

Today we begin the final chapter of Hebrews, but we'd better not get too excited, because it'll take us a few weeks to get through it yet.

And some folk see Chapter 13 as something that's been tacked-on at the end – a whole bunch of unrelated points that for some reason, the writer feels a need to emphasise...

On the contrary.

Chapter 13 continues the consistent progression of instruction that has been leading us to the point of how the people of God should respond to Who Jesus Christ is, and what God has done through Him...

- **Because** we've been saved by the blood of Jesus;
- **Because** Jesus died to take away our sins and make us righteous;
- **Because** our God is an awesome God (yes, a God of mercy and forgiveness, but a God who **will** judge the unrepentant),,,
- **Because** we must not refuse the God who will shake the heavens and the earth;
- **Because** our God is a consuming fire,,,

This therefore, is how we should live.

At the end of Chapter 12, we were reminded of the return of Jesus, and the unshakable Kingdom – our glorious eternal destiny in the presence of our God. It's a place where "the righteous" will be perfected – there will be no more sin. And we were also reminded, of the coming judgment of the **unrighteous**...

therefore, let us be grateful... and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe

And this is what leads us into Chapter 13 – a call to offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe

What is worship?

- Some might think of “worship” as coming to church (so, for some of you, that might mean “having a bit of a nap...”).
- Some might narrow “worship” down to “singing” – It’s when we sing, that we worship.
- Some might narrow it down even more, and feel that “singing” is much better worship, if it’s being performed by a world-class band, and if it’s not the type of music I like, then that’s empty worship...

But I do hope you know, that “worship” is much more than “singing a song”. For worship to be true/acceptable, the words of the song I sing, must be a reflection of the melody of my heart...

At one time, God was angry with His people and their greed/violence/corruption,,, And He told The Prophet Amos, exactly what He thought of their worship, because their hearts were so far from Him.

Amos 5:21–24 (ESV)

²¹ “I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings
and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the peace offerings of your fattened animals,
I will not look upon them.
²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

You see, if we are **not** a people of justice or righteousness, our worship, is an offence to God...

James said it like this:

James 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Romans 12:1 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

So, what we're reading today, is a picture of worship. It's a picture of sacrificial living, which is spiritual worship.

Now, when we talk about sacrificial living, it involves sacrifice – we are giving something up for God... But by the time we get to V5, we're going to discover the word “contentment”... You see, when it comes to following Jesus, yes, there is a very real aspect of “sacrificial living”. But there's contentment in that.

Someone once said:

*If worship is just one thing we do, everything becomes mundane. If worship is **the** one thing we do, everything takes on eternal significanceⁱ.*

And when it comes to eternal significance, you've gotta be content with that...

So, what is acceptable worship?

1.

The first requirement for worship to be acceptable, is brotherly love... And a lot of what follows, is very much an expression of brotherly love.

Jesus said: **John 13:35 (ESV)** **By this all people will know that you are my disciples**

- carry a big bible around with you?
- have a fish sticker on your car?

- telling other people what they have to do?
- “I’m a Christian, you know”...

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

If I do not love my brother and sister in Christ, my worship is unacceptable to God.

1 John 4: (ESV)

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

You see, there’s two things in play here. The first thing is “The way of Christ, and the way of Disciples of Jesus, is very different to the way of the world.” That’s why Romans 12 said: ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed**

What do people of the world do when someone rubs us the wrong way, or when somebody hurts us??? They hold a grudge, is what they do.

Some might:

- let it out in a tirade;
- have a seething bitterness in their heart toward the other;
- cut a person off – deliberately avoid having to see/interact them;

- put up with the other (when they have to), but they refuse to address the bitterness they continue to harbour in their heart...

That's what the world does... But Disciples of Jesus do not conform to the world... Disciples of Jesus will be known for their love for one another...

Now, I've been in some churches, where for some, their lack of love for their brother, was quite evident... And based on Scripture, we know that the worship of those who do not love their brother, is not worship that is acceptable to God.

So, it may be the way of the world, but it's not the way of Disciples of Jesus.

And the 2nd thing that's at play, is the very nature of Christian brotherhood. We're not just different to the world, because God **commands** us to be different. We are different to the world, because we are transformed. Romans 12 said: **be transformed by the renewal of your mind**

The very nature of Christian brotherhood, is the presence of Christ, within... One of the most beautiful doctrines of Christianity, is that when you become a Christian – as you let go of being the boss of yourself, and you surrender your life to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit moves in. And this is Christ, living in your heart... And the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is the most beautiful thing...

Jesus said:

Luke 11:¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Are you having trouble, loving your brother and sister in Christ? Do you **want** to love them again, but you sense (and they probably sense it too), that you have this continuing broken relationship??? Pray for God to fill you with His Holy Spirit, and through His Holy Spirit, you **will** love again...

You see, if I love Jesus, I **will** love my brother or sister in Christ, because they are filled with the Holy Spirit... Christ is in them... And if Christ is in me, and Christ is in you, how can I not love you??? Are you with me??? This is the nature of Christian brotherhood.

As John said: he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

So, Let brotherly love continue.

It sorta sounds like, it's something we started out doing at some point, but it's in danger of lapsing... Let brotherly love continue.

- Don't let it stop;

- Don't hold back forgiveness;
- Don't hold on to the grudge;
- We've gotta get rid of that awkwardness, for brotherly love to continue.

And at this point, we're given a couple of examples of brotherly love:

A.

The first example is to be hospitable – to be hospitable to strangers, no less...

Now, once again, that's not normal in the world – to invite a stranger to stay at your house for the night... But as Disciples of Jesus, the **new** normal, is this thing called "brotherly love"... It is a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, even if we've only just met them...

I've told you before, when Robyn and I go away on holidays, we always plan (on a Sunday) to be somewhere where there's a Christian church... We do a bit of research online, to see what churches are about, and what their theology's like.... we prefer to go to a church in a country town..

*And nearly every time, we find fellowship. We meet people there, who, within 2 minutes of meeting them, we **know** that we are among brothers and sisters in Christ. Have you experienced that? If you haven't, you'd better get out more. It's a delight.*

*And in my experience, the brotherhood of strangers, becomes very real, when you move to another town. When **we** have moved town, and we've met new brothers and sisters in Christ, we've discovered:*

- *instant friends;*
- *an instant support network*
- *family*

We are family, because we share the same blood (the blood of Jesus)...

What a delight it is, to get to know more of our family in Christ...

And the other good thing about fellowship is “usually there’s food involved”.

Ever since the beginning of the Christian church, fellowship has been shared over a meal... And I love it when I see people in this church, inviting each other over, for a meal... I love it, when we invite someone to come to our place for a meal, and they say, “Sorry, we can’t come. Somebody else has already invited me.”

But, sadly, that isn’t the culture of every church. *16 years ago, our family got to travel to the US and Canada. And while we were there, we planned to be in a country town on a Sunday, and we went to church (a small church). And only one person in that whole church, came up to us and talked to us... And it was the Pastor. He dutifully talked to us for the required 2.5 minutes, at which point, we knew that we were dismissed... It was just wrong...*

And I hope no one ever has that experience here. What a joy it is, to have visitors, and what a joy it is, to show hospitality – a hospitality beyond what is normal... And who knows? we might even be entertaining an angel without knowing it...

Think of Abraham's nephew: Lot.

God had heard that the sin in Sodom was terrible, so he sent his angel to check it out... And Lot saw this man in the town, with nowhere to stay, and he said, "Come and stay at my place"... And he did. And Lot and his family were saved that night, because of the Godly hospitality they showed to the Angel...

Now, maybe you don't want those pesky angels in your house, dropping feathers everywhere... Obviously, most times we meet an angel, they just look like an ordinary, every-day person...

So, that's one example: Hospitality.

B.

The second example of brotherly love, is risking fellowship, with our Brothers and Sisters, who are being persecuted.

V³ Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

Sounds like “empathy”.

In Australia, it’s relatively safe to be a Christian. At the moment, the only real persecution of Christians, is “Lawfare”... Making it illegal for Christians to pray in certain circumstances, and inventing novel offences such as “hate speech”, by which they try to stop the Gospel from being proclaimed...

So, in Australia, we can be cancelled; we can be sued; fined... In an extreme case, it is possible to also be put in prison (such as if one continues to defy a court order) and keep on proclaiming the Gospel where it’s not welcome...

But in other lands, it can be much more severe. This very day, in Nigeria, Christians are being murdered. And in other countries too. Places like North Korea; Somalia; Afghanistan; Iran; Yemen; Libya... and the list goes on... It’s not safe to be a Christian... Some are murdered; Some are jailed; Some are enslaved...

And of course, if one Christian tries to visit another Christian (who’s in chains for the sake of Jesus), that’s a pretty risky thing to do... It’s like putting a target on your back (Hey, I’m a Christian too. You’d better start watching me)...

But can you imagine the joy and the relief that an imprisoned believer would have, when they receive a visitor:

To know that:

- they’re not forgotten;
- someone’s looking after their family;
- they are being prayed for;

- they are loved...

For us, how **we** can stand alongside Disciples of Jesus who suffer for their faith. And not just be aware, but to have this connection of empathy, because they and we, are part of the one body... That's why every Sunday, we pray from the Open Doors prayer list, as we pray for the persecuted church.

So, because we love our brother, we feel their pain.

Now,
The brotherly love we show for one another, is a **big deal**. It's not an optional extra...

For some of us, the previous chapter (Hebrews 12) might have messed with our theology... Because this is a letter to Christians, and chapter 12 contains a strong warning about the coming judgment, and about how we as Christians must not ignore the commands of God.

Chapter 12 said: ²⁵ **See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.**

How do we refuse God? By not obeying His commands.

If the people of the Old Covenant didn't escape when they willingly disobeyed God, **how much less will we escape, if we reject Him who warns from heaven....**

Does that mess with your theology? It might be at odds with the teaching of man, but it is **not** at odds with the teaching of Jesus...

This is a direct reflection of what Jesus taught about brotherly love/hospitality/generosity/caring for the persecuted,,, **and** about judgment...

Matthew 25: (ESV)

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. **42** For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, **43** I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' **44** Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' **45** Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' **46** And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Disciples of Jesus, are sheep. Not goats. Disciples of Jesus, love their brother (even the stranger)...

So, the first requirement for our worship to be acceptable, is brotherly love...

2.
The second, is holiness in sexuality.

We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. See to it, 12:¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal..

In other words, “Do not despise your eternal inheritance, for the purpose of immediate fleshly gratification.”... When it comes to sexual activity, Disciples of Jesus take a very different path, to the people of the world...

It may be normal:

- for most couples to live together before they get married.
- that many will never marry.
- that many change partners as often as a bush-dance...

But Disciples of Jesus honour marriage.

Marriage:

- is not an institution of the past.
- is God’s good design; and
- is the only appropriate relationship, for Christians to enjoy God’s gift of sex.

let the marriage bed be undefiled

The marriage bed is a place for husband and wife.

Not a place:

- for try before you buy;
- for multiple partners;
- for experimenting in immorality or adultery;
- pornography...

for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

If:

- I don’t honour marriage;
- I am immoral or adulterous;

- I defile the marriage bed by bringing another person into it,
my worship is not acceptable to God.

3.

And the third requirement for our worship to be acceptable to God, is to not be fixated on:

- the love of money;
- Greed;
- Materialism;
- the quest for always wanting more.

And we're going to dig into that **next** week. We're going to talk more about "contentment", and how the Lord is our helper, and how love for money, is repulsive to God. If I love money, and am not content, my worship is not acceptable to God.

So, we'll leave that for next week, but for now, how can our worship become acceptable to God?

It's about:

- Godliness with contentment.
- living our lives, as an act of worship to God...
- Living every day for Jesus;
- sacrificial living – giving up what the world would cling to, as we pursue the righteousness and holiness of Christ.
And
- depending on God to lead us into righteousness.

V⁶ So we can confidently say,

"The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me?"

Let's pray,

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your love,
For Your Forgiveness; and
for the patience You have given us.

Lord, forgive us for times of appalling worship.
Not the quality of the music,
but of lives, and lack of love/holiness.
Father, forgive us.

Lord, we want to thank You,
for the love of our brothers and sisters in Christ.
Lord, we ask for Your Holy Spirit.
Fill us with Your Holy Spirit.

And with the help of Your Spirit,
we forgive those whom we hold grudges against,
and help us to love them.
Help us to love them,
because they are family in Christ.

Lord,
may Your Word be more powerful to us
than man's ideas.
When Your word speaks,
May we not refuse You.

Lead us into obedience,
and holiness,
and righteousness,

in the Name of Jesus.

Amen.

ⁱ Timothy J Christenson in Quotes & Idea Starters for Preaching & teaching from Leadership Journal. Rowell EK. Baker Books: Grand Rapids.