

Hebrews 13: The Response Well-Pleasing to God

Author: Dr. David A. deSilva

Session 12

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Hebrews 13, Philadelphia, Hospitality, Sacrifice of Praise, Covenant, Jesus Christ, Well-pleasing, Gratitude, Perseverance

Abstract

This session focuses on Hebrews 13, illustrating how its practical exhortations are integral to the sermon's overall message of gratitude and perseverance. Dr. David deSilva discusses key Christian behaviors including sibling love (philadelphia), hospitality, and marital fidelity, framing them as essential for maintaining solidarity against societal hostility. He explains Jesus' role as the unchanging mediator of grace and emphasizes that believers are called to offer sacrifices of praise and mutual service well-pleasing to God. Ultimately, the session underscores that living in gratitude and mutual support is the key to remaining within God's favor and arriving safely at the eternal city.

Outline

I. Introduction to Hebrews 13

A. Relationship to Preceding Argumentation and Challenges

1. Chapter 13 is integral to the sermon, not mere tacked-on instructions
2. Addresses the actual challenges of marginalization and hostility facing the congregation
3. Provides specific directions for persevering and arriving safely at the lasting city

B. Thematic Consistency of "Well-Pleasing" (Euairestos)

1. Term "well-pleasingly" (euairestos) in 12:28 sets the frame: show gratitude through acceptable worship
2. Recalled in 13:16: "with such sacrifices God is well-pleased" (euairestos)
3. Recalled in benediction (13:21): "working in you what is well-pleasing" (euaireston)
4. Echoes Hebrews 11:5-6 where pleasing God is essential to transcending death and is the consequence of trust

C. Core Goals of Exhortation

1. Maintaining solidarity and support throughout the Christian community
2. Detaching from the pursuit of status and wealth in the world
3. Finding stability in Jesus and the relationship of grace established with God

II. Commended Behaviors and Orientations (The Lexeme Phil-)

A. Brotherly Love (Philadelphia)

1. Injunction to "let brotherly love continue" (13:1)
2. Background: Greco-Roman ethical views on sibling devotion (e.g., Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Plutarch's *Treatise on Fraternal Affection*)
3. Christian community as an adoptive family with shared ideals and commitments
4. Mutual support compensates for lost natural networks and buffers societal hostility

B. Hospitality (Philoxenia)

1. Love of guests and strangers (13:2)
2. Vital for providing spaces for communal house church worship and supporting traveling missionaries
3. Rationale: Genesis stories (Abraham, Sarah, Lot) where some unwittingly entertained angels

C. Care for the Marginalized

1. Remember the imprisoned as if imprisoned with them and the mistreated as being in their skin (13:3)
2. Mobilizing emotional and material support ensures no member feels comfortless
3. Non-Christian witness: Lucian of Samosata's satire "The Passing of Peregrinus" confirms Christians' intense dedication to caring for their imprisoned brothers and sisters

III. Behaviors and Orientations to Avoid

A. Wrong Forms of Love

1. Marital infidelity (13:4)
 - a. Command to respect marriage and keep the marriage bed pure
 - b. Rationale: God will judge fornicators and adulterers
2. Love of money (philargyros) (13:5-6)
 - a. Command to let lifestyle be free from greed and be content with what is present
 - b. Economic deprivation used as society's deviancy control technique (recalling 10:34)
 - c. Scriptural grounds for confidence: Deuteronomy 31:6 ("I will never leave you nor abandon you")
 - d. Bold response: Psalm 118:6 ("The Lord is my help... What can a human being do to me?")

IV. Leadership, Unchanging Foundation, and Diverse Teachings

A. Remembering Former Leaders

1. Remember leaders who spoke the word of God and founded the community (13:7)
2. Consider the "end result" (ekbasis) of their conduct—a euphemism for death/martyrdom
3. Imitate their faith

B. The Unshakable Reliability of Jesus Christ

1. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (13:8)
2. Contrasted with human instability (e.g., Dio Chrysostom's complaints on human inconstancy)
3. Ongoing consistency of Jesus' character, word, and favor as the anchor for the heart

C. Warning Against Diverse and Foreign Teachings

1. Rejection of external regulations (diverse teachings) (13:9)

2. Fine thing for the heart to be made firm by favor/grace, not by foods
3. The Christian altar (13:10)
 - a. Access to a privileged altar from which earthly tent worshipers have no authority to eat
 - b. Likely symbolic resonance with participation in the benefits of Christ's sacrifice (e.g., Eucharist/communion)

V. The Day of Atonement and Going Outside the Camp

A. Day of Atonement as Prototype

1. Bodies of animals for sin offering carried outside the camp and burned (Leviticus 16:27)
2. Jesus suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem to sanctify the people with his own blood (13:11-12)

B. Summons to Go Outside the Camp

1. Go out to Jesus outside the camp bearing his reproach (13:13)
2. Leaving the comfort and security of worldly society (following the pattern of Abraham and Moses)
3. The margin as an ambiguous place of clean/unclean, but crucially where God's presence is found (Exodus 33:7)
4. Contrast of lacking a lasting city here versus seeking the coming city (13:14)

VI. Acceptable Sacrifices of Praise and Good Works

A. Sacrifice of Praise

1. Offer a sacrifice of praise to God continually through Jesus (13:15)
2. Recontextualizing Psalm 50:14 (thanksgiving and public testimony replacing animal slaughter)
3. Confession of God's name as a public declaration of the benefactor's honorable reputation

B. Sacrifices of Service

1. Do not forget to do good and to share resources (13:16)
2. Rooted in prophetic teachings (Amos, Isaiah) prioritizing justice and mercy over ritual slaughter
3. Indirectly repaying God's generosity by supporting sisters and brothers (Matthew 25)

VII. Epistle Closing and Benediction

A. Subjecting to Current Leaders

1. Obey and submit to current leaders and teachers (13:17)
2. Leadership ethos: sleepless care for souls and mindfulness of giving an account to God
3. Cooperation prevents unprofitable groaning and conflict

B. Prayer Request

1. Request for prayer to have a good conscience and to be restored quickly (13:18-19)
2. Indicates prior acquaintance and pastoral relationship

C. Concluding Benediction

1. May the God of peace who led up from the dead the great shepherd make you complete (13:20-21)

2. Weaves themes of resurrection, the eternal covenant, and Jesus' superiority to Moses (Isaiah 63:11)

D. Final News and Greetings

1. Bear with the brief word of exhortation/sermon (13:22)
2. Announcement: brother Timothy has been released from prison (13:23)
3. Greetings from those of Italy (13:24)
4. Formulaic closing: "May grace be with you all" (13:25)

VIII. Takeaways and Contemporary Application

A. Deepening Kinship and Philadelphia

1. Make sister and brother more than casual terms of address
2. Commit resources and lives to fellow Christians in need

B. Global Family Ethos for Repressed Believers

1. Adopt the plight of marginalized Christians worldwide as if in their skin
2. Engage through prayer, breaking silence, mobilizing aid, and lobbying

C. Rejecting Destructive Behaviors

1. Prioritize marital fidelity and relationship health
2. Discern "enough" in a capitalistic, consumption-oriented culture to escape the love of money

D. Bearing Christ's Reproach and Boldness

1. Embrace public witness and reject hiding faith
2. Good works as an integrated return of favor in a circle of reciprocity
3. Keeping eyes focused on Jesus, the Son of God, to navigate life without drifting