

The New and Better - Part 3
(A Review of Hebrews' Applications)
Reading: Hebrews 12:1-3; 28-29

Bethany Baptist Church
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...pray...

We've spent the last **two weeks** reviewing the *theology* of Hebrews.

Hebrews *teaches* that everything about *Jesus* and the *New Covenant* He *mediated* by *His blood* are *new* and *better*.

But the Christian life is not simply a system of abstract & isolated *beliefs*.

What you *believe* guides how you *live*. From what you believe about the *reality of God* to what you believe about *sexual identity*.

The **NT** writers *understood* that, and always *applied* their *doctrines* to our *practices*.

Hebrews is no different.

The letter can be divided into **two** parts: **1:1 - 10:18** (*theology*) & **10:19 - 13:25** (*application/practice*).

These **two** parts are **not divorced** from each other; Hebrews' *theology* clearly shapes its *instructions*.

After all, a *new* and *better* **theology** should lead to a *new* and *better* **life!**

This morning brings us to our *final look* at Hebrews, and I'd like us to remember...

Three lessons from Hebrews' new and better lifestyle.

- 1. Faith (Chap 11)**
- 2. Holiness (Chap 12)**
- 3. Church (Chap 10 & 13)**

The new and better life is lived by faith.

1. The *end of October* marks the anniversary of **Martin Luther's** launching of the **Reformation** on October 31, 1517. The *battle cry* of the **Reformation** was: "*faith alone*"! So this fine October morning, we'll start by reviewing how Hebrews emphasizes a *lifestyle of faith*.
2. Our letter does a wonderful job of *defining* faith, *illustrating* faith, and drilling down on some key areas of *living* by faith.
3. Let's turn to **11:1-6 (read)**.
 - a. My favorite words to help understand *faith* are "*belief*" and "*trust*." These ideas help us see that *faith* is more than just *agreeing* w/some set of statements or promises. Biblical *faith* involves *trust* – or in a more active sense, *entrusting* yourself to someone or his *promises*.
 - b. **11:1** develops **two** key components of *faith*: ***assurance & conviction***.
 - i. *Assurance* comes out of the idea of *foundation* – what we *rest on*.
 1. *Faith* rests easy that God will deliver on His *promises*.
 2. The Christian reads about *Jesus' return* and *heaven* and our *eternal inheritance* (etc.), and **by the assurance of faith**, these *gospel hopes* are brought w/in *reach*!
 - ii. *Conviction* takes *assurance* another step, because *conviction* suggests *action*.
 1. **Noah** had never seen *rain*, but he built that *boat*!
 2. **Moses** had never eaten *kosher*, but he left *Pharaoh's court*!
 - iii. **I.e.** *Faith* turns *future tense promises* into *present tense comforts*, and then **obeys!** *Faith* brings the *future* w/in *reach* of your soul! You *see* God's promises w/ the *eyes* of your heart and obey them from the *conviction* of your soul.

iv. **V.2** goes on to point out that this is the kind of faith that *saves sinners* in every age (**OT/NT**). **V.6 then** reminds us that *faith* is the condition for *pleasing* God and *coming* to Him. *Sola fide...faith alone!*

4. Do you have a *hero*? Someone from your *family* (*grandparent, famous ancestor*)? Someone from *sports* or *history*? How about someone *from* the faith who *lived* by faith? Hebrews chap.11 is popularly known as “*The Faith Hall of Fame*.” Men & women who gained God’s approval by their *faith*.
 - a. Some are *famous* and we remember their names and celebrate their lives. Some are *anonymous*, and we know little about them.
 - b. Sometimes faith was expressed in *victory*; sometimes tested in *suffering*.
 - c. They all share this in common (11:39): they *gained approval through their faith*. God’s approval...

5. But as soon as you step back *out* of the *Faith Hall of Fame* and into **Ch.12**, you *set your eyes on the ultimate example of faith*. **Read 12:1-3**.
 - a. Jesus is faith’s *author* and *perfecter* (or, if the life of faith is a *race*, Jesus is faith’s *leader* and *victor*).
 - b. Do you want an *example* of how to *live by faith*...look at *Jesus*. The ultimate expression of *faith* is to *obey* God even if it *hurts*. That takes *trust* – that requires *looking past the problems, seeing the promises, and acting*.

6. Hebrews connects living by *faith* to *assurance*, *perseverance*, and *heaven*.
- a. The gospel promises *assurance* of *salvation* **now**; you should know **now** where you are going **then** (→ *when you die*). **Turn to 10:19-23.**
 - i. Don't miss the references to *confidence* and *assurance* in **vv.19** and **22**, connected to *entering* and *drawing near* (God's presence).
 - ii. And where does *full assurance* of your relationship w/ God begin (22)...? *Faith...full assurance* that belongs to *faith*.
 - b. *Faith* allows you *persevere*. What kept **Noah** building that *boat*? What kept **Abraham** on the road to the *promised land*? Do you remember that although Abraham & Sarah *finally* received the son they *long for* (Isaac), the *patriarch* lived in Canaan until the *lives* of his grandsons, he **never** actually owned *more land* than Sarah's *grave*!
 - c. Which brings us to this third expression of *faith*: *faith believes that heaven is real* – and *best*.
 - i. Let's *trace that theme* through the *Hall of Fame* (**read** these):
 1. **11:9-10** – Abraham had his **GPS** programmed for the *Celestial City*.
 2. **Vv.13-16** – He had **no** *intention* of turning back; **no** *doubt* that the *better, heavenly country* was just over the *horizon*.
 3. **Vv.26-27** – **Moses** saw the promised *Christ* more clearly than he saw *Pharaoh*!

- ii. The 21st century western church may have lost its “*faith focus*” on *heaven*.
1. Life often seems *so good (cushy, plush)* that there isn’t much motivation to think about heaven.
 2. We pursue *prosperity, success, relationships, retirement, health, long lives* with so much passion that our vision of heaven becomes *distant* and *opaque*.
 3. Do you have a *favorite verse* about heaven? Do you *think* about heaven? Do you *want to go* there? Are you convinced that *every day in heaven* will be *indescribably better* than the *best day* you’ve ever experienced here?
 4. Can *this* be said of you (13:14)? For ***here*** we do ***not*** have a *lasting city*, but we are seeking the city ***which is to come***.

The *new* and *better* life is lived by *faith*.

The new and better life is marked by holiness.

1. When we *move on* from considering *faith* to thinking about *holiness*, we really **haven't** *moved too far*. That's because *holiness* is one of the Bible's big evidences that you possess *saving faith*.
 - a. James, for example, wrote (1:27) – *Pure and undefiled religion* (expression of our *faith*) *in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

2. What does *holiness* look like? Our world today seems to have **no idea**...! But the Bible is *clear*! Hebrews, like many NT books, has lists of *holy practices* (not *exhaustive*, but *authoritative*). **Turn w/ me to chapter 13.**
 - a. Our author is *wrapping up* his word of exhortation with a list of *holy pursuits*.

 - b. On the *positive side* we find (follow in your **NT** as I point these out):
 - i. **V.1** – The call to *brotherly love*, reminding us that *church* is *family*.

 - ii. **V.1,2** – The willingness to extend *hospitality*, particularly to Christians who are *strangers to you* or are *suffering persecution*.

 - iii. **V.15** – a lifestyle of *praise* and *gratitude* (*worship*).

 - iv. **V.16** – a lifestyle of *good deeds* and *generosity* (**read**).

- c. On the *negative side* (“Thou shalt not”):
- i. **V.4** – abstain from *sexual sin* – “*fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*” How popular is this clear warning...?
 - ii. **V.5** – free yourself from *coveting* and *greed* (instead, *cultivate contentment*).
 - iii. **V.9** - guard against *mysticism* (“*subjective spirituality*”; *to pursue God though personalized religious beliefs, practices, and experiences*).
- d. Perhaps we could summarize *holy living* from the author’s lovely *benediction* in **13:21**, where he wishes that God might *equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight*.
3. Hebrews not only describes *holy living*, it offers some very effective tactics for *pursing* it. Let’s look at **12:1-4** again (**read**).
- a. This is a picture of an *athlete* preparing to *compete in a race*. To *strive for holiness* demands *arduous toil*.
 - b. To pursue holiness you take off *worldly, sinful encumbrances*.
 - i. The world offers *unhealthy relationships, unholy entertainment, and unhelpful pastimes*.
 - ii. *Pull them off, and throw them aside*.
 - c. To pursue holiness you follow *Jesus’ example and lead*. To begin with, accept that the *race of faith* is difficult.
 - i. You can’t be *genuinely holy* if you don’t *love Jesus!*

- d. To pursue holiness, *accept* God's *loving discipline* (**read v.5-11**).
 - i. God's *discipline* **hurts!** **V.11** – *not joyful, but sorrowful!*
 - ii. God's *discipline* is an *evidence* of His *love* and your *legitimacy*.
 - 1. You should worry if your life is *sinful* but God **doesn't** seem *concerned!*
 - iii. God's *discipline* produces *holiness/righteousness* (vv.10, 11).
- 4. Hebrews provides *high octane motivation* for *personal sanctification*: God's *consuming holiness*.
 - a. After a call to serve God w/*reverence & awe* (12:28), we read in **12:29** – *for our God is a consuming fire*.
 - b. Has your zeal for *personal holiness* felt like *wet kindling* lately? *Holy living* is ignited by a *holy fear* of a *holy God*.

The new and better life is a life marked by evident holiness.

The new and better life is nurtured by church.

1. Jesus said that the Church *belongs* to Him, and He will *build* it. As the NT unfolds, Christ's New Covenant people are called His *flock* (e.g. Lk 12), His *body* (1 Cor 12), and His *bride* (Eph 5). The Apostle Paul alludes to us as the *army* of Christ Jesus (2 Tim).
 - a. To that list the writer of Hebrews adds that Christ is the *honored Son* who is *head* over His Father's *house* – and in **3:6** that house that the Son rules over is *us* – His *church*, His *people*.
 - i. ...*but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house* – whose house **we are**, if we hold fast the confession of our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.
 - b. All of which remind that Christ is supremely *over* us: *Shepherd, Head, Husband, Captain, favored Son*.
 - c. When you came to Jesus you were bowing to His *Lordship* and taking your place in His *household*.
2. Hebrews has at least **two** *specific teachings* on living the *new and better life* in the context of your *local church*. One deals with *assembling* and the other *leadership*.
3. The local church is a *specific* group of believers in a *specific* place in a *specific* time, gathered for the purpose of *worshiping together, being equipping, serving, evangelism, fellowship, validation of each ones' testimony, and mutual accountability*. The simple *prerequisites* for being counted a part of the flock are: *salvation, believer's baptism, and agreement w/ NT core doctrine*.
 - a. In **Heb 10:23-25** our writer emphasizes a *Christian discipline* that our flesh resists: *assembling, ie going to church on the Lord's Day (read)*.
 - b. Among our goals as we live the *new and better life* are (23) *perseverance (hold fast, w/o wavering)*, (24) *love (God, one another) and good deeds*. And how does that happen...?

- c. *Mutual encouragement!* First of all, *all* of this grammar is **1st** person, *plural* – it's all "**us stuff**" - not *me* stuff! And clearly he calls us to *stimulate one another to love and good deeds* and then to *encourage one another*. That requires *being together*...
- d. Which is what we find commanded in **v.24** – ***not forsaking our assembling together***.
- i. He then goes on to *lament* that some who *think* of themselves as church members *habitually don't* come to church!
 - ii. Which means they *miss* the *soul strengthening power* of the *encouragement* and *accountability* that only comes from *assembling together*.
 - iii. Beloved, there is only *so much encouragement* you can communicate in a *text*! And it's **not enough** to help you *grow strong in grace*!
 - iv. *Beloved in the Lord*, the Word of God **doesn't condone** the so-called Christian who won't *identify with* and *faithfully assemble with* a local, Bible-teaching fellowship. There is simply *no such thing* as a *Lone-Ranger Christian*.
 - v. To fail in this discipline betrays a *disregard* for God's Word (e.g. this command), a *lack of love* for God's people, and *evidence* of avoiding accountability.

4. And there is a **second emphasis** on the local church in the last chapter of Hebrews: the congregation's *elders*. **Turn w/me & follow as I read 13:7, 17, 24.**
- a. The term "*leaders*" in each of these texts is a reference to the same office we find elsewhere in the **NT** as *elders*, *overseers*, or *pastors*. (So this is a reference to men who hold the same *local church office* that I've been called to.) What should be true of a *pastor*...?
 - i. He should *lead*. This is w.r.t. to the congregation's *teaching, practice, and direction*. His *authority* is limited by Scripture.
 - ii. He should *teach* (v.7 - that's how you know these verses refer to *elders*). The text is clear; leaders *speak the Word of God*.
 1. 2Cor is *good*. 2 **Opinions** is ... *not so much!*
 - iii. He should live an openly *fruitful, exemplary* life. V.7 – what you *see* in your pastor should draw you to *imitate* his spiritual conduct. If that **isn't** true, there is something amiss w/either *you* or your *pastor*.
 - iv. He should *shepherd*; **v.17** – *watch over your soul*. One Bible teacher says a *pastor/shepherd's* job is to *lead, feed & protect*.
 - v. He is "*plural*." I.e., practically every **NT** discussion involving *elders* indicates that each church is led by *multiple pastors*.
 - vi. He is *accountable*. The point in **v.17** is that your pastor is *accountable* to Christ for how he's *cared* for you. Some of that can only be measured by how *you* have lived for *Christ*.

- b. But these verses also teach you about **your** relationship to your *elders*.
- i. You should *pay attention* to them. In order to *imitate* the *spiritual virtue, discipline & maturity* you see in them.
 1. E.g. how does you pastor *love God's Word*; deal with *difficult people*; make important *decisions* (authority?); handle *trials*; love his *wife*; raise his *children*?
 2. Why would you *follow* someone in life's most important endeavor – *your faith* – if he isn't *worthy of imitating*?
 - ii. You should *submit to* and thus *obey* your elders. The *limit* of their authority is *God's Word*.
 1. How do *you respond* when your pastor makes a decision *you don't like*, but it doesn't *counter* God's Word?
 2. Not only by your *actions*, but your *words* and *attitudes*?
 3. Do you see the end of **v.17**? If your relationship to your pastor is *prickly*, it's *hard* on him and ***unprofitable*** for *you*.
 - iii. You should *pray* for your *elders*. Pray for *wisdom* in setting *direction & dealing w/problems*. Pray for *effective preaching*. For *grace* to lead from the *Word*, not the *world*.
 - iv. And finally, *work* at maintaining a *good relationship* w/ your leaders. **V.24** - Why the command to *greet your leaders*? After all, they're *right there w/ you*! But you know...every good relationship requires *care & feeding*.

God has given the *Church* to His *Son*. There is a sense in which He has given the church to *us*: so we can *worship, serve, and be equipped – together*.

Jesus is our resurrected Great Shepherd and ever-interceding High Priest.

We know Him and obey Him *by faith*.

We honor Him and become like Him *through holiness*.

We worship Him and serve Him in His *church*.

This is our *new and better* life.

Read 13:20-21 ... 25

...pray...