

**Hebrews - Jesus Greater Than  
Hebrews 13 - Put it into Practice  
Rev'd Lynda Johnson**

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Today we conclude our Hebrews series. I've had the privilege of visiting some of the connect groups and hearing first hand how Hebrews has had an impact. It's been great.

Jesus is certainly greater than anything else this world has to offer.

Today our topic for this last chapter is "Put it into practice". There are lots of practical and helpful instructions here.

Really what the writer is doing in this chapter, is pulling together all the things he has already said:

- about the supremacy of Jesus
- about the cross
- about how all those who came before have led us to the cross
- and about how we understand the perseverance it takes to journey with Jesus.

**Now**, at the end of the letter, we look to the future, and work out what is our calling, and what it is that should distinguish us as Christians.

What is this amazing future that is calling us; and how can we faithfully step out into that future?

Those are pretty good questions as we come to this point in our life together as a church, when next week we launch and celebrate a new Vision and a new plan.

What are our lives to look like, both corporately and individually, because we belong to Jesus, the one who is greater than everything else.

But there is a danger that we mustn't read this chapter in isolation from the rest of the book.

If we do that, we could all too easily find ourselves on a self-righteous moralistic quest that simply says 'be good for goodness' sake.'

And can I say, that does nobody any good. Least of all, the Gospel cause.

Today I hope that we read and understand these encouragements and exhortations to Godly living in the light of the whole book. Because that's the only way it all makes sense.

Throughout the rest of the book, we've had the systematic presentation of Christ and his work and the impact of that.

It's been made clear that we have forgiveness through Christ and the cross, and now we move to this list of very practical dos and don'ts which arise out of a good understanding of what Jesus has done.

In these closing verses we have more than 15 categories with at least 20 instructions.

Our writer is helping us to Put this discipleship into practice.

This final chapter of Hebrews goes from love, to hospitality, to visitation, to marriage, to money matters, to leadership, to false doctrine, to accepting abuse, to praise, back to leadership again, to a benediction, to exhortation, to greetings, to grace...

How amazing that chapter 13 starts with love and ends with grace! I like that.

But there are some real jewels here as Hebrews comes to a close.  
As I read these first few verses particularly, vv.1-12, this is what I see:

vv. 1-3 - it's about **love**

vv. 4-6 - it's about **purity**

vv. 7-14 - it's about **loyalty**

But we need to remember that love and purity and loyalty are not separate, they're intertwined and interdependent.

So firstly, it's about love.

It's interesting because what this is describing is

- loving those you know,
- loving those you don't know,
- and loving those who are outcast.

Christians are to be concerned for the needs of others.  
Those for whom Christ has died, cannot live for themselves.

Christianity is faith in action and that means love being at work.  
So the writer draws attention to something of what it means to live in love.  
Because Jesus is greater than everything and anything else, that gives us the reason to live this way.

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

Think about it. How many times does the Bible tell us to love each other?

Jesus himself summarises the commandments by saying, love God, love others. In fact, a lot of the commands in scripture are a commentary on how to apply God's love to one another.

Showing hospitality means to reach out to others and extend friendship and welcome.

How often do we stay in our own friendship circles, ignoring or neglecting others?

And most of the time we don't even realise we're doing it.

And we don't realise because we're enjoying being with the people we know and like, so we think we're being friendly and hospitable.

But do we look around?

Do we really show hospitality, friendship and welcome?

For example, what **really** happens in the hall following our services?

Do we always sit or stand with our cup of tea or coffee, where we always sit or stand with our cup of tea or coffee, talking with the same people we talked to last week?

Or do we look up and out, and actively pursue the one or two who are standing on their own.  
The new people, the lonely, the different?  
How good are we at it really?

What do we do when we go home from church each Sunday?  
Are there days when we just go home and have a bite to eat?  
Might it not be possible, to spontaneously say to somebody else at church - what are you doing for lunch today?  
We've got nothing planned, but perhaps together we could make lunch happen at my place. The place is a bit of a mess, but that doesn't matter. Would you like to come?  
And it doesn't have to be spontaneous. You could actually think about doing it, right now?

And what about caring for those in prison and those mistreated?  
Prison ministry is a challenge.  
Around the world there are many Christians in prison for their faith. They have committed no crime, except for proclaiming Jesus and living for Him. And they have suffered for it.

And what about those in prison here.  
Are they simply the forgotten ones or do we have a heart to see them truly change and be invited into the kingdom? Could we, dare we, might we, reach out to those recently released from prison and integrate them into a loving Christian community?

Secondly,  
vv. 4-6 - it's about **purity** -  
- purity in sexual relations,  
- purity in the financial,  
- and purity with possessions

These aren't separate from being loving, but these are all ways that love is to be carried out faithfully. And none of them are easy.

Hospitality, care for prisoners, honouring marriage, money matters. All these things are all directly associated with this command to love one another.

So what about marriage?  
How well do we uphold marriage and how well do we keep ourselves pure within marriage?  
How well do we present the gift that marriage is, to the wider community?  
This is a great challenge to us because marriage has now been redefined.  
But in our faithfulness to the gospel we can still uphold and be a witness to the uniqueness of Christian marriage in the midst of those around us.

The writer then turns to money. In the Gospels Jesus talks more about our attitude to money and our use of money than anything else that he talks about? This writer to the Hebrews says quite simply, keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have.

And the very next thing we read says: "**Never** will I leave you, **never** will I forsake you."

Dependence on money is futile, because that is not our deepest need.  
What a tremendous promise for us in Christ! To have the assurance of God's presence and help.

And don't forget that we're not reading this passage in isolation, from a perspective of mere morality. We're reading this in the light of the whole book, from the perspective of being and continuing to be forgiven sinners, exhorted to live for Christ. This is not about condemnation, this is about freedom to live as Christ intended.

and thirdly, in vv. 7-14 - it's about **loyalty** -  
- ultimately loyalty to Jesus and his gospel,  
- loyalty to the new way, not the old way,  
- and also loyalty to those Jesus has used to impact you.

Here's where the writer talks about leadership, and specifically leadership within the church, within the body of believers.

He reminds them all that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, and so don't be carried away by those who teach a new and different gospel. By any who teach something 'strange' he says in v.9.

Any who take up leadership positions within a church must give an account. This is very clearly said in v.17. And that accountability is to God.

As it should be, because He is the head of the Church.

All church leaders are responsible to God and are to follow the lead of Jesus. Therefore suffering is part of leadership. Humility is part of leadership.

Realising this solemn task, the writer asks the readers to pray. To pray for them as leaders.

Can I please ask all of you, on behalf of the whole leadership body of this church, to pray for us.

Pray for Chris, for Brad and for me, for Marg and Ethan, pray for those who lead ministries, and if you lead a ministry, pray for yourself and those who lead other ministries; pray for those who lead small groups, monthly groups, prayer groups, youth groups, children's groups, those who lead our mission into the community, pray for our Wardens and those on Parish Council.

Leaders need prayer for this church to be the type of church we are called to be, the type of church we **need** to be.

The whole of this end part of Hebrews is not an easy passage to read.

That is why I am at pains to make sure that we don't just read these verses in isolation from the rest of the letter.

This passage only make sense when we see who we are in the light of Jesus Christ.

In the light of his sacrifice, his one perfect and complete sacrifice, which all the faithful of the Old Testament were looking for and waiting for, and which the OT prepared us for, this great Jesus who is the exact representation of God to us.

We're not to read these verses and make them into a moral ground on which we stand and judge the rest of the world. If we do that we will be condemned.

What we need to do is to see these exhortations and **encouragements to Godly living** as coming out of a pure and living commitment to the crucified and risen Christ.

As we conclude this series, I want to take you back to our first week, when we looked at chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2.

Do you remember back there we were greatly challenged by seeing how high and exalted Jesus is, and there was a warning.

At the beginning of chapter 2 we were warned that we couldn't escape if we ignored such a great salvation.

Here at the end of this letter we get another warning

Have a look at the end of chapter 12, just before we get these concluding exhortations. v.25.

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

The wording is reminiscent of chapter 2.

"How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation .....

And here ....."If they did not escape .... how much less will we."

My friends, this reading today is a scary **challenge to discipleship**.

Discipleship which comes out of a considered and well thought-out commitment of will to Christ. This challenge to discipleship needs to be taken on board. How do we put it into practice??

As part of his closing greetings in this letter, the writer says in 13:22:

*Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly.*

Whoa ..... let's hear the long version!

I think he's acknowledging that this is hard stuff, it's hard to hear, and it's hard to do. He's also saying though..... "but it's worth it!"

And he encourages his readers with this beautiful benediction...

*Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*