

## Bible Study Guide

PASTORATE

September 4, 2013

### Lectionary Readings

Psalm 112; Ecclesiasticus 10:(7–11)12–18; **Hebrews 13:1–8**; Luke 14:1, 7–14

### Context

The letter to the Hebrews is about how God has led his people from the early days of the old covenant to its fulfillment in Jesus, and how he now leads his people of the new covenant to its fulfillment in the city that is to come. The author concludes his letter in chapter 13 by offering a series of practical instructions on how the church is to live in the meantime. In this final chapter of Hebrews, we not only find some of the more pressing matters every culture must wrestle with—justice, sex, money, and power—but we also see them reinterpreted for the church according to the person of Jesus.

### Hebrews 13:1–8

<sup>1</sup> Let mutual love continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup> Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. <sup>4</sup> Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. <sup>5</sup> Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” <sup>6</sup> So we can say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” <sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

### Commentary

When questions for daily living surface, the church’s discussion should always be rooted in the person of Jesus. As he lived, so the church is called to live. The person of Jesus is spoken to explicitly at the end of the passage as the one who never changes (v 8). But Jesus’ ethic also implicitly stands behind each of the preceding verses. As the world behaves in ways that are self-serving and destructive, the challenge for the church is to take the path of Christ, the way of self-sacrifice and love.

Indeed, *mutual love* stands as the heading for the entire passage (v 1). The starting point for walking the way of Christ is to learn to live together in love. *Mutual love* speaks not of a particular emotion, but of the commitment to meet one another’s needs with patience and kindness (as 1 Corinthians 13 depicts). This is counter-cultural because the church consists of people from all backgrounds, classes, and ethnicities. It makes sense to care for one’s own kin, but not those who are so different from one another. The church, then, should stand out in this way.

To *show hospitality* is another mark of Christ-likeness, especially to those on the margins, to strangers (v 2). Though this makes one vulnerable at times, it also reveals the radical nature of God's grace. The premier biblical example of this was the hospitality shown by Abraham in Genesis 18:2–15, which is alluded to by the reference to the possibility of entertaining angels. Ministering to the needs of the imprisoned and the suffering also stands in stark contrast with the punitive (in)justice and retributive systems that so dominate our world (v 3). To take the path of Jesus means showing compassion to those whom this world deems as criminal and deserving of punishment.

Verse 4 challenges the church to demonstrate the faithfulness of Christ by honoring their marital relationships, especially as it concerns the issue of sex. The ancient world was every bit as sexually promiscuous as the Western world, and Christians of both are to model an ethic that rightly values God's gift of sex. And as people view sex through the lens of self-gratification, so it is with money. Greed and the pursuit of wealth are ubiquitous in our culture. The way of Christ calls the church to flee *the love of money* and instead embrace contentment (v 5).

The final admonition calls to mind those faithful leaders of the past who provide an example for such a radical way of life (v 7). Through perseverance in the faith, they modeled the life of Christ, and so bore the fruit of God's coming kingdom.

### Discussion Questions

1. What are some things that stand out to you in this passage?
2. Do you think it's more difficult to love your family or your church family? Why?
3. When Christians talk about moral decisions and behavior, does the conversation typically revolve around Jesus? If not, what does it revolve around? Why?
4. How does Jesus' life and teaching inform our thinking in each (or one or two) of the following areas: justice, sex, money, and power? Give examples.
5. In which area—justice, sex, money, or power—does today's church have the most difficult time bearing witness to the kingdom of God?
  - a. Why do you think that is?
  - b. How do you think the church can do better in that particular area?
6. Who in your life serves as a powerful example to you for following the way of Jesus?
7. How does this passage encourage you and your faith?

### Collect of the Day

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good thing: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*