

## XXXVI. Farewell to Hebrews

June 4/5/6, 2019

Hebrews 13:18-25

**Aim:** To end our study of Hebrews, recognizing that God's grace equips our lives and enables us to do His will, all for His glory.

### A. Prayer Request (13:18-19)

#### 1. Spiritual Request (13:18)

<sup>18</sup>*Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.*

*Schreiner:* The author asks the readers to pray for him. The plural 'us' here probably refers to the author himself and thus represents a literary plural. The request to pray for the author of a letter is a common feature in NT letters (Rom. 15:30-32; Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 1 Th. 5:25; 2 Th. 3:1). Here the admonition is rather general. Given the other references in the NT, such prayer for the author is probably tied to the spread of the gospel. The comment that the author has 'a clear conscience' might suggest that he is under attack from governing authorities, especially when combined with the request to be restored in v. 19. Perhaps he is imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. The righteous life of the author commends the gospel, and hence it is important to him that his conscience is clear and his behavior honorable in all that he does. He doesn't want to bring reproach on the gospel through any sinful behavior.

*Bruce:* That the plural is purely literary (cp. 5:11; 6:9, 11) is suggested by the immediate transition to the singular in verse 19. The term of our author's request for prayer for himself may suggest that he himself occupied, or had occupied, some position of responsibility in regard to his readers. But what this position might be we can only surmise. The good conscience of which he speaks is probably the fruit of a sense of duty done, a responsibility well charged.

*MacArthur:* To pray for our leaders in the church is to serve and to please God. Prayer makes things possible; it moves the hand of God. The writer of Hebrews apparently was a leader in the church, or churches, to whom he was writing, and here he asks for prayer support of those among whom he had ministered. Every servant of Christ needs the prayers of the believers he is called to work with. Church leaders are made of the same stuff as those they serve. The writer asks for prayer because 'we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.' He was not being egotistical or arrogant, but simply saying that, to the best of his own knowledge, he had ministered to the people faithfully—not perfectly, but faithfully. He not only needed their prayers; he had earned their prayers. He had a right before God to expect them to pray for him. He did not simply imagine or suppose that he had been faithful. He had a 'good conscience' about it.

*Hughes:* The writer's conscience is clear because he has performed well in his spiritual duties toward his friends. His conscience has made him confident toward both men and God. What a boon a clear conscience is! When the conscience is clear, one can ask wholeheartedly for the prayers of all the saints.

*Phillips:* Even the strongest of men realizes his need of grace for a calling to the ministry. Paul himself said, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' (2 Cor. 2:16). No wonder, then, that the writer

## Romans – Lesson 36

of Hebrews goes on to say, ‘Pray for us.’ If obedience is our duty to Christian leaders, surely prayer is the greatest ministry anyone can offer for a pastor or elder or deacon. ‘I see what is the duty of a pastor and I think I am on target,’ the pastor is saying,’ but please pray that I might be faithful, serving God with a clean conscience and living honorably as an example to others.’

### 2. Physical Restoration (13:19)

<sup>19</sup>*I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.*

*Schreiner:* Perhaps the author is in prison or is detained from visiting the readers for another reason. In any case, he urges them to pray that he should be restored to them soon, so that he can encourage them face-to-face. The language of restoration suggests the author was a member of the church and longed to be with them again.

*Bruce:* He had hope to renew his former personal association with them, but had not been able to do so thus far; however, he hopes that the way for a reunion will soon be opened up, and he invites them to redouble their prayers for him to this end. What was the nature of the restraint which prevented him from coming to see them sooner? Some have thought of imprisonment; but in that case he might have said so explicitly. His reference to Timothy’s release in v. 23 has been thought to suggest that he himself is not in custody, but a contrary inference has also been drawn.

*MacArthur:* The writer was not asking for prayer only because he believed he deserved it. He had a need for it. The most urgent need on his mind when he wrote was that he might ‘be restored to you the sooner.’ Whatever the reason had been for his leaving them, he was anxious to return.

*Hughes:* The preacher’s specific request reflects his simple faith in prayer. If they fail to pray, his return to them may be slowed or possibly never take place. But if they pray, he expects that their prayers will speed his restoration. He believed in prayer!

*Phillips:* In verse 19, he asks for prayer so that he can be restored to them soon. We don’t know what is keeping him from the church, but his fervent wish is to be reunited with the flock he has taken such an interest in.

*Hughes:* We are to pray for our leaders. If we desire power in our lives and in our churches, we must pray. Likewise, if we desire our or others’ preaching to be more than exegesis and rhetoric, we must pray. How different the modern church would be if the majority of its people prayed for its pastors and lay leadership. Will we commit ourselves to pray for our pastors and their colleagues and their lay leaders—especially those who chair the boards and committees and teach children in Sunday school and lead other important ministries? I suggest three headings for your prayers: 1) devotional; 2) domestic; and 3) professional. This single commitment could ensure ongoing vitality for our churches. No doubt about it!

*Phillips:* If you do not pray for these things regularly for your pastors, then you fail to realize both their importance for the church and the frailty of their sinful nature, which like yours is flesh in all its weakness. We are living in a time marked by gross sins among spiritual leaders, the damage of which has been inestimable, and we should cry to God that such a thing should not occur in our church. We need to pray for the protection of our leaders, both from a spiritual attack and the normal dangers of life in the world.

## Romans – Lesson 36

### B. Prayer Wish (13:20-21)

*Schreiner:* In 13:20-21 we find a prayer wish, which was typical near the closing of NT letters (Rom. 16:25-27; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 4:20; 1 Th. 5:23; 2 Th. 3:16; 1 Pe. 5:10). Certainly the prayer wish here is one of the most beautiful and one of the most theologically rich in the NT. The main point of the prayer is that God would equip and strengthen the readers to do His will.

*Phillips:* ‘Benediction’ means ‘good word,’ and all the New Testament letters include a benediction at the end, some more elaborate than others. A benediction is a prayer to God on behalf of the readers, and that is especially appropriate here since in the preceding verses the writer has asked for their prayers for himself. This benediction is rather long and involved, yet its purpose is simple. The letter is a ‘word of exhortation’ (v. 22), namely, that through Jesus Christ the congregation would stand firm in the faith and live in a manner pleasing to God. Verse 15 summarizes this whole thrust: ‘Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.’ The benediction likewise summarizes the whole letter, namely, that the readers might do God’s will and please Him with their lives.

#### 1. What God Has Done (13:20)

##### a) *Peace (13:20a)*

<sup>20</sup>*Now may the God of peace...*

*Schreiner:* The author begins the prayer by designating God as the ‘God of peace.’ The phrase is fairly common in Paul (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Th. 5:23) and should be interpreted to mean the God who gives peace. Several exhortations have indicated the importance of peace within the church (12:14; 13:1, 17), and the author reminds the readers that true peace hails from God.

*Bruce:* That God is invoked as ‘the God of peace’ may suggest that the community was troubled by disunity, which needed to be healed if the pleasure of God was to be wrought out in their midst.

*Hughes:* *Peace* is intrinsic to the character and existence of God. God is called ‘the God of peace’ at least five other times in the New Testament (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Th. 5:23). These citations, along with the opening invocation, ‘Now may the God of peace’ reference two marvelous aspects of that peace. First, we see His divine tranquility—the eternal repose in God’s being. And secondly, it references His *shalom*. God’s peace is more than the absence of conflict, it is more than tranquility. It is completeness, soundness, welfare, well-being, wholeness. Therefore, the title ‘the God of peace’ at the end of Hebrews comes as a consciously appropriate benediction to fearful, restless hearts. He gives us *His* peace. Jesus said, “peace I leave with you; My peace I give to You. Not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn. 14:27a). He gives us His repose of soul. Notice also that after promising His peace He said, ‘Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid’ (Jn. 14:27b). What a salve to the harried church! The truth for all of us who are His children is that our God is ‘the God of peace,’ and His plans for every one of us are for *shalom*, well-being. None of His children are an exception and never will be!

##### b) *Resurrection (13:20b)*

*...who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus...*

## Romans – Lesson 36

*Schreiner:* The author also emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection, contrary to the opinion of some scholars, plays a major role in Hebrews (cp. 5:7; 6:20; 7:3). What sets apart Jesus as a priest is that ‘He lives’ (7:8), for He has an ‘indestructible life’ (7:16). He isn’t like the Levitical priests, who were hindered by death, but He ‘remains forever’ and ‘always lives’ (7:23-25). Jesus is the resurrected Lord, sitting at God’s right hand (1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). The resurrection of Jesus signifies His superiority to all Levitical priests.

*Bruce:* This is the only reference to our Lord’s resurrection in the epistle; elsewhere the emphasis is on His exaltation to the right hand of God, in keeping with the exegesis of Ps. 110:1, 4, and the exposition of Jesus’ high priesthood.

### c) *Shepherd (13:20c)*

...*the great shepherd of the sheep...*

*Schreiner:* Jesus is also ‘the great Shepherd of the sheep.’ Jesus’ role as shepherd fulfills Ez. 34:23, showing that He is the new and true David, and that as the shepherd He will take care of His flock (cp. also Zech. 13:7). Indeed, as ‘the good shepherd’ He gave His life for His sheep (Jn. 10:11; cp. 10:14; 1 Pe. 2:25).

*Bruce:* This is the only place in the epistle where the title ‘shepherd’ is given to Jesus: but it is a title which comprehends the other roles which are here assigned to him. The form of the title is derived from the Septuagint version of Is. 63:11: ‘Where is he who brought up out of the sea the shepherd of the sheep?’ The words in their original context refer to Moses (cp. Ps. 77:20). Here they are applied to Jesus as the second Moses, who was brought up not from the sea but from the realm of the dead.

*Hughes:* The shepherd metaphor is one of the most spiritually sumptuous in all of God’s word. Certainly we must admit that we are sheep. But even more, we must note that Jesus took up the term *shepherd* and applied it to Himself (cp. Mk. 14:27). Jesus’ shepherd heart well with compassion, for Mark tells us, ‘When He went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd’ (Mk. 6:34). Even more, His good shepherd’s heart caused Him to give everything (cp. Jn. 10:14-15). But here our writer tells us that He is not only a ‘good shepherd’—He is also ‘the great shepherd of the sheep.’ Why? Because He is a risen Shepherd—‘brought [back] again from the dead.’ As the great risen Shepherd, His compassion and protection are mediated from a position of an unparalleled display of power! He, our Shepherd, is exalted at the right hand of the Father. All other shepherds pale by comparison. There is none like our ‘great shepherd.’ Our risen Shepherd lives not only to give us life, but to tend us so that we will be sheep who bring Him glory. What security and what challenge the fact of our risen ‘great shepherd’ brings to our souls.

*Phillips:* Verse 20 sees Jesus as ‘the great shepherd of the sheep,’ so that it is only by following Christ, by being part of the flock that He shepherds, that anyone attains the blessings of salvation. A new and godly life is realized as we follow Christ as our great Shepherd and as He works in us with a spiritual power from on high.

### d) *Covenant (13:20d)*

...*by the blood of the eternal covenant...*

*Schreiner:* The phrase ‘with the blood of the eternal covenant’ is attached to the phrase ‘who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus.’ The word ‘with’ designates in context the reason Jesus was raised from the dead. His resurrection vindicated His sacrifice, showing that God

## Romans – Lesson 36

approved of the yielding of His life for others. We likely have an allusion to Zech. 9:11. The author revisits a major theme in the letter, for the death of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, inaugurates the new covenant and effectively and finally provides forgiveness of sins so that believers enter God's presence boldly (9:13; 10:19). Furthermore, the contrast between the new and old covenant permeates Hebrews. Jesus inaugurated a new and better covenant (8:1-13; 10:15-18). He guarantees a 'better covenant' (7:22; cp. 8:6), and it is characterized by full and final forgiveness of sins (10:18).

*Bruce:* Jesus was brought up from death 'by the blood of the eternal covenant'; that is to say, His resurrection is the demonstration that His sacrifice of Himself has been accepted by God and the new covenant established on the basis of that sacrifice. The phrase 'the blood of the eternal covenant' echoes 9:20, where Moses speaks of 'the blood of the covenant' confirmed by God with Israel on the basis of the law. But now a better sacrifice has been offered, and the new covenant ratified thereby is superior to the older one in this respect among others, that it endures forever. There may also be an echo here of Zechariah 9:11.

*Hughes:* The foundation for our highest dreams is the everlasting, unbreakable new covenant promise quoted earlier in 8:10 (cp. Jer. 31:31-34). The promise is nothing less than a renewed heart and a personal relationship with God through the atoning work of God the Son and the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. We have His Word for it that all this is ours if we come to Him! And this covenant, this promise, is eternal. It will never be replaced by another as it once replaced the old covenant. It was established by the blood of the ultimate Lamb of God, whose atoning Death was ratified and verified by His resurrection. The writer's friends were being encouraged to remember that whatever came, no matter how high the seas, His new covenant promise would never change or fail. The eternal covenant granted them eternal life.

*Phillips:* Verse 20 sees all this as the result of a covenant between the Father and the Son: it was 'through the blood of the eternal covenant' that God 'brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.' This is a remarkable and instructive statement. A covenant is a binding agreement; it provides the terms according to which two parties come together in a relationship. The covenant relationship we are most familiar with is marriage, a relationship that comes into being through the solemn swearing of formal vows. The parties in this covenant are quite evidently God the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is called an eternal covenant, which means its effects reach forward and everlastingly. Christ was raised from the dead once for all into an eternal life He is able to give to His own. Hebrews 7:25 tells us, 'He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.' Because Jesus lives and reigns forever, He is able to offer a secure and eternal salvation. The new covenant in Jesus' blood, which the writer of Hebrews outlined in chapter 8, is eternal, and its benefits—namely, forgiveness of sin, sanctification by the Holy Spirit, and fellowship with God—last forever.

*Phillips:* At the same time, this covenant is eternal in the other direction, reaching forever into the past. The Bible gives ample testimony of a covenant between God the Father and God the Son established in their own eternal and precreation council. Peter speaks of Christ as the 'lamb without blemish or defect ... chosen before the creation of the world (1 Pe. 1:19-20). Revelation 13:8 calls Him 'the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.' Theologians call this the covenant of redemption. God the Father laid upon the Son a charge that He voluntarily accepted, with promises that would be bestowed upon its success. The biblical data show that Christ accepted the following conditions: 1) that He should take up human flesh, being born of a

## Romans – Lesson 36

woman under the law; 2) that He should fulfill the whole law of God on behalf of His elect people, achieving for them a full righteousness where Adam failed; and 3) that He should receive in their place the punishment His people had deserved for their sins, shedding His own blood for them on the cross. In return, God promised Him the salvation of all the elect as His brothers adopted into Him, as well as dominion over all things through His resurrection from the grave.

*Phillips:* Verse 20 is very direct in focusing Christ's work upon the cross, according to that eternal covenant. It was through His blood that He fulfilled His part of the covenant, having first appeared as a spotless lamb, perfect and without any blemish of His own, and therefore able to offer Himself for others. The Book of Hebrews is soaked in the blood of Christ; a great portion of its teaching has to do with the unique and saving efficacy of the blood of the Son of God, that is, how far it surpasses and fulfills the meaning of the blood of bulls and goats, daily offered by Jews for so many centuries. This, the writer says, is how Christ saves us: Not by setting a moral example; not by simply enlightening our minds with His own philosophy; and not by seizing power to implement a better political agenda.

*Phillips:* The atonement is a repulsive subject to many; they flinch to think that God would require blood-shedding in order to achieve His goals. Yet it is with the shedding of His own Son's precious blood that God makes His most important and essential and final statements to this world, statements we must hear and receive if we are to come to God for salvation. The first statement that the blood of Christ makes us God's holy judgment on our sin. It is only, really, when we see the blood of the Son of God spilled upon the earth that we comprehend anything of the sinfulness of sin. Second, the blood of Christ also shows the great magnitude of God's love for us. It is in dimensions appropriate to a cross that Paul speaks of God's love in Ephesians 3:18, praising its width and length and depth and height.

*Phillips:* Third, the blood of Christ proclaims God's full involvement in our world, at every level. We want a divine wave of the wand to take our troubles away. But God, whose holiness makes such a farce unthinkable, demanding a full accounting for our sin, has Himself come into our world to personally deal with sin and death. In light of the cross of Christ, the accusation that God is far off and aloof from the reality of this world is in fact the greatest of all blasphemies. For the cross displays God's involvement in this world in a way that is not only far greater than we could demand, but is far more gracious than we could imagine. God made a covenant far off in eternity, far before time and creation, that His will would be done. But He also entered into our world in the person of His Son, spilling His own blood and taking death onto Himself that He might seek and save those who were lost.

### 2. What God Will Do (13:21)

#### a) Equip (13:21a)

...<sup>21</sup>equip you with everything good that you may do his will...

*Schreiner:* The author prays that his readers will be strengthened to do God's work and what is pleasing in them through Jesus Christ. Given the rest of the letter, the author is probably thinking particularly of their perseverance, though it is not limited to such.

*Bruce:* The prayer, then, is that the people addressed may be spiritually equipped for every form of good work, and thus fulfill God's will as He operates in them 'both to will and to work for His good pleasure,' as Paul would put it (Phil. 2:13).

## Romans – Lesson 36

*Hughes:* The richness of this request is in the word ‘equip,’ which can mean ‘to perfect,’ ‘to make good,’ or ‘to mend.’ The idea here is to repair things so they can be useful. Matthew uses the word to describe fishermen ‘mending their nets’ (Mt. 4:21). Paul uses it in Galatians 6:1 regarding restoring a brother—that is, putting him back in place. It was used in classical Greek for setting a bone. So the prayer here is a beautiful request that God mend and perfect His children with everything good, thus equipping them to do God’s will. We may sense that we are out of joint. But this prayer is built on the idea that God can and does equip us with everything good to do His will—and our experience confirms the truth of this.

### b) *Enable (13:21b)*

*...working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ...*

*Schreiner:* The readers do not have the internal capacity to fulfill what is written here, and thus he prays for God’s power to be unleashed in them and at the same time asks that his petition will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

*Phillips:* The Book of Hebrews is perhaps the most Christ-centered of all the Epistles, and accordingly we find Christ at the center of the closing benediction. Our writer is seeking transformed lives that will stand firm in the faith, and if the source of this transformation is God’s own peace, the means through which it is received is the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is ‘through Christ’ that every spiritual blessing comes.

*MacArthur:* Even Jesus’ own examples, perfect and powerful as they are, cannot in themselves enable us to follow in His footsteps. The writer calls on God to make possible the outworking of this truth in the lives of His people. To attempt to live the Christian life with the purest doctrine and the finest examples, but without God’s direct power, is to build with wood, hay, and straw (1 Cor. 3:12). We not only need to know God’s will, we need to have His power. So God gives us His ethics and He gives us the power to follow them, to live them out. Christian growth and obedience have nothing to do with our own power. Christian growth and obedience are by God’s power.

*Hughes:* This prayer moves very naturally from equipping to enabling. The Scriptures tells us that all creation and all of God’s work in the world are through Jesus Christ. He not only created everything—He preserves it (Col. 1:16-17). So we should have no trouble believing His statement regarding bearing spiritual fruit: ‘Apart from Me you can do nothing’ (Jn. 15:5). It follows that once we are in Christ, we can do works through Him that please Him (cp. Eph. 2:10). So in Christ each of us has an eternally-designed job description that includes the task, ability, and place to serve. And whatever the task to which He has called us, we will be equipped for it as surely as a bird is capable of flight. And in doing he works that He has called us to do, we will be more and more His workmanship and more and more our true self. Thus the prayer here in Hebrews—‘working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ’—is eminently doable! It is an immutable fact that the power to do what is pleasing to God will always be given to us through Jesus Christ—if we want it! But some of us live as if that is not true. The real question is, do we want it? Do we desire it? Do we expect it? Do we desire it! Then pray for it!

### c) *Exalt (13:21c)*

*...to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

## Romans – Lesson 36

*Schreiner:* The God who has done this great work for believers, who has sent the ‘great Shepherd’ to atone for their sins and has instituted a new covenant, deserves all the glory and praise for all time. His magnificent love exhibited to the readers and the wonder of His plan of salvation elevate human hearts so they are drawn to give great praise and glory to God, both now and forevermore. There is some ambiguity as to whether the glory belongs to God or to Jesus Christ here. Still, it is more likely that the glory is ascribed to God. In 13:15 praise is given to God through Jesus Christ, and here glory is given to God through Jesus.

*Bruce:* The adjective clause which concludes this prayer (‘to whom be the glory for ever and ever’) is probably to be taken as an ascription of glory to God, the subject of the sentence, rather than as referring to ‘Jesus Christ’ as its immediate antecedent. Our author has already made it plain in v. 15 that it is through Christ that glory is to be given to God.

*Hughes:* There is only one thing left to do, and that is to glorify God—‘to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ 1) Glorify Him for His peace, for it is His nature and His desire for His people. He has only thoughts of peace for us. Approach Him with holy delight! 2) Glorify Him for His eternal covenant. What an amazing thing that God should enter into a covenant with us! Adore Him for His blood, which sealed it. Bless Him for our new hearts. 3) Glorify Him for giving us our ‘great shepherd,’ for though we were all going our own way, He sent His Son to save us with His Lamb’s blood, and then to shepherd us. Magnify Him for His shepherd’s compassion and care. 4) Glorify Him that He has equipped us and enabled us to do His will and to please Him—even in the storms! Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen!

*Phillips:* We have been calling this a great benediction, but at the conclusion of verse 21 it becomes a great doxology, a song of praise that makes a fitting climax to everything we have learned in Hebrews. There is a striking similarity here with what is perhaps the apostle Paul’s greatest doxology: ‘For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen’ (Rom. 11:36). How fitting it is, since the Book of Hebrews has as its great theme the deity and the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ, who brings us to God, that this same formula should be applied to God the Son. Verse 20 speaks of His blood as the source of our salvation; it is *from* Jesus Christ that we gain all things with God. Verse 21 asks for Christians to be empowered to serve and please God *through* Jesus Christ, who is our great Shepherd and leader in salvation. Then, the last words of the benediction tell us that all of this is also *to* Jesus Christ, who as God incarnate is the recipient of all our worship and praise.

### C. Postscript (13:22-25)

#### 1. Appeal (13:22)

##### a) *Brothers* (13:22a)

<sup>22</sup>*I appeal to you, brothers...*

*Schreiner:* A common verb for exhortation in the NT, ‘I urge’ (*Παρακαλω*, *Parakalō*) is used here. The term is well translated here, signifying the importance of carrying out the instructions that follow. The author addresses the readers as ‘brothers,’ as fellow members of the people of God.

## Romans – Lesson 36

*Phillips:* We see that there is a warm pastoral relationship between this writer and his readers. He is in close fellowship with their leaders and is well known enough to send greetings to all the people of God there (v. 24). Here, he writes to them as ‘brothers’ (v. 22).

### b) *Bear (13:22b)*

*...bear with my word of exhortation...*

*Schreiner:* He encourages them to ‘bear with’ (ESV) and ‘receive’ (HCSB) his ‘message of exhortation’ (*λογου παρακλήσεως, logou paraklēseōs*). The phrase designates a sermon or homily, and it is used in Acts 13:15 of the synagogue sermon given by Paul in Pisidian Antioch. Hebrews, then, is not a theological treatise or a theological essay but a sermon, an urgent word of warning and admonition given to the readers. The main point of the sermon is that they must not fall away from the message they first received, and the author organizes the letter to explain why falling away would be fatal and senseless.

*Bruce:* The ‘word of exhortation’ refers to the whole of the preceding epistle. In Acts 13:15, where the rulers of the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch send a message to Paul and Barnabas inviting them to pass on any ‘word of exhortation’ which they may have for the assembled company, the phrase clearly denotes a homily; it is thus a very suitable description for this epistle, which is a homily in written form?

*MacArthur:* The writer gives a characterization to his epistle. He calls it ‘this word of exhortation’ (cp. Acts 13:15 where this phrase is used as the designation for a sermon). The book of Hebrews is a great treatise preached with a pen. It is an urgent call to the readers to come to single-minded devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ and to complete satisfaction with the New Covenant. The high and lofty doctrinal themes are the foundation for this primary exhortation. In an almost apologetic manner he encourages the readers ‘to bear with’ what he has written, to receive with receptive minds and warm hearts what he has said—in contrast to those in 2 Tim. 4:3 (whom Paul describes using the same verb, *anechō*), who do ‘not endure [bear with] sound doctrine.’

*Phillips:* Verse 22 describes this letter as a ‘word of exhortation.’ It is a sermon written and sent from a pastor to a congregation.

### c) *Briefly (13:22c)*

*...for I have written to you briefly.*

*Schreiner:* Apparently, the author thinks he wrote briefly, though that may be a conventional word (cp. 1 Pe. 5:12). One can only imagine what the letter would be like if the author wrote everything he desired in its fullness.

*Bruce:* Could a document of this length be appropriately spoken of as written ‘in few words’? It might be a long letter, but not a long homily; it can be read aloud within one hour. At one point the writer has said ‘there is much that we have to say’ (5:11); but at another point he indicates that he could have said much more (9:5b). Even if we regard it as a letter, it is not as long as Romans and 1 Corinthians.

*MacArthur:* *Brachus* (‘briefly’) means short, or in few words. The whole letter (under ten thousand words) is shorter than Romans or 1 Corinthians and can be read in less than an hour. If the writer had dealt fully with the great themes he discusses, the letter would have been

## Romans – Lesson 36

inconceivably long. But it is amazingly short in comparison to the eternal and infinite truth it contains.

*Phillips*: The writer describes his epistle as a short letter. It has been observed that it would take just under an hour to read this epistolary sermon—so apparently this is the Bible’s idea of a ‘short’ sermon!

### 2. Timothy (13:23)

<sup>23</sup>*You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.*

*Schreiner*: The author wants the readers to know that Timothy has been freed from prison. The reference to Timothy is fascinating, and it explains why some identify Paul as the author, given his close relationship with Timothy. Timothy plays a significant role in the NT, especially in terms of the Pauline mission. Apparently Timothy had been imprisoned and was subsequently released. Unfortunately, we have no further information about his imprisonment or the reasons for his release. The author hopes that Timothy will join him quickly, and if he does so, they will visit the readers together.

*Bruce*: Timothy is almost certainly Paul’s friend of that name. We have no other account of his imprisonment. The place of his imprisonment was at some distance from the author’s residence at the time, yet nearer to the author than to his readers, since he has news of Timothy’s release before his readers are likely to know of it, and if Timothy joins him where he is they can travel together to visit them. Timothy was with Paul when Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon were written; that is to say, he was with him in Rome. In 2 Tim. 4:9-13 Paul seems to summon Timothy from Ephesus to Rome, but this is uncertain, as is the chronological setting of these verses.

*MacArthur*: Although the term *apoluō* (‘released’) has a variety of meanings, it is most frequently used in the New Testament in relation to releasing from custody prisoners who were under arrest or in prison. The historical detail of Timothy’s imprisonment is unknown. We are not surprised that he, like his teacher, Paul, was put in jail for preaching Jesus. The writer’s hope was that Timothy would soon join him, and that together they would visit the readers. Here we see a clear illustration of the importance of following up with personal ministry those who are taught.

*Phillips*: These closing remarks indicate a likely relationship between the writer and the apostle Paul. Many have identified the writer as Paul, but this is not likely. The Greek text of Hebrews is strikingly different in style and vocabulary from the known Pauline epistles. Furthermore, in 2:3 the writer speaks of having learned of the Lord secondhand, ‘by those who heard,’ which is not the way that Paul received the gospel, firsthand from the Lord (Gal. 1:16). Nevertheless, the writer of Hebrews must have had a close relationship with Paul, as these concluding verses show. He writes in verse 23 of Timothy, who was Paul’s aide. If Hebrews was written in the mid-to-late 60’s, as most scholars think, then it would not be a surprise for the readers to be intimate with Timothy. We know from Paul’s prison letters that Timothy had been with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment. From there, Timothy had been sent by Paul to lead the important church at Ephesus (in western Asia Minor), but was summoned back to Rome by Paul shortly before his execution, as shown in 2 Timothy 4:21. Paul warned his young protégé about

## Romans – Lesson 36

enemies in Rome, like Alexander, the metal worker, and perhaps such people had Timothy taken under arrest, from which v. 23 tells us he has just been released.

### 3. Greetings (13:24)

#### a) *Leaders and Saints (13:24a)*

<sup>24</sup>*Greet all your leaders and all the saints.*

*Schreiner:* Final greetings are a staple of early Christian leaders, signifying the love and kinship that characterizes believers in Jesus Christ. Interestingly, the ‘leaders’ (*τους ηγουμενους, tous ēgoumenous*) are singled out for greetings. Indeed, ‘all’ the leaders are to be greeted. The readers should subject themselves to these same ‘leaders’ (13:17) since they teach and live out the message communicated by the author. Greetings are also to be given to ‘all the saints.’ The word ‘saints’ (*οι αγιοι, oi hagioi*) is another common designation for Christians, indicating that they are dedicated to God and set apart from the world.

*Bruce:* They have already been exhorted to obey their leaders; now they are asked to convey the writer’s greetings to them, and to all their fellow-believers—that is, we may take it, to members of other house churches than their own in the city-wide fellowship to which they belonged.

#### b) *Italians (13:24b)*

*Those who come from Italy send you greetings.*

*Schreiner:* The love and affection believers have for one another is evident, for also those who are with the author greet the readers of the letter. The phrase ‘those who are from Italy’ (*οι απο της Ιταλιας, oi apo tēs Italias*) is ambiguous. It could mean that the author writes from Italy, probably Rome itself, and those who are with him (probably in Rome) greet the readers. In this scenario the readers may be in Palestine, Egypt, or somewhere else. On the other hand, the phrase may refer to those who are from Italy (i.e., Rome), and the author and his friends send back their greetings to those at home. The latter seems a bit more likely, for the expression is limited to ‘those from Italy.’ He doesn’t say, ‘All those from Italy greet you,’ or ‘The churches of Italy greet you.’ It seems that some from Italy who are currently with the author send greetings to their home.

*Bruce:* ‘Those from Italy’ who send their greetings are probably ‘those who come from Italy.’ In that case our author is writing outside Italy to a community in Italy, and sending greetings home from a group of Italian friends who are with him at the time.

*Phillips:* These closing remarks shed some light on the location of those who received this letter. The main options are that these were Jews living in Palestine directly under the influence of the Jerusalem authorities, or that they were Christians converted from among the Jews of the Diaspora, either in Turkey or even in Rome itself. I have argued that the latter is most likely: this was a church composed of Jewish Christians living in or near Rome. The Roman Jews held a special protected status, owing to their support of Julius Caesar against Pompey some one hundred years before. But now the Hebrew Christians were not only losing that protection, but were also experiencing persecution at the hands of Jews. ‘Those who come from Italy send you greetings.’ It is possible that this refers to people living in Italy, but the most natural way to take it is that some Italians who lived where the writer was sent their greetings, in which case it makes the most sense that the location of the recipients was in Italy.

## Romans – Lesson 36

### 4. Grace (13:25)

<sup>25</sup>*Grace be with all of you.*

*Bruce:* The benediction is identical with that of Titus 3:15.

*Schreiner:* A grace benediction at or near the conclusion of letters is common in the NT. Many of Paul's grace benedictions contain references to Jesus Christ or include other statements that make them more complex. The grace benediction in Hebrews is lean and spare. Actually, however, it matches the wording of Titus 3:15 exactly, 'Grace be with all of you' (*Ἡ χάρις μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, E charis meta pantōn umōn*). The author of Hebrews prays that God's grace will be with all his readers, for the grace of God will keep them from apostasy, and the grace of the new covenant established through the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses them from all sin.

*MacArthur:* The epistle ends with a simple, yet lovely conclusion in the form of a plea for God to grant 'grace' to the readers (cp. Titus 3:15), as He does for all His children through the One who alone can give grace—the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Phillips:* The final benediction in verse 25, like all of Paul's benedictions, speaks of the grace of God, and is identical to Paul's closing line in his letter to Titus. For all its originality, the Letter to the Hebrews does show marks of familiarity with Paul's writings, along with an overall theological framework that also reveals Paul's influence.

*Phillips:* The one absolutely essential thing is to hold fast to Jesus Christ. These early Christians were seeing their world change right before their eyes, just as we do. Their security, their peace, and their prosperity in the world were falling away in the face of sin and death. Meanwhile, they were commanded to live the kinds of lives they could hardly imagine: doing everything according to God's will, and pleasing Him in all things. No wonder the writer of Hebrews concludes, 'Grace be with you all,' because they were going to need God's favor and help in every way. This is the one great and stable power to which the Christian can hold, firm and secure, an anchor within the veil—the grace of the almighty God. And it is *from* Christ's blood that grace is made available to us. It is *through* His present ministry that we find grace for the trials of the day. It is *to* Him who is enthroned at the right hand of the Majesty on high that we offer all the fruits of this grace. To Him be glory forever and ever, to the praise of His Father in heaven. Amen.

For next time: End of Hebrews. Summer Break!