

Hebrews 13:7-17 Answers Heresy & Church Leaders

Introduction: *How can heresy be detected? How is it best stopped?* Prominent in this chapter of Hebrews is the critical role that church leaders play combating false teaching.

******What did the author write in order to safeguard the Hebrews from strange teachings about food (13:7-17)?**

1. He urged them to imitate the faith of their leaders, a faith in Jesus who never changes, 13:7-8.
2. He directly warned them against false teachings on food, saying that we have an altar from which the priests cannot eat, 13:9-10.
3. He made the parallel that as some sacrifices were not eaten, but rather were burned outside the camp, so also Jesus suffered outside of Jerusalem (on the cross); we are to go outside the camp along with Jesus and bear his reproach, 13:11-14.
4. He said that we are to offer up sacrifices of praise and sharing with others (not a sacrifice of animals), 13:15-16.
5. He urged them to be persuaded by their leaders and to yield to them.

— Remember Your Leaders —

1. **Considering the context of the whole paragraph (13:7-16), why did the author point out that their leaders were the ones who had spoken the word of life to them (13:7)?** The contrast was between the reliable word of life spoken by their leaders as opposed to diverse and strange teachings about food (13:9).

What three action verbs are found in 13:7? They were to remember, consider and imitate their leaders.

What would it have meant for the Hebrews to remember their leaders (13:7-16)? It meant that the Hebrews were to remember what the leaders had taught and done. Perhaps these leaders had started the church and then moved on or perhaps they had passed away.

Not only were the Hebrews to remember their leaders, but they were also to consider something about their leaders. What were the Hebrews to consider in 13:7? Compare 13:9b. They were to consider the outcome of the leaders' way of life. A person's beliefs determine his behavior, and a behavioral lifestyle produces its own obvious benefits, especially in contrast to those who don't share that lifestyle. The contrast is between the lifestyle of the leaders and those who were devoted to the varied and strange teachings about food.

2. Why were the Hebrews supposed to consider the outcome of their leader's way of life (13:7)? What was the purpose? They were to consider it so that they would be encouraged to imitate their leader's beliefs and lifestyle.

Aristotle: "We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. . . his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses" (*Rhetoric*).

What theological truth about Jesus was brought out in 13:8? Jesus never changes.

3. Does relevance does 13:8 have to the author's overall argument in this paragraph (13:7-16)? The leaders had taught them the Word of Life about Jesus. Jesus never changes. The false teachings about food were diverse and strange and not something Jesus (or their church leaders) had ever taught.

Mormonism 101: Hebrews 13:8 certainly seems to contradict the false Mormon doctrine of eternal progression, the notion that Jesus is ever changing, ever advancing, ever evolving into a more and more powerful god (one of many). This same idea is reflected in the bizarre Adam-God doctrine, which teaches that as man is God once was, and as God is man may become.

4. What "strange teachings" did the author warn against (13:9)? Evidently the problem was false teachings about dietary restrictions (probably extrapolated from Mosaic Law). The issue here seems not to be Mosaic restrictions, but new and strange teachings that went far beyond Moses.

ESV Colossians 2:16-23 . . . let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink . . . "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" . . . These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

ESV 1 Corinthians 8:8 Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.

Based on 13:9, in contrast to food, what is it that really strengthens the heart? God's grace is what strengthens us, not abstinence from food.

What observation was made in 13:9 about those who were devoted to these strange teachings about food? The food had not benefited them. Pardon the food pun, but the proof is in the pudding!

What should this tell us about any religion that teaches special diets for spiritual purposes? Do you know of any religious groups that do this?

5. **In 13:10-11 the author took the idea of physical food (13:9) to a higher, spiritual level. What altar do we have from which Levitical priests cannot eat (13:10-12)?** See 9:11-28, *Leviticus* 4:12, 16:27, *John* 6:51. Those who serve the tent (tabernacle) are the Levitical priests. According to Mosaic Law, the priests could eat the sacrificial offerings brought to the tent. There was, however, one exception to this. On the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), the sacrifices (a bull and a goat) were taken outside the camp and burned (**Le 16:27**).

In contrast to the Mosaic altar (set up in the tent), our altar is the heavenly altar on which our high priest Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice in the ultimate fulfillment of *Yom Kippur*.

ESV **John 6:51** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

False Religion: Buddhism started out as a non-liturgical version of Hinduism. It flopped. People missed the religious “stuff” of Hinduism. In response, the Buddhists added the liturgy back in to keep its followers. Man-made religions like to have holy men and holy buildings. True Christianity has no sanctuary, no temple, no sacred building, no officiating priest, no altar and no sacrifices. Yet we do have a true spiritual altar and a heavenly priest and together we are living stones that make up a living temple.

6. **Why did those who minister at the tent (the Levitical priests) have no right to eat from our altar (13:10)?** See 7:11-19, 9:23-28. The ultimate problem was that they did not believe in Jesus. Jesus entered the true table as a priest in the order of Melchizedek. The Levitical priests served in the tabernacle that was only a copy of the real one. As such, they were of the wrong order of priests and had no right to serve at or eat from the true (heavenly) altar.

No right to eat (13:10): The author drew a definite line between what has happening back in the Mosaic sacrificial system and what was happening with Jesus. There is no overlap; there is a dichotomy; there is apartheid. You are either associated with one or the other. Neither has any right to eat of the other.

What did the author mean when he wrote that Jesus suffered “outside the gate” (13:12)? Just as the sacrifice of atonement was burned outside the camp, so too Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem, on a hill called Golgotha (Calvary).

According to 13:12, why did Jesus suffer? What was its purpose? Jesus suffered “in order to” (purpose) sanctify the people through his own blood.

7. ******What application did the author urge in 13:13-14? (Reread).** Just as Jesus was crucified outside the city, the author urged the Hebrew Christians to leave the camp of Jerusalem (Judaism and the Old Covenant) and go outside the gate to Calvary, where Jesus died to purify His people from sin.

Example: Ronald Reagan said that he did not leave the Democratic Party, but rather the Democratic Party left him. In a similar way, the author of Hebrews is essentially pointing out that Judaism, originally and legitimately established by Jehovah God, had left the true God and crucified their own Messiah. Judaism had become heretical. John, in Revelation, spoke of heretical Judaism as “those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie” (**Re 3:9**). That which was formerly sacred was now unclean because Jesus had been expelled from it (Bruce, p. 403).

Why might the author have brought out the fact that Jesus bore reproach (13:13)? The Hebrew Christians were themselves undergoing reproach from unbelieving Judaism (the same religion that crucified Jesus).

8. Based on 13:14, why did the author feel no nostalgia toward physical Jerusalem (13:14)? See 11:9-10, 12:22, Galatians 4:25-26, Revelation 11:8. As already mentioned by the author, Abraham was looking for a city whose founder and builder was God. In Christ and the new covenant, we have come to the spiritual Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem.

ESV **Galatians 4:25-26** . . . the present Jerusalem . . . is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

John symbolically referred to the physical Jerusalem as Sodom and Egypt:

ESV **Revelation 11:8** . . . the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.

What city do we seek that is to come (13:14)? See Revelation 21:1-2, 9-14, 22-27. Even though in the new covenant we have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem, there still seems to be a sense in which it has not come in its fullness. The kingdom is both now and not yet.

9. **We’ve been talking about Levitical sacrifices. In 13:15-16, what types of sacrifices are new covenant believers supposed offer to? (Reread). We are to offer up 1.) the sacrifice of verbal praises and 2.) the sacrifice of doing good to and sharing with others.**

ESV **Psalms 50:23** The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me . . .

ESV **Psalms 107:22** . . . offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!

Hebrews 13:16 says, “Do not neglect to do good” (13:16). **What good are you? How do you do good to others?**

Hebrews 13:16 also says, “Do not neglect . . . to share what you have” (13:16). It has been said that talk is cheap; put your money where your mouth is. It is fine and good and scriptural to offer verbal praises to God, but that cannot be all there is to it. According to 13:16, it pleases God when we sacrifice to God by sharing what we have with others (i.e. through service and giving).

10. How is your worship, based on this (13:15-16)? (Rhetorical).

******What final safeguard from false teaching did the author have in 13:17? (Reread).** See 13:7. Rather than listen to the varied and strange teachings about food, the Hebrew Christians were to listen to their own local church leaders. The author seemed to bracket his warning against false teaching between two verses on looking to their leaders for direction (13:7, 17).

What relationship should exist between a church and its leaders, based on 13:17?

11. Do a word study on “obey” and “submit” as found in 13:17. What do these words mean and how are they different in meaning from *hupakouo* (“obey,” used in Ephesians 6:1, 5) and *hupotassomai* (“submit”, used in Romans 13:1, Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 2:13)?

- 1.) The normal Greek word for “obey” is *hupakouo* and is used in **Ephesians 6:1, 5**. It is used with reference to children and slaves. However, the word behind “obey” in Hebrews 13:17 is different from this normal Greek word. From *peitho*, it fundamentally means “to persuade, to convince.” Found here in the middle or passive form, it actually means “allow yourselves to be persuaded by your leaders.” The relationship between a church and its leaders is to be one of discussion, dialog, reasoning, and persuasion. The church is to be open to being persuaded by what the leaders have to say, especially with regard to truth versus false teaching.
- 2.) The common Greek word for “submit” is *hupotassomai* and is used in **Romans 13:1, Colossians 3:18, & 1 Peter 2:13** (with reference to wives and the subjects of the government). Once again, this is not the word used in Hebrews 13:17 for “submit.” Instead, *hupеiko* is used — a word that occurs only here in the entire New Testament. Outside the New Testament, *hupеiko* refers not to a structure (like to the government) to which one submits, but to a battle after which one yields (surrenders). It was used of combatants. Submission still occurs, but the picture is one of serious discussion and dialog prior to one party giving way.

Church Government: What we are dealing with in the final analysis is a delicate balancing act. The church is to be open to being “persuaded” by its leaders. There is to be discussion and teaching, argument and persuasion. The picture is not that of mindless, unquestioning obedience. Yet after a battle (wrangling over ideas), the church should ultimately “submit” (yield) to its leaders. This is especially true in matters of doctrine. The elders should offer substantial evidence as to why a certain teaching should or should not be believed (such as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the Gospel message, the reality of hell or gender roles in the home and church). Yet the elders are the final line of defense against error and if push comes to shove, the those disagreeing with the elder are called up to yield to the elders’ judgment.

12. What reason did the author give for submitting to their leaders (13:17)? It is because the leaders have the responsibility of watching over their souls and will have to give an account for so doing. Similarly, James warned teachers that:

ESV **James 3:1** . . . we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

13. Based on the context, what does it mean to watch over someone’s soul (13:17)?
Compare 13:7-9. In this context it refers to guarding the flock from diverse and strange teachings.

F.F. Bruce: “There would always be a tendency throughout the churches for visitors who came purveying new and esoteric doctrines to be regarded as much more attractive and interesting personalities than the rather humdrum local leaders, who never taught anything new, but were content with the conservative line of apostolic tradition. Nevertheless it was those local leaders, and not the purveyors of strange teaching, who had a real concern for the welfare of the church and a sense of their accountability to God in this respect” (p. 408).

So What?

14. What role do church leaders play in combating heresy?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people’s minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

- These Hebrews lessons are designed for a 45 minute session.

Stephen E. Atkerson

www.NTRF.org

09/10/12