

# Seven Reminders from Hebrews

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## Introduction.

- A. In the midst of long newspaper and magazine articles, we often see these things called sidebars or info boxes. Generally, they're set off from the main text by being a different color, and they contain practical applications of the main thrust of the article. For example, If the main article is about gardening, it might have an info box entitled, "Ten Ways to Keep Rabbits From Eating Your Flowers." It's a way to make the article useful.
- B. In many of the epistles of the New Testament, the last portion of the book serves a similar function to these familiar info boxes. The author of the book has used the bulk of his writing to make a general, theological point, but then, he concludes, "Because of these things, this is how we need to live as Christians." Typically, these applications are short and punchy, almost bullet points, and in few words, they tell us a lot.
- C. In the book of Hebrews, this practical info box begins at the start of Hebrews 13. Here's what's got us to this point: in the first twelve chapters of Hebrews, the writer has described the superiority of Christianity over the Law of Moses. From this superiority, he argues that anyone who returns to the Old Law or otherwise falls away is condemning himself to destruction. His point is that we need to remain steadfast in our allegiance to Christ, because Jesus is our only hope of salvation. This takes him, then, very logically to his info box: things that we need to do to stay faithful to God. We see the first part of this info box in Hebrews 13:1-9. These things were essential for the first-century Christian, and they are essential to us now. Let's turn to them this evening, then, to see what we can learn from these seven reminders from Hebrews.

## I. Be Loving.

- A. This passage first counsels us to be loving, as per Hebrews 13:1. Specifically, this is talking about brotherly love. The root word here is not from the Greek word *agape*, which is what love usually is in Scripture, but from the Greek *phileo*. Indeed, the exact word here is *philadelphia*, from the Greek for "love" and "brother." It's spelled just like the city, which is why Philadelphia is called "The city of brotherly love." This kind of love is directed toward fellow Christians, of course, and it is characterized by a warm, tender affection.
- B. Now, the use of *phileo* in this context adds another dimension to our understanding of Christian love. Sometimes, we hear one brother say of another, "I know I have to love him, but I don't have to like him." Actually, yes we do. The idea of *phileo* is basically an intense form of liking. It's not enough to interact with our brethren with selflessness and gritted teeth. Instead, we must learn to like them, to regard them with warmth and respect. That's the sort of association that God expects His people to have. After all, folks, we all have to spend eternity with each other. We might as well get started on liking each other now.
- C. However, we also need to pay attention to the rest of this verse. God doesn't want us to *phileo* each other once and then give up on the idea. Instead, this brotherly affection must be continual in our lives, so much so that it marks the conduct of an entire church. It needs to be evident in any number of ways: in the joy with which we greet each other when we see each other, in the way we prefer the company of Christians to the company of anyone else, in the loving manner with which we speak of each other, and even in the way we think about each other. The development of this affection needs to be one of the goals of our existence.

## II. Be Hospitable.

- A. In addition to being loving, we must also be hospitable. This is the message of Hebrews 13:2. Now, this passage describes an action that was more important in the first century than it is today. Back then, if you were going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, you couldn't just check in to the Jerusalem Holiday Inn for a week or two. There were no hotels; there was no commercial lodging. Instead, you had to find some homeowner who was willing to put you up, and sometimes, it was someone you didn't even know. Travelers back in the day depended on those who were willing to show kindness to strangers.
- B. Obviously, today we do have Holiday Inns and whatnot, and it's quite uncommon for us to have strangers showing up on our doorstep asking for lodging. However, we can still be a hospitable people by looking for opportunities to be generous with our resources and with our time. If a visitor shows up at church, we might invite them over for Sunday dinner. This idea isn't about any specific actions, though; it's really about attitude. We should look for opportunities to extend our circle of friendship to people we don't know.

## III. Be Kind.

- A. It is also important for us to look for ways to be kind to other Christians. This point is expressed in Hebrews 13:3. It takes the specific form of urging Christians to visit their brethren in prison. Once again, this bears some cultural explaining. During the time of Hebrews, there were a lot more Christians in prison than there are now because being a Christian was often itself a crime. First-century prisons were not welcoming places,

either. Paul's experiences in the inner prison of Philippi shed a grim light on what those imprisoned for the cause of Christ could expect. Visiting brethren in these dire circumstances was important.

- B. Thankfully, imprisoned Christians today are much less common, at least in this country. Thus, literal obedience to this verse is less important now. However, as Christians today, we can show kindness and consideration for Christians who have been trapped in a different kind of prison—the prison of their own bodies. We need to care for our shut-ins. Now, I think we already do a great job of attending to ours. We have good attendance at our monthly singings at Sister Seeman's, and I know that a number of you visit our shut-ins regularly. However, let's all try to excel still more in this important work. Folks like Sister Seeman and Brother and Sister Lee lead lives that are inevitably more empty than they would prefer, and it means so much to them whenever we take a moment from our more busy lives to spend with them. Let's never underestimate the spiritual value of a smile, a kind word, and a few moments of our time. Just as important is the joy we find in bringing joy to them, and in that joy is the essence of Christianity. Let's be kind to our shut-in brethren and sisters in Christ.

#### **IV. Be Pure.**

- A. The Hebrews writer seems to take a detour with his next point, when he urges us to be pure, and this is what we find in Hebrews 13:4. What's this doing in a section of advice about how to be loving? Although it might not be apparent at first, the connection is there. What the writer is doing is telling us not just to seek the things that are loving, but to avoid the things that are unloving, and sexual sin certainly falls into this category.
- B. Indeed, as 1 John 2:15-16 notes, if we are filled with the lust of the flesh, the love of the Father is not in us, and it's easy to see why. Lust of the flesh is one of the three main avenues to love of the self, rather than love of others and of God. When someone commits sexual sin, they don't care that they hurt their heavenly Father and disobey Him. If the relationship is adulterous, they don't care that they are defrauding someone's spouse. They don't even care about the harm they are unleashing on their partner, perhaps in a physical sense, but certainly in an emotional and spiritual sense. All they care about is that they receive physical satisfaction. Sexual immorality is not grand. It is not glorious. It is filthy and evil. Let's remember that.

#### **V. Be Content.**

- A. After this, we are counseled to be content as well. This message appears in Hebrews 13:5-6. Here, the writer is continuing with his theme of ways not to be unloving. Interestingly enough, he is also continuing in parallel with John's warning in 1 John 2. Just as the lust of the flesh drives out the love of the Father, so too does covetousness—the lust of the eyes. It can be every bit as deadly to our souls.
- B. The problem is, as Solomon observes in Ecclesiastes 1:8, is that the eye is not satisfied with seeing. If we obey the lust of our eyes, no matter how much we accumulate, no matter how much we possess, our eyes will still hunger for more, until more of our being is consumed with this lust. The lust of the eye is like a cancer of the soul. There's no end to it. It just grows and grows until it kills everything else. We can't give in to it.

#### **VI. Be Submissive.**

- A. In addition to learning to be content, we must also learn to be submissive to those who rule over us—to our elders. This is what we learn from Hebrews 13:7. Once again, this seems to be out of sequence, but it's not. This is actually our third way not to be unloving. Remember, back in 1 John 2, the third way to drive out the love of the Father is with the pride of life, and this is the point the Hebrews writer has chosen to illustrate that principle, and we need to pay attention. Unless one of our elders has committed a sin that is attested to by multiple witnesses, whenever we speak against an elder, we ourselves are committing the sin of pride.
- B. That sounds harsh, but it's true. We are thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, and acting on that basis. Here's why: God has set up a series of extremely restrictive qualifications that define who can be a leader of His church. Men become elders only after having passed all those tests, and no one can pass those tests without having the spiritual capacities required in a church leader. We who are not elders have not passed those tests, and yet, when we question an elder's judgment, we assume that we are wiser than God's chosen men, and therefore, that we are wiser than God who chose the men. Now, this is not to say that elders are never wrong, because sometimes they are. But they're wrong a lot less than the rest of us.

#### **VII. Be Steadfast.**

- A. Finally, though, as Christians we need to be steadfast. This is the point of Hebrews 13:8-9. Just as Jesus Himself is unchanging, so our resolve to follow Him must also be unchanging. There are many agents of Satan out there who want to lure us away from our path, but we must remain true to our covenant with God.
- B. In context, there's one main way we need to do this: by recognizing the supremacy of Jesus that the Hebrews writer has just outlined, and then by living the life that goes with that recognition. All of the things we've discussed this evening aren't flash-in-the-pan hobbies we trot out every now and then. Instead, we must incorporate them all into our way of life and keep them there.

**Conclusion.** If this is a life you want for you own, you can claim it by coming to the Lord this evening.