

Continuing the Journey of Faith Hebrews 13:18-25

Introduction

Life is full of goodbyes. At the end of the letter to the Hebrews, life will go on. The love between the writer and his readers will continue. And they will all need to keep exercising faith in Christ each day till they reach the end of their earthly journey. The same is true for us.

What last words does the author of Hebrews leave with his readers before he signs off? Last words often capture what we consider most important to remember before parting ways. So the letter to the Hebrews ends with underscoring three important areas our journey of faith requires as we travel on.

18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. **19** I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, **21** equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

22 I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. **23** You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. **24** Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. **25** Grace be with all of you.

1. Earnest Prayer (18-19)
2. Divine Blessing (20-21)
3. Holy Community (22-25)

1. Earnest Prayer (18-19)

18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. **19** I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

The writer has given significant pastoral exhortation to his flock of readers, but he needs and values their earnest prayer for him. God has chosen him to write scriptural truth to these believers, but he is as dependent on the protection and power of God as they are.

Clear Conscience

“Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience.”

Why would he ask prayer because he is sure his conscience is clear? What circumstances is

he facing that would call for this kind of request?

The immediate context gives some clues. He has just talked about being willing to bear reproach for Christ. Hebrews 11 reminded us of many past believers who walked by faith no matter what it cost them. In verse 3 of this chapter he called his readers to remember those in prison as though in prison with them, and in verse 23 he lets them know Timothy is about to be released and will likely join the author on his next visit to the readers. The author is not in prison but is evidently close by, monitoring Timothy's case.

All this points to a situation of legal scrutiny in which godly Christians are being treated as evildoers. His reference to having a clear conscience is in the plural. This could be an editorial we, but more likely it means that the author and others are in the same difficult circumstance of persecution and pressure, some in prison like Timothy, some not.

You need God's help especially at times you're under attack for the faith. Godly people desire a clear conscience before God and man, even if some people think and speak of them as evildoers.

1 Peter 3:14-17

14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, **15** but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, **16** having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. **17** For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Paul on trial

Acts 24:16

So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.

Paul writing to believers whose relationship with him is strained

1 Corinthians 4:4

For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

Even when we have a clear conscience, we still need our brothers and sisters to pray for us. We face pressures from inside and out, some from devotion to Christ, some from our own weaknesses and missteps. None of us have sufficient strength apart from the Lord. None of us are free from mistakes or sins,

and our hearts are deceptive. Especially when we are in tough circumstances or having to navigate hard conversations with people we love—as the writer of Hebrews has written to his readers—we need prayer that God will help us.

Psalm 19:12-14

¹² Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Honorable Conduct

The writer of Hebrews desires to act honorably in all things. We are all flawed. At times we fumble and fail. Even when we try to do what is helpful and right, we can create difficulties, problems, and hurts we don't intend but that are nonetheless real.

Anyone like the writer of Hebrews who regularly tries to shepherd people through difficulties, learns the hard way that his missteps and errors are compounded because they touch so many lives. It can be tempting to shrink from taking the risk, but such a passive approach would be wrong, driven

more by self-protection than love. And it is clear that he loves his readers. So he asks them to overflow all the more in prayer for him to speed his return to them.

Hebrews 13:19

I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

His words reflect his heart for the people he's writing. He wants to be with them. Historically, this is a time of crisis for Christians in the empire. Paul and Peter have been executed. Timothy is in prison, and by the grace of God, about to be released. The times are uncertain. Their earnest prayer for him is strategic spiritual warfare. He wants to be restored to them in person, but God will have to orchestrate it.

Praying this way recognizes God's sovereign control of our world and our specific circumstances. As we've learned from Hebrews 11, sometimes the will of God is for us to endure persecution even to the death. Sometimes He brings deliverance. All according to His perfect, loving and wise plan.

Earnest prayer for one another is vital to our journey of faith. Clear conscience, honorable conduct, providential intervention in our

circumstances—we all need Divine aid regarding these matters.

Who are the brothers and sisters for whom you earnestly pray? Who is under duress? Who is facing danger or bearing grief? No matter how highly you may regard the person—this is the author of Hebrews!—that person needs your prayers.

Who of your brothers and sisters in Christ are praying for you? Who are the individuals who know you and your circumstances well enough to pray for you in ways you most need?

Earnest prayer is a vital necessity as we continue our journey of faith.

2. Divine Blessing (20-21)

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Notice how he prays for them in similar ways he has asked prayer from them. A prayer of benediction.

The ground of his confidence is in who God is and what God has done.

The God of peace—the God who makes all things right—who has restored us from being rebels, enemies, sinners against God to being His saints and children and heirs.

How will this come to pass?—the work of God through Christ Jesus.

“who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus”—power greater than the power of death. Christ died for sins. His resurrection assures us that his sacrifice for us was favorably received by God. The account is paid in full, so He came back to life, guaranteeing that we too shall be delivered from death, physically raised from the grave, even as we have been made spiritually alive.

“the great shepherd of the sheep”—the Lord Jesus is looking out for you, delivering you, leading you—all the way home. The greatest Shepherd ever. You are part of His flock if you are trusting in Him.

“by the blood of the eternal covenant”—the new covenant is forever—it will never lose its effectiveness, ratified by the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who intercedes at the Father’s right hand on behalf of His people

We have no basis to come to our holy God apart from the blood of Jesus—the innocent slain for the guilty.

On this solid ground then, what does the writer of Hebrews pray for his readers?

Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

His prayer is that God would supply everything good for them so that they would do his will. This calls for His doing in us all that is well-pleasing before His presence. Pulling together every ability, filling up whatever is lacking, fixing anything that is wrong. God works this way in us through the God-man Savior-King Jesus the Messiah.

When the people of God do the will of God by the power of God, Jesus gets the glory He deserves. Such living is impossible without God's work in us through Jesus our Savior and Lord. And that glory and praise will go on through the eternal ages to come, because the impact of His work in us will last that long—forever.

Amen. May it be so.

Think how this transforms the way you approach all the challenges of your daily life, whatever they are. God is at work in you to equip you to do what pleases Him. This kind of life is not something you or I deserve, but what Christ Jesus has procured for us. It's something we need to be praying for one another. That's why we pray for what we do in our evening gatherings.

Lean into God's supply. Seek to be sensitive to His will. Practice living in His presence. Treasure your status in Christ, and make the most of it. Our lives should be impossible to explain apart from what God is doing in us through Christ. Join the writer of Hebrews in praying this benediction for your brothers and sisters.

We need a God-consciousness throughout our journey of faith every day. Start your day with God. End it with God. And walk and talk with Him through the day. Keep His Word in your heart, His will on your mind. Love Him, and love others in His name.

3. Holy Community (22-25)

²² I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come

from Italy send you greetings. ²⁵ Grace be with all of you.

This holy community has several dimensions. First, the relationship between the author and his readers—or if you will, the teacher and the congregation he’s addressing.

The author knows that some of what he has had to say will be hard for his readers to receive. He comes alongside them, appealing to them to bear with his exhortation. Sometimes what a congregation most needs to hear is difficult to bring up and hard for them to accept. No doubt you have felt that tension from time to time. Chances are, if you’re feeling it, whoever is exhorting you is feeling it too—just as the writer of Hebrews expresses here.

The truths hardest for us to receive are the usually truths that confront and correct our wrong thinking and practices. *We are glad to receive whatever we already hold and practice. But how are we to grow in Christ if we resist what confronts and corrects us? If we want to know where we most need to change, it’s generally the areas where we are quickest to push back.* The author has written “briefly” in that he could have said much more to his readers, but what he has written he appeals to them to receive.

Next in this holy community is the solidarity and concern they share for leaders like Timothy, who has evidently been in prison and is about to be released.

Hebrews 13:23

You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

You may recall that in Paul's final letter to Timothy he wrote (2 Timothy 4:9) "Do your best to come to me soon."

At the time, of all his co-workers, only Luke was still with him.

It is possible, then, that Timothy did make it to Rome and that while he was there, he may too have been arrested. Or it's possible his arrest came later.

The picture we see here is that both the author of Hebrews and his readers are aware of Timothy's situation, and the author is hopeful to have Timothy with him when he visits them again—hopefully soon. A picture of a solidarity of care and concern for those going through trials of whatever kind.

Hebrews 13:24 Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

Greet all your leaders—to welcome, embrace; he’s already commanded them to keep in mind leaders in the Word who’ve gone before, imitating their life conduct and faith in Christ, who is always the same. He’s commanded them to obey their current leaders as those who watch for the souls and give account to God. Greeting them reflects the good relationship God wants us to have with our spiritual leaders.

That welcoming relationship of loving unity is what ought to exist between us and all the saints—greet all your leaders and all the saints. All the persons who belong to God and are therefore holy. It is a holy community because it is a community that belongs to God Himself. *To be at odds with one another instead of welcoming and embracing one another is contrary to our very identity as God’s children, citizens of the heavenly kingdom.*

The Spirit of God produces this unity, but we must make it an urgent priority to protect and preserve it. It takes work to do so. Vitally important. There is real damage done when the unity is marred.

Ephesians 4:1-3

¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility

and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It's really a display of love for one's neighbor within the community of faith. We are supposed to be showcasing what restoration to our created purpose through Christ looks like.

Leviticus 19:17-18

17 You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. **18** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

This loving holy community extends beyond the local church to all believers everywhere. The author is likely writing from Italy, even Rome. Even if he writes from elsewhere, he is in the company of some who are from Italy who send their greetings to the readers.

Hebrews 13:25

Grace be with all of you.

Wherever we are and whatever our circumstances, all of us need the unmerited

favor and goodness of God upon us. This holy community exists purely because of God's grace. It survives and thrives only by God's grace.

May God continue to grant us this grace! Without Him we can do nothing. That is why we earnestly pray, lean on His Word and His Power, and live connected to one another in the love He has created among His people.

Conclusion

1. Earnest Prayer (18-19)
2. Divine Blessing (20-21)
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Discussion Questions

1. Why is a clear conscience and honorable conduct so important, especially for believers who are under scrutiny or accusation as evildoers?
2. Why would earnest prayer for us be crucial to our clear conscience and honorable conduct?
3. What are ways you make sure you are praying earnestly for your brothers and sisters in Christ?
4. What makes you feel you can share prayer needs with others who will pray earnestly for you?
5. The author asks earnest prayer for him to return to the readers soon. What

does his request reveal about how he views God's providential control of circumstances and God's care for His people?

6. The author's prayer of benediction that God would be at work in the readers to equip them to do His will is grounded on the character (God of peace) and work of God through Christ. What is the connection of this foundation to our day-to-day ability to live for God?
7. Faithful teaching from the Scriptures at times confronts and corrects us. What are ways we can overcome the natural human response to resist making needed changes in light of that confrontation? What can happen if we always reject what confronts and corrects?
8. What does the command to greet (welcome, embrace) all our leaders and all the saints reveal about what the holy community of God's people should be like, and what are some practical ways members of the community display it?
9. What are ways that everything the author has emphasized in these verses is dependent on God's grace—His unmerited favor and goodness to us?