Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Christian Ethics, Pt. 3: Steadfastness, Separation, and Sacrifice
Scripture: Hebrews 13:7-14
Code: 1641

Now tonight we find ourselves studying again this wonderful thirteenth chapter. And we've entitled it the "Believers Behavior" or "Christian Ethics." What does God require out of Christians? And as we begin I'd like to introduce our study which is really part 3 of the study of Christian ethics which we began a couple of weeks ago, by just reflecting on a particular attitude that may have been in the mind of the writer as He penned this chapter. I've read several volumes that say that the 13 chapter may have been written by somebody else and just tacked on to the book of Hebrews, others say it was written at a later time, some say it was kind of an add on thing. My own particular view is that it is very, very important--it is intrinsic to the entire letter and it is anything but an add on, it is a climax. And there are several reason why I believe that and I've given you a couple of them in the past two weeks, let me give you another one tonight.

The Jews, as you well know, to whom this was written, lived their lives according to the law. Under the old covenant which they had all lived under, there were many, many rules. In fact, life was governed by rules. There were so many, many rules that it became very difficult not to break some of them just by virtue of the volume of them. They had made their way in life on the basis of obedience to standards; that was a way of life with them. The Old Testament itself is loaded with standards, it is loaded with ethical patterns, it is loaded with principles of conduct dealing with every kind of situation and every kind of relationship. So the Jews were very accustomed to living that kind of a life. They were very accustomed to living a life of legalism--a life that had to be moving along from principle to principle to principle, that's how it was conducted.

They had laws on diet, what they could eat. They even had laws on how they could cook it. They had laws on clothing, what they could wear. They had laws on the domestic issues of life, the home, the situations around the home. They had laws on economics, everything was pretty well cut and dried, even in terms of their economy, there was X amount of income that had to be given to the Lord at given times during each year and every third year, a part of what they owned. There were laws about relationships, whether they were relationships within the family or outside the family, laws about relationships with neighbors and with those in authority and so forth and so on. There were laws of morality, there were consequences even laid out for certain kind of moral kind of misconduct. There were laws of health, there were certain things that they could and could not do on the basis of health. And so they were very, very rigidly tied in to a system of rules, this is how they lived their lives, they knew nothing else.

They understood very little about any kind of libertinism or any kind of lawlessness, they were prescribed and circumscribed to legal patterns all their lives. And, in fact, from the very beginning this had been God's design, for God designed that they, by following these certain patterns, would be a very unique nation in the world. That anybody in the world would be able to tell a Jew by the diet, by the clothing, by the economy, by all of the features of his relationships to other people, by his attitude toward men and his attitude toward God. God wanted the Jews to stick out in society as a very unique people. He wanted them separate. He wanted them different. So that people might turn to them, see that they were different, see the positive features which they possessed and be drawn to the God that was their God who made it all possible.

And so really their uniqueness had to do with the witness. Their reaching the world was dependent upon the fact that the world looked at them and saw something in them that they desired. A kind of life that was different. God wanted a national witness, God needed a national witness and Israel was that witness. And so they lived by all these standards to show forth God. In fact, Isaiah 43:21 says, "This people have I formed for Myself, they will show forth My praise." In other words, I have set them aside so uniquely they will be a living witness of Me in the world.

In fact, in Exodus, I think it's chapter 19, the Bible calls the Jews a kingdom of priests. Now a priest's function was to take men to God, to take men to God. And that's exactly what Israel was to do. Men were to look at Israel see Israel's distinctiveness by virtue of the kind of conduct they maintained and come to them and say - What is it that causes you to live like this? And then Israel would usher them to God. And so they were in the true sense a kingdom of priests. And the hook, really, that was to catch men and draw them to God was their unique identity as they followed certain ethical patterns, certain principles of conduct.

In Deuteronomy chapter 4, just to kind of set us thinking in Biblical terms, it says in chapter 4, well, we'll start at verse 5; "Behold I have taught you statutes and ordinances, or laws, even as the Lord my God commanded me that you should do so in the land to which you go to possess it." Now listen, "Keep therefore, and do them." In other words, God has given you laws to be maintained, to be kept, to be obeyed. "For this is your wisdom and your," watch, "and your understanding in the sight of the nations." You see, this is the thing that sets you apart as wise and understanding in the eyes of the nation. "Who shall hear all these statutes and say surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great that hath God as near unto them?" You see, the world is supposed to look at you and say - Wow, those people have some standards; they have some principles that operate, that function. Is any people as near to God as they are? That's a dynamic witness. And then people who wanted to know God would come to them and be introduced to God. And so verse 9, he says, "Only take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life, teach them to thy sons and thy sons sons." Don't forget the rules, don't forget the principles, don't forget the

statutes and the laws and the ordinances, you teach them to your children because generation after generation they will stand in the midst of the world as a witness to the living God. So laws to Israel were very, very important. Their very identity legally and legalistically was their witness in the world. And their conduct was based on these principles and was for the purpose of drawing men's attention ultimately to God.

Now it's interesting too, that they became so absorbed in legalism that they went way, way further than God ever intended. God gave them enough laws to maintain things and they just got real law happy and went bananas to put it in the vernacular and just started inventing laws hand over fist. And they came up with a whole series of laws than they passed on orally. In other words, they would just speak them from generation to generation. And this series of oral laws was known as the Mishnah. And you're perhaps familiar with that if you know anything about Jewish history. The word shnh means to teach or to repeat orally. So, this was orally transmitted called the Mishnah. Finally, they felt they ought to write it all down and they wrote it all down and they called it the Talmud. And the Jewish Talmud is the codification of all the Jewish laws added to Scripture. And I mean it is massive. It is a monstrous thing. The word Talmud simply means teaching.

There are six parts to the Jewish Talmud, some of you may have seen one. But there are six parts to it. There is a section on agriculture, all the laws regarding what you can do and what you can't do in agriculture. There is a section on feasts. There is a section on women. There's a section on civil and ceremonial law, legal matters. There's a section on sacrifices. A section on unclean things and their purification. Now all of those sections are loaded with law after law after law for the conduct of the Jew.

During the time of Jesus Christ if you study the New Testament, you find that the Jews were meticulously concerned with obeying laws, weren't they? They got literally in knots when they saw Jesus' disciples not doing the things that were prescribed by the law. Or when Jesus did something that was not allowed in the law they had a terrible time handling that issue. Jesus said your only problem is you strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. What He meant was you are all worried about the minutiae of the law and you're blasting to pieces all of the principles that God really wanted to communicate through the law. You kept the letter of the law and lost the message of it.

But nevertheless by the time you come to the group of Jews that's being written to in the book of Hebrews, they are legalists, believe me. They are legalists in the sense that no other nation in the history of the world has been legalists. They live by the law, they function by the law, they know nothing about liberty only about being attached to a system. They were not free spirits. They were not do-your-own thinkers. They were not libertines. They were staunch, absolute legalists. The only life they knew.

Now watch this, here comes the new covenant. Right? Here comes the new covenant and the first guy that really expounded on the new covenant was Paul. And Paul came along and said - I want you to know that the new covenant is not law it's grace. And, of course, he blew the minds of the Jews with that. They knew no concept like that. They really should of known it because the Old Testament is full of God's grace. They were so locked into legalism that they thought this was some kind of horrifying heresy. And even when Jews became Christians they found it extremely difficult to let go of all of the rituals. And that's what fouled up the early church and Paul writes to that issue in Romans 14, because, you know, Gentiles would have Jewish Christians over for a little afternoon meal and they'd serve pork and the Jewish Christians couldn't handle that. And so it was becoming a real issue in the church because they still hadn't liberated from the concepts of the law.

But you know, as we study the New Testament we find that the new covenant releases them from all of the ceremonial features of the law, not the moral issues but the ceremonial ones. There is to be no more feasts, no more sacrifices, no more holy days, no more rituals, no more Temple, no more priests, no more offerings, that's all gone. All of those little minute legalistic standards are passed away. It's all grace. On the cross Jesus said - It's finished. He did it all. And all you have to do is believe. Well, you know for a Jew to handle that is a very, very difficult problem, very difficult. The perfect work by the perfect high priest through a perfect covenant who offered a perfect sacrifice brings about perfect promises and perfect salvation and what do I do? You just believe. See, and the Jew says - No. I can't handle that. That cross-grains everything I've ever known. Don't we have to do something? I mean, are there any standards at all? I mean, I feel so comfortable if I had a few. Is law no longer the way? Aren't there any principles at all? Can I just exercise a free kind of liberty and do whatever I want? Well, the answer to the question is no. Because you become a Christian doesn't mean all of a sudden there aren't any rules any more. God has standards.

Now I believe, people, that if you slide into chapter 13 with that in your mind you have a good grip on what He's hitting at. He needs to close this book with some principles or He's going to leave some Jews really strung out trying to figure out what in the world their obligation to God really is, because they know that God hasn't changed and God expects certain things out of His children be they old covenant or new covenant. And so as you come to chapter 13 the Holy Spirit says a resounding "Yes" to their questions and says "Yes" there are standards. They do not save you they do not get you to God, they don't even make God like you better, He likes you totally. He loves you infinitely. But there are some standards that are very, very important.

And you can imagine a Jew saying - Well, we're not the national witness anymore. We've been replaced by the church, guys, the pressures off, live it up. I mean, we don't need to stand out in the world anymore, we don't need to obey the statutes and commandments that the nations might look at us and say - Look at that, they must be belonging to a God who is above all gods. My, we ought to turn to that God. No, we don't have to do that anymore, guys, it's all over. Israel is temporarily set aside, the church is it; we can just play it cool. The Holy Spirit says - No. You're a part of the church,

the church is made up of Jew and Gentile; the standards aren't lessened at all. The standards are there, God expects you to behave in such a fashion that men still see your good works and do what? Glorify your Father which is in heaven. That hasn't changed at all. So while Israel is no longer a witness nation, the whole body of the church, Jew and Gentile is God's witness. And so there are principles.

And so as you come to chapter 13 that's truly what He just delineates. He just goes right on down the chapter giving some very basic principles for Christian living. So we might have a testimony in the world.

Now we see three things in the chapter and we never can get to the last two, we will next week. We see ethics, the principles, example, the pattern we are to follow; energy, the power that makes it possible. We have the principles, we have an exemplary life we are to follow, and we have the energy to make them operate.

Now we've been talking about the principles, the ethics. And we see that in the first 19 verses the ethics of the Christian life are given. And really what happens here is that everything is kind of reduced to simple general concepts. And, first of all, let me just say this. There are three categories of Christian ethics. Number one in relation to others, we've covered that, right? And in relation to others He calls for two things, sustained love and sympathy--sustained love and sympathy. Love will just blanket the whole issue, won't it? And care for each other. Then second category beginning in verse 4 was in relation to ourselves. There are some very important standards in relation to ourselves. Number one was sexual purity, verse 4, "Marriage is honorable, let the bed be undefiled, fornicators, adulterers God will judge." I read where Paul said that when you sin with sex you sin against your own body. The second in relation to ourselves is satisfaction. Remember that from last Sunday night? Verses 5 and 6, "Lear to be without covetousness, learn to be content with such things as you have and know that the Lord's going to help and take care of your needs." So in relation to ourselves there has to be sexual purity and satisfaction.

Thirdly, and we'll pick it up at this point tonight, there is to be steadfastness. In relation to ourselves God desires that we be steadfast. Notice verse 9 and we'll read it, "Be not carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with foods which have not profited them that have been occupied therein." Now here He is saying to them - Don't get hung up on legalism. Yes, there are moral standards but they are not the external ceremonial deals like what you eat. Look what He says, "Let your heart be established with," what? "Grace," not law. Let your life be rooted and founded on grace not on external law. Superficial things like ceremonial laws and certain kinds of food and certain kinds of clothes and certain kinds of holy days and certain this and certain that. "Which have not profited them which have been occupied with them." He says - Look, in effect, at all those who are still hung up in Judaism, they're still carrying out all the observances and they're lost. They're lost.

Now back up a moment to verse 7. "Remember them which have the rule over you who have spoken unto you the Word of God whose faith follow considering the end of their manner of life." He says this - Look at those who came before you and look how they stayed true. Then He says in verse 8, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever." Look at Him, did He change? Did the ones who were your spiritual fathers change, verse 7? No. Did the one who is your spiritual creator change, verse 8? No. Then verse 9, don't you change either, "be not carried away with various and strange doctrines." The word "carried away" simply means removed, stay where you are.

One of Satan's most subtle approaches to the Christian is to move him away from sound doctrine, to get him wrapped up in some kind of doctrine that happens to be blown about in the breeze by any given point. Christ hasn't changed. Your forefathers haven't changed. Don't you change. One of the saddest things in all the world is somebody who makes a profession of Christ, who believes in Christ maybe is truly saved and all of a sudden gets sucked off into some false doctrine and is rendered ineffective, loses joy, loses reward, loses his effectiveness. This is a problem in Galatians, you know, in the first chapter and the 6th verse, "I marvel that you are so soon removed," there is the same concept, "You, Galatians, you started so well but you're removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." You started out in grace and somebody removed you. He said - It's not really another gospel at all; there's some that trouble you and pervert the gospel of Christ.

And then somebody always says - Ah, but they're such good people. Oh, but he's such a nice fellow. Oh, the evidence is such wisdom and he's so kind and he knows the Bible. And so Paul says, "But we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you then that which was preached unto you let him be accursed." I don't care what he's like, if it's something that isn't true, it's a perversion of the truth let him be accursed. And just to make sure nobody missed it he repeated it again in verse 9. What happened to the Galatians was sad. They started out in grace and got messed up with law. They began in the Spirit and tried to continue in the flesh. He says - What happened to you that you started out in grace and got dragged into legalism? You know what happened? They got agitated by false teachers. The idea of perverted there is to be agitated, they got all stirred up, messed up in their minds by false teachers.

Now this is Satan's ploy. Satan has destroyed many a Christian's testimony, robbed many a Christian of all of his joy and all of his effectiveness by getting him derailed on false doctrine. A good illustration of that is about two miles down the road, this way. These people are forever and ever coming around here announcing to us that they have found the truth. And many of them are Christian people. I had a mother come to me one time, just with tears in her eyes saying her husband and her son had made commitments to Christ and all their life in the church, and they got sucked up into this thing and they were into that thing up to their ears and they had lost all contact with the truth of God's message and there was a sad and tragic thing and that's exactly what Satan would like to do.

Just to give you a little bit of an indication of how Satan operates in this way, let me just share some passages in the Scripture with you and let the Holy Spirit do the teaching for a minute. In Acts chapter 20 verse 29, don't try to follow me, just if you want to write them down, you can look them up later, but Acts 20:29, Paul is getting ready to leave Ephesus and he spent three years there and I mean three diligent years, he spent night and day praying for those people, teaching them all day long for three years, I just can't imagine anybody doing that hour after hour after hour, day after day after day for 3 years. Not just on Sunday but constantly. And he loved them and he gave them all that he had and all that he could possibly give. And now he was leaving and he had one great fear and this was it: "I know this," I don't doubt it, I know it, "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock." I know this is going to happen. Grievous wolves, who are they? False teachers. "Also of your own selves shall men arise," people you trust right out of your own midst, "speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." And he says - You just watch, "and you remember for the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears." And he says, "Now, brethren, I commend you to God, to the word of His grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." All I can do is say - Here's the word, get into it. That's your only protection. Three years I warned you night and day with tears, they're going to come and they will ... and you know the sad, sad, thing is that the church of Ephesus went out of existence eventually because of that. Satan works that way.

At the end of the book of Romans, chapter 16 verse 17 Paul says in closing, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them." Avoid them, "For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but their own body." They're in it for the money. And by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the innocent. Satan infiltrates the church forever and always with false teachers.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 13, the Spirit of God continues to speak and He says this: "For such are false apostles deceitful workers," watch this one, "transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." People say - Well, he talks about Christ and he seems to be really a believer in Jesus. Of course. If he came along and told you he was a believer in Buddha you wouldn't listen to him. And he says - Don't be shocked, don't marvel for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light, therefore it's no great thing, no big thing if "his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works." Of course Satan is going to play the role.

In Colossians chapter 2 verse 4, "And this I say lest any man should beguile you with enticing words," verse 8, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men and the rudiments of the world and not after Christ." Don't listen to philosophies that draw you away.

John said - You better try the spirits and see whether they be of God, 1 John 4:1.

In Jude, that little epistle verse 3, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith." You're going to have to fight to hang on. Why? "For there are certain men crept in unawares who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." Always, always, always false teachers.

And the apostle Paul said of the Galatians in chapter 5 verse 1, - You better stand fast in the liberty for Christ has made you free and don't get hung up again on legalism. There are standards, there are moral standards not ceremonial ones.

Now this is a very serious problem--so serious a problem that in Ephesians chapter 4 and I would like you to look at that for a minute. The apostle Paul brings this out as one of the salient features of a church that teaches the word of God. God knows that the greatest battle that we fight in the church is the purity of the church doctrinally because from that springs every other issue. If we do not have pure doctrine we run into terrible problems. And so He knows then that if we need pure doctrine this is what we have to direct our attention to. So he gives to the church in verse 11 "apostles, prophets, evangelists, teaching pastors, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body to bring about unity." Then verse 14; "Why," why all this? "That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the slight of men." "Slight," the word in the Greek, means the cast of the dice and loaded at that. Cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive. He says - You build the church men, you build the church up into the stature of the fullness of Christ because if you don't they're going to get tossed around by false doctrine. And you know something, you can just watch it happen.

Look at the church today under the name of Jesus Christ and see how the church tends to follow every new wave of whatever comes along. Satan will always endeavor to work in the area of false doctrine. And the church can be like little kids. You know, your little kids, if yours are like ours, they crawl along the floor and they don't have any idea of what goes in the mouth, what's supposed to go in the mouth and what isn't. They stick it all in there. Why? They have no ability to discern. They don't even know what's good for them. You told a kid, by the time he was 3 he could arrange his own diet, he'd be dead by the time he was 5. He'd be sweetened to death. Children have no ability to discern what is good and that's exactly the problem in the church, the church, today, because of a lack of solid doctrinal teaching is populated massively by babes who swallow everybody's line because they do not have the maturity to be discerning.

And one of the saddest things I see at this point is very often in the ministry a man will tell his people what's good and what's bad without ever giving them the principles so that they have to follow him around like a wet nurse. We need to not only teach people what to avoid but we need to teach them

the principles that will allow them to make their own mind up about it. And so it's very important that we be taught doctrine. This is where Satan moves in.

Let me take it a step further and review a passage that you're familiar with 1 John 2, "You cannot be steadfast until you're nourished up in doctrine." This is what he is saying. Now notice in 1 John 2:12; "I write unto you little children," and there the word is teknea, and he's not talking about babes in Christ he's talking about children in the general sense, just all of you who are the offspring of God, every believer whether you happen to be a babe in Christ or very mature, you're all God's children in the teknea sense. He says, I write unto all you teknea because your sins are forgiven for His name sake.

Now he splits the children of God into three categories: "I write unto you fathers because you have known Him that is from the beginning." You know, you can tell a spiritual father--he's got the depth of knowledge, he knows God, he understands something of the eternity and the character of God. "I write unto you young men because you have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you little children because you know" how to say da-da, that's all. Now here you have 3 classifications of spiritual growth, babes, young men and fathers.

Let's begin with the children. Now the word children here, "I write unto you little children," is not teknia, it's paidia, little children to distinguish them from the general term, teknia referring to all Christians, he isolates them down as specific little ones. And the only thing a little one really knows is the father, it's attachment, it's delight, it's dependence, it's simple trust, it's Romans 8:15, "Abba, Father." That's a child. And there are some Christians who don't really know anymore than that.

But young men know more than that. Verse 13, "You have overcome the wicked one." Terrific, verse 14, he says, "I write unto young men," in the middle, "because you are strong and the word abides in you and you have overcome the wicked one." You know, there's only one way to overcome the wicked one and that's to have what? The word abide in you. And how does the wicked one operate? He appears as an angel of what? Light. I told you before, I repeat it: Satan operates in the area of false doctrine--ninety-nine out of 100 times that's where he is busy. Satan, I don't think, is busy at the local bar. I don't think Satan is functioning in all kinds of things like that. I think the flesh, the lust of the flesh and all of that takes care of itself. Satan operates in the area of religion. He is an angel of light. He masks himself in religion. He is a false prophet. And so you see, it is not until you grow up in the word to the stature of a young man, that you literally overcome him.

You know who's vulnerable to false doctrine? Babes, right? He says, young men, the word abides in you and you overcome him. In other words, if I have grown to the level of a young man spiritually, false doctrine is not my problem. The Bible says when you are saved you overcome the world. When you get to be a young man you overcome the devil. There's one thing you never overcome, what's that? The flesh. We wait for the glorification of our bodies to overcome the flesh. But when you go to

a certain point in your maturing in the word of God false doctrine is no longer a problem. But as long as you are a baby it is.

Now with that in mind, reading again from our passage in Hebrews let's see what he is saying, "Be not carried away with various and strange doctrines for is good thing that the heart be established with grace not with foods which have not profited them which have been occupied with them." What's he been saying? Don't be babies. Don't get dragged off into false doctrine. Now if you're going to avoid that what do you have to do? Be nourished up in what? Sound doctrine. And again you come back to the same principle that we have repeated so many times, that the word of God is the key.

Now you'll notice that He says here, you know, if the Christian life doesn't revolve around ceremonial, not meats or foods, and the Jews were so used to food laws and food rituals that it was a tough thing for them to make that kind of a break. There's an interesting verse, it's 1 Corinthians 8:8, this is what it says: "But food will not commend us to God." Pretty simple, God doesn't care what you eat. Food will not commend us to God, "We are neither the worse if we do not eat nor the better if we do eat." In other words, God does not care about your religious diet. That's exactly what he says in verse 9. Let your heart be established with grace. Not with ceremony.

In 1 Timothy, in fact, now this is an interesting verse. There's a lot of ramifications, let me just read it briefly. First Timothy 4:3, some false prophets are going to come along forbidding to marry. You watch anybody that propagates celibacy. Usually, eventually, their movement will go out of existence but apart from that, that is anti-scriptural, and commanding to abstain from foods. Some people will come along and tell you that you shouldn't eat that, you shouldn't eat this, you shouldn't eat so and so and the Bible simply says, "God has created all these things to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving. For it's sanctified by the word of God and prayer." That's why you pray before you eat. So we're not talking about dietary laws.

You remember Peter and his vision in Acts 10? He saw all the animals in the sheet and he heard the word, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat. And don't call anything unclean that God has set aside." In Romans 14, Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not food, meat and drink, but righteousness and joy in the Holy Spirit. So don't listen to the Judaizers, don't listen to the Gnostics, don't listen to the Catholics, don't listen to the Seventh Day Adventists who promote the error that certain food pleases God and certain don't. That's not so. Christianity has rendered all external observance invalid. And God is concerned about the grace in your heart. So then you owe to yourself, sexual purity, so very basic, so very important. And you owe satisfaction that you be content with what you have and you owe to yourself this most important feature - steadfastness.

And this means you must pursue the study of Scripture diligently. In 1 Corinthians 15, I love this, and I'll just read it to you, remember this verse? "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast,

unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Two words, steadfast, unmovable. I think everybody likes somebody with convictions but in the Christian life it's absolutely essential to the life of a believer.

In Colossians 1:23 Paul says, "If you continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard." Don't let anybody drag you off into a false system. No matter what the pressure is like.

You know, sometimes the pressure can be pretty great. First Thessalonians 3:3, this is good. Timothy was under pressure: "That no man should be moved by these afflictions." You may have to suffer, don't let that move you. And Paul was really talking to a guy who was being smashed around by errorists, Timothy. Peter wrote to the Jews that were under pressure of false teachers and he said you "grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ." And then he says at the end of his little epistle, most important words, he says, "Seeing that you know these things beware lest you also be led away with the error of the wicked fall from your own," not salvation but what? "steadfastness." You're really no use to God unless you're solid doctrinally. You owe that to yourself and to God. And to be moved away is tragic.

All right, so then we see the believer's behavior in relation to others, sustained love and sympathy. In relation to himself, sexual purity, satisfaction, and steadfastness. Lastly, the believer's ethics in relation to God. What does God want? What are the things which I am to do toward God?

In relation to Him? One, separation. And that we see in verses 10 to 14. And may I hasten to say this. This is without question, one of the toughest passages, a little brief thing here, and yet it is one of the toughest passages in all the book of Hebrews. The interpretations are multitudinous, to put it mildly. I am not standing here as a dogmatic authority, I'll give you a couple of views and tell you what I think and if you want to pursue it you can pursue it yourself. Beginning in verse 10, let me just read so you'll get kind of a feel for the text. Read the two first verses, "We have an altar of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle for the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned outside the camp." Told you. Now what are we talking about here? This is like the man said trying to unscrew the inscrutable.

Now we have an altar, I got that much, did you get that? Okay, we have an altar. What altar do we have? Well, some say this refers to the physical altar and that's why in some churches you have an altar. Some people say the church must have an altar because it says, "We have an altar." But that can't be the altar he's talking about "of which they have no right to eat." What kind of eating is done on that altar? Well, some have even said it's the communion table. Well, how could you have a communion table that you couldn't eat? That doesn't make sense. In verse 11 he says - it talks about "the bodies of beasts whose blood is brought there." That doesn't sound, to me, like the church. No, in fact the evidence here is on not eating, not eating.

Secondly, some people say it refers to a heavenly altar. Revelation 6 talks about a heavenly altar. And He's saying we have an altar in heaven. Well, that doesn't make any sense either. "Of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle." What has that have to do with the altar in heaven? There's no eating going on there anyways. And what is this about the bodies of beasts? What beasts were ever burned on the altar in heaven? Others say - No, it refers to Christ. How could it refer to Christ? We have an altar of which they have no right to eat. Jesus said in John 6, you can't even know God unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood.

Now I'll tell you what I think it is. And I think the weight of all the evidence is on this particular viewpoint. But I think He's talking about the idea of separation here. A Christian's obligation to God is to be separated from the world unto God, right? I think that's what He's getting at.

Now watch this. We have an altar, He's not talking about Christians necessarily; He's talking about Jews. I think that's the key, once you establish that the thing flows. We, Jews, have an altar. Remember that word altar we have--and there the altar includes the sacrifice and the ritual, we have an altar, people. You remember that thing? "Of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle." Who are the men who serve the tabernacle? The priests. Was there a certain sacrifice on a certain altar they couldn't eat? Yes there was: it was the sin offering. On the Day of Atonement when the sin offering was made they could not eat it. All the other times when they made offerings, the priests ate what was left. The sin offering, once it was made and the blood was sprinkled on the holy of holies on the mercy seat, the animals were taken outside the camp and burned. That's verse 11. For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned where? Outside the camp. He explains right there, I think, which altar it is. He says we have a particular altar sacrifice. We have a particular ritual, where you cannot partake. In fact, the remains of the sacrifice are taken outside the camp and burned.

This, you know what it is? It's an analogy. All He's doing is giving them an analogy to teach them a principle. Here's the principle. You people need to be separated from the system. You know, like those sin offerings that nobody could touch but they had to be taken outside the camp? You need to be so separated from the camp of the world. That's essentially what He's getting at. He's simply drawing a little analogy--you can't push it very far. He's saying like the animals in the sin offering were taken outside, the believer needs to be removed from sinful man. Removed from the system, removed from the world and come apart.

Now he takes it a step further in verse 12 by identifying Jesus Christ. And incidentally, the people didn't want any part of a sin offering anyway. They didn't want to partake of that. Verse 12 says, "Wherefore, Jesus also that He might sanctify the people with His own blood suffered outside the gate." Jesus was separate from the system, wasn't He? In the Old Testament the Jews took those bodies of those sin offerings, both the priests and the peoples' offering, and they took them outside

the camp. They didn't want a thing to do with those sin offerings. They separated them from themselves. Jesus did the same thing. The system didn't want Jesus either, they threw Him out. He suffered outside the gate. And He sanctified the people, with His own blood.

Now as the carcasses then were burned outside the camp of Israel so Jesus was killed outside the city of Jerusalem. He was killed outside the wall of Jerusalem and perfectly fulfilled the picture of the Old Testament. You know those old sin offerings were the pictures of Christ, weren't they? So when He came He suffered outside as the offering had been taken outside. Now I don't want to belabor the point anymore than that. Both were rejected, the sin offering, rejected. They didn't want to eat it, put it out. Jesus - rejected, put it out. And they wanted no part of either.

And so He brings the point down to verse 13, "Let us go therefore unto Him outside the camp bearing His reproach, for we have no continuing city but we seek one that comes." Let's us separate from the system as well. We Jews have an altar then, and in it there's a sacrifice which nobody can eat. The bodies are rejected, taken out of the city and burned. Jesus, the true sin offering, also was rejected by the system though for a different reason. He's not pushing the analogy; he's simply saying this is like Jesus who was also suffering outside the city.

And of course, there are many differences, you can't push it as I said because the animal was killed already before it was taken out, Christ died outside. And Jesus was so willing to go, He was willing that He might sanctify the people with His own blood. He was despised, He was rejected, He was hated, He was unwanted, betrayed, arrested, mocked, beaten, killed like a common criminal and He accepted every bit of it to shed His blood on the behalf of men. The Bible says right here in the book of Hebrews without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. Jesus knew that and He shed His blood for the forgiveness of sin. The Old Testament sacrifice was a shame to the people and they put it out. Jesus was ashamed and they put Him out although they didn't know that He was the true sin offering. They had no thought for that. And the practical point is this, people, you and I must be willing to go out from the system and to bear the reproach and the shame that both the sin offering and Christ Himself bore to be rejected by men. Moses did it, chapter 11 verse 26; "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." Moses considered the stigma that rests on God's anointed greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt. And so the writer of Hebrews is saying to us in 13:13 that you ought to consider the stigma, the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of the system--move out. That's all He's saying. So I see a very clean break between verses 9 and 10. He simply says we have a sacrifice in which the feature is separation. Christ was separated from men, you be separated as well.

Now Paul defines this concept in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 in some detail, let me read you these words: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers for what fellowship have righteousness with unrighteousness and what communion hath light with darkness and what concord has Christ with Satan, what part hath he that believes with an unbeliever. What agreement has the temple of God

with idols?" Paul says you have nothing to do with the system. You're different.

Another thing that our author may be remembering here and because I'm not into this context as a Jewish individual living in that day, I can't be sure, but I have a hint in my mind that in verse 13 he's got something else in his head and seems to me like he's jamming all kinds of thoughts together here and leaving me a little bit confused. But that's often my problem. Anyway, in verse 13 he may have this in mind. You remember that at one point in the time of Israel's wanderings, God was rejected by Israel. And God, remember, moved outside the camp and manifested His presence outside the camp. And after the incident of the golden calf Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp of Israel. And you remember it was called the tent of the testimony. And so it was that everybody who wanted to approach God had to go outside the camp of Israel and approach Him there. Why? Israel in the main had rejected Him. And God set Himself apart and said if you come to Me you come apart from the system.

You know something, beloved, I believe that's exactly what God is saying today, if you're going to come to Me you're going to have to come out from the system. You're going to have to come apart from them and touch not the unclean thing. And separate yourself unto Me. Whether the analogy of the sacrifice in the Old Testament outside the gate, the analogy of Christ suffering outside the gate, or whether the idea of the tent of the testimony outside the gate the message is the same, separation. People say to me, "MacArthur, do you believe in biblical separation?" Of course, and biblical separation is this: you have nothing to do with the system. Now you need to qualify that somewhat. But let me give you a simple statement. "Love not the world," 1 John 2:15, "neither the things that are in the world." Don't love the system.

Now what was the system for them? What was it? Judaism. What is He saying then to the Jewish reader here? Separate yourself from Judaism. Separate yourself from the system of Judaism. You want to know something? The moment that Jesus Christ died on the cross, Judaism ceased to exist as a way to God. And you know what it became? It became worldliness. It just fell into the category with everything else. It became as pagan as the aberrational religions of New Guinea, Judaism. It ceased to exist in the eyes of God. And so it was worldliness. And He's saying get out of the system of law, legalism, and ceremonialism, come outside the camp to Christ who is out there.

Oh sure you'll have to suffer. Jesus said, "In the world you'll have tribulation, be of good cheer, I've overcome the world." Later on, earlier in chapter 15, He said - Don't be surprised if they kill you, they did it to Me. Are you willing to bear My reproach? You say, "Well, does this mean that we put on blinders and we go live in a monastery, you know, and we become sort of obnoxious? And does this mean we stop buying at a market that sells liquor? And we don't go to McDonald's if the boy who takes the order is not a Christian? Does this mean we don't involve anything where people aren't saved?" Of course not. Jesus said, Father, in John 17:50, and I don't pray that You take them out of the world, just keep them from the guy who runs the system.

You know, I can go to a conference somewhere, this has happened a lot of times, I'll go to stay in a hotel and I can feel perfectly at ease at the hotel. I can find my nice room in the hotel. And I can spend my time studying. Down below in the saloon, they may have a girlie show. The difference between being in the world and not being of the world is staying in the hotel and going to the girlie show. Now if I want to get from here to Philadelphia I don't run around trying to find a Christian pilot. I just get on the airplane. That doesn't mean that I participate in everything that goes on. I don't have to get belted on the free champagne.

I remember one time in Portland when we had an engine stall problem; we got down on the ground. I'm always happy when they land and say they've got trouble. I just don't want to hear it when we're in the air. So they say, "We'll be a few hours. And there was a convention of Lions on the plane and the guy next to me was a kind of a happy guy when he got on. And after a little while the stewardess came in and said we're going to be grounded for an indeterminate time, we do not know how long it will be, none of the passengers are going to be able to leave the plane because it could be fixed momentarily, so in the meantime we'll be serving free drinks. Four hours went by. The guy next to me was so bombed that he could hardly hold his head up. And we got into a conversation and it was kind of a tragic thing. Well, you know it was another illustration to me, I was in that airplane and that airplane in a real sense is a part of the world and yet I was absolutely not involved at all in the system. I had nothing to do with it. In fact, finally, the guy said to me, he said, "You've been sitting here and you haven't touched a drop," you know, he said, "What do you do?" And I said, "Well, I'm a preacher." I'll never forget his reaction, he jumped right up and he said "Oh, God," he said. And he started to yell all over the whole plane, "You'll never believe what we have here." So I just kind of, you know...about ten guys converged on my seat for about the last 20 minutes and just pumped me questions.

An interesting sequel to the thing is before we got to Los Angeles, this guy had unbarred a story of broken heartedness that would just tear your heart but...but the thing was, you know, I could be there and not have anything to do with the system. It's one thing, people, to be here, it's something else to love what the world loves.

I'll tell you something else, it's not just what you do it's an attitude. You're just as much a part of the system if you don't do it but wish you could as if you did it. You know, some Christians, as I've said before, don't do evil things, they just wish they could. That's being in love with the system. And as a Christian, God says we're to be separate, get out of the system; come apart unto God. It's an attitude. Jesus said, "If any man comes after Me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." What does that mean? That means bear the reproach of Christ. Go where Jesus is, outside the system. And when you meet the system it's for the sake of confrontation, not communion. Big difference. And the only people who really identify with Jesus Christ are the ones who are willing to cut the cost, to pay the cost and move out.

What does it say in 2 Timothy 3:12? "They that live godly in this world shall suffer persecution." They that live godly. A lot of Christians don't live godly, they don't get persecuted. They never come apart from the system. The apostle Paul knew what it was to come apart from the system; he didn't have anything to do with it. And yet he kept leading people to Jesus, he went to the sinner but he never joined in his sin.

Philippians chapter 2 verse 17, he says, "If I be offered on the sacrifice and service of your faith I joy and rejoice." Chapter 3 verse 10, "I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings." He says I'm willing to come all the way out there and be a sacrifice and know the sufferings of Christ in my own life just to be separate from the system because if I live that kind of life you're going to see me and you're going to come to Christ. So very important.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 10, "We are fools for Christ's sake." And here just dripping with sarcasm, Paul says, "We are fools for Christ's sake but you are wise in Christ, we are weak but you are strong, you are honorable, we are despised." You know what happens to a Christian who just plays it cool? Kidding himself, robbing himself of joy and fruit. Verse 11, "Even unto this present hour," he says, "we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling place," don't even know where we're going to sleep, "and we work with our hands and we are reviled but we bless and we are persecuted but we endure it, we are defamed and we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." Paul didn't get along too well with the system.

Now these Jews in Hebrews would know a little bit about that reproach, wouldn't they? The writer's saying to them come out from among them, be separate, move to God. Sure it will cost, sure they'll rap you for it, sure they'll think something's gone wrong in your head, you'll be ostracized, you'll be condemned--small price for the glory that awaits you. And I say if a man is not willing to be separated from the world unto God, Jesus said he's not worthy to be His disciple. All these guys came along and Jesus said -Come on, be My disciple - and one guy said - Ah, I have to go bury my father. His father wasn't even dead. What he meant was I've got to go get the inheritance and then I'll be around. And so it went with the would-be disciples. If you're not willing to leave father and mother, everything in the world, come out, you're not worthy to be His disciple.

Listen, by the way, let me footnote it by saying this. Hanging on to the system is kind of dumb anyway because it's going to go up in smoke. And it's foolish. All that is in the world passes away, 1 John 2, passes away. There's not going to be anything left. You don't want anything to do with the system because it says in 1I John 5:19 the whole system lies in the lap of the wicked one. You want anything to do with that? You don't want anything to do with the system because of what Peter says, "You have an incorruptible inheritance, undefiled that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." What do you want with the trinkets of the world? There's nothing that this world has to offer you that's even

worth grasping.

One other verse that comes in mind that's in 1 Corinthians 11, I think it is 32, "When we are judged we are chastened to the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world." You don't want the world because it's going to be damned. You want to come apart unto Christ. Paul gives us principle after principle in this regard so does the Holy Spirit through other writers even as here.

Let's look at a second thing. Our relation to God is not only this idea of separation but the idea of sacrifice. And we talked about this this morning--it's beautiful how the Holy Spirit ties these two together. Verse 15, sacrifice. You know how important this was to a Jew? A Jew comes in in the New covenant, he wants to know there is some rules still. And you know what he wanted to know? Are there any sacrifices left? Is anything to be sacrificed? Is that whole deal--is that concept gone? And he gets this wonderful information.

There are two sacrifices God wants, the first one is word the second one is deed. The word is in 15; "By Him," who's that? Jesus Christ, "Therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name." You know what kind of sacrifice God wants? He doesn't want animals, doesn't want barley, He wants the praise of our lips. You notice the phrase "by Him?" There's only one way to God, right? Jesus Christ. Can you offer an acceptable sacrifice to God apart from Christ? Only by Him, that's the only way, by Him. We cannot enter His presence any other way. And so the believer priest comes into God's presence and he says here's a sacrifice and God says I want the sacrifice of the praise of your lips.

What comes out of your lips toward God? You ever get into such a stress that you start getting angry with God? He doesn't like that. Let me give you an idea of what to say to God when you want to praise Him. "I will extol Thee my God, O King, I will bless Thy name forever and ever." "Everyday will I bless Thee and I'll praise Thy name forever and ever." "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised and His greatness is unsearchable." "One generation shall praise thy works to another and declare thy mighty acts." "I will speak of the glorious honor of Thy majesty and Thy wondrous works." "And men shall speak of the might of Thy awe inspiring acts and I will declare Thy greatness." "The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all his works." "All thy works shall praise Thee, O Lord." "They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom and talk of Thy power." On and on it goes, Psalm 146, "Praise Ye the Lord," 147, "Praise Ye the Lord," 148, "Praise Ye the Lord," 149, "Praise Ye the Lord," 150, "Praise Ye the Lord." That is pleasing to God. When the cry of your lips is praise to God that's the sacrifice God desires.

Notice the key word to it. Are you ready for this? "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God," what's the next word? "continually." Continually. You say, "But you don't understand my troubles." No, you don't understand your God. First Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God Christ Jesus concerning you." Give thanks in everything. Praising God in all things pleases Him.

Second thing He's pleased with, verse 16, not only word but you better back it up with deed. "But to do good and share, forget not for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Now while you're shooting all the verbal stuff at God be sure you're doing something about it. God says another sacrifice that I really accept is good and sharing. The lip begins and added to that is the life.

For example, James 1:27, a verse that never ceases to simplify the whole concept of religion, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this," can you believe that? Can you believe that any one verse could contain a definition of religion? Are you ready for this? "To visit orphans and widows, and keep yourself unspotted from the system." You want to know what religion is? There it is. You want to live a godly life? Go find some orphans and widows--visit them and keep yourself unspotted from the system. Do good to one another, share, minister to the needs of others. This is what God is pleased with. This is your spiritual sacrifice and we talked about this morning offer to God. Remember how we talked about that? Everything you do in your Christian life is a sacrifice to God. What are you giving Him? Are you giving Him the halt and the maimed and the crippled and the lame? Or you give Him your best?

Boy, Israel was a disaster at this area. In Isaiah 58 I want to just share a couple of concepts. In Isaiah 58 and then I'll look at maybe Zechariah 7 too, but Isaiah 58 verse 2, sounds so good, are you ready? "Cry aloud yet they seek me daily and delight to know My ways as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinances of thy God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice, they take delight in approaching God." All of this is so good, all--they seek me, they love my righteousness, just terrific. Verse 6, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen to loose the bands of wickedness? To undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry and thou shalt bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou see the naked should cover him and thou should hide not thyself from thy own flesh?" He says hey, your religion looks good on the surface but that's not what I'm asking for. Didn't I tell you to clothe the people who are naked and give food to the hungry? That's what I'm after. That's what God wants.

"My little children," said John, "love not in word only but," what? "deed and truth." God has some principles, beloved, they're simple and they're binding. God says I want you to be separated and I want you to offer spiritual sacrifice pleasing to Me. Thanksgiving with your mouth, deeds of goodness and sharing with your life. Let's have a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You that You have reduced the Christian life to the common and simple concepts that are shared with us in this chapter. We thank You, Lord, that the Jews needed to feel that the absence of the old Levitical system didn't mean that there weren't any more sacrifices, in fact there are some. Not just superficial things like animals but those down deep things like praising You and doing good toward others. Father, that we might worship You in spirit and truth. Lord, help us to offer You sacrifices that are pleasing in Your sight. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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