

Hebrews Chapter 13 - John Karmelich

1. My lesson title for this final chapter of Hebrews is the following question: "If I believe that Jesus desires to guide my life, what does He specifically expect me to do?" The good news is that this chapter gives examples of the answer to that question. This chapter is full of practical advice on what God the Father expects of us, with Jesus guiding our lives.
 - a) If you recall, the last chapter was about understanding God's use of discipline in order to guide our lives. The last remaining question of this book is therefore, "Discipline to do what?" The answer to that question is covered in the text of this chapter.
 - b) Chapter 13 is in effect, a bunch of commands for us to follow. I find this chapter to be the most straightforward chapter in the book. This is helpful, considering how difficult it was to get through all of the Old Testament references in Chapter 12. This chapter teaches us in effect, "Do this and do that", and then God will be pleasing with us.
 - c) The trick of course is actually the "doing this" part. Again, the secret of life is not to try to please God based on our own power and strength, but to draw upon His power in order to accomplish what it is He desires that we accomplish in our life.
 - d) Am I saying that Christianity is based on doing good works? No I am not. I am saying that if we are saved by the grace of God, we should be doing something about it. The specific's of what we should be doing is the main topic of this chapter.
2. OK John, I get the point. What should I specifically do? The answer keys upon the first verse of this chapter that says we should love each other as believers in Jesus. Let me explain:
 - a) This phrase is in effect the same commanded Jesus gave: That is, to love one another. (See John 13:34.) Does that mean we still have to obey the 10 commandments and this is Jesus 11th commandment? Not exactly.
 - i) I believe Jesus is making two key points with this command. The first was that nonbelievers would know we are Christians based on that love. The second point which is a key point of the book of Hebrews is that we are to draw upon God's power in order to not only obey this commandment but all of God's laws.
 - ii) Does that mean we are required to keep all of God's laws? I would argue that laws as theft and murder are still "on the books". There are many laws in the Old Testament that were written for the Jewish people (that point to Jesus) that are not applicable today, with the "food laws" as being the most commonly cited example.
 - a) My point is we don't try to earn God's love by diligently following all of the hundreds of laws in the Old Testament. We as Christians are saved by God's grace alone. Because we are saved by that grace, we don't have to try to earn His love by doing good works.
 - b) So should we do good works? Of course, but not to earn His love, but strictly to show His love to others around us. We do good works in order to teach others about the love of Jesus and to help others grow in that love.
 - iii) In effect, the rest of this chapter is simply examples of how to show Christian love to others. In that sense, much of this chapter is kind of like the Old Testament book of Proverbs, which gives simple straightforward advice on how to show love to others by doing specific good works. If one can keep that thought in mind, the chapter is very straightforward and easy to understand.
3. Finally, the letter of Hebrews ends with some greetings in the last few verses. It is interesting to consider the fact that Hebrews is unsigned. Therefore, whoever was the original recipients of this letter, must have known who was the author was, because the author mentions that it is his plan to see the recipients soon. OK, and I should care because? It is because the author in his own way, showing God's love to others by caring about their lives so they too can grow in their relationship with Jesus. Speaking of growing in our relationship, let us start Verse 1.

4. Chapter 13 Verse 1: Keep on loving each other as brothers.
- a) If I had to pick the most important commandment to learn in this chapter, it is Verse 1. In effect, the rest of this chapter can be applied based on applying this verse to our lives.
 - b) The verse tells us to keep on loving each other as brothers (that word implies brothers and sisters). That short command is full of implied questions:
 - i) OK, so who are my brothers and sisters as Christian believers?
 - ii) What about my unsaved relatives. Do I now ignore them?
 - iii) What if I didn't particularly care for certain Christians to begin with?
 - c) To answer these questions, first we have to remember our "power source". We shouldn't show love to other people using our will power. We ask Jesus to be as our power source in order to show love to other people. How do we do that? Let me give some examples:
 - i) Let's use going to church as an example: We might pray, "God, show me who it is at church you want me to spend some time with today. Make it obvious to me who you want me to listen to and show love to." We then go forward and just be friendly to people we see there.
 - ii) What about Christian believers who I don't really care for? First, one has to see people as needing Jesus and not focus on their flaws. Is it easy to do? No. That is why we draw upon His power to face those we may not want to face at that time.
 - iii) What about my unsaved family members, do I ignore them? The command to show love to one's fellow Christian does not mean for example, ignoring one's family. It just means that we are to obey Jesus' command to show love to the fellow believer by caring about others around us.
 - iv) So how do I balance my time of my needs versus the needs of others around me? What I have to learn is that if we put the needs of others before our own, God then makes the time to take care of our own needs. We don't have to spend all our time say, satisfying the needs of every stranger we need. We just need to ask God what He expects of us, this moment. I then find He makes it obvious to us what to do at that moment. Does it always work perfectly? Of course not. Is it easy? Of course not. The secret is drawing on His power and using it for His glory.
 - d) My daughter is struggling at this moment as one of her best friends is not around as her mother has a serious problem. She made a comment to me that helped her deal with her pain. She said in effect, "Real life is not like television where things work out at the end of the show." I responded, "On television shows, they have 30 or 60 minutes to work it out. In real life we have to wait on God's timing." She understood that concept even though she is still in pain over the loss of her friend.
 - i) My point here is that showing love to others requires working on God's timing as well as trusting Him to give us the power to show love to others in the first place.
5. Verse 2: Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.
- a) To understand this verse, first we have to understand a little about life during "biblical times". To stay at inns (think cheap hotels) was a dangerous thing. Such inns were often associated with brothels. The Hebrew word for "hotel" and "brothel" are the same word.
 - i) Because Christians had the reputation in those days for taking in strangers, there were also people who would take advantage of believers. In fact, the early church issued a decree that said in effect, "If someone prophesized to you and part of that prophesy was to demand either food or money, reject such people".
 - b) OK, now that I've warned you about the dangers of ever inviting a stranger over to one's home, let me explain this verse. I've met some wonderful Christians over the years that have a gift for inviting strangers over to their homes. Yes it can be dangers and one never knows when one encounters a thief. The point is if one is trusting in Jesus, then a sign of God's love is one is hospitable to strangers. That is the idea being taught here.

6. Verse 3: Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.
- a) Again, we have to go back to that culture and that time to understand this verse. One has to remember that people back then were put in jail for being Christians. Even though the Roman Government allowed freedom of religion, they didn't allow rioting, as they feared any sort of uproar against Rome. Therefore, some were in jail based on false accusations and some were in jail in effect for their religious beliefs. The point here is that one can easily say, that person is in jail. It is too bad for them, or that they deserve to be there.
 - b) To understand this verse another way, if we care about the souls of others, then that must care about those who are in prison. I have met some wonderful Christians who have a heart for prisoners and wanting to see them grow close to God. It is amazing to hear the stories of how much interest those prisoners have in Jesus, because in many cases that becomes their only hope. This also reminds me of the fairly recent passing of Chuck Colson, who started a wonderful national ministry to help prisoners draw closer to God.
 - i) Another interesting thing I have heard about prisons is that when someone makes a commitment for Jesus, the other prisoners test them. Those other prisoners want to see how serious one is about that commitment and see if they are really willing to walk away from their old lifestyle. Such prisoners do need the encouragement of other believers to strengthen their trust in Him. God does call on believers to care about those in prisoners and that command is given here.
7. Verse 4: Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.
- a) This verse does not mean that every Christian has to be married or that divorced people are automatically going to hell. Remember that salvation is about one's trust in Jesus and not about one's marital status.
 - b) If that is true, what is the point of this verse? It is saying in effect, "If one is married, one does not cheat on that marriage." One has to remember that one of the most common comparisons in the bible is "marriage and our relationship with God". That is because in both cases, to cheat is a sin. To cheat in marriage is called adultery. To cheat in our relationship with God is about worshipping other things. Either way, the issue is sin.
 - c) The reason God wants us to not cheat on marriages is simply because He wants the best for our lives. To say it another way, adultery is not a sin for God's sake, but for ours. What if one's marriage has problems? Is the solution to work them out, or is the solution to cheat? That is the point here. That applies to our relationship with God as well as our relationship with one's spouse. One of the things I have learned in marriage is the very few times where I really shine is simply when I learn to put my wives needs as a priority over my own. That is what Christian love is all about. Willingness to put the needs of others over our own. That too, obviously needs to apply to marriages as well.
8. Verse 5: Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."
- a) Next on our list of practical things the Christian needs to do is to deal with the love of money. Is this verse saying that one should never be ambitious to earn more money? Of course not. The point is not about trying to either earn a living or even about financially doing well in life. The point is about contentment. It is a human desire to want more. In fact, most advertising is based on the fact that people are never satisfied with what we already have. This verse is also not saying that one has to take a vow of poverty to be a good Christian. The issue again is about contentment in life.
 - b) So how do we be content with what we have? It starts by letting go of jealousy. That is why the 10th Commandment is to not desire one's neighbor's "stuff". The idea is to learn to have contentment in life while still being ambitious to accomplish our goals.

- c) The point here has nothing to do with trying to do financially better in life or trying to make a living to support one's loved ones. The point is one can always desire more. One can go through life either thinking, "I need more to be happy, or I can learn to be content with what I have". There is nothing wrong with being ambitious or trying to earn more. The challenge in life is to say, "What if I don't make any more? Can I still be happy with what I currently have?" That is the issue of contentment being discussed here.
- i) OK John, I sort of know all of that. Why is being brought up here? The writer of Hebrews is listing things that can cause us to not be a good witness for Jesus.
 - ii) That is why the writer reminded us to show love to others (Verse 1).
 - iii) That is why the writer reminded us to entertain strangers (Verse 2).
 - iv) That is why the writer reminded us to visit prisoners (Verse 3).
 - v) This why the writer reminded us to not cheat in marriage (Verse 4).
 - vi) Finally that is why the writer is reminding us to be content with money (Verse 5).
 - vii) The point of these verses is not that we have to do all of these things in order to be saved. The point is how to be a good witness for Jesus. Let's face it, people who don't care about pleasing God, usually put themselves as a priority over pleasing others. They don't show love to others, don't visit prisoners, cheat in marriage or even steal in order to have more money. These verses are teaching us how to be different from the world around us.
 - viii) These verses are saying in effect, "You want to be a good witness for Jesus? Here are some examples of how one can be a witness to others around us."
9. Verse 6: So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"
- a) Since I took a break from all of this practical teaching to say why it is important, so the writer of Hebrews takes his own break to give this bit of advice here in Verse 6.
 - i) That bit of advice is in effect, "What can people do to me that compares to the fact that I will live for eternity?" If Jesus is truly guiding my life, what could I possibly be afraid of? Strangers who steal? Prisoners hurting me? Bad marriage? Loss of money? All of these issues require sound advice on how to live and I can't cover those principals in detail in this lesson. The point is simply that no matter how well or how poorly one's life goes, God is there to guide us through those good and bad times if we are willing to let Him guide us. There is nothing that we have to fear because He is always willing to guide us through such issues.
 - b) OK, enough commentary on why these verses are here. It's time to get back to learning some practical tips on living the Christian life through my own commentary. ☺
10. Verse 7: Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. ⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.
- a) The key word here is "leaders". This is about those who have helped you and me grow in our relationship with Jesus. It could refer to ordained pastors, priests, or simply one's friends who have helped us draw closer to God.
 - i) Does this mean such people are perfect? Of course not. It just means that such people have a strong faith that Jesus is God, and we should imitate that faith.
 - ii) In a practical aspect, I regularly pray for the leaders of my church and other Christians who have influenced my life. I also try to stay in the habit of praying for those Christians who have a big influence over my children as well.
 - iii) I believe remembering one's leader(s) is more than just praying for them. It is also helping them when they ask for ours help. This is why I financially support my church. It is a way of remembering those who's faith God wants me to imitate.
 - b) This leads to Verse 8. It reads like a catch phrase, the fact that Jesus is still in charge, be it yesterday, today or whenever. Yes it is a reminder that Jesus is always there and that He doesn't change even though this letter was written 2,000 years ago.

- c) One of the arguments made against Christianity is the fact that it has been about 2,000 years since Jesus said He was going to return. How are we expected to have faith in a 2,000-year old (and still counting) fact? One answer is simply that the bible says it is true such as here in Verse 8 and we accept it as the Word of God. The more practical answer is that if one learns to trust God, one understands that He does guide our lives and that reminder of His guidance helps us to walk by faith.
- i) Remember that the purpose of this chapter is to remind us of how to walk by faith that Jesus is real and He exists. It is full of practical bits of advice on how God wants us to live as believers. Every now and then we all need the reminder that all of "this" is real. I find that God in His own way, reminds us every so often of the reality of His existence even though it has been 2,000 years.
- ii) Speaking of getting back to how God wants us to live now, it is time for Verse 9.
11. Verse 9: Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.
¹⁰We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.
- a) One of the things that is common in churches is for people to get caught up in strange teachings. They seem to come and go like "waves" through a church. These issues are not necessarily good or bad things, just things that distort us from focusing on what God calls us to do as Christians. I find that one of the biggest things we fight in our lives is boredom. We easily get tired of doing the same thing all the time. One of the things that people do when they get bored is debate over things that are not that important.
- i) Don't get me wrong. There are many issues to learn about one's faith in Jesus and I hold my opinion about many debatable issues just like the next person. The issue is not about understanding or not understanding specific issues. The issue is are we focusing on what God calls us to do or not?
- ii) So how do I know what God is calling me to do at any given moment? Again, it starts by asking Him. It is often simply considering what one should be doing at any given moment or using one's talents to make a difference for Him.
- iii) In summary, the point here is about having enough focus to beware of distractions that keep our focus off of what God desires us to do at any given time.
- b) This leads to the second sentence of Verse 9 and Verse 10. These verses are examples of what the writer of Hebrews is talking about when it comes to "strange teaching".
- i) By the way, notice the phrase "strange teaching" is not sinful teaching. The point is such discussions may not be over sinful issues. It is just issues that in the long run, don't affect our relationship with Jesus, nor is it important in whatever God is calling us to do at any given moment.
- c) With that said, we discuss the specific examples. To start, let us return to the Jewish Christians who were the original recipients of this letter. These people were struggling with the possibility of returning to Judaism. It is as if some other Jewish people were trying to get these Christians to come back to Judaism by saying, "We have these special foods (think "kosher") that keep us close to God because we eat this way". We have this special altar (think about the tabernacle in Jerusalem that stood at that time) that we use to worship God with. How can you as a Christian think that you are better than us when we have these special foods and this special altar? Those are the types of foolish arguments that those Jewish Christians had to deal with. In a similar way, we Christians can waste many hours arguing over things that don't matter.
- i) So since you brought up these arguments by the Jewish (non-Christians) living at that time, what is the response to those debate questions? Glad you asked, because that is the purpose of the next three verses. In other words, "You Jewish people may have these things, but we as Christians have something better". That which is better, is the main point of Verses 11 through 13. Speaking of which:

12. Verse 11: The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. ¹² And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. ¹³ Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. ¹⁴ For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.
- a) The writer of Hebrews discusses the fact that in the Old Testament, after animal sacrifices were made, their ashes were burned outside the camp. Further, when Jesus was crucified, it took place outside the city walls of Jerusalem that stood at the time of that act. OK, why is that a big deal? To understand, it may help to bring up a parable that Jesus taught:
- i) Jesus said, "The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice." (This is a quote from Gospel of John, Chapter 10, Verses 2-4).
- ii) The question as one reads that passage, is what is the shepherd leading the sheep "out of"? In this parable, the shepherd has sheep inside a fenced area. Apparently those sheep are mixed in with other sheep. The shepherd then gives some sort of distinguished call, to lead his own sheep out. Again, the question that scholars have pondered about this parable is what does Jesus want to lead us out of and to?
- a) Does that mean Jesus wants to lead us out of the world? No, in the sense that God calls us to be witnesses to the world, although He calls us to live a life differently than how the world lives. How we live differently includes the examples giving throughout this lesson.
- b) Some scholars speculate the Jesus is talking about leading people out of Judaism into a life of being a Christian. That would make sense in the fact that Jesus was talking to a group of Jewish people. OK, but what if you are I are not Jewish. What is it referring to? It refers to leaving our old life of just living to glorify ourselves or whatever rituals we trusted in, and start living for Jesus and trusting Him to guide our lives.
- b) So what does this have to do with these verses here in Hebrews Chapter 13? What they do is make the same sort of point that Jesus made in John's Gospel. It is about leaving our old lives behind and start living a life of trusting Jesus to guide our lives. What old life are you talking about? As I have been pounding the point all through Hebrews, it is to live the Christian life about learning to trust Jesus to guide our life daily.
- i) The reason these verses in Hebrews make such a big point that Jesus was crucified outside of the city walls is that it is symbolic of us "leaving our old life" of just living to please ourselves and learning to live to please God based on how we live.
- c) This leads me perfectly to Verse 14. That verse talks about the fact we as Christians look forward to a "city to come". In other words, our rewards for how we live our lives do not come in this lifetime, but in the next one. That does not mean we can't enjoy life now. It just means that we as Christians primarily look to rewards in heaven in exchange for living our lives to make a difference now.
- i) John, that sounds like a work based religion and not faith. As I have beaten the point home in previous lessons on Hebrews, we shouldn't work hard for Jesus in order to earn points by Him. We should work hard based on having gratitude for what God has already done for us. It is not to prove our worth to Him. It is to make a difference for Him based on what He has called us to do in this lifetime.
- ii) What if I don't know what to do? As I have stated many times in these lessons on Hebrews, start by asking God. Do what needs to be done in one's life and trust that He is guiding us. Learn to live with the idea that God is watching us and let it affect how we live our life. Then use one's life to make that difference.

13. Verse 15: Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.¹⁶ And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
- a) These two verses focus on the issues of praise and sacrifices. Let me discuss each of them.
 - b) Personally, I think praising God is much more than just saying how much we appreciate Him when we pray or say, sing in church. The issue here is not so much when we praise Him, but our general attitude. A grateful person is usually a joyful person. If we can learn to show gratitude to God regularly, it reminds us that He is making a difference in our lives. The point is we don't show gratitude to God for His sake, but for ours.
 - i) Remember that praising God is much more than taking a few minutes to actually express it. I am convinced how one generally acts as a Christian is also praise. In other words, if we do the type of good works being described in this chapter, that is also praise in God's ears (speaking figuratively of course).
 - ii) That is what Verse 16 is also saying. That when we do good things and share (i.e., make a difference) for others, that is also pleasing to God.
 - c) In effect, this comes back to the opening verse of this chapter, which was about showing love to others. Remember that the Christian concept of love is all about putting the needs of others as priority over our own needs. Jesus said that that act of showing love is how the world will recognize us as believers. That doesn't mean that non-Christians can't do good things. It just means that a sign of a Christian is their attitude in life is generally, to consider what is best for others around me, as opposed to what is best for me? Learning to live that way is part of the discipline necessary in order to live out the Christian life. Again, we depend upon Jesus as our "engine" in order to have the power to live that way.
 - i) Meanwhile, the writer of Hebrews has a little more practical advice to give us before we wrap up this final chapter of the book.
14. Verse 17: Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
- a) As I thought about these verses, I asked myself, "Which leaders are they referring too?"
 - i) Does this just apply to our leaders in church? What about government leaders? What about other authorities we have to obey such as teachers or bosses? What about the one's I didn't vote for? What about the one's that I did not have a choice to be under their authority, what about them?
 - ii) The answer is yes to all of the above. If it is a voting situation, it does not mean we have to vote for the one's already in power. It just means that whether we like it or not, for the moment, those people that are in charge have to be respected as being in charge of our lives.
 - b) Remember that this chapter focuses on the issue of how do we show love to one another. The issue is in effect, "Are we respecting our leaders or not?" Remember that they too will be accountable to God as our leaders. Therefore how they act is in effect His problem and not ours. God calls on us to submit to them whether we like it or not.
 - i) Consider that when Paul wrote his letters, he was in the Roman Empire where roughly two thirds of those people was slaves. Did Paul particularly care for that slavery system? I doubt it. Paul never spoke up about it because in effect, he had "bigger fish to fry". He was concerned about leading people to salvation through Jesus. Therefore, he figured, government leadership is God's problem and if He wants to bring that system to an end, it will happen. In fact, once the influence of Christianity dramatically affected the Roman Empire, slavery did come to an end.
 - ii) OK John, that is an interesting fact about ancient history. What is your point? It is if we are willing to submit to authority, even the one's we don't like, God will work to "right the wrongs" of our leaders as they are His problem and not ours.

- c) Are you saying that if we just submit to our authorities, all the wrong things that they do will just magically go away? Hardly. The point is our primary job as believers is to be a good witness for Jesus. That means being submissive to authorities. That means obeying the law, even the one's we don't like. It means we acknowledge the fact that whether we like it or not, they are in charge. Paul taught in Romans 13:1 that Christians are to pray for their leaders. Yes, that includes the one's we don't like.
 - d) This leads me to Verse 17. It says we are to be obedient to them, so that "their work may be a joy and not a burden". My very loose translation: Don't be a pain in their behind. ☺ If they are in charge, let them be in charge and don't question their authority. Again, this is a separate issue from voting or even discussing politics. This is about accepting the fact that whether we like it or not, they are in charge.
 - i) The issue comes back to showing Christian love. One way we do show love is by accepting those who are in authority over us. It is to remember that leaders are accountable to God for their leadership whether such people realize it or not.
 - ii) Remember that Christian love is about putting the needs of others over our own. One of the needs of our leaders is for us to obey their authority.
 - e) People who know their bible like to ask, what about those biblical times where specific people rebelled against authority? For example, Peter refused to stop preaching about Jesus when the Jewish religious leaders ordered him to stop. (Acts 5). Even back around the time of Moses, there is a story of the Egyptian midwives who refused to obey the king's order to kill the Israelite babies (Exodus Chapter 1). What about those times?
 - i) The answer is that if our leaders command us to do things that are violate God's laws, we should not obey such orders. We still may have to suffer in this lifetime for such disobedience, but obeying God takes priority over our leaders. I would also advise to pick one's battles well. One can always find fault with any decision a leader makes. One has to decide whether or not it is worth fighting those orders and is it a clear and obvious violation of what God desires for our lives.
 - ii) Remember that such rebellious incidents are the exceptions and not the rules. We are called to be a good witness for Jesus. One way we could be a good witness is to submit to those who are over us, whether we like them or not. It is a matter of showing the type of "biblical" love Jesus talked about by putting the needs of others as a priority over our own needs.
 - iii) Meanwhile, Verse 18.
15. Verse 18: Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. ¹⁹ I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.
- a) My first thought as I looked at these two verses is who is the "us" of this verse? My point is even though the writer of Hebrews is not stated, the original recipients of this letter must have known who wrote it, in order for the reader to know who this is.
 - i) This is one reason why I suspect Paul wrote it. His fame was growing. Paul also knew many Jewish (non-Christian) people didn't like him because he was teaching Jewish people to turn to Jesus. Therefore, he kept his name off of Hebrews to help circulate this letter better without any prejudice based on who was the author.
 - ii) The "us" also refers to the person who delivered the letter. Another possibility is that Paul was in prison when he wrote it, and he had to dictate it to the writer. Since there is then more than one person involved in it's writing, we have an "us" here. Am I positive about this? No, but it does fit many of the facts of this letter.
 - iii) OK, enough speculation about the author. Back to the verses.
 - b) Obviously who ever was the author, he is now long dead. So who do we pray for given the fact the original "us" is now long gone? We are back to the issue of our leaders. Let me explain further about whom the writer is calling us to pray for, and why.

- c) The issue in Verse 18 has to do with having "a clear conscious and living honorably".
- i) Translation: We can't live the right way, without God's help. This gets back to the idea that it is our natural human desire to do what we know God does not want us to do. There is a classic joke about a hotel next to a lake. There was a big sign on the hotel balcony saying, "No Fishing". Many people violated that rule and fished. The hotel took the sign away, and that cut way down the number of people who fished off the balcony because it took away the desire to do what was wrong.
 - ii) My point is simply that we can't do what is right in life without God's help. We can only do so much by willpower. It takes the guidance of God in order to truly make a difference over the long run. OK, John, you've beaten that point to death over all of these lessons in Hebrews. What does it have to do with these verses?
 - a) Here, it is the reminder to pray for our fellow believers. Somehow, when we ask God to bless individuals, it helps them to stick close to Him and continue to draw upon His power.
 - b) To say it another way, "God designed obedience to be a group effort". He calls on us to pray for fellow believers in order for us to know what is His will for our lives at any given moment. That is why I pray daily for many people I know so that God can guide their lives. That is also why I ask that those of you who read these lessons pray for me as well. I am convinced that the prayer of others I have never met inspires what I write here.
 - c) The main point is that God wants us to be good witnesses for Him. Doing that requires us to show love to each other. Doing that requires His help in order to make a difference in the world. Doing that requires us as believers to pray for those people He puts on our hearts at any given moment so that those people we pray for also make a difference for Him.
- d) This leads to Verse 19, which is a strange comment when one thinks about it.
- i) Again, whoever the unnamed author of Hebrews was, he is familiar to the original recipients of this letter. I say that because Verse 19 is the author asking the readers to pray for the author that he may come see the recipients soon.
 - ii) So does that mean if we pray for someone to visit us, they must? Remember that pray is about getting God's will done, not ours. However, God does give us an interesting type of power here. If we want someone to visit us, we can pray about it and if it is His will for that person to visit us, He will work out the details so that person can see us. That in effect is what this verse is saying.
 - iii) It is saying that God can be a communication source between people if it is His will for us to see that person again. Earlier in this lesson I talked about how my daughter is struggling because she longs to see her friend who's mother is in legal trouble. My daughter prayed about this for weeks, and just the other day, God answered that prayer. We just got in touch with her and my daughter may be able to spend some time with her soon. That in effect is the type of prayer God is asking of us and is a good example of how this verse fits in with our own lives.
 - a) My point is not to teach you about our life. The point is when we truly turn the situation over to God, He does guide us through those issues.
- e) Speaking of having peace through a situation that is out of our hands, I present Verse 20:
16. Verse 20: May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
- a) These verses begin the "closing blessing" of this letter. It is a common style in writing after making all of one's arguments (in this case, explaining exactly who Jesus is and what God wants from us in response to who He is), to give a final blessing on the reader.

- b) Notice the title "God of peace". Going back to the example of my daughter, we have been praying in effect for "God's peace" through this difficult situation so that this relationship can be restored. The point is giving our problems and situations over to God and saying this is now your problem, I'll accept whatever is Your will here" does give us a sense of peace knowing that the results of whatever we have to deal with is now His problem, not ours to worry about. Yes we still have to do the footwork, but we let go of the results. That is why God the Father is called "The God of peace" at this point.
 - c) The next part of Verse 20 is the reminder that God the Father raised Jesus up from the dead among other reasons to show that His blood is complete payment for all of our sins. It is also to show that Jesus is now in charge of our lives, which is what Verse 20 means when it says, "great Shepherd of the sheep". My translation: We are like simple sheep that belong to Jesus, who is in charge of our lives.
 - d) This leads us to Verse 21. The main point here is simply that God the Father will provide for us everything we need in order for us to do His will. Let me explain that:
 - i) Does that mean that God the Father literally makes a visual appearance to every believer and says, here is what you need to do to be my disciple? Not exactly. ☺
If we are called to be His disciples and we are called to make a difference for Him, then God somehow and somehow makes it possible for us to accomplish what it is He wants us to accomplish.
 - ii) Let me speak from personal experience here. When I first became a believer, God put in me a desire to study the bible for years. In effect, He worked it out because I have an occupation that required a lot of time driving in my car, so I could listen to lectures on the bible. Then one day I believe He said to me, "By now you should be teaching". From there, this writing ministry developed. Did I plan the way this ministry worked out? Of course not. Did I plan to spend many years studying the bible? Of course not. My point is not to give you details of my life, but simply to show that God in His own way, and on His own timing, does work out our lives for His glory if we are willing to turn over our time to Him and say in effect, "All I have is Yours and I will trust You to guide me to do what is Your will for my life."
 - e) OK, after that happy story, it is time to get back to Verse 21. The verse ends with the fact that Jesus will rule forever and ever. OK, that is cute and I accept it. What's the point?
 - i) The point is whatever we do to make a difference for Jesus, has eternal blessings. It is a reminder of how to best use our time. Do we use it to benefit our own life or to benefit God? What we do for ourselves at the best will only benefit us for the length of our life. Does this mean I have to ignore my family, friends and say work in order to only make a difference for Jesus? Of course not. If anything it just means we get God involved in the process of how we live with our family, friends and our job as examples. The point is we make Jesus part of our everyday lives, so that whatever we are called to do, we can do it for His glory.
 - ii) OK, time to finish this letter and specifically, the last four verses.
17. Verse 22: Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.
- a) Time for more of my loose translation: The writer is saying, thanks for putting up with me while I wrote this letter to you. I have written you only a short letter. It makes me wonder what the writer considers a long letter, if he considers this thirteen-chapter letter (yes I know the chapter breaks were added centuries later) a short letter?
 - b) This also gives me reassurance that if I can write a 12 page commentary every week, it isn't too long to read if the author of Hebrews considers what he wrote a short letter. Yes, it may be too long for you to read, but God somehow makes it possible for me to write this just about every week.

- c) This verse is a reminder that the book of Hebrews along with the rest of the bible is commonly accepted as being inspired by God. It is interesting to read the writings of Christians who lived less than a century after the books were written. Those people believed the bible books were "God inspired" and their own writing was not "gospel".
 - i) The point for us is simply that God does call on us to study His word and think about what it means. That is what inspires me to write these lessons.
18. Verse 23: I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you. ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all God's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.
- a) If you want more proof that Paul wrote this letter, notice there is no explanation in the letter of who Timothy was. It is as if the author understood that his audience knew who this man was and it required no further explanation. For those of you who don't know their bible well, Timothy was a traveling companion of Paul. He was younger than Paul and was trained by Paul himself to be a disciple.
 - b) The next question is "released from what"? My speculation is that Timothy spent a time in prison around the time he was visiting Paul in Rome. With Timothy being a disciple of Paul, Timothy apparently spent some time in prison. My guess is that it was either for helping Paul or just talking about Jesus in a city that at time worshipped multiple gods.
 - i) The point is, as this letter was written, Timothy has been released and the writer of Hebrews was aware of it.
 - c) Now notice that Verse 24 says, "Those from Italy send you their greetings." That probably means Hebrews was written from Italy. To finish my "Paul wrote this theory," visualize Paul either in jail or under "house arrest" (Acts Chapter 28). During that time he wrote this letter to Jewish believers in Jesus. Paul knew that Timothy was out of jail and Paul had Timothy deliver the letter. Now notice the last part of Verse 23. It says that the author of Hebrews will come with Timothy to see you. Some speculate that Paul was free to travel around Italy after his first trial there, and that is why he made this comment.
 - d) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history and theories. Why should I care?
 - i) The point for us is simply that if the writer of Hebrews cares about those who read the letters, it is another sign that showing Christian love is to care about the needs of others. To put it another way, the writer of Hebrews did not state all of these facts about Jesus and about how to live the Christian life just to show how much knowledge he had about Christianity. He wrote this letter because he truly cared about the lives of these believers and wanted to see them draw closer to Jesus.
 - ii) To personalize this, if I only cared about writing these bible studies to show off my knowledge of the bible, I am wasting everyone's time. If I write these lessons in order for all of us to grow in their faith in Jesus, then I am doing the right thing.
 - a) I am not saying that we all have to be Christian writers. I am saying that Jesus calls all of us as believers to show love to one another. The writer of Hebrews did it by writing this letter so that other Jewish Christians could grow in their faith in Jesus. I write in order for other people to grow in their relationship with Jesus. I am asking all Christians to use whatever gifts God the Father has given us, in order to make a difference for Jesus. That is "Christian love" as Jesus defined and a key point of this lesson.
 - e) Before I leave these verses, let me on the phrase, "Greet all your leaders and all God's people." Whoever the original recipients of Hebrews were, the writer is urging them to greet other Christians. That does not mean to just say hello to them and go back to one's own life. The idea again, is to care about the lives of other believers. It is just another way of showing love to one's fellow Christian. Sometimes it is as simple as taking the moment to talk to fellow believers. Sometimes it means getting involved in the lives of others. Again, the key point is about putting the needs of other believers above our own.

19. Verse 25: Grace be with you all.
- a) So why end this letter with a reminder about God's grace? After all, aren't all believers covered by God's grace whether we think about that fact or not? Why would the writer of Hebrews want to end with this catch phrase?
 - i) I believe it is a final reminder to all of us that we can't earn God's love by doing good things. That is something all of us have to regularly remind ourselves. It is very easy to think that I have sinned too much to be forgiven by God. It is very easy to also think that He must be really impressed with what I am doing at the moment. In summary, it is just a reminder that we can't learn God's love. We just accept His complete payment for all of our sins, and then live a life based on gratitude. We draw on His power to live the type of life that He desires for us.
 - b) If we remind ourselves of His grace every now and then, that will help us to remember that it is not up to us, but up to Him as to what happens in our lives. Yes it is up to us to live out our lives and make the best decisions possible. The point is we give the results of our lives over to Him and we don't have to worry about the results of whatever happens in our lives. Because we as Christians are saved by grace alone, we can let go of worries. On that happy thought, I can wrap up this lesson.
20. Heavenly Father, I don't know what You have planned for me today, or for the rest of my life. I just know that I can't earn Your love based on my actions. I can't sin enough to lose my salvation, and I can't make You love me more by doing good things. Therefore, I am simply going to live my life to make a difference for You. I am going to trust You in order to help others draw closer to You. Help me live my life to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

For those of you who have not been with me for more than one bible book, I always put a list of my sources on the final page of the final lesson of any book. In other words, if you would like some further commentary on Hebrews, you may want to see study of the authors who helped influence me to write these studies, as it is listed on the next page. Thanks for reading, and you are more than welcome to read other studies I have written on other books of the bible.

Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted *me* to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #7 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these psalm lessons. The specific commentaries on the book of Hebrews is listed first, and then the bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on Hebrews by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
2. Commentary on Hebrews by Bob Davies. They are available for free in MP3® format at http://northcountrychapel.com/audio_studies/tapelist.php?book_id=58.
3. Commentary on Hebrews by David Guzik. It is available for free in text and audio format. He wrote a detailed commentary on Psalm 119, that I am particularly grateful for that one as well as other particular Hebrews. The web address is http://www.enduringword.com/hebrews_audio.htm.
4. Commentary on Hebrews by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>.
5. Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament -- David H. Stern; (June 1994) Jewish New Testament Publications; ISBN: 9653590081; David Stern is a Messianic Jew who wrote a commentary on the New Testament from a Jewish perspective.
6. The Defender's Study Bible by Dr. Henry Morris World Publishing (1995) ISBN: 052910444X
7. The English Standard Version Study Bible; Copyright (2005-2009) The Standard Bible Society. The version itself is copyrighted 2008 by Crossway Bibles, a publication of "Good News Publishers".
8. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every bible verse. It is available through Zondervan. Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this same source.
9. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm.
10. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229.
11. I am also grateful for my pastor, Phil Helfer, who "by coincidence" was teaching Hebrews the same time as I was writing these lessons on Hebrews.
12. I also refer sometimes to Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at www.str.org.