

## *Concluding Exhortations*

Hebrews 13:7-19

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Good morning. At this time, I invite you to open your Bibles to Hebrews 13. The focus of our meditation today will be Hebrews 13:7-19.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So, Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have. For such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Obeys your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be at no advantage to you.

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner. [ESV]

The word of God.

Heavenly Father, we come before you Lord God hungry and thirsty to be nourished by you. Lord, this isn't a time where we want to hear the mere voice of some individual man. We want to hear the prophet of today's church, Lord Jesus Christ, speaking to us. So, by the power of your Spirit and through the power of your word, Lord God, speak into our very hearts. Challenge us, convict us, encourage us, strengthen us, but don't leave us the way we came. This asked in Jesus's name. Amen.

This is a message that I've entitled Concluding Exhortations. It's actually a title that I struggled over. Initially, I thought since this is the end of the preacher's sermon, perhaps we should go with – since "exhortation" is a call – the Final Call. But then I thought as I stood in the pulpit with a bow tie, I didn't want to give you the wrong idea as the *Final Call* is a newspaper that is published by the nation of Islam. So, Final Call was not the title I wanted to go with after that. Then I thought, perhaps it's a Call to Duty, but then again, that's a video game so, I couldn't go with the Call to Duty. So, I landed on Concluding Exhortations.

As you may recall, the previous two messages set the spotlight on Christ's office as our mediatorial king. First, we were given a God-entranced glimpse at the gloriously unshakeable kingdom in chapter 12:18-29. In that passage, the preacher to the Hebrews uses transcendent imagery for the purpose of provoking gratitude and acceptable worship characterized by reference and awe. So, before our eyes, he laid before us the scenery, the accoutrements, the environment of worship as he causes to think about the Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, a festive gathering of enumerable angels, the assembly of the first born, God the judge of all, Jesus the mediator of a new covenant enrapturing our minds and our hearts and drawing us toward worship.

But then the preacher used those images as the foundation or grounds for calling the redeemed citizens of the kingdom to exercise love one to another through hospitality, biblical empathy, marital fidelity, and contentment in chapter 13:1-6. We've seen throughout this 13-chapter sermon the preacher to the Hebrews taking robust theological truth and meshing it or dovetailing it with commanding exhortations. He's not one given to just information, the dispensing or the data dumping of information. He has an eye and a heart set on transformation as it were.

And so, on the hills of his theological musings his exhortation. He realized that he was speaking to a people who would become dull in their hearing, who were drifting or facing a temptation to drift from the faith. And so, as he preaches to them through 13 chapters, can you imagine preaching this long? As he preaches to them, we see pastoral urgency. There was a context to be spoken into. And so, as he has this sense of urgency and as he's looking to reach his audience, he lays before them the all-surpassing superiority of Christ far greater than the angels, far greater than Moses. His works far greater than the old economy, which were merely a shadow to his substance, a type to his anti-type.

And as he presents this picture of the superiority of Christ, he continually calls them to hold fast to Christ and Christ alone. The issue was that there was a bit of an admixture coming into their worshipping assembly. There was – in the language of Ecclesiastes 10:1 – there were “dead flies in the ointment of the apothecary.” I love that verse. What should have been an environment of pure doctrine and beautiful worship started to have these foreign elements entering into it. And so, he had to rehearse into their hearing, their thoughts, their hearts, things that they were aware of.

So, I was reading and talking through this with my wife. And as the passage was speaking of these obvious and rudimentary things about Christ, the question was, did they not know that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever? Yes, just as we do. And just as we do, there were times when they didn't act like it, so they had to be reminded. And so, as the preacher is going to speak to this worshipping community dove-tailing theologically with truth with commanding application, he does so for the purpose of showing them what the church community is to look like.

And in contrast to those previous messages that spotlighted Christ as our mediatorial king, this passage throws the spotlight on Christ as our priest, our great high priest. It's that office that Hugh Martin referred to as “the foundational office.” Wow, the foundational office. It's the foundational office because He is standing in the right to the throne having the scepter in His hand as a result of what He accomplished as a priest. He has content to His message and to His preaching as the prophet of today's church as a result of what He accomplished as a priest.

And so, as we walk through today's passage through that somewhat lengthy introduction, we'll consider it under the following strains of thought: a call to remember, a call to avoid, a call to offer acceptable sacrifices, and a call to cherish. Beginning with our first verses of the day, a call to remember, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life. Imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

And as the preacher is bringing them into this point of exhortation, he sets his gaze on the leadership of the church. And in this grouping, in this passage, he takes this speaking and this focusing on leaders and makes it sort of the book end of the text. In verse 7, you see I'm speaking of leaders. In verse 17, he again revisits speaking of leaders. But here, as he speaks of leaders in verse 7, he does so for the purpose of bringing to their remembrance these leaders that have gone on to be with the Lord. He uses very general language here as he says, “Remember your leaders.” It could have included people in various walks of life or ministration or vocation.

But then he provides us with something of a parameter to give them an idea of who he's speaking about. “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.” Remember your pastor, remember your preachers, remember your ruling elders, those who council you, those who cared for you through the word of God, those who had as their worldview the lens through which they saw life itself, the Scriptures, remember them. Think of these folks, why are they to call these folks to mind? Remember,

these are people who have become dull of hearing, people who were drifting, people who as they were considering their walk or their Christian life started to feel unreal. They started to feel like they needed to give way to some of the pressures that were pressing in on them, as we sometimes do.

When the dominant voices surrounding you are: maybe you should go back to Judaism. And you're struggling, the temptation is there. In our contemporary context, when it seems like Christ is not invoked, when it seems like speaking dogmatically concerning doctrine or the way things are to be played out in life concerning marriage, concerning sexuality, concerning all sorts of human values that the Lord God in His word speaks on, when the many voices of this pluralistic society press in on you, the temptation is there. The temptation is there to drift and to waffle.

And so, the preacher says consider these examples, these gifts that God has given to His church that live their lives out before you not because they had some measure of perfection, but because the very tenor of their life showed a fidelity, a faithfulness. We need these models. We need these examples. And it's almost like you need them and you draw from them when you pick up Christian biographies. But then if we're going to be real about it, there are times where you pick up a Christian biography and you think about these geniuses and you think about these folks that have done great exploits for the kingdom. You close up your Spurgeon biography and you're just as discouraged. You read about Jonathan Edwards and what he accomplished very early in life, and you think why did they recommend this book to me? This isn't encouraging. I'm a slacker.

And when I thought about that, and I thought about this in light of Christian biography, I think about that constant struggle that we have to stay fit. And so, you join a fitness program, or you link up with a fit community. And one of the workouts is: what we need you to do at this point is to do a handstand and do push-ups from that handstand. And you're raising your hand like, excuse me, is there a modification to that workout? I'm not going to be able to do that. There are times when Christian biographies feel like that, a push-up from a handstand position submerged under water.

And so, the preacher comes to us and he says consider those who have had proximity and a personal relationship alongside of you, along with you. Those who you've seen go through the ups and downs of life. And while they have had times where they've struggled and while they've had times where they've been broken in their walk, you saw a measure or a consistency about them. When it seemed like all around their soul gave way, Jesus was still their hope and stay. And the preacher says, consider them. Consider them and imitate their faith. Live as they lived. Walk as they walked. Be imitators of them as they are or rather were imitators of Christ. See their lives as epistles read for men and read their life and walk in that pathway.

And then he launches into what seems to be like a random outburst of theological truth when he says, look, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever," and you're like wait a minute, transition point here? That seems a bit random. But what he's doing is saying, look, you see how they were able to stay consistent. That wasn't because of their own strength. That wasn't because of their own doing. Their consistency was grounded in Christ who is the consistent One, the One who is faithful. The One who is unchangeable. We look at this, and we immediately say: that's a great proof test to teach about the eternity of Christ and the immutability of Christ. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But from a functional office standpoint, it speaks of Jesus Christ as the same yesterday considering what He did in His incarnation coming into flesh, and His oblation, His lifting Himself up upon the Cross to bear our suffering and shame and our ruinment in our stead.

Not only is He the same yesterday but today! He's the One who ever lives. He ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the throne of God. He's the One who stands before the Almighty, ever living to make intercession for you. And so, the durational eternity of your salvation is wrapped up in the One who ever lives to make intercession. And so, in the face of those teachings that come in as pluralistic trends, talking points that seek to pull you away from the purity of the gospel, the preacher says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Moving on to our next verses, not only does he call them to remember their leaders, he calls them not to be led away by diverse teachings. Here we see something of another point about verse 8 which is not only this verse that looks back and provides us with the foundation for verse 7, but it's actually a verse that looks back at verse 7 and looks forward to verse 9. The rationale behind, "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings" is the consistency of Christ. These things waffle. These things are variegated and variable. But Jesus Christ is the same. As he speaks about them having the threat of diverse and strange teachings, it's almost like he's saying these "manifold teachings," these "multi-colored teachings." Don't be led away by them.

And as I read verse 9 – and maybe it's because I need to grow up – but as I read verse 9, I read a bit of sarcasm here. I don't know if you get that, but when you look and it says, "for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace and not by foods," what he's doing is he's going back to Psalm 104. And as he goes back to Psalm 104, he's making reference to a table blessing that the saints would say, grace, as you will. And in that Psalm 104 passage, it speaks about foods that strengthen the heart and thanking God for his bountiful gifts. Here, he uses it in the context of a cultural religious context. And he's saying, just as the food from your table when you say grace over it does nothing to strengthen your heart in the sense of the core of your being, these ceremonial meals aren't going to strengthen you.

He says, look, the strength that you need to stand comes from grace. This thing that is unmerited favor, this thing that is ill-deserved favor, this thing that is referred to as God's riches at Christ's expense – or as one Bible teacher refers to it, he says grace refers to the divinely initiated and effective solution to the problem of sin and its goal is the removal and restoration, the removal of sin and the restoration of creation. That's grace. He says that's what strengthens one's heart.

Earlier in 4:16 as he speaks about grace, he says this grace is something to be sought because after you hear that it's not food, it's not these outward things that strengthen your heart, you think, well, do I need to obtain this grace? And in 4:16 he tells us. He says, go to the throne room of grace that you might receive mercy and that you might obtain grace. It's that picture of one going before the Lord and realizing their weakness and their frailty and going to Him alone is the One who can strengthen them.

Then he goes on and he, already having heard the situation that they were going through, he goes in to verse 10 and says, we have an altar. They were being told that because you don't have the externals, the tangible substance of religiosity, you don't even have an altar. You don't even have a priest. You don't even have a religion. And in response to that, the preacher encourages his people by saying, we have an altar. And they're like, where? You talking about the table? No, he says, I'm talking about the Cross. I'm talking about the Cross, the completion of our redemption, the securing of our full atonement. It's the picture of Christ being both offerer, the high priest, and offering, the slaughtered sacrifice. It is a picture of Christ, the one who knew no sin becoming sin, but not only that but becoming the provision for that sin. Both offerer and offering, both sin and sin offering, being pulled together in Christ fulfilling to the fullness all that we see in a day of atonement.

The day of atonement, some of you may think immediately having sat in PD's class, I know where you're going with that, got it. Yeah, yeah, chapter 16, I remember that. Have you gotten that far? Thank you.

And so, immediately you think things like, okay so, the priest would come with his bowl as a sacrifice for himself. The high priest would come with his bowl as a sacrifice for himself and come with a goat as a sacrifice for the people. And that blood would be offered up, but the bodies would be taken outside the camp and burned. And the people who carried the bodies outside of the camp to burn them and carry out the scapegoat as well could not return into the camp until they had washed. Immediately I started to think about stories of contamination. It made me think about a mother who being careful about the health of her children would snatch up her children and make sure that as they come out of one place where germs could be passed around, that when they get in the car, they pass around the hand sanitizer. But that same mother has to compete with a father who wants to teach the children the five second rule.

You all are familiar with the five second rule. And that same father leads them in chants like, eat if off the floor.

And so, just as that father may act as sort of an admixture to bring in contamination, they were zealous in making sure that the contamination or the ceremonial contamination on the worshippers clothing was dealt with before they were able to enter into the camp. And so, we see, moving on, we see Jesus is pictured or set as a contrast against that, the contamination of sin in the eyes of God was so serious that it required the burning and the consuming of the sacrifice outside the camp. And so, we see Jesus Christ taking to Himself that reproach bearing shame and scoffing rude. In my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood. Halleluiah, what a Savior.

We see Jesus taking to Himself that reproach, and the question is, why the suffering, why the reproach, why the disgrace? Why did He die? Did He die merely as a victim or did He die as someone who was just overtaken? The passage is very clear. He died pouring out His blood for the purpose of setting apart a people unto Himself. He died as a substitutionary atoning sacrifice to set apart His people. And so right on the heels of that atoning truth, the preacher says, let us go outside the camp. You guys have been shirking and leaning back and keeping at arm's length the reproach and the disgrace of identifying with Christ. You guys have been waffling and drifting in your relationship with Christ, and he says, lean into that reproach. Identify with Christ.

It's the same language that we see earlier in the gospels. It's the same language that tells us to take up our cross and follow Him. It's the same language that tells us that this world is not our home. It reminds us that Christ was hated by the world, and those who are His followers will likewise be hated. And the preacher isn't saying, don't shirk that hate. He's not saying, avoid that at all costs. He's not saying, just go and fit in. He's saying, take a stand. The place of reproach is where your Savior meets you.

And then he picks up from where he left off earlier in the book in chapter 11 when he says, "Here we have no lasting city." He's reminding us that we're pilgrims passing through. And it's like that illusion to Abraham who is not looking for a lasting city here but was looking for the city to come. The One who is builder, maker, designer, and architect is God. He's going back to the beautiful pictures that we saw in 12:18-29, the city of Mount Zion, the pictures that we also see in Isaiah chapter 2 where we see these people from all nations, tribes, and languages flowing up to Mount Zion to the place of worship. The preacher is saying, consider that beautiful imagery and apprise that as more valuable, more beautiful than merely fitting in.

And so, as they are grappling with waffling or giving in, he reminds them of their relationship with Christ, the beauty of being in covenant relationship with Christ. He says, through him and him only, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise. He's taking us into, what are our acceptable sacrifices that we have? We don't come with bowls of goats, but we come with acknowledging Christ. It's not easy. It's almost easier in some senses to get yourself a bowl and goat and let that be your sacrifice when you think about the uncomfortability of taking a stand for Christ.

Now he doesn't say, look, take this stand one time and then you can tap out. He says, look, continually, ongoingly, perpetually let this be the tenor and direction of your life offering up to God a sacrifice of praise acknowledging Christ whether it's in season or out of season. Then he says, you have another sacrifice to offer and that's not to neglect doing good. It says, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have." Initially I looked at that and I said, okay well, do good and share what you have. I saw it as two sacrifices. But "do good" is sort of a general Greek term there, just generally do good. And it appears that the next phrase is more exegetical, so as to speak, so as to say the interpretation of doing good is this sharing what you have. It's the Greek word for "fellowship." Your sacrificial giving one to another, whether that's your time, whether that's your money, whether that's your energy, God is saying, these are the sacrifices that are pleasing to God. Your sacrifice of praise, acknowledging Him, and you're living out a life of sacrifice before this worshipping community in which you live.

Verses 17-19,

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be at no advantage to you.

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

You come to this portion of the message, and then you think, okay, here we go. Obey, submit, and it's hard to hear those words because those words are humbling. More often than not, and a lot of times it is the case, the thought is, why should I submit to him? I'm so much smarter. Why should I submit to him? I am more experienced. Why should I submit to him? I am far more spiritual. But leaders within this context understand that they are not rulers of their kingdom. The church is not the kingdom over which the ruling elders and teaching elders rule. No, the leaders within this worshipping community are your servants, but you're not their boss. The leaders in this worshipping community are not owners, but as the language of the passage says, they are managers who will have to give an account. They are keeping watch over your souls and they have to give an account. That's intimidating. Give an account of who?

But it's obvious. It goes back to language we see in the Old Testament. It's very parallel language that we see that speaks of the prophets reading such a passage. Ezekiel 33:6-7,

But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.

So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them a warning from me.

You have to give an account. You have to give an account. You have to give an account. And so, when you hear this language about obeying and submitting, it's not as harsh because the stakes are so high. And the preacher himself knew how daunting the task was because as he is faced with this urgent desire to be before them again, he says, pray for me. Pray for me. Yes, pray for me that I might be restored among you, so I can labor among you. Pray for me that I can be consistent. Pray for me that I might live a life worth modeling. Pray for me that I might not be inconsistent with my calling.

And so, as he says, obey your leaders and submit to them, and they are present imperatives, so as to say this is to be the way you live among them continuously and ongoingly. And I thought it was fascinating that this word that they use for "obey" here is the same word that's used in verse 18 and rendered "sure" in ESV, or "trust" in the King James version. It's almost as if he's saying, as I'm calling you to obey your leaders, an element in that is trusting them. God has entrusted them with the care of your souls, so trust your leaders. Pray for your leaders. Cherish your leaders.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you Lord for your word. I pray that you have spoken to the hearts of your people. I pray, Lord, that as it is the case as your reign does not fall without it watering or causing the vegetation to grow. I'm trusting that the watering of your word into the hearts of your people will bring about growth within them. Seal this word to our hearts today. This asked in Jesus's name. Amen.