible would not tell us to love and forgive one another unless we were really going to need those reminders. Someone once joked that the church would be a great place without people! There may be some truth to that, but the church is people, and people can be hard to get along with. Sometimes you don't have to do anything to offend people and others may not even be aware that they have offended you.

Both Jesus and Paul had a lot to say about love and forgiveness:

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times’” (Matthew 18:21-22).

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you (Colossians 3:12-13).

There have been people that I have found particularly difficult to love. I have had to ask God to help me, confessing the reality of my non-love. Is there anyone that you need supernatural help to love today?

v. 2 – How open is your home to others, either for a meal or an overnight stay? Of course in Biblical times there were few hotels or inns, so traveling saints had to rely on the hospitality of brothers and sisters. Hospitality can be an invasion of your privacy, upsetting your routine and schedule. But that may be the thing that is most valuable about hospitality. It takes you and your family out of the ordinary so that you can experience the blessing of giving something intangible—warmth, comfort and fellowship.

Peter urged the saints:

“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9).

Is this what you are doing? How can you show hospitality to someone soon? The two who entertained angels were Abraham and Lot (see Genesis 18:3 and 19:2). They thought the visitors were travelers and instead found themselves entertaining angels! You never know the blessings in store when you open your heart and home to visitors.

v. 3 – I don't think the writer was referring to prisoners in general, but rather those who were imprisoned for their faith. There was no prison system like we are accustomed to today with visitation and other programs. But I do think we should extend this principle to visit anyone we may know who is in prison for whatever reason. I have been to a lot

of prisons and the conditions are better than most would expect. But the people are lonely and lost and a prison visit is a wonderful place to give something away for which the recipients cannot repay you. Even writing letters to inmates can be a act of mercy to them. And of course helping the families of those incarcerated is another way to show the love of God to someone who is down and out.

Day Seven

4 Marriage should be honored 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."

v. 4 – This seems so straightforward, but marriage today is under attack like never before. Same-sex unions, the ease of divorce, the acceptance of cohabitation, Internet pornography, and materialism all work to dishonor marriage. But the truth is that God has judged and will judge adulterers and fornicators. But the lax moral state of modern society makes even that statement of judgment sound so harsh.

Yet God’s forgiveness still extends to the sexually impure, and in today’s culture it’s hard to find someone who isn’t tainted by this plague. So the Church needs to maintain this standard of purity, while extending grace and forgiveness to all who fall short.

v. 5 – You may be going through rough economic times, just as some of the original readers were. Some of their hardship was due to their faith in Christ. It is so easy for money and our “stuff” to get a hold of us, especially with materialism and greed being so prevalent today. Are you free from the love of money? When I started my business three years ago, I had to face the hold money had on me. I “panicked” when I didn’t have enough of a cushion in my bank account or a few dollars in my pocket. I had to face the fact that I derived a great amount of security from money and not God.

It also takes work to be content with what you have. Once again, I am guilty of seeing what others have and wanting that. I am working at being content with what I have instead of pining away for what I don’t have. It isn’t always easy.

But in the context of this issue of money and possessions, the writer quoted a promise that is seen two other times in the Bible. The Lord promised Joshua (see Joshua 1:5) and Solomon (see 1 Chronicles 28:20) that He would never leave them, and He makes the same promise in this verse. If you don’t have money or possessions, you have something far greater—God Himself!

How long is “never.” It is a long time! The Lord has promised that He will always be with us, never forsaking us. Wow! Double wow! That is powerful. In these last few years since I started my ministry, I may not always have had money, but I have found something much better—I have found God! God is so faithful, but we are sometimes reminded of that in hard times.

Brother or sister, do you know that God will never leave you? Can you comprehend the wonderful truth and good news that He will never forsake you? Money will come and go, possessions will wear out, success may visit and depart. But through it all, Jesus has said He will never, ever forsake you. And if Jesus says “never,” that means “never.” End of discussion. Amen.