

**Hebrews 13:6-9**  
**October 9, 2016**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Imagine being an Israelite. Judaism is all you've known, and all of your family and friends are Jewish as well. You've gone to the Temple each week to worship God, and you've trained your children in it. Then Jesus comes along. People are amazed at his teachings and his ability to perform miracles. Even the Jews are wondering if He is the promised Messiah. And then Jesus is ultimately crucified and then resurrected from the dead, which got the attention of both Jews and Gentiles, including some of your family and friends. Jesus was even seen by over 500 people, and he revealed himself to Mary and some of the very people he disciplined before he was crucified.

They couldn't deny what they observed! And then NT church is birthed by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost after Jesus ascended into heaven. People began following Jesus. The group was called The Way. I want you to imagine what it would have been like if you were an Israelite who was convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. You left Judaism, which means you are not worshipping with your family and friends. Your family is beside themselves! They can't understand this decision you made. You can just hear them say, "Are you crazy?!!"

But you're not crazy. Your parents and grandparents laid eyes on Jesus. They shared powerful accounts of what Jesus did among the people. You are sold out for Jesus, so you join The Way. At first this was exciting. You were willing to take the heat for this decision. But after suffering persecution for this decision and seeing how hard it is stay the course and keep following Jesus, you are tempted to return to Judaism. You are so discouraged that you are starting to drift away from your commitment to Christ. You're not even sure you care about the consequences. You just want peace and to return to a faith system that was familiar to you, whether it was broken or not.

So here you are. You're done. You want to be reunited with your family and friends. The cost of following Jesus is greater than the perceived benefits that can be gained in Christianity – so you think.

The author of Hebrews is deeply concerned that you're getting ready to make a big mistake by returning to Judaism. We have been studying Hebrews since Valentine's Day. We have watched this author work his tail off to convince you that Christ is superior over the Prophets, over the Angels, over Moses, over priests, over the Old Covenant, and over any temporal sacrifice or sanctuary.

He encourages you to ***hold fast to your confession of faith in Christ***. He goes thru numerous inductees of the Hall of Faith and reminds you of those who have gone before you as a great example to each of us. He tells you the importance of enduring in your faith, much like persevering as you run your race.

The last thing this author wants is to see a large group of young Hebrew Christians who are discouraged turn their back on Jesus and return to Judaism. He doesn't want you to even consider this! So in today's passage, the author describes ways to strengthen, encourage and support one another as a fellowship of believers.

**Transition:** *I want us to consider that all of us CAN make a meaningful difference with our fellow believers BY applying the SUGGESTIONS offered by this author.* By the time this hour is over, it is my prayer that you will know not only "what" the suggestions are, but leave with some ideas on how to best **apply** these suggestions. If all of us apply these suggestions consistently, then we will have made a meaningful contribution toward strengthening and encouraging our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let's begin.

### **BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.6:

- So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.6: What is the next suggestion in this passage? [Say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"]

Observation: Remember that these Hebrew Christians were experiencing rejection and persecution. When the heat is on, the author directs their attention to the Lord who is their helper. If the Lord is their helper, what can man do to me?

Transition: The next three verses refer to the spiritual leaders of the local assemblies.

### **[Read Heb 13:7-9]**

V.7:

- Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

V.8:

- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

V.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 ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.7: What suggestion does the author make regarding our spiritual leaders? [**Remember** your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.]

Q: The author suggests why we should remember them. What do you see? [Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.]

Q: Let's keep in mind that these Hebrew Christians were living during the beginning of the Church age. How did key spiritual leaders die when the NT church was being launched? [Crucified upside down, beheaded, martyred, stoned]

Transition: By God's grace, we live in a country where we don't face persecution for our faith, but you go to other countries which are hostile to Christianity, those spiritual leaders are facing death for sharing the gospel.

Q: Can you think of a spiritual leader in your life who has had the greatest impact on you such that you imitate their faith? [Let people share]

Observation V.8: When the author reminds his readers that "Jesus is the same yesterday and today and tomorrow," he's basically saying Church leaders may come and go, but Jesus Christ remains the same; and it is Christ who is the center of our faith.

Q V.9: What does the author want them to avoid? [Being carried away by all kinds of strange teachings]

Q: What were some of the strange or false teachings that floated around during their time? [The Jews had dietary laws that governed food. They were required to stay away from certain foods so they wouldn't be defiled. Another false teaching was by the Judaizers who tried to convince these Hebrew Christians had to be circumcised in order to be justified by the Law. Paul said, "Don't fall for that!" It is justification by faith alone in Christ Jesus!]

Q: How do we protect ourselves from being drawn away by strange teachings? [We gather to study God's Word. We test what we hear to the Bible, our source of truth.] Some recipients of the Letter to the Hebrews were considering going back to Jewish laws that governed foods. The writer warned them that these dietary regulations would not profit them spiritually because they never profited the Jews spiritually!

### **LOOK:**

One way we can strengthen the body of Christ is to show grace to strengthen our hearts. Remember the spiritual leaders, whether they were your parents, friends, or a beloved pastor and the testimony they exuded.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 327–331). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### **Enjoying Spiritual Fellowship (Heb. 13:6)**

The affirmation of faith in Hebrews 13:6 comes from Psalm 118:6. This is a messianic psalm and is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, so we may claim this promise for ourselves. It was a source of great peace to the early Christians to know that they were safe from the fear of man, for no man could do anything to them apart from God's will. Men might take their goods, but God would meet their needs.

A woman said to evangelist D.L. Moody, "I have found a promise that helps me when I am afraid. It is Psalm 56:3—'What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.' "

Mr. Moody replied, "I have a better promise than that! Isaiah 12:2—'I will trust and not be afraid.' "

Both promises are true and each has its own application. The important thing is that we know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Helper, and that we not put our trust in material things. Contented Christians are people with priorities, and material things are not high on their priority lists.

### **Submitting to Spiritual Leadership (Heb. 13:7–9, 17, 24)**

Three times the writer used the designation, "Them that have the rule over you." The phrase refers to the spiritual leaders of the local assemblies. The church is an organism, but it is also an organization. If an organism is not organized, it will die! Wherever Paul went, he founded local churches and ordained qualified believers to lead them (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). "Saints ... bishops [elders], and deacons" (Phil. 1:1) summarize the membership and leadership of the New Testament churches.

Each Christian has three responsibilities toward the spiritual leaders in his local church.

***Remember them (vv. 7–9).*** The word "remember" may suggest that these leaders were dead, perhaps martyred, and should not be forgotten. How easy it is to forget the courageous Christians of the past whose labors and sacrifices make it possible for us to minister today. But while we do not worship people or give them the glory, it is certainly right to honor them for their faithful work (1 Thes. 5:12–13).

These leaders probably had led the readers to Christ because the leaders had spoken the Word to them. When you recall that few Christians then had copies of the Scriptures, you can see the importance of this personal ministry of the Word. Today, we can read the Bible for ourselves, listen to radio or television sermons, and even listen to cassettes. We are in danger of taking the Word for granted.

The believers could no longer hear their departed leaders speak, but they could imitate their faith and consider its outcome, or "end." This could refer to their deaths, suggesting that some of them were martyred. However, I believe that "the outcome of their way of life" (Heb. 13:7) is given in Hebrews 13:8—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever." Their lives pointed to Christ! Church leaders may come and go, but Jesus Christ remains the same; and it is Christ who is the center of our faith.

After I had announced my resignation from a church I had been pastoring for several years, one of the members said to me, "I don't see how I'm going to make it without you! I depend so much on you for my spiritual help!"

My reply shocked him. “Then the sooner I leave, the sooner you can start depending on the Lord. Never build your life on any servant of God. Build your life on Jesus Christ. He never changes.”

Of course, there is always the danger of being “carried about with divers [various] and strange doctrines” (Heb. 13:9). The purpose of spiritual ministry is to establish God’s people in grace, so they will not be blown around by dangerous doctrines (Eph. 4:11–14). Some recipients of the Letter to the Hebrews were considering going back to Jewish laws that governed foods. The writer warned them that these dietary regulations would not profit them spiritually because they never profited the Jews spiritually! The dietary laws impressed people as being spiritual, but they were only shadows of the reality that we have in Christ (read Col. 2:16–23 carefully).

When local churches change pastors, there is a tendency also to change doctrines or doctrinal emphases. We must be careful not to go beyond the Word of God. We must also be careful not to change the spiritual foundation of the church. It is unfortunate that there is not more doctrinal preaching today because Bible doctrine is the source of strength and growth in the church.

**Obey them (v. 17).** When a servant of God is in the will of God, teaching the Word of God, the people of God should submit and obey. This does not mean that pastors should be dictators. “Neither [be] lords over God’s heritage” (1 Peter 5:3). Some church members have a flippant attitude toward pastoral authority, and this is dangerous. One day every pastor will have to give an account of his ministry to the Lord, and he wants to be able to do it with joy. A disobedient Christian will find on that day that the results of disobedience are unprofitable, not for the pastor, but for himself.

Quite frankly, it is much easier to “win souls” than it is to “watch for souls” (see Ezek. 3:16–21). The larger a church grows, the more difficult it becomes to care for the sheep. Sad to say, there are some ministers whose only work is to preach and “run the program”; they have no desire to minister to the souls placed in their care. Some are even “hirelings” who work only for money, and who run away when danger is near (John 10:11–14). However, when a shepherd is faithful to watch for souls, it is important that the sheep obey him.

**Greet them (v. 24).** The Jews used to greet each other with “Shalom—peace!” The Greeks often greeted one another with “Grace!” Paul combined these two and greeted the saints with, “Grace and peace be unto you!” (1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; and all his epistles except 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. When Paul wrote to pastors, he greeted them with, “Grace, *mercy*, and peace.” I wonder why?)

Of course, the writer of the Hebrew epistle was sending his personal greetings to the leaders of the church; but this is a good example for all of us to follow. *Every Christian should be on speaking terms with his pastor.* Never allow any “root of bitterness” to grow up in your heart (Heb. 12:15) because it will only poison you and hurt the whole church.

While it is true that each member of a local body has an important ministry to perform, it is also true that God has ordained spiritual leaders in the church. I have been privileged to preach in many churches in America, and I have noticed that where the people permit the pastors (elders) to lead, there is usually blessing and growth. I am not talking about highhanded, egotistical dictatorship, but true spiritual leadership. This is God’s pattern for the church.

### **Sharing in Spiritual Worship (Heb. 13:10–16, 18–19)**

While it is true that a New Covenant Christian is not involved in the ceremonies and furnishings of an earthly tabernacle or temple, it is not true that he is deprived of the blessings that they typify. A Jew under the Old Covenant could point to the temple, but a Christian has a heavenly

sanctuary that can never be destroyed. The Jews were proud of the city of Jerusalem; but a Christian has an eternal city, the New Jerusalem. For each of an Old Testament believer's temporary earthly items, a New Covenant believer has a heavenly and eternal counterpart.

"We have an altar" (Heb. 13:10) does not suggest a material altar on earth, for that would contradict the whole message of the epistle. In the Old Testament sanctuary, the brazen altar was the place for offering blood sacrifices, and the golden altar before the veil was the place for burning incense, a picture of prayer ascending to God (Ps. 141:2). A New Covenant Christian's altar is Jesus Christ; for it is *through Him* that we offer our "spiritual sacrifices" to God (Heb. 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5). We may set aside places in our church buildings and call them altars; but they are really not altars in the biblical sense. Why? Because Christ's sacrifice has already been made, once and for all; and the gifts that we bring to God are acceptable, not because of any earthly altar, but because of a heavenly altar, Jesus Christ.

The emphasis in this section is on separation from dead religion and identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in His reproach. The image comes from the Day of Atonement. The sin offering was taken outside the camp and burned completely (Lev. 16:27). Jesus Christ, our perfect sin offering, suffered and died "outside the gate" of Jerusalem. All true Christians must go out to Him, spiritually speaking, to the place of reproach and rejection. "Why stay in Jerusalem when it is not your city?" asked the writer. "Why identify with the Old Covenant Law when it has been done away with in Christ?"

The readers of this epistle were looking for a way to continue as Christians while escaping the persecution that would come from unbelieving Jews. "It cannot be done," the writer stated in so many words. "Jerusalem is doomed. Get out of the Jewish religious system and identify with the Saviour who died for you." There can be no room for compromise.

The writer named two of the "spiritual sacrifices" that we offer as Christians (Heb. 13:15–16). Note that the word "spiritual" is not in contrast to "material," because material gifts can be accepted as spiritual sacrifices (see Phil. 4:10–20). The word "spiritual" means "spiritual in character, to be used by the Spirit for spiritual purposes." A believer's body, presented to God, is a spiritual sacrifice (Rom. 12:1–2).

The first spiritual sacrifice is *continual praise to God* (Heb. 13:15). The words of praise from our lips, coming from our hearts, is like beautiful fruit laid on the altar. How easy it is for suffering saints to complain, but how important it is for them to give thanks to God.

The second spiritual sacrifice is *good works of sharing* (Heb. 13:16). This would certainly include the hospitality mentioned in Hebrews 13:2, as well as the ministry to prisoners in Hebrews 13:3. "Doing good" can cover a multitude of ministries: sharing food with the needy; transporting people to and from church or other places; sharing money; perhaps just being a helpful neighbor. I once had the privilege of seeing a man come to Christ because I helped him mow his lawn after his own mower broke.

Next the writer emphasizes the importance of *prayer* (Heb. 13:18–19). He was unable to visit the readers personally, but he did want their prayer help. It is possible that some of his enemies had lied about him, so he affirms his honesty and integrity. We do not know for certain who the writer was. Many think it was Paul. The reference to Timothy in Hebrews 13:23 would suggest Paul, as would also the "benediction of grace" in Hebrews 13:25 (see 2 Thes. 3:17–18). Some scholars have suggested that Peter referred to Paul's authorship of Hebrews (2 Peter 3:15–16); but that statement could also be applied to things Paul wrote in Romans. We do not know the name of the human writer of this book, nor is it important that we do.

## Experiencing Spiritual Lordship (Heb. 13:20–21)

This benediction seems to gather together the major themes of Hebrews: peace, the resurrected Christ, the blood, the covenant, spiritual perfection (maturity), God's work in the believer. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ *died* for the sheep (John 10:11). As the Great Shepherd, He *lives* for the sheep in heaven today, working on their behalf. As the Chief Shepherd, He will *come for the sheep* at His return (1 Peter 5:4). Our Shepherd cares for His own in the past, present, and future. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Our Great High Priest is also our Great Shepherd. When He was on earth, He worked *for* us when He completed the great work of redemption (John 17:4). Now that He is in heaven, He is working *in us* to mature us in His will and bring us to a place of spiritual perfection. We will never reach that place until He returns (1 John 2:28–3:3); but while we are waiting, we are told to continue to grow.

The phrase “make you perfect” (Heb. 13:21) is the translation of one Greek word, *KATARTIDZO*. This is an unfamiliar word to us, but it was familiar to the people who received this letter. The doctors knew it because it meant “to set a broken bone.” To fishermen it meant “to mend a broken net” (see Matt. 4:21). To sailors it meant “to outfit a ship for a voyage.” To soldiers it meant “to equip an army for battle.”

Our Saviour in heaven wants to equip us for life on earth. Tenderly, He wants to set the “broken bones” in our lives so that we might walk straight and run our life-races successfully. He wants to repair the breaks in the nets so that we might catch fish and win souls. He wants to equip us for battle and outfit us so that we will not be battered in the storms of life. In brief, He wants to mature us so that He can work *in* us and *through* us that which pleases Him and accomplishes His will.

How does He equip us? By tracing this word *KATARTIDZO* in the New Testament, we can discover the tools that God uses to mature and equip His children. He uses the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16–17) and prayer (1 Thes. 3:10) in the fellowship of the local church (Eph. 4:11–12). He also uses individual believers to equip us and mend us (Gal. 6:1). Finally, He uses suffering to perfect His children (1 Peter 5:10), and this relates to what we learned from Hebrews 12 about chastening.

What a difference it would make in our lives if we would turn Hebrews 13:20–21 into a personal prayer each day. “Lord, make me perfect in every good work to do Thy will. Work in me that which is well-pleasing in Thy sight. Do it through Jesus Christ and may He receive the glory.”

The basis for this marvelous work is “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20). This is the New Covenant that was discussed in Hebrews 8, a covenant based on the sacrifice discussed in Hebrews 10. Because this New Covenant was a part of God's eternal plan of salvation, and because it guarantees everlasting life, it is called “the everlasting covenant.” But apart from the death of Jesus Christ, we can share in none of the blessings named in this profound benediction.

The “Amen” at the end of the benediction closed the body of the epistle. All that remained was for the writer to add a few words of greeting and personal information.

He had written a long letter, and in it he had dealt with some profound and difficult doctrines; so he encouraged his readers to “bear with [suffer]” this letter of encouragement. This seems like a long letter to us, but he felt it was just a “few words.” No doubt some members of the congregation responded negatively to this letter, while others received it and acted on it. Paul (1

Thes. 2:13) tells us how we should respond to God's Word. Read the verse carefully—and practice it.

What Timothy's relationship to the group was, we do not know. He was a prominent minister in that day and most of the Christians would either know him or know about him. These personal touches remind us that God is interested in individuals and not just in groups of people.

"They of Italy salute you" (Heb. 13:24) could mean that the writer was in Italy at the time, or that saints from Italy were with him and wanted to send their greetings.

These personal references at the end of the letter raise questions that we cannot answer now. But the total impact of Hebrews answers the important question, "How can I stand firm in a world that is shaking all around me?" The answer: know the superior Person, Jesus Christ; trust His superior priesthood; and live by the superior principle of faith. Build your life on the things of heaven that will never shake.

Be confident! Jesus Christ saves to the uttermost!

**Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 811-812). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

## V. Epilogue (chap. 13)

The readers were also to avoid monetary greed and to **be content with what they have** (v. 5; cf. Luke 12:15; Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:6–10). Even if they had little on the material level, they had the Lord (Heb. 13:5) and His help (v. 6).

13:7–8. Religious directions follow the moral ones and this segment of the Epilogue extends through verse 17. The call, **Remember your leaders**, perhaps referred to former leaders who had passed away. The **outcome of their way of life** could be contemplated with good effect and the readers were to **imitate their faith**. Those leaders were gone, but **Jesus Christ** of whom they spoke remains continuously **the same**.

13:9. That is why new doctrines which conflict with the unchanging message about Jesus Christ should be rejected. The author's reference here to **all kinds of strange teachings** does not sound at all like a reference to normative Judaism but as if the readers were confronting a peculiar, sectarian variation of that religion (cf. comments under "Background and Setting" in the Heb. *Introduction*).

13:10–14. If those who hawked "strange teachings" tended to idealize the wilderness experience and the tabernacle, the writer's words now make a special point. A Christian has a special **altar** (probably a figure of speech for the sacrifice of Christ) from which he derives spiritual sustenance. **Those who minister at the tabernacle** were not entitled to partake of that kind of spiritual food. If some people preferred a desert way of life and considered themselves "servants" of the ancient tabernacle they were, the writer pointed out, debarred from Christian privileges. Under the old institution the **blood** from sacrifices made on the Day of Atonement was brought **into the most holy place, but the bodies were burned outside the camp** (v. 11), a location deemed unholy in the years of the wilderness sojourn. But **Jesus also suffered outside the city gate** (i.e., outside Jerusalem), but the effect of His sacrifice was **to make the people**



**holy**. Far from association with Him being unholy, as some unbelieving Jews regarded it, the readers were in fact “holy” (or sanctified; cf. 2:11; 10:10, 14) and should not hesitate to share in **the disgrace He bore** (cf. 12:2) by abandoning **the camp** of Judaism and identifying with Him. If the readers actually were acquainted with sectarian encampments in their region this exhortation would have had special force. The readers’ true home was no camp or city that then existed, but **the city that is to come** (cf. 11:10, 16; 12:22).

13:15–16. No blood sacrifices were needed in the light of Jesus’ death, but to **offer ... praise** and **to do good and to share with others** were indeed **sacrifices** that **God** desired (cf. 10:25).

13:17. If former **leaders** were to be remembered and their teachings retained (vv. 7–8), present ones were to be obeyed. Their responsibility before God was to be recognized and their shepherding tasks should not be complicated by disobedience. (**So that their work will be a joy** possibly should be, “so their accounting [to God for you] may be with joy.”)

13:18–19. With that same sense of spiritual humility that led him to use “we” in most of his warning sections, the writer requested the prayers of his readers, and **particularly** that he might **be restored to them soon**. His interest in them was personal, and he was eager to see them.

13:20–21. In a lovely benediction which captures a number of the major themes of the epistle (e.g., **peace, blood, covenant**, Resurrection, **Shepherd, equip**), the writer expressed confidence in **our Lord Jesus** as the **Great Shepherd** of New-Covenant people, through whom God was able to effect His will (equip is *katartisai*, “to prepare, make ready for use”; cf. Eph. 4:12) in the readers and in himself. This indeed is what he prayed for his readers.

13:22–25. Urging once again that his readers **bear with his word of exhortation**, he expressed the hope that he and **Timothy** would soon **see** them. After giving them greetings, he committed them to God’s **grace**.