

FAITH IN ACTION

Hebrews 13:1-25

As a boy, I became familiar with a little white can with black and red print: 3-in-1 Oil—for squeaky doors, rusty bolts, or stuck gears.

In recent years I concentrate on the electronic marvel of computers. But to use a computer requires “software” to make it run. \$300-600 per package

Years ago someone came up with “8-in-1” Software--One Inexpensive package--Included basic tasks people buy a computer to handle for one low price => \$19

Now at least you can buy “Microsoft Office” and get six (?) for the price of one!

Swindoll preached 8 messages from chapter 13 of Hebrews—the \$300-each variety. We’re going to try to preach 7 in one morning—“*fools rush in where angels fear to tread*”

That’s the way the author wrote the book.

Seven concluding exhortations tacked on to the end, which sum up what he hopes will be the outgrowth of what he has been trying to tell us throughout the book.

He has been urging afflicted Hebrew Christians, suffering for their faith, not to throw in the towel.

He has urged us . . .

to draw near to God (rather than run away and escape),

to hang on to their hope (rather than throw in the towel)

to encourage one another (rather than withdraw and try to stand alone)

Now he gives seven specific exhortations that apply shoe leather to his appeal.

What does this look like in practical daily life?

What would it have looked like in their day?

What should it look like in our day?

[The main thought that jumps off the page at us as we look at these seven exhortations:]

Genuine faith is proven by practical action.

1. LOVE ONE ANOTHER 13:1-3

While so many are suffering for their faith,

God's people have an opportunity to demonstrate love for one another.

Their brethren need help and support as never before.

These exhortations tie in to the suffering the church is going through:

Love for brethren, (let it remain)

Don't neglect **hospitality** => Love of strangers

Care for those in prison, as though a co-prisoner with them

Care for the mistreated, since the same thing could happen to you

These aren't just theoretical mandates stuck on the end.

These deal with real conditions faced by suffering Hebrews.

It's easy to concentrate on self-defense.

—to think: "Too bad—for them" and go on our way, hoping it won't happen to us.

The writer urges us to love and care for one another.

We ought to demonstrate our commitment and support for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Transients are fleeing adversity and affliction, coming to other towns seeking support.

Abraham demonstrates hospitality to unknown visitors and unknowingly ministers to angels; he is blessed by them!

He doesn't promise angelic visitations, but he does indicate that God may use our hospitality to bless us when we least expect it.

Paul: *"Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."* (Rom. 12:13)

Peter: *"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."* (1 Pet.. 4:9)

Many believers are in prison for their faith. They should visit and encourage them.

That's how prisoners were fed (Guatemala jails).

Someone has to minister to those in jail for their faith.

The Apology of Aristides describes how Christians cared for those in prison: If they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs... If there is among them a man that is poor or needy, and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food."

Others are suffering mistreatment and abuse, at the hands of family and friends.

The writer urges us to stand together—to support and encourage each other

The reason for this is that we are all members of the same body.

When we strike our thumb with a hammer, the whole body feels it!

When we suffer from a headache, it affects everything we try to do.

How does this exhortation apply to us?

How do we respond when those around us go through hard times? *Do we care?*

Have we taken concrete steps to help one another?

Do we pray for those facing affliction?

If we can't think of anything else to do for them, we can at least pray!

Do we take them food?

Various people have needed financial aid.

We have helped as a body. Have we helped someone individually?

Do we send them a note of encouragement, or drop by to see them?

It's amazing how encouraging a note, or a visit can be in the midst of hard times—just to know somebody cares!

Guatemala: the offender's widow from our church

Do we open our home to help a transient in need?

These people came as refugees, sponsored by the church.

We have opportunities to assist traveling missionaries, or foreign students.

When such people come through, do we open our homes to them?

No one can be involved in every situation,
 but how do we respond to those we DO know about?
 Are we committed to *our* brothers and sisters in Christ, to
 transient saints passing through, to those going through
 affliction? *What are we doing about it?*
 What are we doing to minister in the lives of
 others—especially our brothers and sisters in Christ going
 through hard times? **13:1-3**

2. MAINTAIN SEXUAL PURITY 13:4

He doesn't tell us the relationship between this warning and the affliction they're suffering, but there apparently is one, since that's true of the rest of the exhortations.

1 Cor. 7 warns that adversity makes it hard for couples to care for one another.

Perhaps he's concerned that they might not pay attention to their marriage and Satan might take advantage to attack homes and destroy marriages.

Pollster Daniel Yankelovich found that 80% of Americans hold to a philosophy of self-fulfillment—a feeling that ego needs, sensation, and excitement take priority over work and the needs of others, including spouse and children.

When that philosophy faces adversity, the result is “*every man for himself.*”

People aren't concerned about preservation of the family—only self-preservation

In that context a moral fall is a natural result.

Swindoll identifies two wrecking balls that are pounding away at our homes: *marital infidelity* and *material idolatry*.

These two traits of 21st C. America are concerns of writer to the Hebrews in 1st C.

The dangers faced by our pressure-cooker society are the same as those faced by the anxious, afflicted church, under fire for their faith in 1st C.

Key to survival isn't material prosperity of the home, but it does reside in the home.

What do you do in times of religious persecution, if your spouse is the source of opposition?

That's one reason for marrying someone who shares your beliefs.

But what if you're already in a marriage with an unbeliever?

What if he or she is the *source* of the pressure?

(That may be why the issue is dealt with here—it's true for many of these people.)

That's not an excuse for unfaithfulness!

God's standard is still firm:

Marriage is to be honored.

Sexual relationships are to be kept pure.

God judges unfaithfulness.

Don't throw in the towel on your marriage either!

Just because the pressure has increased, don't throw away God's standards.

Marital faithfulness and holiness are still God's norms! Therefore, . . .

Marriage is to be honored and sexual relationships kept pure.

However difficult it may be, God calls for **faithfulness**—the key word is **commitment**

In physical abuse, separation may be necessary—to protect a spouse, or children.

But *that's no excuse for unfaithfulness.*

In our pressure-cooker society, lots of issues keep our homes from being all that we want them to be.

People will counsel you: “throw it all over board!” “Get out!”

“If your mate doesn’t appreciate you, find someone who appreciates you and treats you right!”

God calls us to commitment—faithfulness in marriage and purity in sexual relationships.

Don’t be deceived into compromising that standard.

God says hang in there!

Honor your marriage vows.

Stay pure in your sexual relationships.

Remain faithful.

Trust God to fill the emptiness in your life!

The second “wrecking ball” that tears away at our homes is “*material idolatry*”—view when stress and pressure increase, accumulating more “stuff,” makes it all feel better.

If we could just get a fancier house. . .

If we could just get the latest luxury car. . .

If we could buy that new entertainment center. . .

If we could get the latest state-of-the-art computer ...then I’d feel good about *me*

Marital commitment is the proper response to the first wrecking ball.

Material contentment is the proper response to the second. . . .

3. BE CONTENT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE 13:5-6

Phil. 4:11-12: “. . . *I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.*”

1 Tim. 6:6-8: “*Godliness is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. . . . If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.*”

In times of affliction and uncertainty about the future, it is easy to cling to our funds.

“You never know when you may need it!”

In contrast to that natural response, we are warned not to commit ourselves to money.

Basis of exhortation: God is there.

Cling to Him in uncertainty—NOT to our financial resources or possessions.

Contentment keeps us from crabbing about our cupboard, no matter how bare it may be.

Contentment helps us be thankful for what we have, rather than complain about what we *don't* have.

Some of the most contented people I've ever met are those who have the least.

Just how *thankful SHOULD* we be?

Be content with what we have and trust God to provide what we need.

God has promised that He will stay with us.

He will provide everything we need.

With Him, we lack nothing that is essential for our well-being.

Ps. 118: *"It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in man."*

We could add:

*"It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in riches,
real estate, or IRAs.*

*"It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust dollars,
diamonds, and the Dow.*

*"It is better to take refuge in eternity than in a Lexus or
Mercedes*

All these things fade or lose their value.

Markets crash. Dollars devalue. Costs escalate. Cars burn.

But God is our helper: *what harm can people do to us if
the Lord is on our side?*

He's here today. He'll be here tomorrow.

You can count on it!

So, cling to Him, not to your things!

Are we content with our salary, or do we complain because we
deserve more?

Are we satisfied with our home? Could we live there happily
the rest of our life?

Do we salivate every time a mail-order catalog arrives at our
door?

Are we spending ourselves into debt to satisfy our desires, or are
we able to wait on God's timing to provide what we need?

4. IMITATE THE FAITH OF YOUR LEADERS 13:7-8

Remember them, consider the outcome of their lifestyle, imitate their faith.

As you think back, who are the godly men and women who have affected your life?

Was it a godly parent or grandparent? A church leader? A Sunday school teacher?

A class mate? A neighbor? Someone at work? A close personal friend?

Stop and think about them for a minute.

What is it about that godly person that impresses you?

Those who went before us set us an example.

They taught us God's Word.

But their teaching didn't end with the Word—It included a lifestyle.

He tells us to look carefully at their lifestyle, and how that worked out.

What did their godly lifestyle produce?

Imitate what you saw in them.

My dream for my years of ministry is that people will see in my life a consistency.

Consistency marked by asking what God has said, and then applying the old axiom: "God said it; I believe it; that settles it!"

Consistency that recognizes, he may not always have been right, but he practiced in his life, what he told us from the pulpit.

If I fulfill my dream, you should remember someone who spoke the Word of God to you and then, considering the result of his lifestyle, imitate his faith.

I'm not a perfect model, but that's my dream for my life—to present the Word clearly, and then model what it looks like! It's wrapped up in the chorus I love, *"May all who come behind us find us faithful!"*

Section concludes with a theological certainty to remember:

Jesus hasn't changed!

If He was there for the godly giants of the past, in their hour of trial,
if His strength was sufficient for them, then we can count on it too!

He is the same yesterday and today, and we can count on that for tomorrow as well.

Isn't that good to know? When everything around us is uncertain,
when our world is shaking and we don't know what tomorrow holds, . . .

. . . we know who holds tomorrow, and we know that HE is the same, yesterday and today, and tomorrow as well!

Therefore, let's imitate the faith of those leaders who have blazed the trail before us.

They trusted Him and God was glorified through their godly lifestyle and faithfulness.

If we follow their example, He will be glorified through our godly lifestyle and faithfulness as well! We can count on it, because we can trust Him!

5. FOLLOW SOUND DOCTRINE 13:9-16

Details apply in a unique way to 1st C. Jewish readers.

“Don’t allow yourself to be carried away by diverse and strange doctrines.”

Human religions come in many sizes and colors—many shapes.

Yet, they all have certain things in common.

They are all *“foreign”* to God’s doctrine of grace.

They are all based on legalism, on keeping the rules.

Observe sound doctrine and don’t submit to the rituals of legalism. 13:9

It’s better to strengthen our hearts with grace, than with ceremonial foods —or any other legalistic ritual— which can’t transform our lives.

Legalism isn’t the answer. No matter what standard we set up, we can’t keep it.

If our God is a holy God with righteousness as His standard, we have a drastic need: we aren’t in the same league!

We’ll never make it!

We need a provision in which our strength comes from God, on the basis of *His grace*

We have a different kind of altar, one based on God’s grace 13:10

Those who minister *inside* the tabernacle can’t eat at our altar. It’s for those who have been thrown out, but who have come to Christ.

Following verses draw a line between those who follow a legalistic approach to religion, and those who live by God’s grace. 13:11-14

It contrasts the *insiders*, from Israel's perspective, and the *outcasts*, who are rejected by their friends because they have chosen to identify with Christ.

We are cut off from society, as Christ was, in order to identify with Him.

He couldn't accomplish what He came for as an insider—neither can we.

Following Jesus means we're going to be "put out," rejected by insiders.

Old system is an object lesson, when they made a sacrifice for sin in the holy place, they offered *the blood* there,
—but *the body* had to be taken *outside* the camp to be burned.

—it provided no nourishment to the insiders at all!

When Christ, the Lamb of God was offered, to sanctify the people with His blood,

He suffered *outside* the camp, not *inside*.

The *insiders*, who rejected Him, received no benefit from His sacrifice.

Therefore, to offer true sacrifices to Him, we have to go *outside* the camp.

We won't be able to come to Him *inside* the camp. He isn't there!

So we have to join Him *outside* the gate, where He suffered.

We have to identify with the shame and rejection He bore.

That won't happen on the inside, among the *insiders*, where all the old crowd hangs out. We'll have to come out and identify with Him.

We don't look to the old city of Jerusalem for our hope, that city won't endure!

Our hope is in the eternal city that is yet to come.

Our sacrifices, as people cut off from Israel's sacrifices, are different 15-16

It's really the only kind that can be offered *outside the gates!*

We can offer these sacrifices *continually*, not just on special occasions.

So now we bring a sacrifice of praise to God.

What does that look like?

It's the fruit of lips that praise Him.

It's the sacrifice of doing good and sharing what we have with God's people,

With such sacrifices, God is still pleased.

Let's bring Him our sacrifices!

6. SUBMIT TO YOUR LEADERS 13:17

God's people recognize the authority God has placed in leaders and submit to them.

Two reasons for submission and obedience:

1. They are responsible for keeping watch over your lives.

2. They will have to give an account to God

Leaders have a serious commission!

Don't make it miserable by resisting instruction.

Ministry is scary enough when all goes well!

James warns us not to seek it, because the responsibility is awesome!

But when God's people resist His Word, then it's miserable.

You don't have to observe Moses' ministry for long to realize how much suffering he went through to lead God's people. Jeremiah is called "the weeping prophet" because he spent so much time grieving over the pain God's people was bringing on themselves due to their disobedience.

You don't know what ministry is about until you have spent time praying and weeping over people who refuse to hear what God is trying to tell them!

God promises to train His children for godly living. When we refuse to listen, He uses pain as a training rod. It's no fun to receive, nor watch or take part in it.

Sometimes when I look out over this body, and know what some of you are going through, I grieve. I ask myself: *"When are we going to learn to pay attention to God's warnings, so that we don't have to suffer His corrective measures."*

At those times ministry is no fun!

The other side: there is no greater joy for a leader than to watch God's people apply His Word and grow to maturity.

John: *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."* (3 John 4)

Hebrews exhorts us ***"Make their work a joy, not a burden."***

Remember the stories about Mothers' Day or Christmas, when children ask what they can give their mother. She responds that she desires their love, or that they would obey what she has taught them.

You want to know what you can do for *me*?

Let me hear that you are growing in your walk with Him, . . .

Let me hear that you are maturing in the faith, . . .

Let me hear that you are hearing God's voice

and imitating the godly lifestyle you have seen in us!

Nothing brings greater joy, than to hear that our children are walking in accordance with God's truth.

7. PRAY FOR US 13:18-19

At no time is prayer so critical as when we are under the pressure of adversity.

In the midst of affliction, we are to pray for one another, that we might live as God desires, and that we might continue in the ministry to which God has called us.

Pray that we'll hang in there—that we'll be faithful.

Pray for each other:

—that we will keep a clean conscience

—that we will live honorably in every way

—that we will be able to minister effectively where God has called us to serve Him—even in the midst of hard times.

Do you know someone who is going through hard times right now? Have you been praying for them?

Here are three requests you can present on their behalf

Concluding prayer 13:20-21

His prayer for them, and mine for you!

That God will enable them to live as they should in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Concluding personal notes 13:22-25