

A.B. Simpson:

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,
"Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13: 20, 21).

We have now reached the close of the doctrinal portion of this great epistle, and the last chapter is occupied with a number of practical applications, and a final benediction and doxology, followed by a few parting salutations.

I. PRACTICAL APPLICATION (Heb. 13: 1-19)**1. Love (verses 1-4).**

The great theme of this epistle has been faith, but faith ever works by love. And so four kinds of love are here enjoined:

(a) Love to the brethren. "Let brotherly love continue."

(b) Love to the stranger. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

(c) Love to the suffering, a love that leads us to make common cause with them, and take upon us in practical sympathy their very burdens and bonds. "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

(d) Domestic love and personal purity in the relationships of the home (v. 4).

2. Contentment and freedom from the restless and inordinate desire for earthly things. "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have" (v. 5).

It will be noticed here that this virtue is founded upon faith and springs from a spirit of confidence in God's protecting and providing care, for it is added, "For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." But our faith must be very positive, and meet God's promise with full confession and perfect confidence. Therefore it is added, "So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." There is a beautiful correspondence here between what He has said and what we should say. Faith should take up and echo back the Word of God, and only as it does this will the promise be made good, and the reckoning become real.

3. Constancy. "Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein" (v. 9). The Hebrew Christians were in great danger, like the disciples of Galatia, of being disturbed by false teachers, especially those that sought to persuade them to go back to the law, and give up their simple faith for a religion of ceremonialism. The apostle seems to connect this exhortation with the two preceding verses, seven and eight, the one reminding them of the example of their teachers; the other recalling to them the unchangeable character of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is one of the most beautiful verses in the whole Bible, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever," and while it stands in splendid isolation in this chapter, apparently disconnected from the context, there can scarcely be a question that there was a latent connection in the mind of the writer between the unchangeableness of Jesus and our stability as Christians. This is the only way for us to hold fast our constancy, by having in us as the source and strength of our life the heart of the unchangeable Christ. If Jesus Christ is in us in every thought and feeling, word and action, we, too, shall be the same yesterday, and today and forever, and all our moods and tenses will be resolved into one blessed present tense of immovable peace and victorious joy.

4. The fellowship of Christ's sufferings. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." (v. 13.) We have already referred to this verse in the former chapter, and it is only necessary here to notice that it is connected with the blessed hope of the coming kingdom and the city which God is preparing for His separated and suffering people. In the assurance of that blessed hope, it should not be hard to give up the earthly camp, and the prizes of human ambition and success.

5. Service. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (verses 15, 16). Here, as we have seen in the last chapter, there is a double service, thanksgiving to God and blessing to our fellow men, both by our personal acts and our liberal gifts.

6. Submission to one another in the Lord, especially to our spiritual teachers and leaders. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (v. 17).

7. Mutual prayer, especially for the Christian ministry. "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner" (verses 18, 19). This is the highest of all service, -- our ministry at the throne of grace. This is a blessed work from which nothing need ever debar us, and if we are hindered from personal activity we can pour out the strength of our lives through those for whom we pray. So let us love, so let us be content, so let us stand steadfast, so let us enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, so let us serve, submit ourselves and pray for one another in the blessed household of faith and family of God.

II. PARTING BENEDICTION

But now the full heart of the writer turns from didactic speech and personal exhortation, and pours out one burning prayer and benediction, in which he gathers up the deepest teachings of this whole blessed epistle. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (verses 20, 21).

1. The God of peace. This beautiful expression sums up in a single phrase the spiritual results of the great redeeming work with which the Epistle to the Hebrews has been occupied. We have already seen that the first great thought was the coming of Jesus Christ from God to bring us the message of His will. The next was the going back of Jesus Christ to God as our Great High Priest. But the consummation of the writer's thought was the bringing of us back to God in full reconciliation and perfect fellowship, as the Author and Finisher of our faith. This is the idea expressed by the "God of peace." Jesus Christ has brought us back to God, and now He steps back from the foreground of the picture, and leaves us in the Father's house, and in direct relations with God Himself. There is no cloud between us and the eternal Father. He is to us the very God of peace.

2. "The great shepherd of the sheep." But while we recognize our reconciliation to the Father, not for a moment can we forget the blessed Mediator through whom it has been accomplished and is still maintained. Here a new figure is introduced, although it is used to express an old fact. It is the figure of the shepherd, and back of it there rises the vision of the lost and wandering sheep, of the long and loving search, of the midnight, the wilderness, and the terrible cost, the glad home-bringing, and the peace and safety of the heavenly fold. But while this is a new figure in the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is not a new figure in the Old Testament from which this beautiful epistle is so largely drawn. Indeed, it is the oldest, sweetest, and most frequent image under which the grace of God has been portrayed, from Abel down to Christ Himself. And so it adds a delightful touch of tenderness and completeness to the whole epistle, to represent our Lord Jesus, in the last picture of His person and work, under the figure of the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

3. The everlasting covenant. This expresses the security of our salvation and the solid and permanent foundation on which our relationship to God through the work of Jesus Christ has been established. It is the result of an arrangement as stable as the throne of God. Every condition of justice and equity has been met. Every possible cause of failure has been anticipated, and the interests of Christ's redeemed people are guaranteed by an everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son, in which all the conditions have been fully met, and all the contracts and promises ratified so completely that, as the Psalmist expresses it, it is "In all things well ordered and sure." This is one of the most helpful truths brought out in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that we are saved not through the work of the Law, but through a new covenant in which Christ has met and fulfilled all the conditions and bequeathed to us all the promises. As the writer expressed it in a former passage, "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Heb. 6: 18, 19).

4. The Precious Blood. "Through the blood of the everlasting covenant." This covenant has been ratified by

blood, and the blood runs as a crimson thread all through this evangelistic epistle. It is perhaps the most prominent thought in the central portion of the letter. There is no ambiguity about the teaching of this portion of the Scriptures respecting the cross of Christ. It is the blood that purchases our redemption. It is the blood that puts away our sin. It is the blood that seals and ratifies the covenant. It is the blood that sanctifies and keeps us. It is the blood that opens the way into the holiest of all. It is the blood that pleads for us, and claims the answer to our prayers. Over every page of this beautiful book we might well write the caption, "The Precious Blood of Christ."

5. The practical outworking of this great redemption. "Make you perfect in every good work to do his will." It is not a mere treatise on systematic theology; it is not a mere intellectual diversion; but it leads to the very highest standard of holy living. His will becomes our rule of action, perfect conformity to it our goal of attainment, and every good work our mode of reaching this lofty standard and heavenly aim. The life of faith, if genuine and sincere, will always lead to the life of holy activity and practical righteousness. But here it is more than an ordinary standard of righteousness. It is nothing less than the highest perfection that the apostle asks for his readers. Just as the faith required in this epistle is the highest confidence, so the holiness presented as our ideal is entire conformity to the will of God "in every good work." This would be impossible for us, but it is not impossible when we remember the crowning thought of the whole epistle, that Jesus Himself is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and this truth is not forgotten in the closing benediction, for in the very next clause he reminds us of:

6. The divine inworking which is to bring about the practical outworking. This high and holy standard is not to be reached by our most strenuous exertions, but by God's "working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ." It is union with Christ, abiding in Christ, the heart and life of Christ within us, the realization of that fine expression which we find in Colossians 1: 29: "Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily," and which we find yet again in Philippians 2: 12, 13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

7. The Doxology. And so the benediction ends in a sublime doxology: "To whom be glory forever and ever, Amen." Instead of being crushed with discouragement, and paralyzed with a sense of the impossibility of our task, we are lifted up to sublime confidence and praise by the delightful fact that it is not our working, but His, and duty is transformed into delight and the heart can only sing:

Once it was my working, His it hence shall be,
Once I tried to use Him, Now He uses me.

Well may we say of such a Savior and such a salvation, "to him be glory forever and ever. Amen."