



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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What is the gospel of Jesus Christ? Part 5

RESPONSE—FAITH AND REPENTANCE

I started trying to teach my son to swim very early on. It was a chore. A year or so old at the time, the little guy didn't like getting water in his face in the bathtub, much less this massive ocean of a pool he was staring at now. At first, “teaching him to swim” meant getting him to splash around a bit on the top step, and maybe putting his lips in the water enough to blow some bubbles if he was feeling really brave.

Eventually I convinced him to walk around with me in the shallow end, with a death-grip around my neck, of course. Once we mastered that, it was time for the Big Show—Jumping Off the Side. Fulfilling my God-given duty as a daddy, I lifted him out of the pool, stood him on the side, and said, “Come on, jump!”

I think, at that moment, my one-year-old son wrote me off as a crazy man. The look on his face, in about two seconds, went from confusion to dawning understanding, to amused rejection, to outright contempt. He frowned and said, “No. I go see Mommy.” Again acting faithfully on my solemn responsibility as a father, I refused to surrender, chased him down and eventually convinced him (with various bribes) to come back to the pool. And so we came to the moment of truth.

I jumped into the water again and stood in front of him with my arms outstretched, watching him bob up and down in his swimmy-diaper as one-year-olds do when they kind of want to jump but not really. “Come on, kiddo,” I said. “I’m right here. I’ll catch you, I promise!” He looked at me half skeptically, did one more little wind-up, bouncing at the knees, and then fell into the pool with what was more a flop than a jump.

And I caught him.

After that, we were off to the races. “Doot ’gain, daddy! Doot ’gain!” And so commenced half an hour of jump, catch, lift, reset, jump, catch, lift, reset.

When it was over, my wife and I started to worry that maybe our son had gotten a bit *too* comfortable with the water. What if he wandered out to the pool

when no one was there with him? Would he remember all the times he'd safely jumped into the water and decide he had this pool thing whipped? Would he jump again?

Over the next few days we watched him around the pool, and what we saw both comforted me as a parent and touched me deeply as a father. Never once did my little boy think about jumping into the water—at least not unless I was standing underneath him with my arms out, promising to catch him. And then he would fly!

You see, despite all his apparent successes, my son's trust was never in his own ability to handle the water. It was in his father, and in his father's promise, "Come on, kiddo. Jump. I promise I'll catch you."

Introducing Faith and Repentance

Mark tells us that Jesus began his ministry by preaching, "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel**" ([Mark 1:15 \(NASB\)](#)). That command—repent and believe—is what God requires of us in response to the good news of Jesus.

Throughout the New Testament, this is what we see the apostles calling people to do. Jesus called on his listeners to repent and believe the good news. Peter, at the end of his sermon on the day of Pentecost, told the people to "**repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus**" ([Acts 2:38](#)). Paul explained his ministry in [Acts 20:21](#), saying, "**I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus**" (NIV). And in [26:18](#), he recounts how Jesus himself had sent him

[Acts 26:18 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸ "**To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.**"

Faith and repentance. This is what marks out those who are Christ's people, or "Christians." In other words, a Christian is one who turns away from his sin and trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ—and nothing else—to save him from sin and the coming judgment.

Faith Is Reliance

Faith is one of those words that's been misused for so long that most people have no idea what it really means. Ask someone on the street to describe faith, and while you might get some respectful-sounding words, the heart of the matter will most likely be that faith is belief in the ridiculous against all evidence.

One year I was watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on television with my son. The event's theme was "Believe!" and the focal point, suspended above the reviewing stand, was what the anchors were calling a Believe-o-meter. Every time a new float came by, or a band played, or dancers danced in their elf costumes, the needle on the Believe-o-meter bounced a little higher. Of course, the highlight of the parade was when Santa Claus himself rode in—his sleigh fashioned inexplicably in the shape of a majestic goose—and the Believe-o-meter went wild! What with the music, the dancing, the confetti, and the screaming kids—and screaming adults, for that matter—an alien visitor would surely have concluded that yes, Elia, these people really *do* believe this.

My six-year-old, God bless him, thought the whole thing was uproariously silly.

But that's what the world thinks now about faith. It's a charade, a fun and comforting game that people are free to engage in if they wish, but with no real connection to the actual world. Children believe in Santa Claus and the Easter bunny. Mystics believe in the power of stones and crystals. Crazy people believe in fairies. And Christians, well, they believe in Jesus.

Read the Bible, though, and you'll find that faith is nothing like that caricature. Faith is not believing in something you can't prove, as so many people define it. It is, biblically speaking, *reliance*. A rock-solid, truth-grounded, promise-founded *trust* in the risen Jesus to save you from sin.

Paul tells us about the nature of faith in Romans 4, in his discussion about Abraham. Here's how he describes Abraham's faith:

[Romans 4:18-21 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸ "**In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."**

¹⁹ **Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and**

**the deadness of Sarah's womb;
²⁰ yet, with respect to the promise of God,
he did not waver in unbelief but grew
strong in faith, giving glory to God,
²¹ and being fully assured that what God
had promised, He was able also to per-
form.”**

Despite all that was working against God’s promise—Abraham’s age, his wife’s age and barrenness—Abraham believed what God had said. He trusted in God without wavering and relied on him to accomplish his promises. Abraham’s was not a perfect faith, of course; Ishmael’s birth to Hagar proves that Abraham at first tried to rely on his own schemes to fulfill God’s promises. But having repented of that sin, Abraham in the end put his faith in God. He relied on him, as Paul says, **“fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”**

The gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to do the very same thing—to put our faith in Jesus, rely on him, and trust him to do what he has promised to do.

Faith for a Righteous Verdict

But what exactly are we relying on Jesus for? To put it simply, we are relying on him to secure for us a righteous verdict from God the Judge, rather than a guilty one.

Let me explain. The Bible teaches that the greatest need of every human being is to be found righteous in God’s sight, rather than wicked. When the judgment comes, we desperately need the verdict pronounced over us to be **“righteous”** rather than **“condemned.”** That is what the Bible calls being **“justified”**—it is God’s declaration that we are righteous in his sight, rather than guilty.

And how do we secure this righteous verdict? The Bible tells us plainly that it won’t be by asking God to look at our own lives. No, that would be a fool’s move. If God is ever to count us righteous, he will have to do it on the basis of something other than our own sinful record. He’ll have to do it on the basis of someone *else’s* record, someone who is standing as a substitute for us. That’s where faith in Jesus comes in. When we put our faith in Jesus, we are relying on him to stand as our substitute before God, in both his perfect life and his penalty-paying death for us on the cross. In other words, we are trusting that God will substitute Jesus’ record for

ours, and therefore declare us to be righteous (**Romans 3:22**).

Romans 3:22 (NASB)

²² “Even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.”

You might think of it like this: When we trust Jesus to save us, we become united to him, and a magnificent exchange takes place. All our sin, rebellion, and wickedness is imputed (or credited) to Jesus, and he dies because of it (**1 Peter 3:18**). And at the same time, the perfect life Jesus lived is imputed to us, and we are declared righteous. God looks at us, and instead of seeing our sin, he sees Jesus’ righteousness.

1 Peter 3:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ “For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”

This is what Paul means when he writes in **Romans 4** that God **“credited righteousness”** to us apart from our own works, and that our sins are **“covered”** (**vv. 5, 7**).

Romans 4:5 (NASB)

⁵ “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

Romans 4:7 (NASB)

⁷ “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAW-LESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.”

Most importantly, it’s what Paul means when he says, shockingly, that God **“justifies the ungodly”** (**v. 5**)!

Romans 4:5 (NASB)

⁵ “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

God does not declare us righteous because we are ourselves righteous. And thank God that is true, because none of us would meet that standard! No, God declares us righteous because by faith, we are clothed with Christ’s righteous life. God saves us by pure grace, not because of anything we have done, but solely because of what *Jesus* has done for us.

The prophet Zechariah makes this point with a beautiful image of Joshua the high priest being given new clothes. Here’s what Zechariah writes:

Zechariah 3:1-5 (NASB)

¹ “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.

² The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?”

³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel.

⁴ He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” Again he said to him, “See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.”

⁵ Then I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by.”

Those rich, clean, new clothes did not belong to Joshua. Nor did that clean turban. All that belonged to Joshua himself were the filthy clothes in which he stood, the very ones Satan was about to point to in derision and accusation. No, the righteousness Joshua enjoyed before God was not his own. It was given to him by another.

That is true for us as Christians, too. Our righteousness before God is not our own. It is given to us by Jesus. God looked at his Son and saw our sin, and he looks at us and sees Jesus’ righteousness. As the song says,

**“God the just is satisfied,
to look on Him and pardon me.”**

Faith Alone

When you realize just how dependent you are on Jesus for your salvation—his death for your sin, his life for your righteousness—you understand why the Bible is so insistent that salvation comes *only* through faith in him. There is no other way, no other savior, nothing and no one else in the world on which we can rely for salvation, including our own efforts.

Every other religion in human history rejects this idea that we are justified by faith alone. Instead, other religions assert that salvation is won through moral effort, good deeds, and somehow balancing one’s account by accruing enough merit to outweigh one’s

evil. That’s not surprising, really. It’s very human to think—and even to *insist*—that we can contribute to our own salvation.

We are all such self-reliant people, aren’t we? We’re convinced of our own self-sufficiency, and we resent any insinuation that we are what we are because of somebody else’s intervention. Think of how you would feel if someone said about your job or something else you value, “Yeah, you didn’t earn that. You only have it because somebody *gave* it to you.” **And yet that’s exactly the case when it comes to our salvation before God.** It is given to us as a gift of grace, and we don’t contribute anything at all—not our own righteousness, not our own payment for our sins, and certainly not any good works that balance the account (**Galatians 2:16**).

Galatians 2:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ “Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”

Putting your faith in Christ means that you utterly renounce any other hope of being counted righteous before God. Do you find yourself trusting in your own good works? Faith means admitting that they are woefully insufficient, and trusting Christ alone. Do you find yourself trusting what you understand to be your good heart? Faith means acknowledging that your heart is not good at all, and trusting Christ alone. To put it another way, it means jumping off the edge of the pool and saying, “Jesus, if you don’t catch me, I’m done. I’ve no other hope, no other savior. Save me, Jesus, or I die.”

That is faith!

Repentance, the Flip Side of the Coin

Jesus’ message to his listeners was, “**Repent and believe in the gospel**” (**Mark 1:15**). If faith is turning to Jesus and relying on him for salvation, repentance is the flip side of that coin. It is turning away from sin, hating it, and resolving by God’s strength to forsake it, even as we turn to him in faith. So Peter told the on-looking crowd, “**Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out**” (**Acts 3:19 NIV**). And Paul tells everyone “**that they should repent and turn to God**” (**Acts 26:20**).

Repentance is not just an optional plug-in to the Christian life. It is absolutely crucial to it, marking out

those who have been saved by God from those who have not.

I have known many people who would say something like, “Yes, I’ve accepted Jesus as Savior, so I’m a Christian. But I’m just not ready to accept him as Lord yet. I have some things to work through.” **In other words, they claimed that they could have faith in Jesus and be saved, and yet not repent of sin.**

If we understand repentance rightly, we’ll see that the idea that you can accept Jesus as Savior but not Lord is nonsense. For one thing, it just doesn’t do justice to what Scripture says about repentance and its connection with salvation. For example, Jesus warned, **“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3)**. The apostles, when they heard Peter’s story about the conversion of Cornelius, praised God for granting to the Gentiles **“repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18)**, and Paul speaks of **“repentance that leads to salvation” in 2 Corinthians 7:10**.

Moreover, to have faith in Jesus is, at its core, to believe that he really is who he says he is—the crucified and risen King who has conquered death and sin, and who has the power to save. Now how could a person believe all that, trust in it, and rely on it, and yet at the same time say, “But I don’t acknowledge that you are King over *me*”? **That doesn’t make any sense.** Faith in Christ carries in itself a renunciation of that rival power that King Jesus conquered—sin. And where that renunciation of sin is not present, neither is genuine faith in the One who defeated it.

It is as Jesus said in **Matthew 6:24**: **“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”** To put one’s faith in King Jesus is to renounce his enemies.

Repentance, Not Perfection but Taking Sides

Now none of that means that a Christian will never sin. Repenting of sin doesn’t necessarily mean that you stop sinning—certainly not altogether, and often not in particular areas, either. Christians are still fallen sinners even after God gives us new spiritual life, and we will continue to struggle with sin until we are glorified with Jesus (see, e.g., **Galatians 5:17; 1 John 2:1**).

Galatians 5:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ **“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”**

1 John 2:1 (NASB)

¹ **“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”**

But even if repentance doesn’t mean an immediate end to our sinning, it does mean that we will no longer live at peace with our sin. We will declare mortal war against it and dedicate ourselves to resisting it by God’s power on every front in our lives.

Many Christians struggle hard with this idea of repentance because they somehow expect that if they genuinely repent, sin will go away and temptation will stop. When that doesn’t happen, they fall into despair, questioning whether their faith in Jesus is real. It’s true that when God regenerates us, he gives us power to fight against and overcome sin (**1 Corinthians 10:13**).

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NASB)

¹³ **“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”**

But because we will continue to struggle with sin until we are glorified, we have to remember that genuine repentance is more fundamentally a matter of the heart’s attitude toward sin than it is a mere change of behavior. Do we hate sin and war against it, or do we cherish it and defend it?

One writer put this truth beautifully:

“The difference between an unconverted and a converted man is not that the one has sins and the other has none; but that the one takes part with his cherished sins against a dreaded God, and the other takes part with a reconciled God against his hated sins.”

So whose side do you take—your sin’s or your God’s?

Real Change, Real Fruit

When a person genuinely repents and believes in Christ, the Bible says that he is given new spiritual life. **“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,”** Paul says. **“But because of his great love**

for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions” ([Ephesians 2:1, 4–5 NIV](#)). When that happens, our life changes—not immediately, not quickly, not even necessarily steadily. But it does change. We begin to bear fruit.

The Bible says that Christians are to be marked by the same kind of love, compassion, and goodness that characterized Jesus himself. True Christians will perform “**deeds in keeping with their repentance,**” Paul says ([Acts 26:20](#)). “**Each tree is known by its own fruit,**” Jesus said. “**For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush**” ([Luke 6:44](#)). In other words, when people are given new spiritual life, they begin to do the kinds of things that Jesus did. They begin to live like Jesus lived and bear good fruit.

One thing we must be constantly on guard against is any thought that those fruits are the cause of our salvation. There is always a danger that when we begin to see fruit in our lives, we’ll subtly begin to rely on that fruit for our salvation, instead of on Christ. Guard against that temptation, Christian. Realize that the fruit you bear is merely that—the fruit of a tree already made good by God’s grace in Christ. To rely on your own Christian fruit to secure God’s favor is ultimately to shift your faith from Jesus to yourself. And that is no salvation at all.

Where Will You Point?

When you stand before God at the judgment, I wonder what you plan to do or say in order to convince him to count you righteous and admit you to all the blessings of his kingdom? What good deed or godly attitude will you pull out of your pocket to impress him? Will you pull out your church attendance? Your family life? Your spotless thought life? The fact that you haven’t done anything really heinous in your own eyes? I wonder what you’ll hold up before him while saying, “God, on account of *this*, justify me!”

I’ll tell you what every Christian whose faith is in Christ alone will do, by God’s grace. They will simply and quietly point to Jesus. And this will be their plea: “O God, do not look for any righteousness in my own life. Look at your Son. Count me righteous not because of anything I’ve done or anything I am, but because of him. He lived the life I should have lived. He died the death that I deserve. I

have renounced all other trusts, and my plea is him alone. Justify me, O God, because of Jesus.”

CORAM DEO **(Before the face of God)**

The New Testament is in the Old concealed; the Old Testament is in the New revealed.
—Augustine

This brings us to the special issue of this series, the Gospel According to the Old Testament, and this book highlighting the gospel according to Hosea. The aim of the series is to show the pervasiveness of Christ in the Old Testament and to encourage all who read, teach, or preach from the Old Testament to do so with a view to Christ and His gospel. The book of Hosea, like every Old Testament book, lends itself to this approach.

Much of Hosea’s message parallels the points of the sermons preached by most of his prophetic and ministerial counterparts: God hates sin, God judges sin, God delivers from judgment upon repentance. Each of these points certainly has gospel implications. Yet, as is true regarding all of God’s servants, there was something unique about Hosea, his ministry, and his message. His life and preaching exhibit a transparency that clearly points to Christ, but they also evidence a deep complexity that places his prophecy among the most difficult to understand in the Old Testament. But whether we look on or under the surface, Christ is the key to meaning. Discovering Hosea’s inspired contribution to the progression of God’s redemptive revelation is the goal of our study.

To say that Christ is the key to understanding Hosea is not to say that He is the only specific theme in the book, but it is to say that every other truth or command must find its ultimate reference in Him. To attempt to implement anything the Bible requires without reference to Jesus Christ is folly, whether it pertains to Old Testament or New Testament truth. The same principle applies to Hosea. It is beyond the scope of this book to treat exhaustively every verse in Hosea; this is not a commentary. Rather, this will be a theological overview of Hosea’s message with a view to its gospel application. Searching for Christ in Hosea is not a vain game of hide and seek; finding Him is a sure thing. God’s promise is that those who seek Him will find Him. So as we study Hosea, we want to be on Christ-alert.

I will develop the study in three parts. **Part 1** concerns necessary issues of introduction. Introduction is

that discipline of study that deals with such matters as authorship, date, historical background, purpose, and theme of writing. Although these may not be the most exciting or edifying elements of Bible study, they are essential facts that help to put a book in its context. Knowing both the historic and the canonical contexts of any book of the Bible is a significant aid and safeguard to proper interpretation. It is important to see where Hosea fits in the progress of both redemptive history and revelation.

Part 2 develops the symbolic message of Hosea—his marriage to Gomer. Unquestionably, the link between Hosea’s personal life and his public ministry is unique and therefore critical for the understanding of the message. Understanding the theology of marriage as a biblical symbol and type of God’s relationship to His people and specifically of Christ’s relationship to His church is essential to grasping the significance of Hosea’s experience. The significance of his tragic experience highlights the beauty of the ideal relationship that exists between Christ and His bride.

Part 3 establishes the parallels between Hosea’s life and the message he preached. If his marriage to Gomer was the symbolic message, his direct message concerns God’s marriage to Israel. What Hosea did for Gomer; God did for Israel. What Gomer did to Hosea, Israel did to God. It was a relationship initiated by divine love, spurned by treacherous sin, and maintained by unfailing divine faithfulness. Although many of Hosea’s statements are deep and difficult, his overall gospel message is very much on the surface. This particular part of the study will lend itself to the aim of the series to show the gospel in the Old Testament.

Please remember that in this study I am concerned with the big picture of Hosea, not the minute details. Our interest is in why and how the parts fit together to advance the revelation of the Christ and the gospel, rather than a technical exegesis to interpret all the specific parts. There are commentaries for that. So while I acknowledge that all the problems of interpretation may not be resolved, it is my prayer that throughout this study the Lord Jesus Christ will be evidently set forth and that the Holy Spirit will lead into truth by showing Christ and glorifying Him.



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Hebrews 13 – Overview

Part 1

When coming to [Hebrew 13](#), in some ways it almost seems out of place. In studying Hebrews up to this point, it has been chapter after chapter of doctrine, doctrine, doctrine. It has taken time and work to get through all of the various warnings that the author has given and to keep them in perspective for the Christian life. The warnings are very weighty and have great significance for the Christian’s walk. It was not until [Hebrews 12](#) that the author really brought in any major kind of exhortational passages (v1-4, 12-15), but still the primary content dealt with the doctrine of God’s discipline in a believer’s life, as well as the final warning. The exhortations of [Hebrews 12](#) were somewhat supplemental to the overall purpose of the chapter. However, when arriving at [Hebrews 13](#), the entire tone of the content changes dramatically. It is one exhortation after another – and in some ways the actual exhortations almost seem somewhat disjointed, even unrelated to all that has been studied. There are actually 21 exhortations in just 25 verses, and nine of those exhortations are in the imperative tense which makes them commands.

Now, just follow the flow here in taking a look at these verses. First, he says to “**let brotherly love continue**”.

That is very good – a great encouragement to say the least. However, it is only the third time that the word “love” has been used, and certainly there is not any kind of major teaching on “brotherly love” anywhere previously. In v2, he talks about entertaining “strangers” – not previously mentioned. In v4, he talks about “prisoners” – not previously mentioned. Then in v4, he says that “marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled”. At this point the reader should be scratching his head! The author has not said one single word throughout this entire letter about marriage – not one word. I am reading that and I am asking myself “Where did that come from?” Then, on three separate occasions (v7, 17, 24) he talks about those who “rule over you” or those who lead you. Once again, the author has not even come close to discussing biblical leadership in this letter – not one place, and here he mentions it three times. He mentions in v9 about being “carried about with various and strange doctrines”. The word “doctrine” has only been mentioned once before in [Hebrews 6:2](#) in relation to the “doctrine of baptisms”. Then right in the very middle of the chapter (v10-14), is this amazing doctrine about Christ and the fact that He “suffered outside the gate” and therefore believers are to “go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach”. Then he ends talking about praying and having a “good conscience” in v18 and bearing with the “word of exhortation” in v22. It almost seems at first glance that the author is in a rush, has to be somewhere, but he still has a lot to say before he finishes the letter. It seems that he is just writing down things that he was not able to previously mention, but simply has run out of time. Obviously, that is not the case, but at first reading it seems to give that impression.

Now, these observations are not intended in any way to make light of the Scriptures – not in any way at all. However, if one does not pay attention to how something is being written, then in essence they can easily miss the meaning. There is a rule in hermeneutics that simply states that “without context there is no text”. Some state it as “without context, the text becomes pretext.” There is such an obvious difference in content here that it has to gain the reader’s attention in some way. In my mind personally, this letter and Romans are the most doctrinal books in the Bible. Most all other New Testament letters start with doctrine and end with exhortation, – Ephesians, Colossians, etc. That is the clear New Testament pattern – doctrine, then practical application, and rightfully so. In Hebrews, the divide between doctrine and practical application takes place

between [Hebrews 11](#) and [Hebrews 12](#). That should be very clear to any serious student of this letter. However, if one reads these last two chapters carefully, it should be clear that they still are very different from one another. For instance, in [Hebrews 12](#) the author builds to an intensely theological crescendo that ends with the statement in the last verse that “our God is a consuming fire”. However, when coming to [Hebrews 13](#), the reader is moving from fire to function, from the vertical to the horizontal, from a personal love for God to a practical love for the church and those in the church. He ends not with a “consuming fire”, but “grace be with you all”. The tone of those two verses is drastically different.

Hebrews, though, is so different from the other books of the New Testament. It is intensely doctrinal from the very beginning. There is so little exhortation, but then the reader comes to [Hebrews 13](#) and it is like the author just has so much to say that he has not been able to address – so every verse is on a different subject than the previous verse. Just look again at how this develops: v1 – let love continue; v2 – entertain strangers; v3 – remember prisoners; v4 – marriage; v5 – covetousness, contentment; v6 – do not be afraid; v7 – those who lead you; v8 – Jesus Christ; v9 – strange doctrines; v10 – an altar; v11 – burning animals; v12 – Jesus suffering; v13 – bear His reproach; v14 – no continuing city; v15 – offer praise; v16 – do good; v17 – leaders again; v18 – pray; v20 – blood of the covenant; v21 – God’s work in you; v22 – exhortation. What is he trying to say in all of this? Where is the unity? What is this? You have to see and appreciate this dramatic change to properly exegete this chapter – it is a must. It could probably be guaranteed that somewhere in some theological institution someone has written a doctoral thesis that there must be two authors to Hebrews based on the change of character in Hebrews 13. Listen to how one of the commentaries identifies this. It says, “*The abrupt shift that occurs with Hebrews 13 and its unique content and certain stylistic differences with the rest of the epistle have caused several scholars to question its authenticity.*” Several of the commentaries remarked that the conclusion of some scholars was that [Hebrews 13](#) was simply an add-on at the last minute by someone else. Some even said that some scholars thought that Paul probably added the last chapter because he felt that the letter needed some additional exhortation. That seems to be somewhat frivolous in handling the Scriptures, but at least it points out the problems that this last chapter has created for some.

Now, here is what should be taken from this dramatic change of character in this chapter. The author is literally spiritually exhausted by the time he reaches

Hebrews 13. He has provided an amazingly deep, deep explanation and exaltation of the high priestly ministry of Christ and the responsibilities that it places personally on believers. He has very slowly and very carefully dealt with the incredibly serious warnings that every believer needs to heed. He has literally exhausted himself in presenting to these Hebrew Christians who were being persecuted and having their goods plundered that Jesus Christ is more than sufficient and more than worthy of their continued faithfulness. Obviously, however, there are some “minor” issues that he may have wanted to deal with, but they simply never fit into the content that he was addressing. If someone is writing or talking about a subject that is weighty, essential, and crucial, then the last thing that they want to do is to somehow drain off the seriousness of their subject with some issues that are minor in comparison to what they are talking about. Even in this chapter, it seems that his insertion of v10-14 on Christ’s suffering and the believer’s corresponding response to that suffering, shows that he is having trouble leaving the subject of Jesus Christ. He has been utterly consumed with the person and the work of Jesus Christ, and in some ways everything else just seems to dwindle in importance to Him. Personally, I love how he ends this letter. He is letting the believers know that he has not wasted or exploited their time with His exaltation of Christ. To the contrary, everything else just pales in the light of what Christ has done for them. If believers really and truly understand who Christ is and what He has accomplished on their behalf, then living for Him should be their joy.

When a person does not understand or appreciate doctrine, they will find it very difficult to live for Christ. For those Christians who never seem to truly live for Christ with passion, with obedience, and with integrity, generally they are not grounded in doctrine and do not like doctrine. However, doctrine is foundational to the Christian life, and unfortunately the Christian landscape is just cluttered with religious programs and gimmicks that have little to no impact on people’s lives. Many churches do not systematically teach doctrine. Messages are generally topical and book series are short. Many believe that long series tend to cause people to lose interest, so they teach through the Scriptures quickly. Someone told me that they had taught the book Ephesians in four weeks.

The modern church has become worldly. Churches today seek the world’s wisdom, believe the world’s psychology, follow the world’s agenda, and unfortu-

nately adopt the world’s methods. I was so grieved recently by a Christian concert that was held in a city near where I live of which I saw a video. The band had all of the lights and the stage paraphernalia and they were singing a song that I could not even understand what they were singing. It was just loud. However, what really drew my spiritual ire and indignation was that they had bubbles floating all around the stage that were being created with a bubble machine. I guess they could not use stage smoke, so they used bubbles floating all over the auditorium. This was in the First Baptist Church of that city - not some liberal venue. The whole event was biblically irreverent, but it was what was appealing to those listening and watching. Could someone imagine anything like this happening when Jesus or Paul were teaching – smoke, flashing lights, bubbles? How ludicrous does that actually sound? The church has literally made Christianity a spectator event where people are much more concerned with being entertained than being driven to the person of Christ.

If many of today’s church leaders were surveyed, they would say that the church needs to be innovative, creative, and much more culturally aligned than it is. According to worldly wisdom, the Bible is simply not able to meet the demands of living in the 21st century. Many do not believe that the gospel is sufficient to win people to Christ or that the Word of God is able to promote meaningful spiritual growth, provide practical guidance, or transform people’s lives. They have placed God in a place where He really needs people’s help. So, what do churches do? Well, at a very basic level they simply supplant the Word of God with other things. They take the plain and clear teaching of Scripture and supplement it with frivolous entertainment, group therapy, psychological counseling, social programs, political activism, signs and wonders, and anything else that promises to appeal to modern religious consumers. No wonder Paul was so adamant in [Galatians 1:8-9](#) about those who taught what he called “another gospel”. There is no telling what a person might hear in some church services.

According to the world’s theology, sin is merely a dysfunction and salvation means having a better self-esteem. When this theology comes to the church, what it does is replace difficult, but essential doctrines and warnings like those in Hebrews, with practical techniques for self-improvement. People like Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer are experts at this kind of frivolous and vain theology. The world’s agenda is personal happiness and personal fulfillment, so the gospel is presented as a plan for individual gratification rather than as a pathway to costly discipleship. Where did the church ever get off track, and what will it take to get back on

track? The church seems willing to try whatever seems like it might work. It easily be called the “gospel of pragmatism”, or whatever it takes to draw a crowd.

Recently a very prominent and influential pastor who has a very large and popular church said that he was not going to do expository preaching anymore because it simply was not what the people enjoyed. Just think what he is saying to a younger generation of preachers who just want to have a big church somewhere in affluent suburban America. In an effort to make newcomers feel more comfortable, many pastors teach the least amount of theology and doctrine possible. Worship in a service has become much more of a form of popular entertainment rather than transcendent praise.

At the same time, evangelical churches have become much more humanistic. It is more about the individual and having their felt needs met than it is about becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. The inevitable result is that the less that people talk about God, the more they will talk about themselves. It is all about how God can meet someone’s personal needs. Sermon content is determined more by the audience than by the Holy Scriptures. Everything is now relative and being biblical is culturally outdated and irrelevant. Moral convictions are no longer determined by careful exegesis on the basis of biblical absolutes, but rather they are simply choices that people make based on their personal feelings. No one is compelled to think and study anymore – just come to church and be entertained! It seems that the church has developed and is satisfied with a kind of meaningless Christianity. If the blind lead the blind, they both will fall into the ditch.

So believers are left with a penetrating question - whatever happened to the truth? Well, it got lost in the church service when the minister decided to give his people what they wanted rather than what they needed. It got lost in the staff meeting when they decided to give more time to the choir and announcements than they would give to the preaching of the Word of God. It got lost when the church decided that it only needed to meet once a week. It got lost when people decided that they did not need to bring a Bible to church anymore. It was lost in the Christian bookstore somewhere between the self-help section and the aisle full of Jesus merchandise and Christian CD’s. It was lost in people’s minds and hearts when they decided to accept the world’s

theology of human achievement rather than sacrificial service and allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Well, having said all of that, it is no wonder that the author of Hebrews has unashamedly and uncompromisingly taught about what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, and left some of the most basic of practical principles to the very end. It should be appreciated that he has not short circuited the real message – Jesus Christ the exalted son of God, the believer’s great High Priest. No wonder he uses simple exhortations in [Hebrews 13](#) like “**do not forget**” and “**remember**” and “**do not be carried about**”. It seems that he is just assuming that his audience got it. He is assuming that they understood the message about Christ and His high priestly work on their behalf, and because of that message that they decided they would take the warnings seriously and devote their lives to being faithful followers of Christ. What do you think? Do you reckon that the modern cultural church got it? Do you think that their understanding of the high priestly work of Christ on their behalf will ever make a meaningful impact on how they live and that to which believers should be truly committed?

The Scriptures are full of passages where believers are exhorted to live lives that exemplify what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. If someone claims to be a believer, then it only follows that they should live like a believer. Churches are full of people who say they are believers, but they live like unbelievers. Somehow the modern Christian culture has made obedience and faithfulness optional. Most of that comes from the simple fact that local churches allow people to be members in its church, but they never address or discipline them when they live in open sin or rebellion to the clear teachings of Scripture. [Titus 2:7-8](#) says,

Tit 2:7: in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, ⁸sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.

No matter what someone thinks, the world is going to take its notion of what Christianity is and what it is like from those who profess to be Christians. Jesus said in [Matthew 5:16](#),

Mt 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Eventually, what a person says that they sincerely believe about God and Christ has to be translated into that which is being practically demonstrated in their lives. There are no other meaningful options and for anyone to not see that simply means that they have missed what it even means to be a Christian. Christians cannot divorce their lives from what they say that they believe. The heart of [Hebrews 13](#) is its doctrinal exhortation in v10-14 where Christians are exhorted to follow the example provided to them by Jesus Christ. He is always the motive for what believers do.

ENDNOTES


¹Hughes, 205.

²Allen, 603.

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