

Be kind, be careful, be content and yet consider your leaders - Hebrews 13:1-7

James Muldoon - Carey Baptist Church – 3 February 2008

Hebrews 13 is not just a PS to the rest of the letter. It gives us some of the nuts and bolts of how to persevere in the Christian life. It contains a scattergun of commandments which deal with matters Christians face day-in day-out. Hebrews 13 may not give you too much doctrine; the rest of the letter has given you plenty of that already! But it will give you practical guidance about how to live a persevering Christian life.

i The Christian's social life

v1-3 give us three instructions about our social lives. Those for whom Christ has died cannot live for themselves alone; we must be concerned about the needs of others.

The first instruction is in **v1**. It reminds us that, as Christians, we are all one family. So let brotherly love continue. Do you love your brothers and sisters as you should? All of them?

The second instruction comes in **v2**. It's all to do with hospitality, but the NIV's translation here neatly brings out the force of the Greek. As a Christian, you are to be a friend of strangers. That was very important in the ancient world. It is still important today. In fact, it may be that we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to serve the Lord here. Do you see what impact hospitable Christians could have upon people from overseas who now live in Reading? Do you see what a powerful statement of love hospitality is? Do you see how it may well open a door of opportunity for the gospel?

Biblical hospitality is more than having other Christians over for a meal. But we should do that too! As we saw a couple of weeks ago, if we're going to help one another to keep on going spiritually, we must know one another. And there's no better way of getting to know others than to have them round for a meal. It can make some people's week to be invited out!

So if you're healthy enough, and if you have somewhere to take people back to, and if you have a tin of beans, do hospitality! Get others to help you if you're not too confident. But do not neglect hospitality. Some people have entertained angels unawares by taking in strangers! And many people who have entertained visitors have found out that it's the hosts who receive the blessing, not the guests!

The third instruction about the Christian's social life is in **v3**. We are to remember those who are prisoners for the Lord's sake. Remember those in other lands who are in gaol for loving the Lord. Find out about them. Pray for them. May we remember our family members who are in prison for the sake of Jesus Christ right now.

ii The Christian's private life

v4-6 give us two instructions about our private lives.

v4 tells us about sexual purity. It says that marriage is good. And it is: Christians must emphasise that. Furthermore, sex within marriage is good. But, says the writer, those who flout God's rules for sex will not get away with it. God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. That kind of teaching was as counter-cultural then as it is today. But the Bible is clear. God will not allow the sexually immoral into heaven unless they repent.

v5-6 give us the second instruction. We're to steer clear of covetousness and we're to be content with what we have. Covetousness is everywhere in the UK today. But, Christian, you do not need to covet. Why? Because God is with you. And if God is with you, you lack nothing. You have all you need. You might own nothing; yet you possess everything (as Paul says in II Corinthians 6:10). Money in the bank is not a greater asset than having the Lord God with you!

All of us fit into one of two camps here. Either we trust in God. Or we trust in something else, be it money or self or whatever. Do you trust in God? If you don't, you're in great danger. You're trusting in something which will fail you. Come to him, repenting of your sin. Trust in his Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to save sinners. Follow him, devoting your life to him. If you do, he will never let you down. You'll live with him for all eternity.

iii The Christian's spiritual life

v7 gives us one instruction about the Christian's spiritual life. This theme is going to continue through the rest of the chapter, though.

In **v7**, then, the writer points the Hebrews back to those who first taught the gospel to them (who had almost certainly passed away). He tells them to remember them, to remember their lives, to remember the fruit of their lives, and to imitate them.

If you're in some kind of leadership position in the church – whether you are an elder or a YPS teacher or a young person helping at YPi or an A&P Group leader or whatever – it's good to ask yourself questions like these from time to time. Is your life beyond reproach? Is it clear to all that you don't flirt? Is it clear to all that your speech is seasoned with salt? Is it clear to all that you are seeking to honour God in your family? Is it clear to all that you consider the Lord in the way you dress? Is it clear to all that you are serious about living the Christian life? Is your conduct worthy of imitation?

If you're a leader, make sure that your life is worthy of being remembered. Make sure that it's worthy of imitation. And if you're not a leader, follow those who are good examples as they follow Christ. They will help you to live fruitful lives if you do.