
The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Conclusion

Hebrews 13:22-25

22 But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. 23 Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. 24 Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. 25 Grace be with you all.

We obviously come this morning to the last verses of this great letter written to the Hebrews. This letter, described as brief by the author, has taken us on a three year journey (we began this in March 2005), a journey that may not have seemed brief by the author standards, but please know that even in our time together in this book, we have only scratched the surface of the depth of its teachings as well as to its practical applications to our lives.

Let me remind you that the theme of this letter is simply the superiority of Jesus Christ over all things, all persons, all relationships, over all religious institutions and practices. Jesus is to be seen in this book as all in all and over all. This thesis of the superiority of Jesus is meant to drive all readers to proper and practical worship of Jesus. As we come to the end of this book, we must all ask ourselves the questions, “Does Jesus Christ has preeminence, first-place in your life?” Does Jesus have primacy over your life, over your relationships, over your employment, over your habits, your pleasures, your pursuits and over all things that make you who you are?”

As we come to these closing words of the book of Hebrews, I must say to you that I was both surprised and saddened by how little is actually written about these verses by some preachers and commentators. Even my own initial response to these verses made me reel with some guilt as I asked myself, “Ok, what can be done with these verses.” Let us not view these verses as some incidental, uninspired closing remarks, but rather as truly important, God-inspired words by which to bring teaching and encouragement to our souls. These words are here, according to 2 Timothy 3:16, because they are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, perfect, complete and thoroughly equipped and prepared for every good work in Jesus Christ.

Let us begin with an outline of this text and as I give you this outline, I will say to you that the majority of our time will be spent on the first of the three points I give you. This is not because the other two are not as meaningful or as important, but rather that there is more to understand from the first point than the other two. I submit to you that in these closing words of Hebrews 13 we find three “words” or messages by which the author sums up the meaning and intent of this letter. These three “words” are:

- I. A word of **exhortation** (13:22)
- II. A word of **encouragement** (13:23-24)
- III. A word of **edification** (13:25)

We begin then in verse 22 and what the author clearly identifies himself as the word of exhortation.

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I. A Word of Exhortation (13:22)

Reading the text again, “*But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.*” From this verse I see three things; a passion, a plea and a pursuit.

A Passion

Let us note how the author begins this word of exhortation. It is begun with a passionate and affectionate longing for those whom he regards as “brethren” – as brothers, as those who are close to him, to those whom he has revealed himself to by way of heart and concern. And to these brothers he says, “*I urge you...*” Some translations say, “I beseech you.” Literally this is a calling out, the Greek word meaning to come along side and to call someone; to call them to action. It may be as simple as calling someone to the dinner table or as imperative as calling someone to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Obviously, as seen by our translation here, there is a sense of urgency in this calling. So passionate has the author been about the person and work of Christ, he now calls his readers, he urges on his readers, out of love he seeks to compel his readers on to a further consideration of Christ, to a further commitment to Christ, to a further contemplation of the depth of Christ.

How about you? Have you ever been called, beseeched, urged to consider well, more deeply, more fervently the realities of Jesus Christ? If you sit here this morning regarding yourself as saved by the person and working of Christ, then somewhere, somehow, someone urged you on. And if you have continued to walk with Christ, then I well suspect that other someones, perhaps a parent, a friend or a pastor, urged you on to walk more closely with Jesus. Is this not so? Are you not grateful to those who have expressed their passion for Jesus by revealing that passion to you? And if so, how much ought we to pray to the Lord that we might be so passionate about Christ and so concerned for the spiritual wellbeing of others that we would urge, come along side and call them to examine the primacy and superiority of Jesus in their own life? In our text, this verb “urge” is a present active verb, implying that the author has been and will continue to call these readers to consider and to come to Christ. And I believe it reminds us that we must also be continually, constantly urging one another in the church as well as those outside a living relationship to Christ to consider and come to Him. Do you have this kind of passion? Do we have this kind of passion to communicate Christ? Lord, grant that it would be so.

A Plea

In addition to this passion we see the actual plea of the author as he says, “***bear with this word of exhortation...***” This idea to “***bear with***” is the actual command of this verse. This verb literally means “to hold oneself against” – “to hold or press oneself up close to something,” A simple picture of this might be when children play hide and seek. Perhaps you can remember yourself or have seen another child pressing themselves up close against a tree or a wall so as to not to be seen. The KJV translates this word as “suffer”. Jesus asks the question in Matthew 17:17; “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?” meaning “how long must I put up with you; how long must I be so close against all this unbelief – when will you believe and obey?”

And here in Hebrews 13:22, the readers are being called to “bear with” – to suffer; to keep themselves close against something; that something being called, “this word of exhortation.” What the author is calling for is a response to all that has been written; that response being primarily obedience to the things that have been written. This word of

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exhortation, and by the way, the word exhortation here is the noun form of the verb, “I urge or come along side to call you to action” meaning that this letter itself is the sum and substance of the call. This whole letter is a call to come to Jesus and now, and remember this was hard for many of them, the call is to obedience to these divine precepts. Would these brethren, who according to Hebrews 3:1 were partakers of a heavenly calling, a heavenly exhortation, now respond but conducting their lives in obedience and compliance with the life of Christ?

And ultimately that is the call, the exhortation to us as well. For most of you, you have heard of the glories of Christ, you have contemplated His superiority and preeminence – and now, in light of that, what is your response? Will you bear with this word of exhortation? Will you obey it? Will you allow it to further govern your life and attitudes? Will you so consider the greatness of Christ so as to reveal areas of your own life that are not yet surrendered to His Lordship?

But why is such a bearing with, such a suffering, such a response of obedience important? I would like to quickly survey and remind you that the book of Hebrews, not unlike what we see in Deuteronomy 27-28 with the curses and the blessings and curses on Israel, curses if they disobey but blessings if they obey God’s revealed will, is also filled with both curses and blessings. In other words, if we neglect, forsake or outright forget this word of exhortation as found in the letter to the Hebrews; this is to say, if we do not live in light of the superiority, supremacy and primacy of Christ, then we are, according to this letter to expect the following curses, but if we do live in such a way we can expect the following blessings:

1. The curse of damnation – of eternal separation from the blissful presence of God. (Hebrews 2:1-3)

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

We are reminded that this is no salvation apart from knowing God and specifically His Son as revealed by this word of exhortation, the word of God. There is no escaping the coming wrath of God by any other means than coming Him who offered Himself up for our sins. If we neglect this exhortation, we will not escape the wrath of God.

2. The blessing of absolution – of being forgiven of sin (Hebrews 2:9-10)

9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

In Christ we have been forgiven our sin, sanctified, set apart for glory, granted salvation, so great a salvation that is to be regarded as the blessing of God as revealed to us in His word, this word of exhortation.

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3. The curse of **disbelief** – of not believing and therefore living according to God's word. (Hebrews 3:12-13)

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

We are reminded here that those who neglect the word of exhortation will not believe and will fall away from the word of God being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, that is being imprisoned by the trickery of sin that tells them they are okay with God when they have no fruit of salvation and are wandering further and further from a right understanding of who God is and exactly what it is He has done for sinners.

4. The blessing of **assurance** – believing in God's word brings confidence of one's standing and hope in Christ (Hebrews 3:14)

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end...

When we are in Christ, partakers, those who have had the fullness of Christ invade our lives, we have assurance, that is full conviction or belief about all that God has said will happen.

5. The curse of **disobedience** – of living in a manner contrary to the life of godliness (Hebrews 4:11)

Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

Israel, in her disbelief concerning who God was and what He did in delivering them from the land of Egypt also disobeyed. The inevitable result and curse of disbelief is disobedience – a failing to do according to the will and exhortation of God. And remember that one of the key calls to the first readers of this letter to the Hebrews was simply to consider and come all the way to Christ, who did for them and has done for us in obedience what we could not do ourselves – that is fulfill the law of God and provide a perfect sacrifice for our sin that deserved death. In the death of Christ we must not find freedom to sin – to be disobedient, thinking sin has been paid for, therefore it doesn't matter how I live, but rather the death of Christ for our sins is our freedom not to sin – to live out the rest of our lives as slaves of righteousness.

6. The blessing of **access to God** - of having the privilege of boldly coming before the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:14-16).

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

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The great blessing of God for hearing and heading this word of exhortation – we have access to God in a manner that OT believers never had and the knowledge that we will not be turned away for we have a great high priest who understand and sympathizes with us.

7. The curse of dullness and defiance – of not hearing the word and actually becoming hostile to it. (Hebrews 5:11; 6:6)

5:11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing...6:4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

Here we are simply reminded that one of the curses of neglecting the word of exhortation is an inability to really hear and understand it and then, rather than embracing it, one actually becomes openly defiance and hostile to the teachings of God, which is the meaning behind the statement in 6:6, “have fallen away” – that these have become actively and openly hostile to the things of God.

8. The blessing of acceptance – of being heard and hearing from God (Hebrews 6:9-10)

9 But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. 10 For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

Here we have the great reminder that the blessing of hear and heading this word of exhortation results in our being heard and hearing from God. God will not forget those who minister to His people and He will in fact minister to such as these. Of course this is reminiscent of 1 Corinthians 15:58 which says,

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

We have the blessing of knowing that as we obey the will of the Lord by doing the work of the Lord, we will not be forgotten for forsaken by the Lord.

9. The curse of despising the sacrifice of Christ – of not seeing any merit or beauty in the work of Christ on the cross (Hebrews 10:26-27)

26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

This despising the work of Christ is a curse because all it leaves a person with is the terrifying expectation of judgment.

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10. The blessing of anticipation through endurance – since sin is not held against us, we look forward to the reward to come. (Hebrews 10:32-35)

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, 33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. 34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. 35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

There is a great reward that awaits those who hear and heed this word of exhortation – a great possession that is Christ Himself who is heir to all things of to whom we are co-heirs.

11. The curse of devaluing grace – of not seeing the goodness of God revealed through the work of Christ. (Hebrews 12:15-16)

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.

The curse of devaluing grace, of not considering yourself needful of grace in part or in hole, leads to a cursed life, one described here as a life filled with one or more of the following, bitterness, defilement, immorality and godlessness. When we begin to think ourselves not in need or not in as much need for the grace of God, the inevitable result is the manifestation of such things.

12. The adoration of Him who gives grace – the right worship of Him who saves and keeps us by His grace (Hebrews 12:28; 13:15; 21)

12:28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe...13:15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name...13:21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

When we hear and heed this word of exhortation; as we see Christ for who He is and what it is He has done, the blessing is a desire and ability to fervently adore Him who has accomplished all these things for us by His grace.

A Pursuit

Beloved, these are the warning and the blessing of this word of exhortation. The passion is seen in the author's urging his readers to heed this call. We are now called to bear with, to come along side and call one another to these things. And then we have the plea, to be warned and admonished where it is needed and to partake and proclaim of the blessings of this letter as often as possible. Finally there is the pursuit found in the words, "for I have written to you briefly." While this is one of the longer letters in the New Testament, when you consider the great doctrinal truths it contains, it is fairly concise. I see in this qualifier a reminder that

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there is much more to be considered and explored; that this letter is not the exhaustive end of the discussion of the Superiority of Christ, but rather is the beginning of it. We must desire to pursue more. And so three questions as we close this first point. 1) Do you have a passion for other, yourself included, to know the truth of God? 2) Do you plead with others that they might bear with, continue faithfully on in this word of exhortation? 3) Is it your pursuit to press on and know even more of the supremacy and superiority of Christ in your life? May it be so.

II. The Word of Encouragement (Hebrews 13:23-24)

23 Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. 24 Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

Remember, it is not my intention to make light of these last two points, but these are rather concise statements and should be easy for us to consider. First is this word of encouragement. In verse 23 we are told something that we have very little information about, however it appears that Timothy, the disciple and trusted companion of Paul, had himself been imprisoned for the faith. What a joyful thought it must have been for these first readers, who knew of Timothy, to hear the news of his release. And in addition to this, it was the author's intention and hope that both he and Timothy would be able to come and visit the recipients of this letter. What an encouragement it would have been for these believers, to know that they were loved and cared for to such an extent that these two men would visit them. It reminds me how much we ought to express a genuine love and care for one another. I am certain that some in this room would be greatly taken aback if someone like John MacArthur called them and said, "I have heard about you and your church and though I might come and visit you for a while, to encourage you in the faith." That would be a special time, would it not? But why is it that we don't seek to follow such an example, and visit one another from week to week, even day to day with the intention of encouraging the faith?

To further press this word of encouragement home, the author reminds the readers to greet all of the leaders as well as the other saints who were not evidently present at the reading of this letter. The point – make sure everyone is encouraged by what has been written here. It seems clear that whoever wrote the book of Hebrews was well-known and well-loved enough to these believers. Let's say that Dinesh and Shannon Panjwani wrote a long and detailed letter to Hope CBC. How many of you would be content to simply know that they wrote a letter? No, you would want to know its content. And, any others who were not here when the letter was read, would most likely like to hear the content. The author of the letter to the Hebrews is saying in effect, "make sure everyone is encouraged by this letter, by this word of exhortation." Oh that we would be so desirous to hear from other believers such words of encouragement. To know that there are other believers who care about this ministry and care about the faith of each of us. This is truly the intent of greeting one another – to encourage one another in the things of the Lord.

III. A Word of Edification (13:25)

Grace be with you all.

These final words of Hebrews are far more than a simple farewell or benediction. In truth it serves as the final and climatic prayer of this book revealing the belief and desire of the author that everything written in this letter would be received, responded to and acted upon because of and by the only means by which it could, according to the grace of God.

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Beloved, there is a sense in which this stands as the greatest prayer that can be prayed for God's people. It does not matter whether you are praying for an individual or an entire congregation, "grace, God's grace be with you all." Let us not forget that in its most basic form, grace speaks of the free and unmerited favor of God toward undeserving sinners. In 2 Peter 1:2-3, it is by grace that all we need for life and godliness has been granted us in Christ. According to Ephesians 2:8, we are saved by grace. In Romans 5:2 we are told that we stand justified by God only by grace. Not because we deserve it but because it brings glory to God, does God therefore work in us that which pleases Him. Our every meeting together in true fellowship and worship is an act of God's grace. Our every labors, the food we eat, the conditioning of the air in our homes, indeed even the water we drink and the air we breath are all the result of God's grace toward us. How apt, how necessary it is that we would remind one another in prayer and plead with God for His continuing grace. I love how Matthew Henry put it:

"When the people of God have been conversing together, by word or by writing, it is good to part with prayer, desiring for each other the continuance of the gracious presence of God, that they may meet together in the world of glory."

So, here we have Hebrews summarized in these closing verses. It has been a word of exhortation – warning us of the dangers of not following Christ; revealing to us the blessings of faithfully following Him. It has been a word of encouragement – reminding us often of our need for godly fellowship, solid biblical teaching and accountability to God. And, it has been a word of edification, showing us that we are edified, that it build up in our faith, in our understanding and serving of God only by grace and therefore let us be diligent to plead for God's grace to continue. Not that God will withhold His grace from us, but reminding us that apart from His grace we are helpless and hopeless, but that in His grace **"we overwhelming conquer though Him who loved us"** (Romans 8:37). May Jesus Christ come to have first place in everything; may He be seen by all as superior and supreme to any other person or pursuits. And by His grace, may we all be found in Him that we might anticipate continued fellowship in a better country, a heavenly country where Christ reigns and is worshipped without reference to sin forevermore.

Soli Deo Gloria

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