

Hebrews 13:1-25

Suffering the Exhortation

And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation – v. 22

We have noted very early on in our studies of this epistle that Hebrews identifies itself as *a word of exhortation*. We have seen those exhortations – there's numbers of them. The easiest way to find the bulk of them is to trace the phrase *let us* throughout this epistle. That phrase occurs 12 times in Hebrews.

Heb 4:11 *Let us labour to enter into that rest...*

Heb 4:14 *...let us hold fast our profession.*

Heb 4:16 *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace...*

Heb. 6:1 *...let us go on unto perfection.*

Now as we come into the final chapter of Hebrews we find a concentrated section of exhortations. This adds to the argument, I suppose, that this epistle was written by the Apostle Paul for this is a stylistic tactic of Paul in some of his other epistles. It's interesting to observe here also that even though this would be the longest epistle of Paul in Scripture, he nevertheless identifies it as a letter written in a few words (v. 22).

No doubt there was much more that Paul could have written. He did, after all, have a very strong burden for his kinsmen after the flesh. But as the constraints of time undoubtedly pressed him we find him in this chapter leaving exhortation after exhortation to the Hebrew believers that he loved and then calling on them to *suffer* or literally to *bear* or *endure* the word of exhortation.

William Gouge, in his commentary on Hebrews finds the second table of the 10 commandments in these exhortations. The very first exhortation, indeed, sets before us the essence of the second table of the law – *Let brotherly love continue*. Gouge goes on to note that these exhortations can be analyzed under 3 forms of Christian duties – duty to others; duty to themselves and duty to God.

I think the exhortations can be analyzed in such a way in which they can fall under 3 different calls. There's a call to constancy; there's a call to contentment; there's a call to submission as well a call to separation. A student of this epistle could easily spend as much time examining each of these exhortations as he spent examining each of the characters of faith in Hebrews 11.

What I would like to do this morning, however, is to conduct a broad survey of these exhortations in which we'll simply make mention of the various exhortations, and then we'll also notice the theological basis for these various exhortations. And we won't have to go beyond the chapter to do that. You'll notice that in close proximity to each exhortation there is a statement of some kind that pertains to God. And then finally we'll consider what I take to be the heart of all these exhortations. I will select one statement that describes how we can accomplish meeting all these Christian duties.

Suffer the Word of Exhortation

This is what our text tells us. Suffer the word – bear up the word – endure the word of exhortation. And when we consider just how many exhortations we find in this epistle and in this final chapter especially, it could be tempting to ask – how can I possibly perform all these tasks? How can I possibly do my Christian duty when there is so much involved in it? In our study today I'll attempt to answer that question.

If we're going to *suffer the word of exhortation*:

I. We Must Know What It Encompasses

Consider with me under this heading what I mentioned a moment ago – that there are various calls. There is a call to constancy – and the way we can identify the exhortations that pertain to this call is to note the word *continue* and to note the things that pertain to our memories which are expressed positively and negatively. There are two exhortations that use a form of the word *continue*. There are two exhortations that pertain to things we're to remember and there are two exhortations that pertain to things that we're not to forget.

In the very first verse we see something that is to continue – *Let brotherly love continue*. The implication, of course, is that brotherly love has been functioning. That's a mark of genuine Christianity. The Christian loves other Christians. John makes this very matter a test of the validity of man's Christianity. So we read in 1Jn. 3:14 *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not [his] brother abideth in death.*

There is no author of any New Testament epistle that doesn't touch upon this matter. Paul addresses the issue. John addresses the issue. Peter, in 1Pet. 1:22 *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, [see that ye] love one another with a pure heart fervently.*

This is an issue, therefore, that calls for constant attention. And even when it's seemingly going very smoothly it's a matter that can always be improved upon. So Paul writes to the Thessalonians in 1Thess. 4:9,10 *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another; And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.*

Do you see how the Thessalonians were doing just fine in the matter of brotherly love. There was no need for Paul to write to them. They didn't need any form of correction. They didn't need to be goaded into this Christian duty because it was something that they were taught of God to do. And yet Paul would not let them be complacent in the issue so he says to them in v. 10 that even though there was no need for him to write and address the issue he would nevertheless write *but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more.*

Here is an issue, then, that should be given constant attention by the believer. Don't ever allow yourself to think that you've arrived. You can do more. You can increase more and more. *Let brotherly love continue* then. Here is a call for constancy or for continuation. In connection with this call vv. 2,3 make specific applications.

Heb 13:2 *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.* Arthur Pink, in his commentary, makes much of John Owen's remarks on these verses. Listen to the words of Owen as quoted by Pink:

There was a special urgency for pressing this duty by the apostles, arising from the persecution of the Lord's people in different places, which resulted in their being driven from their own homes and forced to seek a refuge abroad. "At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (#Ac 8:1) — some traveled as far as "Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch" (#Ac 11:19). Therein did they obey the direction of Christ's that "when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (#Mt 10:23), removing to other parts where, for the present, peace obtained; for the providence of God so directs things it is very rare that persecution prevails universally — hence some places of quiet retirement are generally available, at least for a season. Yet this being forced to leave their own habitations required them to seek refuge among strangers, and this it is which gives point to our present exhortation.

Moreover "at that time there were sundry persons, especially of the converted Hebrews, who went up and down from one city, yea, one nation, unto another, on their own charges, to preach the Gospel. They went forth for the sake of Christ, taking nothing of the Gentiles unto whom they preached (#3Joh 1:7); and these were only brethren, and not officers of any church. The reception, entertainment, and assistance of these when they came unto any church or place as strangers, the apostle celebrates and highly commends in his well-beloved Gaius (#3Joh 1:5, 6). Such as these, when they came to them as strangers, the apostle recommends unto the love and charity of the Hebrews in a peculiar manner. And he who is not ready to receive and entertain such persons, will manifest how little concern he hath in the Gospel or the glory of Christ Himself" (John Owen).

Do you see the meaning of entertaining angels unawares? The word *angel* is literally a *messenger*. There were messengers during the times of persecution who went everywhere preaching the gospel. This is certainly an exhortation that bears a present day application to us here in our country. We are or we should be keenly aware that throughout the world there are those who suffer adversity for being Christians. We are to remember them, and not to forget them. We are in the same body with them and worship and serve the same Savior.

This call to constancy is given to us again in v. 15. *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of [our] lips giving thanks to his*

name. Our ability to praise God continually will be contingent upon our understanding of how blessed we are of God in our salvation. If we have the right view of salvation and can expound to ourselves the meaning of that phrase back in 2:3 *so great salvation* then we'll have no problem giving heed to this call for constancy in our praise to God. Where this becomes a greater challenge is where we leave off walking by faith and begin to walk by sight.

This call to constancy is also found in v. 7 which poses a weighty challenge to elders and teaching elders especially *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] conversation*. And in v. 16 *But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*.

There's another call in these exhortations which could be labeled a call to contentment. Notice the words of v. 5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have*. Contentment is an art that must be mastered. Thomas Watson, the great Puritan has written a little book entitled *The Art of Divine Contentment*. Contentment doesn't come naturally especially to those who are sinners or to Christians who still must fight sinful natures. Even Paul himself would say to the Philippians *I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content* (Phil. 4:11).

There is also in these verses a call to separation. Notice the words of v. 13 *Let us go forth, therefore, unto him (Christ) without the camp, bearing his reproach*. This is a call not to go with the popular flow of things, but to go instead in the way of reproach which is the way that Christ himself went.

And then notice as well the call to submission. I have referenced v. 17 in the past as a verse that should frighten me as a minister but should also frighten you as one who sits under a minister. Notice what it says: *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, there's the part of the verse that challenges and humbles me; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you* – there's the part of the verse that should humble and challenge you. It is in your best interests that the ones who watch for your souls can give their account with joy and not with grief.

So we see, then, the exhortations of the chapter. We have only touched upon them but by and large they are self explanatory. Would you consider with me next that if we are going to heed these exhortations – or suffer the word of exhortation, to use the words of the text we must not only know what the exhortation encompasses, but:

II. We Must Know the Theological Basis for These Exhortations

The Christians motivation for striving, you see, is based upon what he knows about God. Theology is the study of God. And throughout these exhortations we find very rich statements about God which pertain to Christ. This is why I say it often that there is a connection between theology and practice. It has been a mark of the downfall of the

church in our day and age that there are so many preachers and teachers and I suppose even seminary professors who mistakenly think that in their quest to be practical they have to divorce themselves from theology. Theology is that which is dry and boring and speculative, the rationale goes. And yet we see in this final chapter of Hebrews and indeed we see throughout the entire New Testament and certainly in Paul's letters that there is a very close connection between theology and practice.

The first theological statement we have in this chapter doesn't pertain directly to the exhortations we noticed but it certainly could apply to them indirectly. The statement occurs in v. 4 in connection with marriage and marital fidelity. Heb 13:4 *Marriage [is] honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.* There's our first theological statement – God is the judge of all the world and all the universe.

That would be a frightening prospect if that's all the theology we had. But notice in vv. 5,6 that the Lord is our advocate and our constant companion. *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

And would you notice a few verses later a verse that is well known and speaks to us of the immutability of Christ. Verse 8 – *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.* Isn't it good to know that our Savior has not, does not, and will not change. This is our assurance that he will never leave or forsake us. If he has been with us then he will be with us. This is our assurance that just as certainly as he has been our helper he will be our helper. If he has been gracious to us, he will be gracious to us. If he has been faithful and just to forgive us our sins then he will continue to be faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

The immutability of Christ is hard for us to fathom because in a world that is filled with sinners we've experienced a sense of let-down where men are concerned. Men do let us down. Men do change. Men who start out well and are well intentioned nevertheless still change and still let us down. Sometimes this comes about because of circumstances that are beyond man's control but it comes about, nevertheless.

Christ stands in stark contrast to the fickleness of men. He is unchangeable in his attributes. And there are no circumstances that are beyond his control. So we have this tremendous source of assurance in this theological statement – *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.*

Let me add one more verse under this heading of theology. Notice the words of v. 20 *Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant...*

Our God is the God of peace. Christ has made peace between us and God and Christ is the source of our peace. Jn. 14:27 *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

And our God is the God of power. He's the God that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus. And our God is the God of the everlasting covenant. If you want a key verse in the scripture for the blessed truth of covenant theology – the theology that views salvation in terms of the contract between the Father and the Son and the contract, as it were, between the Son and those who would believe on him, you find it in this 20th verse of Heb. 13. Here is an everlasting covenant sealed with the blood of Christ. Our God and our Savior is the God of the everlasting covenant.

Now it is by taking these theological statements about God and about Christ and meditating upon all that they mean that we light the fire of devotion in our hearts and fan the flame into a blaze of holy zeal for our God. If I know and am convinced that Christ is the God of peace, and the God of power and the God of the everlasting covenant and that he does not and will not change – then I find the motivation to let brotherly love continue – and I find the zeal to remember them that are in bonds – and I will remember them that have the rule over me – and I will be compelled to go to him outside the camp and bear his reproach.

Do you see how the two things go hand in hand – our practice and our theology! May these sublime statements about our God and about our Savior draw us to our Savior that we may learn in increasing measure the greatness of our God and the greatness of his salvation.

These things taken together lead us to our third and final point. If we would suffer the word of exhortation, we must know what the exhortation encompasses which is tantamount to saying that we must know our Christian duty. And we must know the theological foundation for that duty so that we'll find the proper motivation to strive. It remains for us to consider finally and briefly that if we would suffer the word of exhortation:

III. We Must Know the Bottom Line

If I could take all of these exhortations along with their theological foundations and express it all in a phrase or a sentence, it would be the statement of v. 9 *For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.*

The Hebrew Christians were being led away from grace. Legalistic Judaism would undermine the doctrines of grace. And once a Christian is led away from grace then Christian duty becomes a very heavy burden to bear. We become bogged down under the weight of our inability. Our religion becomes forced and we either become engulfed in pride or we become self deceived.

A Christian who is established in grace, however, will find himself constantly asserting the truth of Rom. 5:20 which tells us that *where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*. The devil's aim is ever to convince the Christian that he's applied too many times for grace. God is tired of giving you grace. God expects more out of you if you're to continue receiving grace.

It's the devil's lie. And this is once again why it is so important for us to understand the doctrines of the gospel. The everlasting covenant which is nothing short of the gospel tells us that all that God requires of us has been supplied by Christ. God requires perfect obedience – Christ has supplied perfect obedience. God requires righteousness – Christ is our righteousness. God requires our sin debt to be paid – Christ did pay it through his atoning death on Calvary's cross.

This is why Paul can call him the God of peace. This is why the reference to God as being judge of all the world who will judge whoremongers and adulterers can work for us rather than against us. Our judgment has been executed. Christ was condemned for our sins and God will never demand payment from us that he's already received from Christ. He would be unjust to demand double payment.

And would you note again the theology of v. 8 *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever*. He will never change. If he has been the God of grace then he will be the God of grace. If it has been righteous for God to bestow grace upon us then it will always be the righteous thing for God to bestow grace upon us.

We need for our hearts to be established in these truths. We need for the truth of God's grace, in other words, to reach the very core of our being and so be firmly implanted there that we will never be moved. As the refrain to a hymn in our hymnbook goes – *I do believe, I will believe, that Jesus died for me; that on the cross He shed His blood from sin to set me free*.

And could I just add here that it is our knowledge of the theology of the scripture that will enable us to be established in grace. Dr. Cairns told us many times that a person's view of God will govern what a Christian does and how a Christian lives. Your view of God will determine whether or not you experience joy or peace or whether you experience the bondage of slavery.

How, then, can I suffer the word of exhortation? How can I apply myself to all these duties? Well to begin with – I have to know what they are. This requires the study of God's word. Our 3rd catechism question tells us that the scriptures principally teach us what we are to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of us.

We must know our duty and we must know the theological basis for our duty. And by rightly knowing the character of God in the gospel we will go a long way in establishing our hearts with grace.

I wonder, then, this morning. Will you suffer the word of exhortation? Will you be able to suffer the word of exhortation? If your theology is defective you won't be able to. These exhortations will become too heavy for you to bear. The devil will do all he can to see to it that your theology is defective. He will challenge you on what God has said. But if you understand the person and work of Christ, aright then you'll be established with grace and the devil will lose any grip he has over you. You must devote yourself, therefore, to understanding God's grace aright. You must come to know and appreciate how God's grace is grounded in the blood atonement of Christ. If you'll do that then you'll strive for

the right things in the right way. You won't ever be content in thinking that your striving is adequate but you'll be absolutely convinced that your striving is acceptable. It's acceptable to God because it's based on the merits of Christ.

May God help us then to suffer the word of exhortation by being firmly established in his grace.