



Hebrews - Chapter Thirteen

Summary of Chapter Thirteen

This final chapter provides the author with one final opportunity to encourage his readers to implement the good lifestyle practices that are based on the teachings of the church, especially warning of the worldly traps of sex, power, money and its associated suffering. The solution to avoid such traps is given - Jesus! What is more, Jesus makes sense of the rest of it. The writer then goes on to offer a final benediction and personal greetings.

IV Hebrew 13:1-25 - Concluding Exhortations and Remarks

As he finishes his letter, the author states some specific points of application for the community (vv.1-19), invokes a word of blessing (vv.20-21), and greets the community (vv.22-25).

IV.a Hebrews 13:1-19 - Sacrifices pleasing to God

As is common in other NT epistles, for example Romans chapters 12-15, the author concludes the letter with a series of specific moral exhortations.

¹ Let mutual love continue.

Hebrews 13:1

Mutual love. Relationships in the church, marked by love: <<For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do>> (Hebrews 6:10), <<And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds>> (Hebrews 10:24), are the fruit of faith, as seen throughout Chapter 11 and especially in: <<But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting>> (Hebrews 10:32-34). Paul encouraged love in a similar manner: <<love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour>> (Romans 12:10).

² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2

Hospitality. The virtue of hosting and caring for visitors was especially valued in antiquity: *<<the stranger has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveller>>* (Job 31:32), and was still prevalent in the 1st Century since travel was difficult and inns could be dangerous. **Hospitality** is called for: *<<Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher>>* (1 Timothy 3:2), *<<For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled>>* (Titus 1:8), and: *<<Be hospitable to one another without complaining>>* (1 Peter 4:9). This extends beyond just giving a meal and a bed for the night: *<<Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers>>* (Romans 12:13), and: *<<Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers. Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth>>* (3 John 5-8), something that was put into practice, such as by the evangelist Philip: *<<The next day we left and came to Caesarea; and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him>>* (Acts 21:8).

Entertained angels. This is something that is recorded as happening in the OT such as the accounts in Genesis 18:1-15, Judges 6:11-24, and 13:3-24.

³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.

Hebrews 13:3

Remember those who are in prison. Hebrews 10:32-34, quoted in comments on v.1, is one example of believers being imprisoned and others supporting them. Others include the disciples of John the Baptist: *<<For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her>>* (Mark 6:17), combined with: *<<The disciples of John reported all these things to him. So John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?''>>* (Luke 7:17-19). The church supported Peter in his time of imprisonment: *<<About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him>>* (Acts 12:1-5); Paul was met by members of the Roman church while he was on his way to prison and trial: *<<There we found*

believers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. The believers from there, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage>> (Acts 28:14-15), and he was supported during his time of imprisonment, including: <<May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain>> (2 Timothy 1:16). This command is also combined with hospitality in: <<for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me>> (Matthew 25:35-36). Rather than avoiding them out of shame or fear, the church is to care for the persecuted.

Remembering implies active response to needs; both prayer and practical help.

As though you yourselves were being tortured shows the Christian sense of unity for it is also translated as ‘in the body’, which is probably intended to mean ‘in the real world of everyday life’. It could also mean ‘in the church’, although this is less likely; Christians should not separate themselves from the needs of those around them.

⁴ Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.

Hebrews 13:4

Marriage is to be held in honour, and chastity in marriage is called for, with the warning that God will judge anyone who is sexually immoral, Greek *pornos*, a general term referring to anyone who engages in sexual conduct outside of marriage between a man and a woman, or adulterous, Greek *moichos*, referring to anyone who is unfaithful to a spouse. This warning is addressed to members of the church, and if they are genuine Christian believers, this judgment of God would not mean final condemnation to hell, for: <<**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**>> (Romans 8:1), but would bring disciplinary judgment in this life: <<**And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children – ‘My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts’**>> (Hebrews 12:5-6), or loss of reward at the last day, or both. However, in light of the earlier warning passages, such as Hebrews 3:12-14, 6:4-8, 10:26-31, and 12:14-17, it is possible that such sexual immorality will be an indication that the person committing it is in fact not a true believer and not born again: <<**Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again”**>> (John 3:3 NIV).

Adulterers. God’s people had long been commanded to remain faithful in marriage: <<**You shall not commit adultery**>> (Exodus 20:14), <<**If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death**>> (Leviticus 20:10), <<**Neither shall you commit adultery**>> (Deuteronomy 5:18), and: <<**Did not one God make her? Both flesh and spirit are his. And what does the one God desire? Godly offspring. So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth**>> (Malachi 2:15). However, when Jesus came the bar was raised to even

greater heights: <<*But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart*>> (Matthew 5:28). The pagan world of the 1st Century was just as promiscuous as the 21st Century western world and Christians were called then and now to be counter-cultural in their attitude to sex and their personal practises.

God will judge those who wilfully abuse his gift of sex, which he has given as a pleasurable gift - a deep, rich satisfying bond for married heterosexual couples, and not as a casual plaything. Judgement will not necessarily be confined to the future life but so often comes upon people in this life, causing them pain.

⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'

⁶ So we can say with confidence,

'The Lord is my helper;

I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?'

Hebrews 13:5-6

The citation is from Psalm 118:6 and applies the idea of trusting in God for more than just financial needs, especially in light of persecution (v.3).

The love of money has been the downfall of so many people because it becomes the god of their lives: <<*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains*>> (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus went further: <<*Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God*>> (Luke 18:25).

The antidote to the love of money is contentment, which comes from trusting in God's promised provision: <<*Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.*' Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: '*Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed*'>> (Deuteronomy 31:6-8), <<*No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you*>> (Joshua 1:5), and: <<*Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food*>> (Ruth 1:6).

Poverty itself does not bring happiness and there is nothing in the bible to say there is anything wrong with having money and all the nice things that it can provide. It is the heart attitude towards money and what people are prepared to do to get it that causes the problems.

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Hebrews 13:7

Remember your leaders is further expanded in v.17; the repetition may indicate some disharmony in the church at that time.

Those who spoke the word of God, likely refers to doctrinal instruction: <<*instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement*>> (Hebrews 6:2), which is especially significant in their positive model of faith. The primary role of leaders is to preach and teach God's Word, and their lives should reflect the Word that is taught.

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is eternally trustworthy in his position as high priest and as Son of God – yesterday i.e. active in creation: <<*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being*>> (John 1:1-3a), and: <<*but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs*>> (Hebrews 1:2-4), and throughout the period of the old covenant; the Gospel message is not for tomorrow but for today, offering salvation under the new covenant that Jesus has established: <<*again he sets a certain day – 'today' – saying through David much later, in the words already quoted, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day. So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labours as God did from his*>> (Hebrews 4:7-10); and forever reigning in heaven: <<*But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, 'he sat down at the right hand of God'*>> (Hebrews 10:12). This verse may be a transition from v.7, their leaders trusted in this Christ, and Jesus remains trustworthy, to v.9, since strange teachings are departures from the Jesus who is always the same.

The writer stated that Moses, who lived at the beginning of the old covenant, suffered abuse for the Christ (Hebrews 11:26). Therefore, when Jesus came into the world it was not a new revelation but a fresh revelation; the fulfilment of the original one that had been at the heart of God's plan for all time.

⁹ Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them. ¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat.

¹¹ For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.

Hebrews 13:9-11

All kinds of strange teachings. The Law of Moses gave detailed instructions to the Hebrews about what foods they could eat and how they should be prepared. This had been heavily modified under Judaism through the traditions of the elders to the extent that the original purpose of God had been neglected. Jesus challenged a group of Jewish leaders on this issue: <<*He said to them, 'Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?' (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, 'It is what comes out of a person that defiles'*>> (Mark 7:18-20).

Do not be carried away. The author warns of heresy. The central concern appears to be Jewish doctrines and traditions about food and dietary restrictions: <<*For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*>> (Romans 14:17), <<*Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall*>> (1 Corinthians 8:13), <<*Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ*>> (Colossians 2:16-17), <<*They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth*>> (1 Timothy 4:3), and: <<*but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right*>> (Hebrews 9:10).

The author argues against such doctrines by:

1. Juxtaposing them with grace, which truly nourishes the heart.
2. Noting that special foods are of no spiritual benefit: <<*'Food will not bring us close to God.'* *We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do*>> (1 Corinthians 8:8).
3. Observing that the Christian altar is better than the food of the tabernacle.

This may indicate that some Jewish notions, perhaps in a syncretistic mix, are being combated.

We have an altar. Although the writer is instructing those associated with the Jewish practises to leave behind the notion of the old city and temple, he is clearly showing them that they still have a way to bring their offerings before God, which was the key function of the OT sacrificial system.

Those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat refers primarily to the priests who served in the tabernacle and later the temple. However, by association, the writer insists that those who do not avail themselves of the new covenant privileges now available through Jesus are not allowed at this, the ultimate altar. God has established the new covenant, and no promises remain for those who refuse its blessings.

Although the old and new cities of Jerusalem are not specifically referenced, the writer has them in view here. Paul compared the two in terms of the slave Hagar and Sarah, the free wife of Abraham: <<*Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in*

Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother>> (Galatians 4:25-26). The choice is between slavery under a worldly order and true freedom in Christ.

Unlike most OT offerings, the tabernacle priests could not eat the sin offering from the Day of Atonement, since it was burned outside the camp: *<<The bull of the sin-offering and the goat of the sin-offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp; their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be consumed in fire>>* (Leviticus 16:27). However, all Christians partake of the Christian altar, i.e. Jesus' sacrifice. Some see a reference to the Lord's Supper here, while others view this as a broader reference to the saving results of the shedding of Jesus' blood.

¹² Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood.

Hebrews 13:12

Outside the city gate. Jesus went to the place of sacrificial animals (v.11), referring to Calvary, outside the gate of Jerusalem. Jesus' sufferings and death render his people holy, sanctified: *<<For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters>>* (Hebrews 2:11), *<<And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all>>* (Hebrews 10:10), and: *<<For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified>>* (Hebrews 10:14); since his own blood provides forgiveness and atonement: *<<But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!>>* (Hebrews 9:11-14). The point the author is making is that the followers of Jesus are to be happy to leave the city and its Temple, even though their fellow Jews will regard them as traitors and heap shame on them.

¹³ Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

Hebrews 13:13-14

Go to him outside the camp speaks metaphorically of leaving behind the love of this world and desire for its approval, and embracing the reproach of Christ, i.e. bear the abuse he endured, emulating Jesus' response to his shameful sufferings: *<<Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run*

with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart>> (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Moreover, such Christian endurance is founded on a realisation that this world is a mere temporary dwelling, no lasting city, en route to an eternal abode: <<*for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them*>> (Hebrews 11:14-16), and: <<*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel*>> (Hebrews 12:22-24).

¹⁵ Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Hebrews 13:15-16

Sacrifice of praise is a concept found repeatedly in the Psalms: <<*Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High*>> (Psalm 50:14), <<*Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honour me; to those who go the right way I will show the salvation of God*>> (Psalm 50:23), <<*And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy*>> (Psalm 107:22), and: <<*I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord*>> (Psalm 116:17); and in the prophets: <<*I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; I will guide them and restore comfort to Israel's mourners, creating praise on their lips. Peace, peace, to those far and near," says the Lord. "And I will heal them"*>> (Isaiah 57:18-19 NIV), and: <<*Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, 'Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips*>> (Hosea 14:2). Here it is not an offering of a sacrificial animal but the verbal praise of God's name: <<*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire*>> (Hebrews 12:28-29).

To do good and to share what you have are also called sacrifices that are pleasing to God. When Christians realise that such things actually bring joy to God, they are pleasing to him, they are all the more motivated to do them, and they too find joy in the process.

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing – for that would be harmful to you.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey, submit. These statements are stronger than the related comments about leaders in v.7, for here submission to leaders is directly commanded. Such obedience will benefit those who submit, since their souls will be cared for and there will be harmony and joy in their mutual responsibilities. The leaders are also reminded that they will give an account to God.

¹⁸ Pray for us; we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things. ¹⁹ I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you very soon.

Hebrews 13:18-19

The author, who has a clear conscience regarding his Christian service: <<*Therefore I do my best always to have a clear conscience towards God and all people*>> (Acts 24:16), <<*Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God – and all the more towards you*>> (2 Corinthians 1:12), and: <<*I am grateful to God – whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did – when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day*>> (2 Timothy 1:3), requests prayer, especially that he might be restored to those to whom he is writing. Clearly the author knew them previously, no doubt in a pastoral relationship.

So that I may be restored to you is very similar to the words of Paul: <<*One thing more – prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be restored to you*>> (Philemon 22), which may indicate that the author too was in prison as he wrote this letter.

IV.b Hebrews 13:20-21 - Benediction

Following a common practice in NT letters, drawing on OT examples, the author invokes God's blessing on his readers.

²⁰ Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:20-21

The God of peace is a reference also used by Paul and can be applied to any member of the Godhead since they are equally of the same essence. It may refer to God the Father: <<*I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and*>>

will set my sanctuary among them for evermore>> (Ezekiel 37:26), although it most likely refers to Jesus: <<The God of peace be with all of you. Amen>> (Romans 15:33), <<The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you>> (Romans 16:20), <<Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you>> (Philippians 4:9), and: <<May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ>> (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

From the dead. God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, raised Jesus following his crucifixion: *<<In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission>> (Hebrews 5:7), and: <<It is even more obvious when another priest arises, resembling Melchizedek, one who has become a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life>> (Hebrews 7:16).*

The writer has made several references to the sacrificial death of Jesus in the letter and to the fact that he is now in heaven, thus implying the resurrection, but this is the first explicit mention of the fact that Jesus was raised to life.

Jesus is seen as the shepherd of his people: *<<For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls>> (1 Peter 2:25), <<And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away>> (1 Peter 5:4).* This was something that had been prophesied before his birth: *<<And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel>> (Matthew 2:6),* which is a quote based on Micah 5:2, and a role he will take on throughout all eternity: *<<They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes>> (Revelation 7:16-17).* He provides his own detailed explanation of this role in John 10:1-18.

However, Jesus called Peter to be a shepherd: *<<When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs’>> (John 21:15).* This was not something new as God had always raised up leaders to shepherd his people: *<<For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel’>> (2 Samuel 5:2), and: <<For some time now, even while Saul was king, it was you who commanded the army of Israel. The Lord your God said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over my people Israel’>> (1 Chronicles 11:2).*

The link between calling believers to submit to their leaders (v.17) and the call for leaders to be shepherds indicates they are there to care for the sheep and not to rule over them as dictators. Church leaders serve the church. However,

church members have a responsibility to support their leaders. It is considered to be in the sheep's best interest to follow their anointed leaders.

For more on the use of blood in this context, i.e. Jesus' own sacrifice, refer to comments made on Hebrews 12:24.

The eternal covenant. The new covenant has been established forever, refer to comments made on Hebrews 7:22.

Make you complete. The purpose of this equipping is that God's will might be done: <<*For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised*>> (Hebrews 10:36), which was a key focus of Jesus' teaching: <<*Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*>> (Matthew 6:10).

Make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will is a call for believers to do what is pleasing to God, i.e. his will: <<*Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him*>> (1 John 3:21-22).

IV.c Hebrews 13:22-25 - Final greetings

The author concludes with a final appeal, some brief news and closing greetings.

²² I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

Hebrews 13:22

Word of exhortation. Elsewhere the author calls for Christians to exhort or encourage one another: <<*But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*>> (Hebrews 3:13), <<*And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching*>> (Hebrews 10:25). He has modelled such encouragement in the extended discourse/sermon of this letter.

For I have written to you briefly might bring a smile to the faces of some who then wonder what a longer word of exhortation would have looked like! However, when the letter is compared with some of the philosophical treatises written in the first two or three centuries of this era, it is indeed brief, and the writer has given one or two hints of places where he could have said much more.

²³ I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been set free; and if he comes in time, he will be with me when I see you.

Hebrews 13:23

It is generally accepted that this is the same Timothy who was Paul's co-worker: <<*Timothy, my co-worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my relatives*>> (Romans 16:21), and to whom Paul addressed two epistles. The

author and audience had a mutual friend in Timothy, and thus both were in contact with Pauline thought and theology.

Set free, presumably from prison. It is known that Timothy was with Paul during his Roman imprisonment: <<*I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you*>> (Philippians 2:19), and: <<*Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker*>> (Philemon 1); and Paul also requested his presence during his second and final time in Rome before his execution: <<*Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia*>> (2 Timothy 4:9-10).

There is no evidence elsewhere in scripture that says Timothy was also imprisoned. Given the persecution of the church that went on in Rome around the period this letter was probably written, it is quite feasible that Timothy could well have been a prisoner with Paul or with other believers.

²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy send you greetings.

Hebrews 13:24

Greet. NT letters often end with a series of greetings.

Your leaders. Perhaps driving home the submission to leaders earlier enjoined upon the church (v.7 and v.17).

The saints is a common NT expression for believers: <<*But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem'*>> (Acts 9:13), <<*To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Romans 1:7), <<*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus*>> (Ephesians 1:1), <<*I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother*>> (Philemon 7), <<*For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do*>> (Hebrews 6:10), and: <<*Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*>> (Jude 3).

Those from Italy possibly indicates that the author was writing from Italy, or possibly that he was elsewhere and was passing on the greetings of Italians living at his current location. Another option has led to the suggestion that the recipients were Jewish Italians, perhaps from the churches around Rome.

²⁵ Grace be with all of you.

Hebrews 13:25

This was a greeting offered at the end of several Pauline epistles: <<Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ>> (Ephesians 6:24), <<I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you>> (Colossians 4:18), <<Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith. Grace be with you>> (1 Timothy 6:21), <<The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you>> (2 Timothy 4:22), and: <<All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with all of you>> (Titus 3:15).

This verse, the comments made about Timothy in v.23, and much of the doctrine fuelled speculation that the letter was written by Paul or by one of his close associates in prison with him. However, the general consensus is that the letter must remain anonymous.