

JESUS: The Better Practical Expression of God at Work

This epistle has been predominantly theological in content. Paul has been laying the theological and eschatological foundations of the supremacy of the new covenant realities in Jesus Christ. His objective was to convince the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem that the spiritual relationship they had with Jesus Christ was far better than the old covenant Judaic religion that surrounded them, and to which they were being pressured to revert. Even in the midst of Paul's theological arguments, his pastoral heart of concern for his brethren causes him to intersperse his instruction with practical behavioral admonitions. For example, he has exhorted them to "encourage one another" (3:13), to "enter God's rest" (4:9-13), to be "diligent to realize the full assurance of hope" (6:11), to "incite one another unto love and good works" (10:24), to "not forsake assembling together" (10:25), to "endure" (10:36), to accept discipline (12:3-11), and to "pursue peace and holiness" (12:14). Here at the end of this epistle, Paul employs his typical style (cf. Eph. 5:1 – 6:9; I Thess. 4:1-12) of using imperative verbs (1,2,3,7,9,17,18) to admonish practical behavioral action. Paul understood that the theology and the theory had to issue forth in the practicum of behavior consistent with the character of Christ.

Some commentators have questioned the coherence of this final chapter with the rest of the epistle, regarding the content of these latter admonitions to be a loose collection of brief ethical exhortations disconnected from what precedes them. On the contrary, it is not difficult to observe the natural flow of theme and vocabulary that draws this final section into the integral whole of the epistle at large. Paul's encouragement to "pursue the holiness without which no man shall see the Lord" (12:14) is certainly amplified in the practical situations of brotherly love, hospitality, visiting prisoners, respecting marriage, and avoiding materialism (13:1-6). This expression of God's holy character in Christian behavior is also essential to the "well-pleasing service of worship" that is to be evidenced in the unshakeable kingdom of Christ" (12:28). "*Well-pleasing* service of worship" finds practical expression, therefore, in the entirety of the admonitions of chapter 13, but more specifically in verses 7-21 where the Christian readers are advised to worship "outside the camp" of religion (13), offering a sacrifice of praise (15) and sacrifices of doing good and sharing with which God is *well-pleased* (16), all of which God works in the Christian and thus causes to be "*well-pleasing* in His sight" (21). The "*well-pleasing* service of worship" (12:28) involves the entirety of our lifestyle and behavior as we allow God to work in us and express the worth-ship of His character in every situation. Paul was explaining to the Jerusalem Christians that "Jesus is the better practical expression of God at work," expressing His character of holiness in a lifestyle of worship – so much better than the rituals of religious worship that were still taking place in the temple at Jerusalem.

13:1 This first paragraph (1-6) addresses a particular expressive feature of God's holy character – love. "God is love" (I Jn. 4:8,16). The practical expression of God's holy character in lifestyle worship will involve seeking the highest good of others in love. Such love will be expressed to the brethren of the Christian community (1), to strangers in hospitality (2), to prisoners and those mistreated (3), as well as in respect for marriage (4), but not toward material things (5,6). God's love through us (cf. Rom. 5:5) is toward people, not things! Let it be noted that in Paul's thought the practicum of Christianity does not allow for a sacred vs. secular dichotomy. When Christ is our life (Col. 3:4), everything in life is invested with the sacredness of His character expression. All of life is to be marked with holiness and worship, and in particular the practical areas that Paul proceeds to mention.

“Let love of the brethren continue.” Apparently the Jerusalem Christians had a healthy community of love. Earlier Paul had mentioned “the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints” (6:10), and urged them to “pursue peace with all” their brethren (12:14). This brotherly love (Greek *philadelphia*, from which the “City of Brotherly Love” is named – cf. Rev. 3:7-13) for the “brethren” (cf. 3:1,12; 10:19; 13:22) of the Christian community is encouraged and commended throughout the New Testament writings (cf. Matt. 23:8; Jn. 13:35; 15:12,17; Rom. 12:10; I Thess. 4:9; I Pet. 1:22; I Jn. 4:14-17). “Love of the brethren,” our spiritual brothers and sisters in the family of God, is more than a polite handshake on Sunday morning, with a standardized questioning, “How are you?” and the token response, “Fine!” Rather, “love of the brethren” is based on the deeper spiritual commonality of Christians whereby they are interdependent upon one another in the Body of Christ (cf. I Cor. 12:12-26). Christians are integrally linked and united because the living Christ dwells in each Christian, and they are thereby invested in each other’s lives. The conception of a “lone-ranger” Christian “doing his own thing” without connection to the Body is alien to Christian thought. Paul was encouraging and exhorting the Christians in Jerusalem to abide, remain, and continue in their expression of God’s love for one another in the Christian community.

13:2 Expressing God’s love to those in our local Christian community is expanded to include strangers. **“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for through this some have entertained angels unknowingly.”** As a practical expression of God’s worthy character of holiness and love, Paul exhorts the Jerusalem Christians to “not neglect, forget, or disregard” showing hospitality to strangers. Who are these “strangers” or “foreigners” (Greek *philoxenias* – “love of strangers”) that Paul mentions? The context of the “love of the brethren” in the previous sentence (1) makes it likely that Paul is referring to Christian brethren who were outside of their fellowship, and from another city. Practicing this kind of hospitality by receiving Christians from others places as guests in their homes was an important expression of love among Christians in the first century. Paul had encouraged the Roman Christians to “practice hospitality” (Rom. 12:13), and suggested that it be a criteria for elders of the church (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). Peter also advised Christians to “be hospitable to one another without complaint” (I Pet. 4:8,9). In the *Didache*, a collection of early Christian teachings, it is written, “Let everyone who comes in the name of the Lord be received. If he comes as a traveler, help him as much as you can” (*Didache* 12:1,2).¹ The Roman Emperor, Julian, is reported to have objected that the Christians’ kindness toward strangers was a chief means of propagating their atheism. (Christians were often charged with “atheism” because they did not have a god who was identified with a particular temple, with a particular person, such as the emperor, or with a particular idol object.) The importance of Christian hospitality in the early church was based largely on the unavailability of acceptable lodging facilities. The inns that were available were notoriously immoral, akin to brothels. Loving hospitality to strangers became an identifying practice of Christians who wanted to maintain a holy expression of the character of Christ. Paul recommended persons for hospitable reception: Phoebe (Rom. 16:1,2), Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:19-30, and sought such for himself (Philemon 22).

Either as incentive or explanation, Paul notes that through the practice of hospitality to strangers, “some have entertained angels unknowingly.” Old Testament examples of receiving angelic messengers from God includes Abraham and Sarah’s reception of three messengers (Gen. 18:1-15), the two angels who visited Lot in Sodom (Gen. 19:1-26), and the angel who

came to Gideon (Judges 6:11-24). Jesus' comments to His disciples expands the concept of entertaining angels to entertaining the Lord Jesus Himself,

“For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ The righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick or in prison and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it unto Me’” (Matt. 25:35-40)

In the hospitable reception and entertaining of strangers we are often unaware of what God is doing. God often ministers through the messengers, and many a host has declared that they received the greater blessing than the visitor.

In contemporary society there are an abundance of motels and hotels for lodging. Christians are often wary of strangers, protective of their personal privacy, and isolationistic about their homes. The legitimacy of Paul's admonition remains, however, for Christian love takes the risk to open our doors to our Christian brethren.

13:3 “Love of the brethren” will also “remember” or “*Be mindful of the prisoners as having been bound together with them,...*” These prisoners (literally “bound ones”) that Paul refers to were probably fellow-Christians who were imprisoned for their faith. Paul had previously commended the Hebrew Christians for “sharing sympathy to the prisoners” (10:34), and is now encouraging them to continue this practical expression of holy love. The issue of remembering the prisoners was particularly close to Paul's heart, for he was frequently imprisoned for his Christian faith, and may have been imprisoned in Rome while he was writing this epistle. “Remember my imprisonment” (Col. 4:18), he wrote to the Colossians. Later in this chapter he will tell the Hebrew Christians to “take notice that our brother Timothy has been released” (13:23) from prison. Incarceration in Roman prisons often involved harsh and brutal conditions of being chained within dungeons and caverns. The meals provided were meager and not nutritional. Christian prisoners often depended on their brethren for food, fellowship, and personal needs, even though the guards often expected bribes to allow such visitations.

Paul's exhortation to “remember” or “be mindful” of the prisoners is not simply a call for cognitive recollection of cerebral memory, but is an admonishment to let love be put into action in the expression of God's holy character for others. This will include not only prayer, but also active visitation and provision for needs. “What kind of faith is that,” asked James, “if a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Faith, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:14-17). Faith and love are never passive, but always active!

Paul's rationale for his call to “remember the prisoners” is “as having been bound together with them.” Some have interpreted this as a hypothetical identification “*as if* you were fellow-prisoners” or “*as though* you were in prison with them.” A more meaningful interpretation is to recognize this as an actual solidarity wherein Christians are bound together in Christ, and thus bound with one another in the unity of the Body of Christ. Such spiritual

solidarity and oneness includes being bound together in hardship. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it” (I Cor. 12:26). Jesus’ words can again be quoted, “When I was in prison you came to Me... When did we see you in prison and come to You? ...To the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” The union solidarity of every Christian with Christ and all other Christians seems to be the primary incentive of Paul’s admonition.

Attaching another subordinate phrase to the imperative verb, Paul wrote, “*and* (be mindful of) *those being mistreated, as also yourselves being in the body.*” Though most who were imprisoned were also ill-treated and often injured, this phrase does broaden the practical admonition to love all those who are abused, treated cruelly, persecuted with violence, etc.

Paul’s explanation is again more than just a hypothetical identification, “*as if* you yourselves were in their body.” Instead, the explanatory phrase, “as also yourselves being in the body,” may refer to the shared vulnerability that all Christians have, liable and subject to such mistreatment as long as they remain in their physical bodies. Previously Paul had referred to the “defamation and tribulation” experienced by the Hebrew Christians, and how they “had become sharers with those being so treated” (10:33). The solidarity of suffering (I Cor. 12:26) that Christians experience with one another involves feeling the pain of another in a form of empathy that goes far beyond emotional identification, but becomes a genuine spiritual participation in the pathos of another. That is what Jesus did for us “in the body,” when He partook of humanity, temptation, and death (cf. Heb. 2:14,17,18), participating in our human pathos of mistreatment to counter it all with His redemption. Jesus continues to participate and experience the mistreatment of mankind, for “inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto Me” (Matt. 25:40). Though some commentators have interpreted the word “body” in this phrase to refer to the Body of Christ (Col. 1:18,24), the context of physical mistreatment and suffering seems to indicate that Paul was referring to the physical body.

13:4 Practical expression of faithful marital love is another important expression of God’s holy character. Whether Paul’s inclusion of this particular area of practical Christian behavior was a reactive response to a problem of immortality in first century Hebrew society (as some have suggested), we do not know. Whatever his motivational intent, Paul makes a clear call for the honor and sanctity of marriage.

In the absence of a verb to dictate the action, some translators have made this into a statement, “Marriage (is) honorable in all” (KJV). The context of practical imperative exhortations (1,2,3,5,7,9) suggests that these phrases should also be understood in an imperative sense. “(Let) *marriage* (be held) *honorable in all.*” Jesus spoke concerning marriage,

“He who created them from the beginning ‘made them male and female’ (Gen. 1:27), and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’ (Gen. 2:24). Consequently, they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt. 19:4-6).

Early in church history there were some who disparaged marriage as an inferior state, prompting Paul to mention those false teachers who “forbid marriage..., which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth” (I Tim. 4:3). Some think that Paul himself had an adverse view of marriage also (cf. I Cor. 7:1-17). The new covenant scriptures do not exalt celibacy as a higher form of spirituality, either for church leaders or for Christians in

general. “Let marriage be held honorable in all,” Paul writes. The covenant union of one man and one woman (the only form of marriage union the Bible allows) is honorable and to be respected. Marriage is to be regarded as a precious (Greek word *timios* – cf. I Pet. 1:19; Rev. 18:12,16,21) treasure, the highest and most glorious relationship between persons here on earth, and likened by analogy to the intimacy of union between Christ and the Christian (Eph. 5:23-33). Such a marriage relationship should be honorable “in all,” states Paul, which can be interpreted as “in all respects,” or “in all persons” or “among everyone,” all of which are legitimate.

Paul continues the theme of marriage in another phrase that has no verb, but should probably also be translated as an imperative, “**and (let) *the* (marriage) *bed* (be) *undefiled*;**...” The “marriage bed” is a euphemism for sexual activity (Rom. 13:13) that may lead to conception (Rom. 9:10). The Greek word is *koite* from which we get the English word “coitus” meaning “sexual intercourse.” The Bible is very explicit about human sexuality, and has more references to sex than to prayer. God created human beings “male and female” (Gen. 1:27). The Latin word *sexus*, the origin of the English word “sex,” meant “to divide” between male and female. The sexual expression of husband and wife in marriage is in accord with God’s creative intent. One entire book of the Bible, the *Song of Solomon*, deals with the theme of sexual expression in marriage.

Only as God’s holy character of unity, purity, and fidelity is expressed in the marriage act of sexual intercourse is the sanctity, honor, and preciousness of God’s intent for marriage preserved. Otherwise, marital sexual expression is defiled (cf. Gen. 49:4; 35:22) or contaminated, which is what Paul goes on to warn his readers about. How can the sexual intimacy of marriage be defiled? On a physical level, the sexuality of marriage can be defiled by “being joined” (cf. I Cor. 6:16) in sexual relations with another person other than one’s husband or wife, which is the reason Paul goes on to address the infidelity, immorality, and adultery that God will judge. Defilement of the sexual act might also occur on a psychological level. Paul explained to Titus, “To the pure all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their minds and their consciences are defiled” (Titus 1:15). The “marriage bed” can be defiled by selfishness that fails to express love for the other person without thought of self-concern. The sexual expression of husband and wife can be defiled by deep-seated bitterness and resentment that wrongfully uses sexual intercourse as a bargaining chip, a means of manipulation, a method of bribery, or a form of punishment. The “act of marriage” can be defiled when marriage partners fail to focus on one another in love, and are fantasizing or visualizing impure involvement with someone else. Marital sexual activity can be defiled when the emphasis is placed on quantity or frequency, procedures or positions, rather than on the quality of love expression between husband and wife.

In consequence of the defilement of the purity of marital sexuality, Paul explains, “**but sexually immoral persons and adulterers God will judge.**” The word Paul used for “sexually immoral persons” is the Greek word *pornous* from which we get the English prefix and subsequent noun “porn” (as in “pornography” or “porn star”). Although the word has often been translated as “fornicators,” and applied to those who engaged in premarital sexual activity, more recent linguistic scholarship has recognized that the word includes all sexual activity outside of the loving context of marriage that God intended. “Sexually immoral persons” is thus the better English translation (cf. I Cor. 5:1; 6:18; Eph. 5:5; I Tim. 1:10). The word “adulterers” refers to those who are unfaithful to their vows of marriage in sexual infidelity, and serves as a synonymous parallel to “sexually immoral persons” in this context. The seventh commandment stated explicitly, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18), and was based on

the recognition of the faithful character of God that was to be exhibited in the behavior of His people. Violation of God's character of faithfulness in the act of adultery merited the extreme punitive judgment of death in the old covenant (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:20-23). In the new covenant there are still consequences, both present and future, for violating God's character of holiness, and for failing to be receptive in faith to God's character of fidelity and purity. The difference in the new covenant judgment of God is that God has determined all things in reference to man's believing reception of Jesus Christ in faith (cf. 12:23). When Christians are receptive to Christ's manifestation of His character of love and purity and fidelity in their marriages, they will not defile the beauty of God-ordained marriage in sexual immorality and adultery, and God's judgment will be, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21,23).

13:5 Perhaps Paul's mind flowed in typical Hebrew fashion from the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," to the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal," or the tenth commandment, "You shall not covet." Whatever his train of thought, Paul follows his admonitions for brotherly love toward strangers, prisoners, and the mistreated, and his exhortation to the honor of a faithful and loving marriage, with a call to resist the "love of money" and materialistic greed. The imperative verb must again be supplied, "(Let your *manner of life* (have) *no love of money, being content with the things being present;...*" The manner and means of conducting your life (Greek *tropos*, origin of English word "trope") should not be characterized by greed and avarice for the acquisition and accumulation of money. Money is not an evil in itself, for it is but a medium of exchange, serving as legal tender for the purchase of items or payment for services rendered. But when a person develops an inordinate desire and concern for money and the material things it can buy, such personal aspiration (cf. I Jn. 2:16) can become a selfish greed that amounts to idolatry (cf. Col. 3:5). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said,

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ... No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (riches)" (Matt. 6:20-24).

Luke's gospel adds that the Pharisees scoffed at Jesus when He spoke those words, because they were "lovers of money" (Lk. 16:14). When Paul wrote to Timothy, he addressed this same theme,

"If we have food and covering, with these we should be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang" (I Tim. 6:8-10).

Paul also advised that the elders of the church should be "free from the love of money" (I Tim. 3:3), and warned that "in the last days...men will be lovers of self and lovers of money" (II Tim. 3:2). When the focus of a person's life is on the acquisition of money and material things there

will be an inevitable discontent. How much is enough? “Just a little more than I presently have,” was the response of John D. Rockefeller. The materialist is never content with what he has.

Paul warned the Jerusalem Christians to avoid coveting and to be content with their present resources. F.F. Bruce wrote, “The greedy man can never be a happy man; but the opposite of covetousness is contentment.”² Contentment and satisfaction with the sufficiency of what we have is not necessarily a resignation to the status quo. Paul is dealing with the issue of inordinate focus and improper priority toward material things that allows them to become an idolatrous pursuit that can never produce contentment. To the Philippians, Paul wrote, “I do not speak from want; for I have learned to be *content* in whatever situation I am” (Phil. 4:11). To Timothy he advised, “Godliness is a means of great gain, when accompanied by *contentment*. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we should be *content*” (I Tim. 6:6-8). Failure to find contentment in what God has provided, and seeking to find security in material things, leads only to anxiety. Trust in wealth evidences distrust in God’s care and provision.

The security of trusting in God’s ever-present provision is what Paul proceeds to document, explaining, “*for He has said, ‘I WILL NEVER ABANDON YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU’,...*” This was a particularly important reminder to the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem, for God’s promise of provisional care was constantly reiterated throughout the old covenant literature. Moses’ final counsel to the people of God was, “The Lord your God is the One who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you” (Deut. 31:6,8). When Joshua assumed leadership after Moses, God said, “Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you” (Josh. 1:5). The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem needed to remember God’s promise of His unfailing presence and provision. Jesus had reiterated the promise that God would take care of every need, saying,

“Do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. ... Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:25-33).

In his letter to Timothy, Paul had advised, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world, not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty or riches, but on God who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (I Tim. 6:17). The “riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7; 2:7) are sufficient, and we need not fear that He will abandon or forsake us, even if the bottom drops out of the economic system that our society operates by and relies on.

It should be noted that this verse, with its citation of the Old Testament promise of God, has often been wrested from its context and used as a proof-text to bolster a particular theological system of salvation security, i.e. the doctrine of eternal security. This is entirely illegitimate, for the text within its context deals with the security and contentment of God’s provision of necessary physical and material provisions, and not with the permanency or security of a static concept of salvation.

13:6 As a consequence of God’s promise of adequate provision, the Christian can respond in faith. “*So that we may confidently say, ‘THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT SHALL MAN DO TO ME?’*” The quotation Paul uses is likely from the Passover Psalm 118, “The Lord is for me; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Ps. 118:6).

It is similar to another, “In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Ps. 56:11). When our trust and confidence is in God, we need not fear the outward circumstances (economical or otherwise), or what men might do to us by way of deprivation, injustice, litigation, etc. All such circumstances of economic decline, lowered standard of living, job loss, theft, unfair laws, or litigated deprivation, are of no consequence when considered in reference to the eternal life that the Christian has in Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 10:28-33). If we are tempted to be fearful, we need only remember that the antidote to fear is faith (cf. Matt. 14:27; Mk. 5:36; Lk. 8:50). “If God is for us, who (of any consequence) can be against us? (Rom. 8:31).

Some have objected to the idea of viewing God as our “Helper.” Humanistic concepts such as “God helps those who help themselves,” and “Do your best, and God will help you do the rest,” have polluted the proper Biblical concept of God as Helper. There is no hint here of God’s assisting our performance and works to meet His expectations by some form of “infused grace” booster-shot. On the other hand, the recognition of God as Helper by His grace maintains the necessary distinction of God and man that avoids a pantheistic overemphasis on immanence and oneness.

13:7 The second paragraph (7-17) of this final section of the epistle begins and ends with references to the leaders of the church fellowship in Jerusalem (7,17). In between these leadership references Paul reverts to his theological mindset to differentiate the old covenant and new covenant realities again (10-14).

With another imperative admonition, Paul writes, “**Remember those leading you, who have spoken the word of God to you;...**” Many commentators assume that Paul is referring to leaders of the church who had previously died, which would include James, the brother of the Lord, who had been the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:12), and had been stoned to death. There is no compelling reason, however, to regard these leaders in the historical past. Paul exhorts the Jerusalem Christians to remember “those leading you,” using a present participle. “Those leading you” (the same present leaders referred to in 17 and 24) are those who “have spoken the word of God to you.” The aorist tense “have spoken” indicates previous teaching, preaching, and proclamation by the present leaders. These leaders are identified quite generally (cf. Lk. 22:26; Acts 15:22), without any allusion to a particular title, position, or office in the church. They may, or may not, have been elders who engaged in teaching and preaching (I Tim. 5:17). The content of their verbal sharing was “the word of God.” This was not just Bible information, but must be understood Christologically. The gospel message of salvation (cf. 2:3) is not a collection of static information to be assented to as a belief-system, but is the sharing of the dynamic life of Jesus Christ, who as the risen Lord functions continually as Savior and Lord in Christians.

Being mindful of the present leaders was for the purpose of “**observing the outcome of their conduct,**” and subsequently to “**imitate their faith.**” Although elders are exhorted to be “examples to the flock” (I Pet. 5:3), Paul is not simply encouraging the Jerusalem Christians to imitate the exemplary behavior of their leaders. He advises the Hebrew Christians to observe, behold, or examine the outcome or “out-walking” of the conduct (cf. 13:18) and behavior of their leaders. Such observation should allow them to perceive and discern that the “walking out” of the leaders’ behavior was the manifestation of the life of Jesus Christ, as they were receptive to the activity of the living Lord Jesus in them. The command to “imitate their faith,” was not a call to emulate the behavioral example of the leaders. Christians are not called to mimic the external actions of others, not even the behavioral activity of Jesus, Himself, by attempting to be “like

Jesus” or to question, “What would Jesus do?”. The Christian life is not an imitation, but the manifestation of the life of the living Lord Jesus (II Cor. 4:10,11). Paul’s exhortation to “imitate the faith” of the leaders is not a call to reproduce their behavior, but to function in like manner as the leaders were functioning (cf. 6:12), by the faith-receptivity of the activity of Christ Himself. The imperative is to “imitate their faith,” not their behavior!

13:8 Having instructed the Jerusalem Christians to function by the same faith as their leaders, allowing for the receptivity of the activity of the life of Jesus Christ in them, Paul proceeds to write, “**Jesus Christ** (is) *the same yesterday, and today, and forever.*” There is a constancy and consistency of divine character whenever Jesus Christ manifests Himself, whether in His historical ministry on earth or in the lives of prior saints in the past, in present manifestation of Christian behavior, or “unto the ages.” The past, present, and future expression of Christ’s life will evidence the absolute and timeless character of God. This does not mean that there will be an identical behavior expression in every Christian, but the character of Christ exemplified in the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22,23) will be consistent when the life of Christ is lived out uniquely in each Christian.

An alternative interpretation suggested by some commentators is that human leaders come and go, and their conduct may vary, even in the expression of failures, misrepresentations, and sin, but Jesus Christ is the ultimate and supreme leader of the church, who will always be present, yesterday, today, and forever, and will never fail. Another interpretation regards this verse as a statement of the unchangeableness of the gospel message, the fixed doctrine and theology of Christology, the “word of God” spoke by the leaders (7), which must not be varied, for it is “the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Those seeking to justify charismatic manifestations have misused this verse in their attempt to explain that Jesus functions in the same way, “yesterday, today, and forever,” in the performing of miracles, healings, and speaking in tongues.

Perhaps the greatest misuse of these words has been when they are extracted from their context and made a proof-text for the doctrine of God’s immutability or changelessness. God does declare to Malachi, “I, the Lord, do not change” (Mal. 3:6), and this is in the context of His response to sinful oppression. Earlier in this epistle to the Hebrews, Paul quoted the Psalmist, “Thou art the same” (Heb. 1:12; Ps. 102:27). There is truth in the recognition that God is not capricious and fickle. His character never changes. But we must not assume that God’s *modus operandi* never changes. Some theologians seem to think that they have God and His ways of action figured out, despite the fact that “His ways are past finding out” (Rom. 11:33). This is particularly evident in Reformed theological thought, as they stress a restrictive continuity of God’s immutable action. Attempting to fit God into man-made patterns of how He has acted and must continue to act is a prescriptive form of handcuffing God, tying His hands, and putting Him into a performance straightjacket. It is an attempt to put God in an ideological box wherein He must act with a static and identical mode of operation throughout all historical time. God cannot be thus restricted. God’s mode of action changed from the old covenant to the new covenant, when the actuating incentive changed from law to grace. The Scripture narrative indicates that God changed His mind; He “repented” (Gen. 6:6; I Sam. 15:35; Amos 7:3,6; Jonah 3:10). God’s character never changes, but His actions are unlimited in scope and variance as they remain consistent with His character and over-all purposes. God always *does* what He *does* because He *is* Who He *is*.

Paul was not advocating a doctrine of immutably prescribed divine action when He wrote, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” Having mentioned the Christocentric proclamation of the “word of God” (7a), and the conduct of the out-lived manifestation of the life of Jesus in the leaders, and the faith that is the receptivity of Christ’s activity, Paul logically asserts the constancy and consistency of Christ’s character in all of His manifestations, past, present, and future.

13:9 With another imperative verb, Paul urges the Jerusalem Christians, **“Do not be carried away by various and strange teachings, for (it is) good to be sustained by grace, not by foods, by which those walking have not been benefited.”** Whether Paul was intending to contrast “various and strange teachings” with the “word of God spoken by the leaders” (7) is questionable. There is no doubt, though, that Paul remained concerned about the steadfastness of the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem, concerned that they might “drift away” (2:1), “fall away” (3:12), “come short” (4:1), and “throw away their confidence” (10:35) by an apostatizing reversion to Judaism. Paul had urged a maturity for the Ephesian Christians to avoid being “carried away by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph. 4:14). Here he uses the same word to exhort the Jerusalem Christian “not to be carried away by varied, divergent, strange teachings which are alien to new covenant teaching.” In this context it is not novelty that marks these teachings, but the attached traditions of Judaism concerning various food laws. Paul did not want the Christians in Jerusalem to revert back to putting their faith in, and seeking God’s blessing through, the Judaic teachings about food. They were, no doubt, being pressured by their Hebrew kinsmen to keep all the ceremonial and customary food laws of Judaism. The rabbinic interpretations were many and varied concerning what was or was not permissible or kosher. Jewish religion had always focused on food, with strict dietary regulations (cf. Lev. 11), and food being central to their festivities. How they prepared and ate their food was regarded as having value in their relationship with God.

The Psalmist wrote, “Wine makes man’s heart glad, ...and food sustains man’s heart” (Ps. 104:15). This verse had become a standard statement of blessing before every Jewish meal. Jewish people ate and drank to make them happy and to praise God. Paul responds by writing, “It is good for the heart to be sustained by grace, not by foods,...” He is countering the inordinate emphasis that Judaism placed on food by noting that such teachings are alien to the new covenant understanding of God’s grace. Previously in the epistle, Paul had mentioned “food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body until a time of reformation” (9:10), emphasizing the temporary and preliminary nature of all Jewish food regulations. In a very different context Paul had issued a general statement, “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Similarly, he had written, “food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat” (I Cor. 8:8). Under very different circumstances, but with correlative instruction, Paul wrote,

“Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink, ...things which are a shadow...; but the substance belongs to Christ. ...If you have died with Christ, ...why do you submit to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch?’ ...These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Col. 2:16-23).

Though the historical contexts differ, Paul was consistent in his insistence that the externalities of religious food laws were of no spiritual benefit for new covenant Christians. That Paul's comment here in the epistle to the Hebrew Christians is contra Judaic food laws (rather than eucharistic abuses or Gentile dietary regulations as some have suggested) seems to be verified by *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians* written late in the first century or early in the second century, which seems to provide an interpretation of this verse,

“Be not deceived with strange teachings, nor with old fables, which are unprofitable. If we go on observing Judaism, we acknowledge that we never received grace.”³

Foods may enervate and provide energy to the “outer man,” to the physical body of man, but they do not have spiritual benefit. It serves God's good purposes, Paul explains, “for the heart” of man, the “inner man” (II Cor. 4:16), the spirit and soul of a person, to be sustained, strengthened, and supported by the grace of God. God's grace is the divine dynamic of His activity through Jesus Christ, for “grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17). In the new covenant the heart of the Christian is sustained by the Christic grace of God, and “renewed day by day” (II Cor. 4:16).

To further dissuade the Jerusalem Christians from going back to the external legalism of the Jewish food laws, Paul explains that those “walking,” following the Jewish course of action, and conducting their lives by the Jewish meal customs, have not been benefited or profited in their relationship with God by so doing. Just as “the word the Israelites heard did not profit them” (4:2), neither did their meticulous dietary concerns. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” (Jn. 6:63), Jesus said. Paul wanted the Christians in Jerusalem to understand that there was no benefit before God in reverting to the varied Jewish customs and traditions concerning food. Gladness and joy are not found in food, but in Jesus. The heart of a Christian is not sustained by food, but by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

13:10 Despite Paul's pastoral concerns for practical expressions of the Christian life, his mental orientation was theological. In verses 10-13 he reverts to the foundational contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant, between Judaism and the Christian faith, the theme that he has been emphasizing to the Hebrew Christians of Jerusalem throughout this epistle. The connective link of thought was the mention of the Jewish food laws in verse 9. From the idea of “foods” (9), Paul proceeds to address that which Christians “eat” that those associated with Judaism cannot “eat.”

“We have an altar, from which those serving the tent do not have authority to eat.”

Notice the contrast: “We have ... they do not have.” Paul has repeatedly emphasized the “better things” that “we have” as Christians. “We have hope as an anchor for the soul” (6:19). “We have a high priest who has passed through the heavens” (4:14), who is “seated with the Majesty in the heavens” (8:1), and who allows us to draw near to God (10:19-22). Now Paul asserts, “we have an altar...” Jewish religion had a sacrificial altar in their worship center of the tabernacle and the temple. What does Paul mean in declaring that Christians have an altar? Early Christians were charged with being “atheists” and not having a “real religion” because they did not have a visible, tangible, material sacred sites or objects – no temples, altars, idols, or priests. Paul's statement, “we have an altar,” must obviously be interpreted figuratively, for the early Christians did not have a physical structure of an altar made of wood or stones. This would also preclude any reference in this text to a Eucharistic altar of the Lord's Supper table, or an altar rail at the

front of the sanctuary or auditorium. Historically, the cross is where Jesus made the sacrificial offering of His own life for mankind. Based on that historical sacrifice, Paul has argued that we have direct and immediate access into the heavenly sanctuary of the Holy of Holies of God's presence (9:24; 10:19-21) where the living Lord Jesus serves as High Priest. The Christian altar, then, is best understood metaphorically as the spiritual altar in the heavenly sanctuary of God's presence, where Christians are "seated in the heavenlies" with Christ (Eph. 1:20; 2:6), offering up "sacrifices of praise to God" (15), while being "sustained by grace" (9).

From such a heavenly altar, "those serving the tent have no authority to eat." Those "serving the tent," the old covenant worship place of tabernacle and temple, includes not only the Judaic priests, but by extension all Jewish participants who sought to worship God in that place via the cultic rituals of that religion. Thinking that they were sustained in their relationship with God by food laws, they have no right to partake from the heavenly altar where Christians are "sustained by grace" (9), having partaken of Jesus Christ. The Jews were aghast when Jesus said,

"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." (John 6:53-56)

With their meticulous food regulations and literalistic legalisms, the Jews would never consider eating human flesh or blood, but they failed to recognize that Jesus was speaking figuratively of partaking of Himself. Likewise, Paul speaks figuratively when he refers to Christians having "tasted the good word of God" (6:5), and of Jewish adherents having no right to "eat" from the heavenly altar. Judaic participants, who still placed their faith in Jewish food laws, instead of Jesus Christ alone, could not partake ("eat") and be "sustained by the grace" of God in Jesus Christ at the heavenly altar. Those who persisted in the "shadows" (cf. Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1) of old covenant rituals were precluded from participation in the new covenant substance and spiritual reality of Jesus Christ. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "Those who eat the sacrifices are sharers in the altar" (I Cor. 10:18), indicating that participation involves identification. In this letter Paul is advising the Hebrew Christians of Jerusalem that participation in Jewish practices identifies them with the Jewish altar rather than the heavenly Christian altar, where Christians partake of Christ and are "sustained by grace." There is a complete antithesis between the two, an either/or dichotomy that allows no merging or mixing of Judaism and Christianity. Paul was warning the Jerusalem Christians that to revert and seek solace or security in the Jewish practices of worship or food regulations was to forfeit Christian identification and participation in the new covenant relationship with God in Christ. The truism, "What you take, takes you," is valid nutritionally and in spiritual metaphor.

13:11 Paul returns again to the parallels and contrasts of Christ's sacrifice with the sacrifices that were made on the Day of Atonement in Judaism. ***"For the bodies of those living animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priests concerning sin, those are burned outside the camp."*** Every Hebrew person was thoroughly indoctrinated with the details of what transpired on the Day of Atonement. Drawing from Leviticus 16:1-28, Paul summarizes how the blood of a bull and a goat (not the scapegoat) were placed on the altar in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle or temple as a sin-offering for the priest and the Israelite people. These annual animal sacrifices signified the covering of the people's sins for the year. The carcasses of these

animals were afterwards taken “outside the camp” (Lev. 16:27) and burned. They were not allowed to be eaten, as were some of the other Jewish sacrifices. The regulations for the disposal of the carcasses of these sacrificed animals “outside the camp” illustrated the traditional practice of removing things and people regarded to be impure, unclean, polluted, profane, sinful or unacceptable outside of the boundaries of the camp or city where God’s people lived and worshipped. The Day of Atonement was still being enacted at the temple in Jerusalem when Paul wrote this letter. Note that he uses present tense verbs: “the blood of those animals *is brought* into the holy place,” and “the bodies *are burned* outside the camp.” In the practice of first century Judaism, the bodies of the sin-offering animals were taken outside of the gates and walls of the city of Jerusalem to be burned on the Day of Atonement.

13:12 Comparing the old covenant animal sacrifices with the new covenant atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Paul explains, “***Therefore Jesus also, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.***” The death of Jesus on the cross was the once and for all sacrifice that removed sin permanently for the people of faith, and set them apart unto God’s holy purposes. “Through His own blood” (cf. 9:12,14,22), signifying the sacrificial death that Jesus suffered (cf. 2:10; 9:26) on the cross, Jesus fulfilled the type of the High Priest (7:27; 8:1-3; 9:11-15,24-26; 10:9-11), making His sin-offering of His own life in the Holy of Holies of God’s heavenly presence. In so doing, He “sanctified the people” (cf. 10:10,14), setting them apart for direct and intimate access to the Holy God, that He might indwell them and make them “holy ones” (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; 4:12; Heb. 6:10) who would express His holy character behaviorally within His creation. In his letter to Titus, Paul wrote, “Christ Jesus...gave Himself for us...that He might...purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14).

There is both parallelism and contrast as Paul compares the animal sacrifices of the old covenant with the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. As the High Priest and the sin-offering, Jesus fulfills the prefiguring prototype of the old covenant atonement sacrifices, providing a connective association and junction of the new with the old. At the same time, His execution by crucifixion “outside the gate” of the city reveals a fracturing of the old covenant prototypical picture, creating a disconnection, disassociation, and disjuncture with Judaism.

Jesus “suffered” death on the cross, “despising the shame” (12:2) of being crucified as a common criminal “outside the gate” of the city of Jerusalem. Golgotha, “the place of the skull” (Matt. 27:33; Mk. 15:22; Lk. 23:33; Jn. 19:17), was “near the city” (Jn. 19:20) of Jerusalem, but “outside the gate.” The Jewish leaders regarded Jesus as profane and contrary to all their Messianic expectations. They wanted Him removed, expelled, cast out – killed in a most unacceptable manner, by crucifixion, regarded as a “curse” (Gal. 3:13). His execution on a cross “outside the gate” of their sacrosanct temple and city represented their attempt to get rid of the carcass of the troublesome Jesus. In the process of their rejection and repudiation of Jesus, and the facilitation of His death in consort with the Romans, there was enacted a complete rupture and dichotomy with Judaism. In the same events of Jesus’ death there was both a fulfillment of old covenant prefiguring as well as a complete fracturing that forever separated Judaism and Christianity.

13:13 “***So then,***” as a consequence of Jesus’ suffering “outside the gate” (12), “***let us go out towards Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.***” Paul calls on the Jerusalem Christians to act in identification with Jesus and to go where He is “outside the camp.” Jesus is obviously

“outside the camp” of Judaism, the religion of unbelieving Israel, so Paul is encouraging the Hebrew Christians of Jerusalem to make a clean break from the Judaic religion, disassociating with the religious culture and practices that they were being pressured to adopt. This has been a major thrust of his counsel to the Jerusalem Christians throughout this epistle. But there may be more import in the advice that Paul gives to his readers. The call to “go outside the camp” is certainly [1] an urging to go outside the strictures of Judaism with all its prefiguring shadows and legalistic regulations, and to seek the new covenant substance of Jesus Christ Himself, being “sustained by grace” (9). By extension [2], this could be understood as an admonition to “go outside the camp” of all religion which binds people in devotion and ritual. Another alternative interpretation [3] is that Paul is advising them to “go outside of the camp” of earthly attachments of the here and now (14), such as food (9) and money (5) and the security of physical families; to “go out of the camp” as Abraham went out (11:8), seeking the intangible unknown of the heavenly altar (10). This should not be construed, however, as escapism or withdrawal from the world, for Jesus made it clear that Christians are “in the world” (Jn. 17:11,18), but “not of the world” (Jn. 17:14,16). There may be [4] a somewhat cryptic or prophetic encouragement that Paul is delivering to the Christians of Jerusalem, advising them to “go outside the camp” of the city of Jerusalem. Sensing that the old covenant and everything associated with it was “near to disappearing” (8:13), and knowing that the Jewish resistance movement was no match for the powerful and ruthless Roman army, Paul might have subtly indicated that the Christians in Jerusalem should “get out of town.” This interpretation has textual validity since “outside the camp” (11) meant “outside the city gates” (12) in the Jewish practice of the first century, and Paul proceeds immediately to indicate that Christians do not have a lasting, abiding, geographical city (14). All of these interpretations, the theological, religious, sociological, and geographical, may have some validity, but they must be understood in correlation with Paul’s contextual words that to “go outside the camp” is to “go towards Jesus, . . . bearing His reproach.”

It has been noted that when the old covenant people of God rejected God in the golden calf incident (Exod. 32:1-20), Moses called the people out of the camp (Exod. 32:26) and pitched the tabernacled presence of God “outside of the camp”. “Everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp” (Exod. 33:7). In like manner, the Jewish people had rejected God’s Messiah, Jesus Christ, and Paul may have been indicating that God’s presence was no longer in the camp of Judaism and in the city of Jerusalem, but “outside the camp,” to be approached through Jesus alone at the heavenly altar (10). To choose to stay inside the Judaic religion with its temple altar and legalistic ritual, and to choose earthly attachments of family and heritage inside the city of Jerusalem, would be to lose everything, spiritually and physically. To go “outside the camp” where Jesus went to His death (Jn. 19:20), and where Jesus continues to be in His heavenly ministry, was to participate in the heavenly realities of Christ’s high priesthood in the presence of God at the heavenly altar (10) in the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22) where Christians rest (4:1-11) in their sanctification (2:11; 10:10,14; 12:14) and are “sustained by grace” (9).

To do so, however, would involve the identification of “bearing His reproach.” As Jesus was condemned to an accursed death (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13) of disgrace (12:2) outside of the city (Jn. 19:20), in correspondence with Jewish contempt for the carcasses of sacrificial animals (11), so the Jerusalem Christians were to follow Him out of the camp of Judaism and religion, and out of the doomed city of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:2), willing to “bear His reproach.” The Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem had already borne His reproach in ostracism, persecution, denunciation, and humiliation (10:33). But if they were to denounce Judaism entirely and leave

Jerusalem at this very time when they were being solicited to fight the Romans, they would not doubt “bear His reproach” in increasing contempt and hostility, suffering reviling defamation and the alienating stigma of being cowardly traitors who were repudiating their heritage and religion. The price of being “sustained by grace” (9) is to suffer the disgrace of religious repudiation and contempt. Jesus made the cost clear when He said,

“ If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of His Father...” (Mk. 8:34-38; cf. Lk. 14:27).

Jesus also forewarned, “In this world you will have tribulation” (Jn. 16:33). “You will be hated by all on account of My name” (Matt. 10:16-42).

13:14 To provide the rationale and motivation for “going outside the camp” of Judaism and Jerusalem, Paul continues, “*For here we do not have an abiding city, but we seek that which is coming.*” “Here,” in this world on earth, we, as new covenant Christians, do not have an abiding, enduring, lasting city in which we might settle down and make our abode, and practice Christian religion. Many religions have sacred cities with permanent precincts and tangible temples for religious rituals. The sacred city of Judaism was Jerusalem where the recipients of this letter resided, and where they were tempted to adapt to the Jewish religious regulations and rituals. Paul is advising them not to put their trust in physical Jerusalem, and everything associated with it. Even Jerusalem, representing the whole of Judaism, was not a permanent city, for it was doomed (Matt. 24:2) to be destroyed in a few years, in A.D. 70.

Christians do not have a temporal, tangible, geographical city to settle down and make their abode in. Rather, Paul explains, “we seek that (city) which is coming.” This is not necessarily a reference to a future residence that is yet to come. Paul does not use a future tense verb, “will come,” but a present participle, “is coming,” which indicates that this is in the process of being realized. The dialectic of “already” and “not yet” must be maintained. In the progressive pilgrimage of the Christian life, we seek, as Abraham sought (11:14), a “heavenly country” (11:16), a “fatherland” (11:14), “the city whose architect and builder is God” (11:10). This “age to come” (6:5) has already been inaugurated and realized for Christians who “have come...to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22), and “are receiving an unshakeable kingdom” (12:28). Christians recognize that their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20) *already* as they await the complete fulfillment of the promise of the “holy city, Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev. 22:10-27; cf. 21:2) and *not yet* realized in full.

The spiritual and heavenly intangibility of Christianity is often difficult for Christians who still exist in the space/time context of this world, and tend to think in more concrete spatial and temporal terms. The church of Jesus Christ is a spiritual society “called out” to live and worship in a transcendent heavenly city. The sacred space and place (cf. Jn. 14:2) where the Christian lives is in the Holy Place of God’s presence, “near to the heart of God.” This is the permanent *polis* of eternal security, which the Jerusalem Christians would never find by reverting to participation in the religious practices of Jewish Jerusalem.

13:15 Having gone “outside the camp” (13), seeking all that is coming (14), **“Through Him then, let us offer through all things a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name.”** Advising the Jerusalem Christians to “go outside of the camp” of Judaism and “towards Jesus” (13), “through Him then” they are challenged to offer continuously, unceasingly, and in all circumstances “a sacrifice of praise to God.” It is not through the old covenant sacrifices of the Jewish priests at the temple that they are to offer their praise to God. Neither is praise offered only in gratitude for the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. Rather, through the living Lord Jesus, on the basis of the dynamic of His resurrected life, Christians offer their sacrifice of praise to God. Every manifestation of the Christian life is “through Him,” for the behavior and worship of the Christian life is the living Jesus in action. Jesus is the pray-er, the worshipper, the Christian life.

Historically, Jesus offered His own life as the once and for all (9:26,28; 10:10) death sacrifice for the sins of the human race, acting as High Priest in the Holy of Holies of God’s presence, that we might have access to God (10:19,20) in the holy place. It is there that “we have an altar” (10) with unlimited opportunity (not just annually on the Day of Atonement) to offer to God an acceptable and well-pleasing service of worship (12:28). Christian sacrifice is not the sacrifice of animals, but the presentation of praise to God in adulation and adoration of His person and work. This should never be reversed in such a way that praise to God becomes a “law” or a “force” that causes God to act, as if a so-called “power of praise” could become a mantra that leverages God’s action. Christian sacrifice is an availability to be the useful vessels through which God is praised. Writing to the Romans, Paul urged the brethren “by the mercies of God, to present their bodies as a living and holy *sacrifice, well-pleasing* to God, as their *spiritual service of worship*” (Romans 12:1). Peter explained that Christians collectively are “living stones, being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual *sacrifices well-pleasing* to God *through Jesus Christ*” (I Peter 2:5).

Paul provides an interpretive comment to explain “a sacrifice of praise to God,” “that is, the fruit of lips confessing to His name.” The phrase “fruit of our lips” is used in Isa. 57:19 and Hosea 14:2 (*LXX*). It is a figurative expression that refers to the manifestation of verbal or auditory speech. Christian worship will involve confessing, agreeing, and concurring that God is who He has revealed Himself to be. His “name” is an expression of His character, as names were so often employed in Hebraic culture. Such confessing and praising God for who He is is always “through Jesus,” for Paul quoted earlier from Psalm 22:22 indicating that Jesus “proclaims God’s name to His brethren, and in the midst of the congregation sings God’s praise” (2:12).

13:16 Continuing to explain the worship sacrifices that God desires of Christians, Paul writes, **“But do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased.”** The verbal “sacrifice of praise” must be translated into practical behavior. It is not enough to sit around with our hands in the air praising God, and fail to act in loving ways toward those in need. When this happens we are like those whom God spoke of through Isaiah, “This people draw near with their words, and honor Me with their lip-service, but they remove their hearts far from Me” (Isa. 29:13). Not only are we to “love the Lord,” but also we are to “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Matt. 22:37-40; Mk. 12:30-33; Lk. 10:27; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8). Our love must be expressed “in word and deed” (Col. 3:17; I John 3:16-18). Paul, therefore, advises the Jerusalem Christians to not forget, disregard, or neglect “doing good and sharing.” Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), and what would we expect as He now lives in us, but that God would “equip us with every *good thing* to do His will, working in us that which is

well-pleasing in His sight, *through Jesus Christ*" (13:21)? The general expression of "doing good" is particularized in the admonition to share and contribute generously with those who are in need (cf. Acts 4:32-34). God is well-pleased (12:28; 13:21; cf. Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 4:18) with the Christian sacrifice of practical worship that expresses the worth-ship of His character in Christian behavior.

13:17 Another expression of Christian worship in holiness is to ***"Have confidence in those leading you, and defer (to them); for they are vigilant on behalf of your souls, as those who will give an account. They should do this with joy and not groaning, for this would be disadvantageous to you."*** Just as Paul began this section (7) with reference to "those presently leading" the Christians in the church at Jerusalem, he again mentions the necessity to be persuaded of the advisability of respecting and cooperating with those leading them. Similarly, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to "appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction" (I Thess. 5:12). Holy Christian behavior will defer, yield, adapt, and submit to those designated as leaders, willing to work together with them in compliant cooperation. Paul is not advocating a mandated subordination or subjugation to a hierarchical structure of authoritarian leadership. Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18), and Christians must beware of those who would claim "spiritual authority" or "pastoral authority" to "lord it over" (I Peter 5:3) others as false shepherds with dictatorial control. Paul is simply advising the Jerusalem Christians to respect and have confidence in their leaders, willing to lovingly interact in collective cooperation, without engaging in critical challenge or antagonistic rebellion.

Those given the responsibility of leadership, Paul explained, "are vigilant on behalf of your souls, as those who will give an account." The word "vigilant" is translated from a Greek word that etymologically meant, "to not sleep," but linguistically referred to vigilance and alertness in "keeping watch." Paul had told the elders of the church in Ephesus to "be on the alert" (a variation of the same word used here), as those who "shepherd the church of God" (Acts 20:28-31). Those who are entrusted to lead in the church must be diligent (Rom. 12:8), as they are accountable to God for their leadership service, having a "stricter accountability" (James 3:1) because of their influence over the souls of God's people.

Leaders should be able to do this service of vigilant leadership with the joy of serving as God's selected vessels, rather than with the groaning and sighing of a burdensome grief of having to battle uncooperative and unruly people. It is most unfortunate when Christian leaders are challenged, criticized, and second-guessed, losing sleep in anguish and frustration over the souls entrusted to their care. "This is disadvantageous and unprofitable for you," Paul advises the Jerusalem Christians. The purpose of the leadership of the church is that the body might be "built up in love" and "grow in all respects into Him, who is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:11-16). When Christians are uncooperative and recalcitrant with their leaders, this does not serve God's end objective to manifest His holy and loving character by allowing the Christ-life to be lived out in Christian behavior within a loving community that is to represent the Triune interaction of the Godhead.

The Jerusalem Christians, whether within Jerusalem or outside of Jerusalem, were to worship God at the heavenly altar (10) with a verbal "sacrifice of praise" (15), in practical sharing with those in need (16), and by deference to their leaders (17). In such holy behavior (12:14) and worship, God would be well-pleased (12:28; 13:16,21). Paul wanted the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem to understand that Christian worship was not constituted by the ritual and

regulations of the Jewish religion, but by a practical lifestyle of worship that expressed the worth-ship of God's character in all situations.

13:18 Within the final contextual section (18-25), Paul shares some personal concluding comments that reveal his heart-felt affection for his Hebrew kinsmen in Jerusalem. He solicits their prayers for himself and his colleagues (18,19), expresses a prayer for the readers (20,21), encourages the readers to accept what he has written as intended (22), advises them of Timothy's release and his desire to visit them (23), exchanges greetings (24), and concludes by entrusting them to God's grace (25).

“Pray for us, for we are persuaded that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct (ourselves) well in all things.” Paul was not too proud to solicit the prayers of others. He often requests prayer in his epistles (Rom. 15:30,31; Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3,4; I Thess. 5:25; II Thess. 3:1). The present tense verb can be translated, “Keep praying for us,” indicating an awareness or assurance that the Christians in Jerusalem were already doing so. The plural pronouns, “us” and “we,” could be editorial accommodation, but probably refer to Paul and his colleagues in Rome. Some have interpreted this to mean Paul's inclusion of himself with other apostles or other leaders (17) of the church.

Paul considered himself and his colleagues as worthy of the supportive prayers of his readers in Jerusalem, being “persuaded” and “convinced” that they had done what God willed in their lives, by being and doing what God wanted to be and do in them. Previously in this letter Paul had mentioned the cleansing of the conscience at regeneration (9:9,14; 10:2,22), but here he appeals to the inner perception of peace in having been faithfully and behaviorally available to do what God wanted. On several occasions in his writings Paul expressed his assurance of integrity based on a good conscience. In Jerusalem before the Jewish Council, Paul stated, “I have lived my life with a perfectly *good conscience* before God up to this day” (Acts 23:1). Before Felix, Paul said, “I do my best to maintain always a *blameless conscience* before God and before men” (Acts 24:16). These statements were made just prior to his state-sponsored transport to Rome (Acts 27:1). Writings to the Corinthians, Paul explained, “I am *conscious* of nothing against myself, but the One who examines me is the Lord” (I Cor. 4:4), and later, “For our confidence is this, the testimony of our *conscience*, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you” (II Cor. 1:12). The apostle John wrote, “If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God” (I Jn. 3:21).

Continuing to include his colleagues, Paul indicated that they were “desiring to conduct themselves well in all things.” They wanted their behavior to be good and exemplary, a faultless and irreproachable (cf. I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) expression of God's holiness (12:14) in all situations and among all people.

Many commentators have speculated that Paul was attempting to justify his own behavior in explaining why he was worthy of the readers' prayers. Was there resentment or alienation between Paul and the Jerusalem Christians? Paul, as the “Apostle to the Gentiles” (cf. Acts 26:17), may well have been regarded with some suspicion and skepticism by the Hebrew Christians.⁴ Perhaps Paul feared that this letter, this “word of exhortation” (22) might not be well received by the Jerusalem Christians since he advocated such a definitive dichotomy between the old covenant and the new covenant, between Judaism and Christianity, with a rejection, repudiation, and severance from all Judaic religious traditions in order to participate in the “better things” in Jesus Christ.

13:19 There does not seem to be any apparent alienation in Paul's continued urging of the Jerusalem Christians to pray for him. "*And I entreat you especially to do this, that I may be reunited with you sooner.*" Paul appeals to the Jerusalem Christians, beseeching, entreating, and encouraging them to pray for him. The word he uses can also be translated as "exhort" (22) or "counsel," but these have more of a demanding connotation. Paul wanted them to pray "especially" (cf. II Cor. 1:12; 2:4) and more specifically, that he might be reunited with them in a personal visit very soon. His desired reunion with the Jerusalem Christians can be understood as both the *content* of the prayer that he encourages, as well as the *consequence* of such prayer. Paul had been with the Jerusalem church on several occasions previously (Acts 9:26-30; 15:1-29; 21:15-23:22), and wanted to be with them again as soon as possible, "before long" (I Tim. 3:14), shortly, in order to speak with them face-to-face. The question that must be asked is: Was Paul hindered from such a reunion visit because he was incarcerated in Rome, and would have to be released from custody in order to return? There is inadequate information to answer that question, but in another epistle written from prison in Rome, Paul stated, "I hope that through your prayers I shall be given up to you" (Philemon 22).

13:20 Having sought their prayers, Paul turns around and expresses in writing a benedictory and doxological prayer for the Jerusalem Christians. Paul's prayer is heavily weighted theologically, but what would we expect from one whose mind was so oriented to theological intricacies?

"*Now the God of peace, the One having brought out of a corpse the great Shepherd of the sheep in the blood of the eternal covenant,* (even) *Jesus our Lord...*" These words simply establish the subject of the sentence, and the One to whom the prayer is addressed. The designation of God as "the God of peace" was a common way to refer to God, and one that Paul used often (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; I Thess. 5:23). God is the source of inner and outer peace – spiritual peace, psychological peace, and social peace.

The Son of God, the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6), is "the great Shepherd of the sheep." Jesus identified Himself as the "good shepherd who lays His life down for the sheep" (Jn. 10:11,14), indicating that the Shepherd would be struck down (Matt. 26:31). Peter referred to Jesus as "the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls" (I Peter 2:25), the "Chief Shepherd" (I Peter 5:4) of the church. The "great Shepherd" is the "great High Priest" (4:14; 10:21). The Shepherd gave His life for the sheep. The High Priest offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin.

"Through the blood" (13:12) of the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, the "eternal covenant" was established extending "eternal salvation" (5:9), "eternal redemption" (9:12), and "eternal inheritance" (9:15) to those united with Him. The prophets had foretold of this new "eternal covenant" (Isa. 55:3; 61:8; Jere. 31:33; 32:40; 50:5; Ezek. 16:60; 37:26). Whereas the old covenant was designed as provisional and temporary with planned obsolescence (13:8), the new covenant in Jesus Christ would be final and permanent, never to be superseded. At the Last Supper, Jesus spoke to His disciples, "This is the blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for the sins of all time (10:12), establishing the eternal new covenant for all ages between God and mankind.

God the Father "brought up" the crucified Jesus "out of a corpse," raising Him from the dead to be the "great Shepherd of the sheep" and the Lord of the church. The implications of the resurrection of Jesus were (and are) the foremost message of the Christian gospel. We are "born again to a living hope through the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3). Christians are "those who believe in *Him who raised Jesus from the dead*" (Rom. 4:24; I Peter

1:21). Paul advised the Colossian Christians, “You were raised up with Him through faith in the working of *God, who raised Him from the dead*” (Col. 2:12). The dynamic of the Christian life is the indwelling resurrection-life of Jesus. “If the Spirit of *Him who raised Jesus from the dead* dwells in you, *He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead* will also give life to your mortal bodies through His spirit who indwells you” (Rom. 8:11). Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they would “know the surpassing greatness of His power...in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when *He raised Him from the dead*” (Eph. 1:19,20). The divine dynamic of the Christian life is the grace provision of the resurrection-life of Jesus by the activity of the Holy Spirit. In the midst of that “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) wherein we are “united in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom. 6:5), we anticipate that “*He who raised Jesus from the dead* will raise us also with Jesus” (II Cor. 4:14) in the future bodily resurrection (cf. I Cor. 15:12-28).

Jesus “was declared the Son of God with power by the *resurrection from the dead*, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:4). The resurrection of Jesus is the empowering basis of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, reigning and ruling in the lives of individual Christians and collectively in the church. The simplest affirmation of the early Christians, and Christians through the ages, has been, “Jesus is Lord” (I Cor. 12:3). Christians are to “set apart Christ as Lord in their hearts, ...and keep a good conscience so that...those who revile their good behavior may be put to shame” (I Pet. 3:15,16).

13:21 Paul’s prayer first established the subject, “the God of peace,” and explained His historical action through His Son of crucifixion, resurrection, and the establishment of the eternal covenant community wherein the living Christ serves as “the great Shepherd of the sheep” and the Lord of the church (20). Having stated in prayer what God has done, he then prays for God’s continuing action in the lives of the Jerusalem Christians. Paul’s prayer is that God will “***equip you in everything good to do His will, doing in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory unto the ages. Amen.***” Of all the new covenant writers of scripture, Paul seems to be most clearly cognizant that the Christian life can only be lived by the grace of God. He prays that God will prepare (cf. 10:5; 11:3), equip, and supply the Jerusalem Christians to be complete (II Cor. 13:11) and perfect (I Pet. 5:10) by His provision of grace, in order to be functionally operative to manifest His goodness in accordance with His will. The Christian life is the “supplied life” **5** wherein the Christian is fully equipped by the dynamic power of God’s grace for all good. Some manuscripts and translations read, “in every good *work*,” whereas the oldest manuscript (*P46*) simply refers to being equipped “in good.” The “fruit of the Spirit” includes “goodness” (Gal. 5:22,23), and the apostle John explained that “the one doing *good* derives what he does out of God” (III Jn. 11). God equips the Christian to express His character of goodness in every good expression and good deed of the Christian life. “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for *good works*, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). “God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every *good deed*” (II Cor. 9:8).

Equipped by His grace to express His goodness, we are prepared “to do His will.” As Paul wrote to the Philippians, ‘I can *do* all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). We can “do the will of God” only because He is the cause of His own character expression. That which God wills, He works! That which God desires, He does! Earlier Paul had put the words of the Psalmist (Ps. 40:7,8) into the mouth of Jesus, “I have come to do Thy *will*, O God” (Heb.

10:7,9). Jesus accomplished the will of God as “the Father abiding in Him did His works” (Jn. 14:10), and we “do the will of God” (cf. 10:36) as the indwelling Christ expresses His life and character in and through us. Expressed succinctly, we can state that “the will of God is Jesus” expressing Himself in our behavior.

The “God of peace” is “doing in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ...” God is the dynamic of His own demands, the cause of His own effects, the working of His own will. Nothing in the Christian life is generated or produced by human effort or “works,” but it is all accomplished by God’s grace. Paul’s duplication of verbs is not always apparent in English translations, for Paul prays that, “God equip you *to do* His will, *doing in us* what is pleasing in His sight.” This is similar to Paul’s words to the Philippians, advising them to “*work out* your own salvation, for *God is at work* in you *to work* for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12,13). Based on His having “put His laws into our minds, and written them upon our hearts” (8:10; 10:16; cf. Jere. 31:33), by the indwelling presence of Jesus (cf. Jn. 14:20; 17:23; Rom. 8:9,10; II Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; Heb. 3:14), God’s internal dynamic of grace in the living Lord Jesus supplies everything necessary to live a Christian life pleasing to God. During His incarnation on earth, Jesus “always did the things that were *pleasing* to the Father” (Jn. 8:29). It is only “through Jesus Christ” (cf. 15), His life expressed through us, that our behavior can be *well-pleasing* in His sight” (cf. 12:28; 13:16). Every legitimate expression of the Christian life is “through Jesus Christ” (cf. Phil. 4:13). Christianity is Christ.⁶

God is glorified unto the ages by His own action, by His own all-glorious character expressed within His creation. Therefore, Paul’s prayer is that as God equips the Christians in goodness to do His will, and does in the Christians what is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, the “God of peace” (and by extension, Jesus Christ as God) “might be glorified unto the ages” (cf. Gal. 1:5; Ii Tim. 4:18). God created all things (cf. Ps. 19:1) and all persons (cf. Isa. 43:7) for His own glory, but He “does not give His glory to another” (Isa. 42:8; 48:11). God’s glory is in His own Self-expression through His Son, Jesus Christ, for godliness is exclusively the expression of God’s own character, and God is glorified only by the manifestation of His own absolute and all-glorious character in the manifestation of the life of Jesus Christ. The extended phrase, “unto the ages *of the ages*,” or “forever *and ever*,” is an apparent addition not contained in the earliest manuscripts.

“So be it,” “let it be,” “Amen,” Paul concludes his written prayer. He prays, believing that God will accomplish what he has prayed for.

13:22 Some have regarded the remaining words of this epistle to be an addendum or an attached postscript, but they seem to be an integral part of Paul’s personal conclusion. “***But I exhort you, brothers, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you through a few words.***” Paul urges (cf. Rom. 12:1; 15:30; 16:17), entreats, beseeches, appeals, counsels, encourages, or exhorts the Hebrew Christians of Jerusalem to give due consideration to this letter he has written to them. The same word was translated “entreat” in verse 19, but to make the Greek word-play more obvious we have here translated it, “I *exhort* you...to bear with this word of *exhortation*...” This may overstate a sense of demanding harshness not intended by Paul, but he is certainly appealing to the Christians in Jerusalem to “bear with” (cf. Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13), endure (II Tim. 4:3), or to “hold on to” the “word of exhortation” (cf. Acts 13:15) supplied by this epistle, which was meant to be a “word of encouragement” (10:25) of the “better things” that Christians have in Jesus Christ. Some commentators have speculated that Paul was making a courteous apology for the forthright and direct manner of his expressing the dichotomy between Judaism and

Christianity, thereby attempt to soften the blow for the Hebrew Christian readers. Paul was surely unapologetic about the stand he had taken in the content of this letter, and was more likely urging them to cling tightly to the message of all “better things” provided in Jesus Christ alone. The only apology may have been for the length of the epistle, since he proceeds to explain, “I have written to you through a few words.” This may be a classic example of understatement, as Paul recognized that the epistle was rather lengthy. On several occasions throughout the letter Paul indicated that he had “much to say” (5:11; 11:32) and could not “go into detail” (9:5) on every point, but given the breadth of the subject of comparing the old covenant with the new covenant, he had indeed written briefly “through a few words.”

13:23 Concerning his understudy and colleague, Paul wrote, **“Be advised that brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.”** Timothy was Paul’s student and traveling companion (cf. II Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1; I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 1:2), and the Christians in Jerusalem would have been well aware of that relationship. On Paul’s last trip to Jerusalem, Timothy was accompanying him (Acts 20:4), and likely visited the church in Jerusalem at that time. Timothy’s “release” probably refers to his being set free from custody or incarceration in prison, even though we do not have any direct scriptural statement of his being imprisoned. We do know that Timothy was with Paul in Rome when Paul wrote some of his prison epistles (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philemon 1:1). Paul informs the Jerusalem Christians to “be advised, take notice, know” that Timothy has been released – information they would surely be glad to hear.

The briefly stated travel plans are rather ambiguous. Did Paul expect Timothy to come to Rome so they could travel together to Jerusalem, provided Paul was free to go? Or did Paul expect Timothy to travel to Jerusalem where Paul anticipated that he could see and visit with Timothy and the Jerusalem Christians? We do not know the details of the projected travel plans, but Paul obviously hoped to visit with the Christians in Jerusalem and with Timothy.

13:24 As was customary in ancient letters (cf. Phil. 4:21; I Thess. 5:26; III Jn. 14), Paul sends concluding greetings. **“Greet all those leading you and all the saints.”** There may have been several house churches in Jerusalem, each having leaders. If so, the “saints” and their leaders probably kept touch with the other church groups in a network of contact. The exhortation was to convey Paul’s greetings to all the present leaders (7,14) and all the Christian saints.

In addition to his own conveyance of greetings, Paul adds, **“Those from Italy greet you.”** The likely meaning of these words is that the Christians with whom Paul associated in Italy also sent their greetings to the Christians in Jerusalem. Several early sources and manuscripts of this epistle indicate that this letter was written by Paul “from Rome,” so Paul was expressing greetings on behalf of his fellow saints in Italy. Many speculations have been proffered whether this phrase refers to displaced or non-resident Italians living at either the place of origin or the destination of the epistle, but such adumbrations lead to no substantial conclusions.

13:25 In typical Pauline form (Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18; I Thess. 5:28; II Thess. 3:18; I Tim. 6:21; II Tim. 4:22; Titus 3:15), Paul, the “Apostle of Grace,” concludes the letter, **“Grace be with you all.”** This is more than a casual and customary sign-off. Throughout this epistle Paul has returned to reference to God’s grace. “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of *grace*” (4:16). “See to it that no one comes short of the *grace* of God” (12:15). “It is good for the heart to be sustained by *grace*” (13:9). In Paul’s mind, grace was the divine dynamic by which the entirety

of Christian life was expressed, the free-flow of God's activity consistent with His character manifested by the risen Lord Jesus. Paul's final words to the Christians in Jerusalem were to express His desire that they live by God's grace, received by faith.

Concluding Remarks:

Despite his propensity for definitive theological precision and documentation, Paul concludes this letter to the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem with a personal touch of pastoral concern. He allows his loving heart to be expressed through his pen in exhorting the readers to practical loving interactions. He seeks the prayers of his Jewish Christian brethren, and expresses his desire and intent to visit them soon.

The first paragraph (1-6) of this final section (13:1-25) is a series of imperatival exhortations to allow for the manifestation of God's love toward one another (1), strangers (2), prisoners (3), the mistreated (3), and toward their spouses in the sexual intimacy of marriage (4). Money and material things, on the other hand, are not to be loved, but Christians are to rest in the security of God's sufficient provision (5,6).

The practicum of love is carried over into the second paragraph (7-17) in the admonition to respect and cooperate with present church leaders (7,17,24). Sandwiched between these references to leaders, Paul reverts to a theological argument of how Christians are "sustained by grace" (9) because they partake ("eat") from a heavenly altar (10) that is "outside the camp" (11,12,13) in a heavenly city (14), where they worship God in verbal praise (15), in generous sharing with others (16), and by deference for their leaders (17).

In his concluding comments (18-25), Paul solicits the prayers of his readers (18,19), and inscribes a prayer for them (20,21) that expects God to provide the sufficiency of His grace action by the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ in order to do God's will and glorify Him. Exhorting them to endure his exhortation (22), Paul then advises them of Timothy's release (23), explains his intent to visit them in Jerusalem (23), sends greeting to all, including greetings from those with him in Italy (24), and bids them to live in God's grace (25).

This final section (13:1-25) continues the theme of the "better things" in Christ Jesus, by emphasizing that the risen and living Lord Jesus provides the "Better Practical Expression of God at Work," in love and worship and prayer. As this may be the last extant epistle of the Pauline corpus of literature, it is most fitting and consistent that Paul should conclude by emphasizing the divine dynamic of God's grace as He energizes and enacts all that is Christian. God is "doing in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ" (21).

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Goodspeed, Edgar J., *The Apostolic Fathers, An American Translation*. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1950. pg. 17.
- 2 Bruce, F.F., *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Series: The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972. pg. 394.
- 3 Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325*. Vol. I. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1985. pg. 62.

- 4 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*. VI,1,2. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Second Series. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub Co. 1982. pg. 261.
- 5 Freeman, Bill, *The Supplied Life: A Daily Devotional*. Scottsdale: Ministry Publications. 1995.
- 6 Fowler, James A., *Christianity is Christ*. Fallbrook: CIY Publishing. 1996.