

XXXV. Outside the Camp

May 21/22/23, 2019

Hebrews 13:7-17

Aim: To consider the promised city of God worthy of the ‘reproach’ of following Christ outside the camp of public opinion; and in response, living lives of worship and work that please Him.

A. Remember Your Former Leaders (13:7-8)

1. Temporal Leaders (13:7)

a) Remember (13:7a)

⁷*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.*

Schreiner: The readers are admonished to remember their leaders. The leaders here are probably to be distinguished from the leaders in 13:17, for they are not called upon to obey them but remember them. It seems probable, then, that the leaders in view here have died. Remembering is not just a mental recollection but embraces the whole person. It is a kind of remembering that changes those who do the recollecting. The word for ‘leaders’ (*ηγουμενων, ēgoumenōn*) is also used by the author in 13:17 and 13:24. The term is a rather general term for leaders, including political leaders as well, but here the reference is clearly to leaders in the church. They should remember their leaders because they ‘spoke to you the word of God.’ The oral preaching of the leaders is emphasized, and God’s word centers on the gospel of Jesus Christ, focusing on His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. Leaders who established the church may be in view here. The readers must not forsake the word proclaimed by their former leaders.

Bruce: Three times in this chapter mention is made of their guides or leaders. In v. 17 they are told to obey them; in v. 24 they are asked to convey the writer’s greetings to them; here they are exhorted to remember them. In vv. 17 and 24 the reference is plain to leaders who are still alive and active; here the reference seems rather to be to those who led them in earlier days but have now completed their service; the whole course of their lives, from start to finish, now lies before their disciples and followers for review and imitation. By precept and example they showed the right path to tread; being dead they yet speak, and the record of their faith is still alive in the memory of those who knew them.

Phillips: The knowledge of God’s presence and help is the greatest of our encouragements, but there is also the example of Christians who have lived before us. In them, in the outcome of their life and death, we see living testaments to the faithfulness of God and the blessedness of trusting in Him. This is what Hebrews 13:7 commends to us. We are to remember that we are not the first to have tried this kind of life. We have excellent examples of how a Christian is to live and what kind of life that is. Think back, Hebrews says, to the people who taught you the Word of God. We are to search the example of leaders in the church, and especially among them the preachers of God’s Word.

b) Consider and Imitate (13:7b)

Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

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Schreiner: They are not only to stay true to the teaching of the leaders but must also ‘imitate their faith.’ After examining and remembering ‘the outcome (*εκβασιν, ekbasin*) of their lives,’ they should be inspired to live as they did. The word ‘outcome’ could refer to the end of life or more generally the consequence or result of their lives. The term itself doesn’t clearly indicate that the leaders have died, but the call to remember and the contrast with 14:17 suggests they are deceased. The transformed life of the leaders is attributed to their faith, to their radical trust in God. Such was the faith of the OT saints in 11:1-40.

Bruce: Those who planted this community of Christians and fostered it by the ministry of the word of God and the example of faith had run the race unwavering to the end; what they had done their followers could also do. It is not necessary to suppose that they had suffered martyrdom, but like the heroes of chapter 11 they ‘died in faith.’

Hughes: The commands in this verse are beautifully consistent with the purpose of chapter 13, which is to strengthen the little Hebrew church so it will ride out the coming storms of persecution. A church that adequately recalls its godly leaders and considers the outcome of their way of life and attempts to imitate that way of life will sail well! Remembering, considering, and imitating the virtues of departed believers is of greatest spiritual importance both to one’s family and to the broader family of the Body of Christ. Doing so will certainly help keep the boat afloat.

Phillips: Notice what we are to learn from them. Not their personalities, or their ministry techniques, but ‘the outcome of their way of life.’ The text seems to be pointing to both their lives and their deaths and asks, ‘What is the lesson to be learned from these?’ The writer’s confidence is not in men of God; it is in the God of men. God, in the course of His people’s lives, and especially in the lives of these set apart for His service, reveals the glad result of walking with Him in faith for the course of a lifetime.

Phillips: Note what it is we are to imitate in leaders and teachers of God’s Word: not their worldly methods, not their sins, not their fancies or foibles, but their faith. Imitate their faith. Study and reflect upon the times in their lives when they relied on the Lord and boldly stood with and for Him. Observe that it was faith that gave their ministries power; it was faith that sustained them to the end. Through their example, resolve to trust the Lord, to firmly stand on His Word and to rely completely on His matchless grace, especially when others are giving way and times are hard. This is the greatest legacy any of us can impart from the pattern of our lives, and it is by providing such examples that Christian leaders most powerfully serve the Lord and His church. This is why, as Paul shows us in 1 Timothy 3, the qualification for an elder in the church is not money or stature in the world, but faith in Christ that issues forth in a godly example for others.

2. Eternal Jesus (13:8)

⁸*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

Schreiner: Verse 8 asserts that Jesus Christ remains the same, picking up the thought from 1:11-12. The author does not suddenly insert here a bit of abstract systematic theology that is unrelated to the context. He exhorts the readers to remember the gospel and the life of leaders who are no longer with them (v. 7). The readers should not fend off these words by thinking that those were different circumstances and a different time so that the life of former leaders is no longer relevant to them. On the contrary, the Christ they worshiped is the same yesterday and

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today. Outward circumstances may change, but He doesn't change. Leaders may die, but Jesus remains the same and continues to be faithful. They should look to Jesus who, as 12:1-3 demonstrates, is the supreme example of faithfulness and constancy.' Indeed, He remains the same forever. The grace that enabled the leaders to trust in God and to live in a way that pleases God is still available, and it will always be available.

Bruce: Yet they died; they lived on in the memory of those who had known them, but they were no longer available for consultation and wise guidance as they had once been. Jesus Christ, by contrast, was always available, unchanging from year to year, 'the same yesterday and today and forever.' In 1:12 the words of Ps. 102:27 were applied to Him: 'thou art the same, and thy years have no end.' These words in their original context were addressed to the God of Israel; but this is not the only instance in which we find such a spontaneous transition of reference from the Father to the Son. *Yesterday* Jesus 'offered up entreaties and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save Him from death' (5:7); *today* He represents His people in the presence of God, a high priest who has a fellow-feeling with them in their weakness, because He 'endured trial in all respects like' themselves, 'while remaining free from sin' (4:15); *forever* He lives, this same Jesus, 'to intercede for them' (7:25). His help, His grace, His power, His guidance are permanently at His people's disposal; why then should they lose heart? He never needs to be replaced, and nothing can be added to His perfect work.

Hughes: We cannot talk to departed saints, but Jesus Christ is always available, for as the writer adds in what is perhaps the most famous verse in Hebrews, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.' What a contrast with the changeableness of us humans and of life here on earth. The only thing that is sure is change! We humans appear for a little while to laugh and weep and work and play, and then we are gone. This is a melancholy thought at best. Our souls long for something solid. But the great truth is, God does not change, and neither does the Holy Spirit or the Son, Jesus Christ. In fact, the very same Old Testament Scriptures and wording that describe God the Father's immutableness are applied directly to Christ (cp. Ps. 102:27 and Heb. 1:12; Is. 48:12 and Rev. 1:17). This means that though the Savior has ascended into Heaven and dwells in that splendor, He is the same! He is the same in His wrath and His love and mercy and compassion and tenderness as He was here on earth. Our priest is eternally the same and eternally contemporary. We need not fear opinion changes or mood swings in Jesus!

Phillips: Times change, we say. What was good for others may not be good for us. What worked before might fail in our time. Against such concerns the writer points out this vital truth: 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.' The point is not just that Jesus, being the second person of the eternal Godhead, remains today as He ever was before, true though that is. The point is what this says about our passage, namely, that we may confidently embrace the pattern of the Christian life taught by the Bible because Jesus is the same. This means that if you are a Christian, these commands are not given as just some ideal or program, some bygone philosophy that served a prior generation. Rather, by this kind of life, you are now serving and following Jesus Christ Himself, who was and is and is to come, who lives and reigns now in the heavens and by His Spirit on the earth. The Leader you truly follow, the Lord you serve and trust is none other than Jesus Christ Himself, who in His Word speaks to you as He did before to others, and whose call will never be superseded or set aside.

Phillips: Three vital implications flow from this verse. First, since Jesus Christ is the same, His ministry and call are the same as they ever were. The Christ you see in the Gospels is our own Lord, the Son of God, mighty to save. Similarly, the demands He placed on His first disciples

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are fully valid today, for He is still the same (cp. Lk. 9:23). That call to the cross is still the same today. So, too, is Christ's offer of blessing (cp. Mt. 11:28).

Phillips: Second, the Christian life is ever the same, unchanged in all generations. The stories and teachings in the Bible are not irrelevant to modern or post-modern man. IN the face of the world's complaint that ours is an outmoded creed, this is our reply: 'Jesus Christ is the same.' This is why we should study church history and Christian biographies, because other lives of faith are examples for us. A. W. Tozer wrote, 'One of the most popular current errors, and the one out of which springs most of the noisy, blustering religious activity in evangelical circles, is the notion that as times change the church must change with them.' Because Jesus Christ is the same, now is our turn to live as Christ's people in a manner that would be recognizable to those who came before us. They will not accept the excuse that our times are different from theirs, nor should they. All times are different in some ways, but Jesus Christ is always the same.

Phillips: Third, because Jesus Christ is the same today as ever, it is Jesus we represent and display before our own generation. It is not a tradition, not a philosophy of man we serve, but Jesus Christ the Savior of sinners, the Son of God who bears His love in our world, who calls men and women through us to a living hope as He did in ages past.

B. A Sacrifice of Praise (13:9-16)

Phillips: Because Jesus stays the same and lives forever, the way of discipleship to Him is a constant one. The same can be said for Christian truth. If Jesus Christ is the same always, then the doctrines of our salvation always remain unchanged, grounded as they are in His person and work. Having given instructions on Christian living in verse 1-8, the writer now turns to the matter of Christian belief.

1. Strange Teachings (13:9)

a) *General Warning (13:9a)*

⁹*Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings...*

Schreiner: The readers should stay true to the teaching given by their former leaders (13:7), and 'not be carried away by teachings that are alien to the message communicated to them (2:3). The verb 'carried away' is used for wind and water that transport things by their force (cp. Eph. 4:14-16). The identity of these strange teachings is on first glance uncertain, but as the author unfolds his argument in the subsequent verses, it is clear he refers to teachings derived from the OT law. We have clear evidence, then, that the instructions here accord with the main purpose of the letter in which the author exhorts the readers not to embrace the old covenant and the Levitical cult. The readers must not be swayed by such teachings, for they will not afford them assistance.

MacArthur: One of the saddest things in the world is for a Christian to get drawn into false doctrine and be rendered ineffective, to lose his joy, reward, and testimony. Yet such has been happening since the earliest days of the church (cp. Gal. 1:6-7). The 'varied and strange teachings' were not necessarily new teachings. They were not named, but it is likely that many, if not most, of the teachings were traditional Jewish beliefs. But they were strange to the gospel of grace (cp. Acts 20:29-30).

Hughes: The little Jewish church was not only harried by the imminent threat of persecution, but was also assailed within by the succumbing of some in the congregation to a strange teaching

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that combined esoteric eating practices with their Christian faith. No one knows exactly what the practices were, though we do know that some held that their sacred menu would make them better Christians.

Bruce: Because ‘Jesus Christ is the same,’ says our author, ‘do not be swept off your course by all sorts of outlandish teachings.’ The strange teaching which laid such insistence on food was probably some form of syncretistic gnosis, perhaps with Essen or quasi-Essene affinities. To put such indifferent matters in a place of central religious importance would diminish the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever.

Phillips: The warning, ‘do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings,’ is always needed, but especially when the church is weak in grace and shallow in understanding (cp. 5:11-14), as certainly is the case in our own time. Notice how the writer puts it: there is a danger that these lightweight Christians will get carried away by stranger teachings, just as a strong wind blows away chaff, or as rolling waves toss around a ship that is not well anchored. Like the Hebrews, one thing we can be sure of is that false teaching will come along (cp. Acts 20:29-30; 2 Tim. 4:3). Knowing this, Christians—especially those entrusted with stewardship over the church—need to be always on their guard to defend the truth (cp. 2 Tim. 1:13-14).

Phillips: One reason why this danger of false teaching is so constant is that Christians have an active, aggressive enemy—namely, the devil—who constantly schemes to weaken or overthrow our faith. The devil has two main strategies, both of which are seen in the Book of Hebrews. The first is persecution, Satan’s assault on the church from without. The writer of Hebrews identifies this threat and worries that some will betray the faith to avoid suffering. However, in light of the history of the church, persecution really is not a very effective strategy. It has always been the case that ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,’ so that persecution makes the church grow stronger.

Phillips: But Satan has another strategy, and this is to work from within the church: the strategy of infiltration. He sends false teachers to don Christian garb and stir up falsehood and error within the church, and by this means he has succeeded in doing a great deal of harm over the years. Indeed, given that Christians in America have experienced so little persecution, we should not be surprised to realize that the devil has been quite busy working from within, employing, as Paul describes them, ‘false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light’ (2 Cor. 11:13-14). This is a very grave threat in our own time, and one we should be constantly on guard to combat.

Phillips: Two words are used here in the Greek, the first of which is *poikilais*, which is best translated as ‘diverse.’ The word is used of clothing woven with many colors; the Septuagint uses this word for the multicolored coat Jacob gave to his favored son Joseph (Gen. 37:3). This is what false teaching is like: it is dazzling to behold; in the place of plain truth it presents something enticing from every viewpoint. In metalworking, this word is used of alloys like brass; so, too, false teaching mixes the heavenly with the worldly, divine revelation with human reason; it blends and collaborates rather than preserves the pure substance. Things described by this word are complex and not clear, intricate and not plain. Of course, this is much of the attraction when it comes to new and false teaching. It is alluring because it takes a clever angle on an old theme; it is enticing to the mind; it appeals to our intellectual pride. This is always a temptation for those engaged in academic work, which is why scholars often produce teaching of the sort that does great damage to the church.

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Phillips: The second description given in verse 9 is *xenais*, which means ‘alien’ or ‘strange.’ This was the word Greeks used for those who were citizens of another nation, for foreigners, and even mercenary soldiers. The word was also used of things not previously known, things unheard of and unfamiliar. False teaching is alien and foreign; it is not native to God’s Word. Here we are warned against novelty in theology, which like the diverse is always appealing to our fallen minds.

Phillips: Both of these terms—diverse and alien—aptly describe much of what is entering the minds of Christians today in sermons, on the radio, and over the counters of Christian bookstores. Just as in our worldly society, so also in our worldly church, the ‘new’ is thought to be better. We have new perspectives and new paradigms, new models for Christian living, new prayers that promise abundant blessing. Given such a savage assault from within the church—which is exactly what American evangelicalism is experiencing today—it is no wonder we are losing spiritual power for true godliness. The question surely arises, ‘How do we tell the difference?’ How do we judge doctrine? By the sincerity of the teacher? On the basis of his or her personality? Because it is popular and everybody is buying it? That is how many consumers shop for the truth. But what our passage says about false teachers tells us how we should discern matters of truth. Beware teaching that is alloyed, that mixes God’s word with the word of man. Beware doctrines that are new, that boast to have discovered what the foolish church never grasped before.

Phillips: Ultimately this is our only sure guide when it comes to matters of truth: Does it agree with the clear teaching of Scripture? If it presents a new interpretation of Bible passages, does it square with what we read elsewhere in God’s Word? Does it suggest a way of approaching and relating to God other than what was set forth by our Lord and by the agents of biblical revelation? No matter how impressive the speaker or the speech, even if he appears as an angel from heaven (cp. Gal. 1:8)—and of course, Satan can give just such an appearance—any teacher is to be rejected if what he says is contrary to the prophetic and apostolic teaching of the Scripture.

b) *Specific Warning (13:9b)*

...for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

Schreiner: The heart (*i.e.*, the whole person) can only be ‘established’ (*βεβαιουσθαι, bebaioustai*) and confirmed by grace. It is the grace of God, manifested supremely in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that strengthens a person. Foods, on the other hand, do not profit. The foods are most likely the foods of the old covenant. Earlier the author spoke of ‘physical regulations’ and ‘food and drink’ that cannot ‘perfect the worshiper’s conscience’ (9:9-10). Such external regulations were not evil. They separated Israel from the nations as the people of God. But neither were they intended to be permanent, and they were certainly not effectual.

MacArthur: Jews were used to having religious regulations for everything, and it was hard for them to adjust to freedom in Christ. All their lives they had been taught and had believed that what you ate and did not eat was extremely important to God. Even how it was prepared and eaten was important. Now they are told that ‘those who were thus occupied were not benefited.’ Spirituality comes ‘not by foods.’ Being spiritual concerned about food is unnecessary under the New Testament. In fact, insisting on dietary regulations for religious reasons is *against* the gospel. Christ has rendered all external observances invalid and useless. ‘For the kingdom of

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God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17). The Colossians were exhorted: 'Let no one act as your judge in regard to food' (Col. 2:16). As Christians, our hearts are only 'strengthened by grace.'

Phillips: We do not know the precise error this warning concerns. Judaism emphasized the importance of eating or not eating certain types of food. The warning here does not seem to be about abstention but rather about eating sacramental meals that supposedly provide spiritual benefit. The writer probably had the Passover meal in mind, as well as the many other sacrificial feasts prominent in Jewish religious life. The New Testament reveals that religious scruples over food did not die easily in the early church (cp. Acts 10; 1 Cor. 8:8; Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:17). The point is that spiritual strength does not come to us by what we eat, but by grace, which is received through faith. Indeed, we may extend the principle to say that no outward activities in themselves provide spiritual blessing, but only the exercise of faith in Christ.

Hughes: Those who imagined that spiritual growth came through a special menu had not only become ignorant of the necessity of grace for growth, but they actually blocked strengthening grace by their proud little rules. Legalisms, even 'little' ones such as dietary rules, impede grace. Humility invites the elevating weight of grace!

Bruce: The language here suggests something more than a relapsing into orthodox Judaism; it reminds us of Paul's appeal to the Colossian Christians not to let anyone sit in judgment on them in respect of food or drink, because things like these disappeared in the very act of being used; regulations and prohibitions regarding such evanescent things provided no spiritual support or defense. 'Food will not commend us to God,' says Paul elsewhere. 'We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do' (1 Cor. 8:8). Our author makes the same point. It is by divine grace, and not by rules about food, that the heart—that is to say, the spiritual life—is nourished; rules about food, imposed by external authority, have never helped people to maintain a closer walk with God. Food regulations of all kinds, whether positive or negative, are catalogued by our author among those external ordinances which Christianity has rendered null and void.

2. Spiritual Worship (13:10-14)

a) *The Altar (13:10)*

¹⁰*We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.*

Schreiner: The foods of the old covenant do not profit, for they don't supply grace. They are just external (9:9-10). Believers, on the other hand, have a far better altar. Clearly the author isn't thinking of a literal altar. The altar where sacrifices were offered points to a better altar where Christ was sacrificed to atone for sins. The author doesn't think of a literal altar in heaven; Hebrews never mentions a heavenly altar. Those who attend to the earthly tabernacle have no 'right to eat' from the altar of Christ, for they are 'behind the times' and are still attending to the old altar. Believers, on the other hand, 'eat' from this better altar. He refers to Christ's sacrifice here, the nature of which was explicated previously in the letter. The 'eating' again isn't literal. It is a colorful way of describing the grace believers enjoy through the sacrifice of Christ. The author reprises here in a fresh way the Melchizedekian priesthood of Jesus Christ, showing that His 'altar' and His 'food' are far better than the altar and food of the old covenant.

Bruce: The word 'altar' is used by metonymy for 'sacrifice.' Our author, who insists throughout that Christians have something better than an earthly sanctuary and animal sacrifices, certainly

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does not suggest that they have a material altar. Christians had none of the visible apparatus which in those days was so habitually associated with religion and worship—no sacred buildings, no altars, no sacrificing priests. If there were people in the first century who said, ‘You Christians have no altar,’ our author replies: ‘We *have* an altar—and a better one than the Jews had under the Levitical order.’ The Christian altar was the sacrifice of Christ, the benefits of which were eternally accessible to them. Material food, even if it was called sacred, perished with the using; in this new spiritual order into which they had been introduced by faith, Christ was perpetually available, ‘the same yesterday, and today, yes, and forever.’

Phillips: Many commentators imagine that the Hebrew Christians were criticized for avoiding Jewish feasts, that Christianity was derided because it did not offer an altar or outward sacrifices. The attack might have gone something like this: ‘Your religion doesn’t even have an altar. You don’t even offer sacrifices. You don’t get meal to eat for spiritual blessing.’ To that kind of criticism, the writer responds: ‘We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.’ The use of the word ‘altar’ refers to the whole system of religion that Christians have in the place of Judaism.

Hughes: Actually, the grace we imbibe comes directly from the cross of Christ, for in verse 10 the preacher adds, ‘We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat,’ referring to the cross because in a Christian context the sacrifice must be on the cross—the sacrificial altar of our faith. Our spiritual food is nothing less than the life of Christ! The force of these thoughts is phenomenal. Jesus Christ is eternally the same and eternally contemporary. Therefore, do not get mixed up with strange teaching as that leading to spiritual diets. Our nourishment comes from grace, which comes directly from the altar—the cross of Christ. This meal goes to the humble!

b) *Animal Sacrifices (13:11)*

¹¹*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.*

Schreiner: The author in verses 11-12 considers the sacrifice on the two different altars, finding a point of similarity (they were both destroyed outside the camp) and difference (Jesus’ sacrifice made them holy). Verse 11 confirms that the author isn’t thinking of the altar of incense but the altar where animal sacrifices were offered. The blood of the animals was brought into ‘the most holy place’ by the high priest. The author probably has in mind the ritual in Leviticus 16, where the blood of animals was brought into the most holy place to secure forgiveness of sins since he notes that atonement was secured through the high priest (Lev. 16:15-16, 27), whereas other priests could offer regular sacrifices (Lev. 1:5, 7-8; 3:2, 8). Once again a previous discussion is recalled (9:7). The practice of burning bulls outside the camp for sin offerings was common (Ex. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 9:11). We have seen, however, that other elements in the context suggest a link with Leviticus 16, for the author specifically says the remainder of the bull is to be burned ‘outside the camp’ (Lev. 16:27).

Hughes: The meal, the work of the cross, also goes only to those ‘outside the camp’—those who do not subscribe to the old Jewish system. The sacrifices offered on the Jewish great Day of Atonement were a prophetic type for the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). On the Day of Atonement a bull was slain to atone for the sins of the priest and his family, and a lamb likewise was sacrificed for the sins of the rest of the people. The blood of these sacrifices was taken into the Holy of Holies, but both the carcasses were

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taken outside the camp and burned up (Lev. 16:27). Therefore, those under the old sacrificial system could not partake of this great offering as a meal.

Bruce: The sacrifice of Christ was the antitype of the sacrifice offered on the great Day of Atonement, and the flesh of the animals slaughtered in the course of that ritual was not eaten; their bodies were ‘carried forth outside the camp’ and there completely burned (Lev. 16:27). In other words, ‘those who carry out worship in the tent’ have no permission to eat from the altar which typically foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ. But the sacrifice of Christ is a better sacrifice, not only because the spiritual antitype is superior to the material type, but also because those who enter the heavenly sanctuary ‘by Jesus’ blood’ (10:19) know that the one who became their perfect sin offering is permanently available as the source of their spiritual nourishment and refreshment, as they feed on Him in their hearts by faith.

Phillips: In the case of many Old Testament sacrifices, the meat from the sacrifice was given afterward to the priests to eat (see Lev. 19:5-6; 22:29-30). But when it comes to the sacrifice offered on the day of atonement, the day once a year when the high priest offered a sacrifice for the sins of all the people, that sacrifice was not permitted to be eaten. Instead, it was taken outside the camp and burned (Lev. 16:27). Verses 11 and 12 make the point that this was the sacrifice to which Christ’s death corresponded—the one the old covenant priests could not consume but which those who have left Judaism to follow Christ receive as their food. These verses form a powerful polemic from the Levitical regulations themselves against the ideas of remaining in Judaism after the true sacrifice has come, and they make a strong reply the Christians could give to their Jewish critics.

Phillips: Our passage condemns any view that Christ enters into men and women simply by their eating food. This especially confronts the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation, that the elements of the Lord’s Supper are literally and physically the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and that we partake of Christ and His grace simply by eating and drinking the elements, even apart from faith. Far from commending an emphasis on a Christian sacramental altar, our passage roundly condemns and refutes the entire mechanical sacramental system of religion. We might extend the principle to everyone who places the reality of religion in any outward form. True religion is found today where there are no big screens, no dancing fountains, no altar to which people are begged to come—none of the rest of today’s machinery of religious persuasion—but where there is simple faith in Jesus Christ. For eternal life comes by none of those external means, but only by the heart inclined to the cross through simple faith in God’s Word. We cannot be sure what the exact problem was among the Hebrews, yet we see in the answer a principle we may use as a general rule. Unless a system of religion relies utterly on the work of Christ in His substitutionary work of atonement, it is alien, it is foreign, to the true religion of Scripture, which is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and especially in His redeeming blood.

c) *Christ’s Sacrifice (13:12)*

¹²*So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.*

Schreiner: A parallel and a contrast are drawn between Jesus’ suffering and the fate of animals. Just as sacrificial animals were burned outside the camp, so Jesus ‘suffered outside the gate.’ The gate here refers to the walls of Jerusalem, indicating that Jesus died outside the city limits of Jerusalem (Jn. 18:17-20). The author probably uses the word ‘suffered’ to create a link between

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the experience of Jesus and the experience of the readers, for even though the readers had not died for their faith (12:3), they were indeed suffering.

Bruce: The fact that the bodies of the animals sacrificed on the Day of Atonement were burned outside the camp suggests a parallel to the fact that Jesus was crucified outside one of the city gates of Jerusalem (cp. Jn. 19:20).

Hughes: Jesus, the ultimate atoning lamb, was sacrificed outside the camp—outside Jerusalem’s wall, on Golgotha—as an offering to God. This means two great things: 1) All those who remain committed to the old Jewish system were excluded from the benefit of partaking of Christ’s atoning death. And, 2) Jesus’ death outside the camp means that He is accessible to anyone in the world who will come to Him. Jesus planted His cross in the world so all the world could have access. And there He remains permanently available!

Schreiner: The sacrifice of Jesus was also distinct from the sin offerings of the old covenant. For Jesus’ blood ‘sanctified’ (*αγιαση, hagianē*) the people. They were placed into the realm of the holy through His sacrifice. The author echoes here what was taught earlier in the letter, where he affirms, ‘We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all’ (10:10), and in 10:29 he affirms that believers are sanctified through Jesus’ blood. True cleansing is not secured through animal sacrifices but only through the one to whom the sin offerings pointed. Not the blood of animals but the blood of Jesus cleanses from sin.

Bruce: Jesus died in order to ‘sanctify the people’—bring them to God as worshipers purified in conscience—by means of His blood, the willing sacrifice of His life.

Phillips: It is clear from what follows that the writer of Hebrews does not expect his readers to become popular by standing firm against false teaching. He therefore adds a statement that connects our disgrace to the disgrace of the cross, which was erected ‘outside the camp.’ Because Jesus taught the truth about God, about man, and about the only way of salvation, He was despised and rejected by men, and was literally cast outside the city gates. There He was put to death as one accursed. Jesus’ whole ministry and message were outside the pale of worldly religion, and so He became an object of scorn and abuse. Outside the gate He suffered and died. In that separation, a principle is established for all who would come to God through Him. Outside the camp is where we go to find the grace of God, for that is where the cross was raised, where God meets with us to forgive our sin and to accept us in the righteousness of the Son whom the world despised.

Phillips: This means that if you want acceptance in the courts of respectable academia, if you want to be admired in the cocktail lounges of conventional and progressive world wisdom, and especially if you want to avoid the scandal of a religion that man rejects, then you may not have fellowship with this Jesus Christ. You may not approach His cross by staying within the safe confines of the worldly city, for the cross is found outside the camp. But if you go outside the gates of worldly acceptance, not because you have some grudge against the world but because you see Jesus there, you will gain the salvation He bought with His blood to make you holy unto God.

d) *Bear His Reproach (13:13)*

¹³*Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.*

Schreiner: Since Jesus suffered outside the camp, ‘therefore’ believers should join Him outside the camp. In the OT being outside the camp meant that one was excluded from the place where

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God specially dwelt with His people, and hence that which was unclean was not allowed in the camp (Lev. 4:12; 10:4-5; 13:46; 14:3; 16:26; Num. 5:2-4; 19:7). Jesus' suffering and death show that He was the 'unclean' one, despised by human beings. The readers must identify with Jesus. They were tempted to find their identity within the community of Israel, to belong to a group that was welcomed by society. The author calls upon the readers to follow Jesus. They should not find their security and safety in the sacrifices of the old covenant. Such sacrifices should not be the place where they seek forgiveness of their sins. Instead, they should bear the 'reproach' (*ονειδιον, oneidiomon*) of Jesus and stand out as disciples of Jesus. Moses was willing to give up the pleasure of belonging to those who enjoyed nobility and power in Egypt, bearing 'the reproach (*ονειδιον, oneidiomon*), of Christ' (11:26). Similarly, the readers endured 'reproaches' (*ονειδιομοις, oneidiomoiis*) in the past because of their faith (10:33). They should renew their commitment to Jesus by being willing to suffer for His sake.

Bruce: Jesus was led outside Jerusalem to be crucified, and this is regarded as a token of His rejection by all that Jerusalem represented. To have His messianic claims rejected by the leaders of the people was in itself a stigma; to be cast out and crucified added to that stigma. But, as Moses in his day 'considered the stigma that rests on God's Anointed greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt' (11:26), so the call came now to the people of Christ to consider that same stigma greater wealth than anything they could hope to gain by declining to burn their boats and commit themselves unreservedly to Him. In this context the 'camp' stands for the established fellowship and ordinances of Judaism. To abandon them, with all their sacred associations inherited from remote antiquity, was a hard thing, but it was a necessary thing. They had been accustomed to think of the 'camp' and all that was inside it as sacred, while everything outside it was profane and unclean. Were they to leave its sacred precincts and venture on to unhallowed ground? Yes, because in Jesus the old values had been reversed. What was formerly sacred was now unhallowed, because Jesus had been expelled from it; what was formerly unhallowed was now sacred, because Jesus was there. 'Let us then go outside the camp' might be a hard exhortation; but if, like Moses, they 'kept their eyes fixed on the reward,' they would see that the stigma carried eternal glory with it. There, 'outside the camp,' stood Jesus, calling them to follow Him. Inside they felt secure; they knew where they were amid its familiar installations; they were psychologically insulated from the world outside. But Jesus claimed the world outside for Himself. The future lay not with the 'camp' but with the Gentile mission; let them exchange the imagined security of their old associations for the new venture to which Jesus was leading His followers out.

MacArthur: The analogy is simply a picture of Christians, following their Lord, separating themselves from the things of sin. As our Lord was crucified outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem, so we are to be spiritually outside the walls of sinning people. The practical point is that, as Christians, we must be willing to go out from the system, to bear the reproach and the shame that both the sin offering and Christ Himself bore, and to be rejected by men. This is the attitude Moses had toward the world. He considered 'the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt' (11:26).

Hughes: There thus remains only one thing to do, and so the writer exhorts us in vv. 13-14. The cities of the earth—all earthly institutions—will fall apart. Only the heavenly Zion will remain. We must go, flee to Him outside the camp, and willfully embrace His 'reproach,' for such an act is worth doing a million times over! Thus Jesus Christ, who is 'the same yesterday and today and forever,' becomes our constant meal—our food, our drink, our life—and we will receive

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from Him grace upon grace upon grace. And because He is outside the camp, He will always be accessible. In fact, He is with us, and coming to us! This understanding that He *nourishes* us and is *accessible* to us will help us keep on course.

Phillips: Since salvation is found in Jesus and in Him alone, the writer exhorts us, ‘Therefore let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured.’ This is an often suppressed truth about Christianity, that the blessings of salvation cannot be had without the disgrace of Jesus’ cross (cp. 1 Cor. 1:22-24; 2 Tim. 3:12). Jesus made it quite clear that following Him means rejection by this world (cp. Jn. 15:18-19). If we want to be joined to Christ and His salvation, there is no way for us to avoid bearing the disgrace with which He was sent outside the camp. It is possible there is an allusion here to Moses. The same word used for the disgrace we must bear is used of him in 11:26: ‘He regarded the disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.’ Like Moses, by accepting such disgrace we will lose out in the terms of this world, only to receive from God a great deliverance.

e) *A Future City (13:14)*

¹⁴*For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.*

Schreiner: The author explains here why the readers should be willing to bear Christ’s reproach and to go outside the camp with Him. He doesn’t advocate self-denial for its own sake. Moses again serves as an example for the readers. He turned away from the power afforded by his Egyptian upbringing because he no longer put his hope in the comforts of Egypt but looked to the future reward he would receive (11:26). So too, the readers bear Christ’s reproach because the city of man, the city of this present world, is not an enduring city. Believers await the eschatological city, the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem (11:10, 13-16; 12:22).

Bruce: Moreover, the old securities to which their hearts clung were themselves insecure; the old order was about to crash. By responding to the call to go out, they would be the gainers; they would be leaving a ‘city’ which was doomed to pass away for ‘the city which has the (true) foundations, of which God is the architect and builder’ (11:10).

Phillips: Verse 14 concludes this exhortation, not so much with an incentive as with a reminder, lest the resolve of the readers be weakening because of the difficulty of their calling. The point is clear: ‘Do not forget, as you are called to forsake the world, that it is a passing world and that your inheritance is found in the place to which you are going.’ We naturally think of the world as a safe place; we think of security in established worldly institutions. The fact is, however, that security is found with the One whose victory has already secured our salvation. Wherever Jesus is, there is hallowed ground, there is peace, there is security, there are hope and life eternal.

Phillips: We need to remember the heavenly situation that corresponds with our being outside the camp with Jesus. The writer of Hebrews has referred to this, our heavenly situation, as being within the veil (6:19; 10:20). We are brought near to God, with Christ in His heavenly dwelling, as God’s children, His people, His flock. Therefore by faith we see that outside the camp is truly within the veil with Christ. This is what Paul meant when he said, ‘For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God’ (Col. 3:3). Yet the day will come when what is hidden will be revealed to the eyes of all. The day will come when the gates of this earthly city will be closed for judgment and destruction, and we will be glad to be outside those gates. Then what has seemed such a weak, ignoble place where now we are found in the shadow of a cursed cross, will

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be manifested in the glory of the new heavens and new earth as the cornerstone of a city that will never pass away, bathed in the light of the open tomb of Christ's resurrection morn.

3. Sacrificial Living (13:15-16)

MacArthur: Sacrifice was extremely important to the Jew. It was God's provision for cleansing of sin under the Old Covenant. Many Christian Jews were no doubt wondering if God required any kind of sacrifice under the New Covenant. Yes, He does, they are told. He demands the sacrifice of our praise and of our good works in His name. He demands sacrifice not in the form of a ritual or ceremony, but in word and in deed—in our praise of Him and in our service to others.

Hughes: There is one final thing that will sustain us, and that is how we live—our lifestyle—specifically, *worship* and *work*.

a) *Worship (13:15)*

¹⁵*Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.*

Hughes: We must make worship the first priority of living. Here our text is very specific about what He wants. It is a sacrifice—'a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledges His name.' He wants us to say it. He wants to hear us verbally praise Him.

Phillips: In terms of Old Testament Judaism, this sacrifice refers to the thank offering, which was offered not to make atonement for sin but in gratitude for salvation and for the many gifts God has given. In fact, the Greek words used in verse 15 for 'sacrifice of praise' are the exact words used by the Septuagint in Lev. 7:12-13, which prescribes the performance of such thank offerings. Jews wishing to express gratitude to God offered bread or cakes or grain to be used by the priests in God's service. This is the kind of sacrifice Christians offer to our Lord: we freely offer our goods and our selves for His service and praise. This was the highest expression of religion in Judaism, an occasional and special mark of piety, but now it is to characterize the whole of our lives as children of God (cp. Rom. 12:1). It is for this that we are saved, to live sacrificially unto Him, to offer a lifestyle of worship, for the blessing of others and for the glory of His name.

MacArthur: God no longer wants sacrifices of grain or animals. He wants only the 'sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.' The psalmists knew a great deal about this sort of sacrifice. If their writings could be characterized by any single word it would be praise (e.g., Ps. 7:17; 43:5; 108:3). All of the last five psalms begin with 'Praise the LORD,' which in Hebrews is *hallelujah*. The sacrifice God desires is the cry of our lips in praise to Him. The Christian's sacrifice of praise is to be offered 'continually.' It is not to be a fair-weather offering, but an offering in every circumstance. 'In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus' (1 Th. 5:18).

Schreiner: Since believers live for the city to come instead of this present day, they are to offer through Christ 'a sacrifice of praise' to God. There is no need to offer sacrifices for atonement (13:9-10), for Christ has atoned for sins and secured final forgiveness with his once-for-all sacrifice (9:25-26; 10:10, 14, 18). Believers give praise to God through Jesus Christ because He has cleansed their consciences so they are free from the guilt of sin. Burnt offerings were to be offered daily to the Lord under the old covenant (Ex. 29:38-42), and in the same way praise is to be offered as a sacrifice continually. The text echoes Psalm 50, which fits with the theology of

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Hebrews as a whole. The Lord doesn't desire animal sacrifices, for He has need of nothing from human beings (Ps. 50:9-13), particularly now that the new covenant has arrived and Christ has given Himself as a sacrifice. Twice the psalmist uses the same words found in 13:15. God asks His people to give Him a 'sacrifice of praise' (*θυσίαν αινεσεως*, *thusian aineseōs* and *θυσια αινεσεως*, *thusia aineseōs* in 50:14, 23). Elsewhere a sacrifice of praise is to be rendered to God for His deliverance of His people (Ps. 107:22; 116:17), which Hebrews interprets as response to the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. Such praise is the fruit of lips that confess and acknowledge God's name.

Bruce: Were they told that they had no sacrifices and no altar? But of course they still had sacrifices to offer, even if there remained no more sacrifice for sin. Animal sacrifices had been rendered forever obsolete by the sacrifice of Christ, but the sacrifice of thanksgiving might still be offered to God, and indeed should be offered to Him by all who appreciate the perfect sacrifice of Christ. No longer in association with animal sacrifices, but through Jesus, the sacrifice of praise was acceptable to God. The sacrifice of praise is further described as 'the fruit of lips which acknowledge His name,' in language borrowed from the Septuagint version of Hosea 14:2. In the Masoretic text of that passage the sacrifice of praise is a substitute for animal sacrifices; so the ERV/ARV translate it: 'so we will render as bullocks the offerings of our lips.'

Phillips: The basic point is that we are to praise God and profess the Christian faith with our lips. This is not just about our gatherings for corporate worship, but encompasses our whole manner of speaking, all of which either confesses or denies His name. Through our speech, our whole attitude is revealed with devastating accuracy (cp. Mt. 12:34). Verse 15 uses the expression 'the fruit of lips.' This is a quote from Hosea 14:3, which speaks of God's people offering Him 'the calves of our lips.' The obvious reference is to sacrificial offerings, and our lips are seen as altars upon which our hearts give worship to the Lord. Far more valuable to God than any outward religious display we offer, is that we should sacrificially devote our speech to Him. This is something we should seek in prayer and cultivate as a Christian duty. Ask God to sanctify your lips, that they would be servants of His will and a source of pleasure to Him. Of course, this will require the sanctification of your heart, which is the whole point. In large part we measure our heart sanctification by the sanctity of our speech, as gossip and coarse joking and cursing and complaining give way to encouraging, edifying, wise, and God-praising words.

b) *Work (13:16)*

¹⁶*Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

Hughes: True worship always involves giving ourselves in the service of Christ and others (cp. Rom. 12:1; Jas. 1:27; 1 Jn. 3:17-18). We may participate in an elegant call to worship and prayer, heartily sing the *Gloria Patri*, solemnly repeat the Apostle's Creed, join together in a grand hymn, reverently prayer the Lord's Prayer, and attentively listen to the Word, but if we do not do good to others and share what we have, none of it gives pleasure to God. But worship coupled with work—this brings God's pleasure and the winds of the Holy Spirit to our sails so we can ride the most daunting waves.

Phillips: Verse 15 speaks of our lips as instruments of worship, but verse 16 turns to practical deeds of love and kindness, and especially to generosity with our material wealth. This includes an eagerness to act kindly toward others, and to work for the spiritual and temporal benefit of other people. It especially speaks, however, of a readiness to show generosity to those in need,

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to give freely of our wealth because we know that this pleases and glorifies God, and because we love others more than our money.

Schreiner: Sacrifices for atonement are not needed, but God is pleased with those who do good and share with others, and such acts are designated as sacrifices. The word ‘share’ (*κοινωνίας, koinōnias*) almost certainly refers to giving to meet the material needs of others (cp. Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13). In Philippians 4:18, the gift the Philippians gave for Paul’s ministry is described as ‘a fragrant offering’ and ‘an acceptable sacrifice.’ The readers needed to be reminded about the importance of looking outside of themselves and caring for others.

Bruce: To the sacrifice of praise is added the sacrifice of kind and loving action. Here we have the proper ritual of Christianity. James expresses the same thing (Jas. 1:27). Peter’s exhortation has the same effect (1 Pe. 2:5), as is also Paul’s plea to the Roman Christians to present their bodies ‘a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship’ (Rom. 12:1). Christianity is sacrificial through and through; it is founded on the one self-offering of Christ, and the offering of His people’s praise and property, of their service and their lives, is caught up into the perfection of His acceptable sacrifice, and is accepted by Him.

MacArthur: If our praise of God in word is not accompanied by ‘doing good and sharing,’ it is not acceptable to Him. Worship involves action that honors God. Praise of God in word and deed are inseparable. Lip service must be accompanied by life service (cp. Jas. 1:27). The only acceptable sacrifice we can offer to God with our hands is to do good to one another, to share, to minister in whatever ways we can to the needs of others in His name (cp. 1 Jn. 3:18).

C. Obey Your Present Leaders (13:17)

1. Submission (13:17a)

¹⁷*Obey your leaders and submit to them...*

Schreiner: The author writes here about current leaders in the church. The readers should obey and submit to them (cp. 1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Th. 5:12-13; 1 Pe. 5:5). The author assumes in giving this command that the leaders teach and live in accord with the theology articulated in the letter. Hence the call to submit to the leaders is not universal. The readers should not submit if leaders deviate from the gospel.

Bruce: The guides referred to here are probably the successors of those whose memory they are exhorted to cherish in v. 7. Our author evidently has as much confidence in the present leaders as in their predecessors.

MacArthur: Church leaders are not to be tyrants, because they do not rule for themselves but for God. But the command is unqualified: ‘Obey your leaders, and submit to them.’ It is the right of such men, under God and in meekness and humility, to determine the direction of the church, to preside over it, to teach the word to it, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort (Titus 2:15).

Hughes: Clearly, all Christians are called to obedience and submission to authority—a call that demands careful definition. We must understand that does not mean unqualified blanket obedience. Neither does it provide the basis for authoritarian churches. Of course, this call to obedience was never meant to entice anyone to contradict Biblical morality or individual conscience. It was, instead, a call to an obedient heart. Slavish, blind obedience is not called for here, but a respectful, submissive spirit is. Christians are to be discerning in their hearing of

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God's Word. They must never accept something as true just because a preacher or leader says it. At the same time, they are to be eager to obey and to submit to authority. Such ought to be one's first impulse when the leader and the people are right with God.

Phillips: In a self-reliant culture like our own, submission to God-ordained authority is a true spiritual exercise and an element of our worship of the Lord. In the Bible, all submission, whether of citizens to rulers, children to parents, or wives to husbands, is done unto the Lord. It is a sacrificial act of worship and trust. Verse 17 gives two commands, accompanied by compelling reasons for godly submission. The first of these commands—'obey'—mainly speaks of receiving the teaching given by spiritual leaders. The Greek verb (*peithesthe*) is also used for 'being persuaded.' 'Submit' speaks of yielding to proper authority established by God. These we offer to God as worship, receiving the truth and yielding to our leaders.

Phillips: Six reasons are given for this obedience and submission. The first is found in the world 'leaders,' which may also be translated as 'guide.' True spiritual leaders are those who go before the flock into the Word of God, into prayer, and into the Christian life. Just as the great message of Hebrews is that Jesus is our all-sufficient guide leading us to God, so also our Lord has appointed leaders in the church to guide us on His behalf. This is especially linked to the idea of being persuaded, because Christian leaders are guides into the Word of God. Second, we submit to spiritual leaders because their authority comes from Christ (cp. Eph. 4:11-12). Since Christian leaders, particularly deacons and elders, are called to serve the church, we are to receive them as authorities established by Jesus Himself.

2. Accountability (13:17b)

...for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.

Schreiner: The reason for submission is the special responsibility of leaders to 'watch over' (*αγρυπνουσιν, agrupnousin*) the spiritual lives of the readers. This fits with what we find elsewhere in the NT where leaders are identified as 'overseers' (*επισκοποι, episkopoi*, Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7), exercising the responsibility of overseeing the flock (1 Pe. 5:2; cp. Acts 20:28). Nor do leaders enjoy unbridled power, for they will give account on the final day of their own ministry, and thus their ministry is to be exercised before God (cp. James 3:1).

Bruce: The leaders carried a weighty responsibility; they were accountable for the spiritual well-being of those placed in their care. Those local leaders had a real concern for the welfare of the church and a sense of their accountability to God in this respect.

MacArthur: The priority of every pastor, every elder, every church leader, is to care for the spiritual welfare of the congregation, 'for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.' It is a sobering responsibility to be a leader in Christ's church.

Hughes: The reason for this emphasis on obedience first is that leaders are accountable to God. The sense here is that 'they and no other keep watch over your souls.' In addition, the words 'keeping watch' literally mean 'to keep oneself awake.' So the idea may well mean that some of the leaders had lost sleep over certain people in the church. The pastor to which the writer calls his people to submit were good, energetic, conscientious, caring shepherds. Moreover, their watching over their people was motivated by the awareness that they 'will have to give an account' to God for the way they care for the flock. The sobering fact is, spiritual responsibility brings with it a higher level of responsibility and judgment. How and why do teachers incur greater judgment? The answer is, if we claim to have an informed knowledge of God's Word for

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God's people, and further claim that we are charged to deliver it, we are more responsible to deliver it clearly and to obey it. Increased responsibility means increased accountability (Lk. 12:48).

Phillips: Third and fourth, these leaders 'are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.' The leaders mentioned in Hebrews watch over our very souls. They are gifted by God for rule and Christian teaching. They lie awake at night—that is what the verb 'keeping watch' literally means—pondering our spiritual well-being, how they might help and support us in the faith. What better reason could there be for us gladly to follow their teaching and rule? Furthermore, as undershepherds, they must give an account to the Chief Shepherd. They are not serving for their own benefit but for ours, and they are called to give an account. Our response, then, is to help them through obedience and faith.

3. Attitude (13:17c)

Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Schreiner: If the readers obey their leaders, then the latter will be full of joy instead of grief and groaning in their ministry. The joy doesn't come from leaders exercising personal and autocratic power because of their selfish will. The leaders are joyful or grieved for God's sake. If the readers fall away and apostatize, their leaders are grieved, but if the readers stay true to Christ, their leaders will rejoice. The readers' obedience isn't only for the advantage of the leaders. It is the best thing for the recipients of the letter themselves. If the leaders are grieved, then the addressees aren't faithful to the gospel, and if the readers stray from the gospel, then they will face the terrible judgments threatened in the letter, and that would certainly be 'unprofitable' to them.

Bruce: The readers are invited to cooperate with their leaders, to make their responsible task easier for them, so that they could discharge it joyfully and not with sorrow. If the discharge of their responsibility and the ultimate rendering of their account were made a burden to them, the resultant disadvantage would fall on those who were led as well as the leaders.

Hughes: Such care invites obedience from God's people. And if that is not sufficient reason, the author gives another, which is that obedience will make life better for all concerned. The fact is, leadership can be a pain. The words 'not with groaning' is an accurate literal translation. All leaders know this pain. But along with the pain comes joy from obedient charges. 'Let them do this with joy and not with groaning' (cp. 3 Jn. 4). Paul expressed much the same when he encouraged the Philippians to live for Christ in this world 'so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain' (Phil. 2:16; cp. Phil. 4:1). Ministry can be a pain—but its pleasures are incredible. Of course, obedience is good for the people as well, as is implicit in the writer's negative understatement regarding disobedience. It would not be an advantage in this life because the strife that comes to the church through disobedience would not only impede the leaders but *everyone's* spiritual growth.

Phillips: Fifth, our obedience is what make spiritual leadership a joy and not a burden. Without a doubt, the single greatest discouragement any pastor faces is a congregation that will not believe what he is teaching from the Word of God. This is what wears a minister down: not hard hours of labor, but frustration with a hard-hearted flock. The greatest gift a Christian can give to a spiritual leader is a readiness to believe and to obey God's Word. Finally, this verse concludes that it is no advantage to us for our ministers to be burdened by division and strife and unbelief

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in the church. The text uses a market term and says, ‘That would be of no advantage to you.’ Surely there are few richer blessings in life than a unified, godly, spiritual church to which we belong, and each of us plays a vital role in building up such a body.

MacArthur: ‘Let them do this with joy and not with grief’ is addressed to the people, not to the leaders. In other words, it is the responsibility of the church to help their leaders rule with joy and satisfaction. One way of doing this is through willing submission to their authority. The joy of our leaders in the Lord should be a motivation for submission. We are not to submit begrudgingly or out of a feeling of compulsion, but willingly, so that our elders and pastors may experience joy in their work with us. Failure to properly submit brings ‘grief’ rather than joy to pastors, and consequently brings grief and displeasure to God, who sends them to minister over us. ‘Grief’ (*stenazontes*) means an inner, unexpressed groaning. It is a grief often known only to the pastor, his family, and to God. Because lack of submission is an expression of selfishness and self-will, unruly congregations are not likely to be aware of, or to care about, the sorrow they cause their pastor and other leaders.

MacArthur: For members of the Body to be in constant rebellion against their pastors and elders prevents proper learning and proper growth. It brings spiritual barrenness and bitterness. A person who never brings joy will never have joy. To cause our leaders grief is harmful to ourselves as well as to them and the church as a whole. It is ‘unprofitable for you.’ When we do not have a loving and obedient spirit, God is displeased, our leaders are grieved, and we lose our joy as well. You will never find a truly happy pastor apart from a happy congregation, or a happy congregation apart from a happy pastor.

For next time: Read Hebrews 13:18-25.