

# Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews

## Chapter 13

### Paul's Closing Argument

(also available on-line at [ichthys.com](http://ichthys.com))  
by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

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#### **I. Introduction:**

Paul had a great deal of "history" with Jerusalem and the church there. Following his early years in his home town of Tarsus in Asia Minor where he seems to have received a classical education fit for a Roman citizen (as we surmise based upon his mastery of Greek and his quotations from classical authors),<sup>1</sup> Paul received his training in the Law in Jerusalem, studying under Gamaliel, one of the most famous teachers of that era (Acts 22:3; cf. Acts 5:34).

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead."  
Acts 23:6 NIV

(4) "The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. (5) They have known me

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<sup>1</sup> Paul quotes the Greek poet Aratus at Acts 17:28, the Greek comic poet Menander 1st Corinthians 15:33; and the Greek poet Epimenides at Titus 1:12.

for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee."

Acts 26:4-5 NIV

(13) For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. (14) I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. (15) But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased (16) to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.

Galatians 1:13-16 NIV

In Paul's case, his previous deep connection with the most devoutly religious unbelieving community in Jerusalem, i.e., the Pharisees, did not stop him from becoming the apostle most dedicated to preaching the grace of God to the gentiles. In some respects, this prior allegiance was a benefit in that it gave him a broader mastery of the Law.

He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Matthew 13:52 NIV

Supremely successful in bringing the gospel to the gentiles throughout the eastern Mediterranean Roman world, Paul now devotes his final hours and last remaining strength to an attempt to prevent the Jewish believers in Jerusalem from falling by the wayside through succumbing to the temptation to return to the past through the Law or Gnosticism under the pressure of societal ostracism. The spiritual well-being of his Jewish countrymen had always been a main theme in Paul's life, and was, in fact, the reason for his first imprisonment as we have seen.

(13b) Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry (14) in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people *to envy* and save some of them.

Romans 11:13b-14 NIV

Envy, after all, is the basic human sin and responsible in the last analysis for most others (Eccl.4:4; cf. Gen.3:4-6; 4:3-8; Jas.3:14-16; 4:5; 1Jn.3:12)<sup>2</sup>. Jewish unbeliever envy of the salvation of the gentiles, moreover, was a particular cause of their hardness (Matt.27:18; Acts 13:43-45; 17:5; 22:21-22; Rom.10:2; cf. Lk.15:25-32). Coupled with the strong pull of tradition and the easier path of falling back into the ways of the past (or seeking gnostic self-fulfillment instead of God's will), this toxic attitude had done much to produce the reversion of many believers in Jerusalem. In this last chapter, Paul seeks to remind his fellow Jewish believers of their basic responsibilities to the Lord who bought them, and to reorient them to the proper way of thinking. As followers of Jesus Christ, of course, they should have expected to be ostracized

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<sup>2</sup> See in Hebrews chapter 5, "Envy".

by their fellow countrymen who refused to accept the true Messiah. That is the legacy of all believers in the devil's kingdom. We are *all* pariahs in the eyes of the world.

(1) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who, though *outcasts* dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet selected (2) in the foreknowledge of God the Father, by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.  
1st Peter 1:1-2a

This is the devil's world at present (Jn.12:31; 16:11; Eph.2:2). Seeking to ease our path by making friends with it is no solution – rather it is the road to perdition (Jas; 4:4; 1Jn.2:15-19). Believers then and now need to embrace that outcast status rather than shunning it, for there is no greater honor in this short life than to be called to share in the sufferings of our Lord.<sup>3</sup>

But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.  
1st Peter 4:13

For those believers in Jerusalem who received Paul's letter, there were only three eventualities possible if they were determined to keep heading the wrong way in disgracing Jesus Christ: 1) repentance and resumption of the right way; 2) ignoring Paul's appeal in the face of increasing divine discipline until finally suffering the sin unto death; 3) giving up on their faith entirely and forfeiting life eternal for the sake of temporary relief in this life alone. The madness and folly of doing anything other than repenting and resuming their spiritual growth whereby alone none of their past suffering would have been in vain is beyond expression. With these parting words, Paul hopes to cement the persuasive arguments he has deployed throughout this epistle, saving as many of his beloved fellow countrymen as he can by "snatching them from the fire" (Jude 1:23), setting them back on the right road, where alone there is true peace in this life and the promise of blessing beyond understanding in the next.

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, (26) because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than [all the] treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward.  
Hebrews 11:24-26

(13) So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i.e., likewise choosing God over the world), bearing His reproach. (14) For we do not have here [on earth] a city which [is meant to be] lasting; rather we are eagerly looking forward to the city that is destined [to come] (i.e., the New Jerusalem).  
Hebrews 13:13-14

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<sup>3</sup> See in Peter #36, "Rejoicing in Participating in Christ's Sufferings".

## II. Translation

(1) Let brotherly love continue. (2) Do not forget [to exercise] hospitality through which some entertained angels unawares. (3) Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow-prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.

(4) Let marriage be honored in every respect and the marriage bed undefiled. For God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. (5) Let your way of life be free from the love of money, being content with what you have. For He Himself has said, "I will not forsake you nor will I abandon you" (Deut.31:6). (6) So with confidence we say, "The Lord is my Helper. I shall have no fear of whatever mortal man may do to me" (Ps.118:6-7).

(7) Remember your [former] leaders, the ones who spoke the Word of God to you. Carefully consider the result of their conduct and imitate their faith. (8) Jesus Christ, yesterday and today [has always been] the same, and [will be] unto the [end of] the ages.

(9) Do not be led astray by strange, heterogeneous teachings. It is good for the inner person to be stabilized [by proper teaching], not by dietary regimes which have done no [spiritual] good for those preoccupied with such things. (10) We [believers who are not following the Law] have "an altar" from which those who serve the [present day, physical] tabernacle have no right to eat.

(11) For the bodies of those animals sacrificed by the high priest as a sin offering whose blood was brought into the Holy of Holies were completely burned up outside of the camp. (12) Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i.e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i.e., separated from fellowship). (13) So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i.e., likewise choosing God over the world), bearing His reproach.

(14) For we do not have here [on earth] a city which [is meant to be] lasting; rather we are eagerly looking forward to the city that is destined [to come] (i.e., the New Jerusalem). (15) So let us then always be offering a sacrifice of praise to God [the Father] through Him, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name. (16) And do not be forgetting to do good and to share [with your fellow believers]. For God is well-pleased with such sacrifices.

(17) Obey the [pastor-teachers] who are guiding you and yield to them. For they are depriving themselves of sleep in keeping watch over your lives, as [is understandable in the case of] those who are going to give an account [to the Lord for how they ministered to you and how you responded]. [So obey them and yield to them] that they may do this with joy and not with groaning. The latter would be unprofitable for you.

(18) Pray also for me (lit., "us"). I (lit., "we") am confident that my conscience is clear [in regard to all I have written you], as I wish to comport myself in a good way in all things. (19) I earnestly request that you do this (i.e., pray on my behalf) so that I may very soon be restored [to good favor] among you.

(20) And the God of peace, the One who led up from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep in the blood of the eternal covenant, our Lord Jesus, (21) will fit you out in every worthy task in order that you may do His will, [even] as He produces in us what is well-pleasing through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen!

(22) I beseech you, brothers, to put up with this message [meant to be one] of encouragement, even though I have sent it to you rather hastily [on account of my present circumstances of having not much time left].

(23) Know that our brother Timothy has been released. If you come with him rather quickly, I will [be able to] see you [before my execution]. (24) Greet all the [pastor-teachers] who are guiding you along with all the holy ones (i.e., believers). The holy ones (i.e., believers) [with whom I am in contact] greet you [as well]. (25) May the grace [of God be] with you all. Amen!

Hebrews 13:1-25

### III. Summary and Paraphrase

*Closing remarks reminding the Jerusalem believers to stay away from Gnosticism and its disreputable activities on the one hand, and to follow Christ, the One who has fulfilled the Law on the other, instead of the shadows which only represented Him.*

Instead of continuing with your dangerous compromising, make every effort to love your brothers instead of associating with those who do not love Jesus. And as long as you are interested in angels, consider that in the past scripture tells us that some of those who welcomed their brothers in need were actually entertaining *actual* elect angels. Do not forget about those who are in prison for our faith either, for this is another way in which you should be showing your love.

I am sorry to have to emphasize once more that sexual disobedience is particularly destructive to all spirituality (but the report I have received about you forces me to do so). So stay far, far away from what those Gnostics are telling you in this regard, justifying such sinful behavior with their lies. And do not allow your concern for your material security to trick you into compromising with the now obsolete Law. I realize that the hardships you have been facing by being shut out of society are a good part of the reason for your turning back (you need to consider that during the Tribulation this pressure will be even greater), but you must remember that God never lets us down, *if* we continue to trust Him and wait for His deliverance, just as the scripture says (Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Joshua 1:5). Believing this truth of God's absolute faithfulness towards those who trust Him, we can have confidence in this reality more than in what our eyes see: He is our Helper so that we have nothing to fear, just as scripture affirms (Psalm 118:6).

Remember also to obey rather than pressure, threaten and bully those who are teaching you these truths of the Word of God. Have faith as they did and do, remembering and observing how God blesses all those who follow Him as He has done with them. Jesus Christ is the truth behind the Old Covenant. Jesus Christ is the One who has mediated the New Covenant in which we now stand by faith. And Jesus Christ is the One before whom we must appear on that great day to come – this is the essence of all I have been saying to you. But in compromising the truth you are turning your back on Him who does not change (Jas.1:17), on Him who *is* the Truth (Jn.14:6).

After all, it is through the truth of the Word that we grow spiritually in our hearts, not through eating sacrificial meat from rituals with which we should now be having nothing to do, or by indulging in the illicit rites of what is falsely called "knowledge". So stay

away from the now defunct rituals of the Law and also from those dangerous false doctrines with which some of you have dallied, listening to Gnostic teaching about angels and aeons. There is no profit to any of the above.

But there *is* great profit in our "eating from the altar" that Christ has provided us, namely, the truth of the Word which is "eaten", that is, received and believed in faith analogously to food. Compare our New Covenant with the Old one, the reality of the cross versus the mere shadows of the rituals to which you have reverted. Under the Old Covenant, the bodies of sacrifices were burned outside of the camp in the case of the sin offering whose blood makes atonement – in order to foreshadow the cross and the blood of Christ. That is why Jesus Christ suffered and died for us outside the city gate too, namely, to rescue us from our sins by dying for them, to make us holy so as to belong to Him and the Father, so as to be delivered from sin and death and judgment. That being the case, instead of compromising so as not to be ostracized, a temporary reprieve from trouble which brings small relief only in this world but at an eternal cost, we need to embrace the ostracism that faith in Christ may bring us, going "outside", away from the false fellowship and compromise within the camp/city/gate – because Jesus Christ is outside, not inside.

We are not of this world even though we are temporarily in it (Jn.17:14). We are looking forward to a better world, a city made by God which is not temporary as everything in this world is, but a lasting one, eternal in the heavens and destined to come to earth (Rev.21:1-2). Instead of ritual sacrifices, let us sacrifice true, real and genuinely spiritual sacrifices, praising God, giving thanks, sharing and ministering to our brothers and sisters in Christ – those are the sacrifices that please Him, *not* these animal sacrifices which have become obsolete and offensive to Him (nor any humanly devised Gnostic "sacrifices").

And I will say it again for emphasis: you have been bullying your teachers to keep them from telling you the truth. Instead, you must listen to them and accept and obey their teaching since they are trying to help you. That is the way to gain a good reward in eternity, namely, by engaging in genuine spiritual growth with their help. Your present approach will lead to loss of reward instead when they have to report on you negatively on the Day of Christ.

I also solicit your prayers. Regardless of what anyone may think, I have always sought to do what is right before the Lord. Keep me in your prayers so that I may be restored to your hearts as well – for that is profitable for you.

Remember whom it is we serve and love and what He did for us: the Father who called us to peace with Him (instead of the turmoil your behavior is forcing), who raised Jesus from the dead (and it is the resurrection that is our hope, not anything in this life – but your behavior is threatening your hold on that eternal life); and our dear Lord Himself who is our Shepherd – He will take care of us, if we follow Him. He is the One who has provided us with this New Covenant with all of its wonderful future promises, bought by His own body and blood given over unto death that we might be saved, and through which we now have eternal life by means of His actual sacrifice for us in the darkness on the cross. Remember these things so that God may help you grow spiritually and recover

to where you were before and so that you may progress and produce in Jesus Christ a bountiful crop worthy of reward to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ forever.

This may seem to be a long letter, but in fact I have restrained myself as there was much more to say. Everything I have written is true and would be to your advantage to accept, even if it hurt your feelings at times.

Some news: Timothy has now been released, so he will be able to guide you to where I am being confined in Rome, if you arrive soon enough, that is. Greet your teachers (they receive first mention because you should be giving them proper respect). Greet all of the other believers (whom I will deliberately not mention by name here lest this letter be used to persecute them). Everyone here in Rome greets you as well (I must not mention them either for the same reason). I wish for you the favor of God – which is surely yours in principle and in practice too if you turn back to Him with all your heart. I firmly believe everything I've written to you.

#### IV. Verse by Verse Commentary

##### Verses One through Three

(1) Let brotherly love continue. (2) Do not forget [to exercise] hospitality through which some entertained angels unawares. (3) Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow-prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.  
Hebrews 13:1-3

**Brotherly Love:** The Greek word here, *philadelphia*, is different from the more common New Testament word for love, *agape*. While the latter is commanded toward all, *philadelphia* is specifically the love we are to exhibit towards our fellow believers in Jesus Christ. This was an important distinction for Paul to make, because it was precisely on this point that the Jerusalem church was floundering. They were not meeting together as believers in Christ for instruction in the truth and for mutual encouragement therein (Heb.10:26), but were instead joining hands with unbelievers in their return to the now defunct Law and its ceremonies. Paul's command for his readers to "let brotherly love continue" or "abide" makes use of the same verb John uses for "abiding in love" in 1st John 4:16, and that our Lord uses in commanding us to "abide in Him" in John 15:4-7. This love for their brother and sister Christians should continue to "abide" in their hearts and ours, regardless of the pressure and tribulation they were suffering then or that we may have to endure in the future.

(9) "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. (10) And then many will be offended (lit. "scandalized"; i.e., "tripped up"), will betray one another, and will hate one another. (11) Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (12) And because lawlessness will abound, *the love of many will grow cold.*"  
Matthew 24:9-12 NKJV

Failing to serve our brethren in Christ through prayer, encouragement, and whatever else they may have need of is the opposite of *philadelphia*. We are all given spiritual gifts for a reason, and the onset of tribulation or even of *the* Tribulation is no excuse for us to fall down on the job. Rather, at such times, there is and will be all the more need for every believer to play his or her proper role in the mutual support of Christ's Church.

(25) . . . that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. (26) And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (27) Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.  
1st Corinthians 12:25-27 NKJV

(15) . . . but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.  
Ephesians 4:15-16

. . . yet not embracing the Head [Christ]. For it is from this Source that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given.  
Colossians 2:19

### **Hospitality:**

A bishop (lit. "overseer", i.e., pastor-teacher / elder) then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, *hospitable*, able to teach.  
1st Timothy 3:2 NKJV

(7) For a bishop (lit. "overseer", i.e., pastor-teacher / elder as in v.5) must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, (8) but *hospitable*, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, (9) holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.  
Titus 1:7-9 NKJV

Hospitality as the quality of being hospitable (as opposed to the practice) is said in the verses above to be a necessary qualification of pastor-teachers. Paul appeals here to the entire Jerusalem church not to overlook this virtue. Many versions translate the Greek word here, *philoxenia* (lit., "the quality of loving strangers"), as "entertaining/showing hospitality to strangers" (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB, etc.). What the word primarily conveys, however, is friendliness, being open to sharing the truth even with those who are not of the fellowship and who may not even be believers. In regard to those who do not know the truth, while the biblical principle of reticence in regard to being too open in an imprudent way (Matt.7:6; 7:15; 10:16) is not revoked by this command, the other side of the coin here is being too withdrawn to the point of not accepting or receiving or welcoming into the fellowship new

faces who may indeed be searching for the truth. After all, as Paul reminds his readers, there are instances in scripture where the strangers turned out to be angels in fact (e.g., Gen.18:1-33; 19:1-22; Judg.6:11-22; 13:3-23). That being the case, it is worth considering that strangers the Lord sends our way may be worthy of a friendly reception as those whose hearts are genuinely set on seeking the Lord (cf. 1Cor.14:23-25). Being parsimonious with the truth in regard to those who actually wanted it was ironically most hypocritical on the part of those believers in Jerusalem who were indulging in dangerous fascination with imaginary angelic encounters through their Gnostic dabbling, especially since "real" angels, in Paul's application, were ready to hand in need of help. While the Jerusalem church had apparently fallen into the bad habit of rejecting all strangers out of hand, especially gentiles, God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom.2:11; Eph.6:9; Col.3:25), and favoritism indulged in for any reason is specifically condemned in scripture (Jas.2:1-9). God looks into each person's heart (1Sam.16:7); believers who cannot see into a stranger's heart do need to be careful, but in the end the person's words and deeds will reveal what is truly therein.

(34) Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism (35) but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

Acts 10:34-35 NIV

**Prisoners:** In our day and age, especially in this country, the instances where believers are in prison for no fault of their own are relatively rare. The cases where believers are imprisoned for their faith alone are even rarer. But that will not be the case in time soon to come.

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

Revelation 2:10 NIV

"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed." This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.

Revelation 13:10 NIV

Imprisonment for speaking the truth was something with which the apostles and the Jerusalem church had had to cope from the very beginning (Acts 4:3; 5:18; 6:12; 7:57-60; 8:1; 26:11; cf. Col.4:3; 4:18), and it is clear from this command to remember such prisoners that some believers were still languishing in jail on account of their faith. Ministering to them was no doubt not easy to do, especially for those who were themselves in dire straits. This also could not be done without personal risk. Attending to these prisoners de facto identified those doing so as belonging to the same "faction", the very sort of identification that many in this church were seeking to avoid by returning to the ritual observance of the Law in company with their unbelieving neighbors. Taking on this sort of risk and burden demonstrated Christ's love and was a godly thing to do. That will also be the case during the Tribulation. But it will take courage.

(16) May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. (17) On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. (19a) May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day!

2nd Timothy 1:16-18a NIV

(34) You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

(35) So do not throw away your confidence; *it will be richly rewarded.*

Hebrews 10:34-35 NIV

### Ill-Treated:

. . . and [remember] those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Hebrews 13:3b

The phrase translated here "as if you yourselves were suffering" is, literally, "as those who are themselves 'in body' ". That is to say, we are all here in this world physically in temporary, mortal bodies, subject to weaknesses, subject to disease, subject to persecution of every sort. It is God's grace alone that we are not destroyed by the evil one and his forces, so if we are kept from absolute destruction, we should never forget who it is that is keeping us safe. And we need also to remember that it is God's will for some of us, and ultimately for all of us (who are willing to grow), to share in Christ's suffering.<sup>4</sup>

(16) The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 8:16-17 NKJV

When one member of Christ's Church suffers, we all suffer along with him or her (1Cor.12:26). And that requires us to do what we can to help and support our brother or sister to the degree that we are able, through encouragement, through prayer, through material support, with love and without hypocrisy (Jas.2:16). The Lord does not expect us to destroy ourselves to help others who are in perhaps less need than we are (2Cor.8:13), but it is the antithesis of Christian love to harden one's heart against those who are suffering and not give them the help we could (1Jn.3:17).

Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.

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<sup>4</sup> I.e., "sharing the sufferings of Christ" ( Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29-30; 3:10; Col.1:24; 2Tim.2:12; 1Pet.4:12-13; cf. Matt.10:38; 16:24; Mk.8:34; 10:21; 10:38-39; Lk.9:23; 14:27; Acts 5:41; 2Cor.4:10-11; Gal.6:17; 1Thes.1:6; 2Thes.1:4-5; 2Tim.3:12). See Peter #36, paragraph II, under "Rejoicing in Participating in Christ's Sufferings"; and in CT 2A, "sharing in the sufferings of Christ" is a part of the normal Christian experience".

## Hebrews 10:33 NIV

This lack of follow-through on the Christian love we all claim to embrace had not been an issue in the past (as the quote above demonstrates), but apparently, had, under the present distress, become a serious problem in the Jerusalem church. Paul here entreats his readers not to fall into that trap of hard-heartedness. While dire situations of the sort that church was facing may not be the norm at present, this is prophesied to become an issue during the Tribulation as well.

(9) "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. (10) And then many will be offended (lit. "scandalized"; i.e., "tripped up"), will betray one another, and will hate one another. (11) Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (12) And because lawlessness will abound, *the love of many will grow cold.*"

Matthew 24:9-12 NKJV

## Verses Four through Six

(4) Let marriage be honored in every respect and the marriage bed undefiled. For God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. (5) Let your way of life be free from the love of money, being content with what you have. For He Himself has said, "I will not forsake you nor will I abandon you" (Deut.31:6). (6) So with confidence we say, "The Lord is my Helper. I shall have no fear of whatever mortal man may do to me" (Ps.118:6-7).

Hebrews 13:4-6

**Marriage:** We all no doubt have a mental picture of the 1st century church at Jerusalem by now, and for all of their faults, it may seem odd that Paul has to add this very pointed reminder about the sanctity of marriage and the consequences of sexual sin. The first thing to say about that is that these believers were human just as we are, and so they were subject to all of the same temptations that plague us today. While the social milieu may not have been as filled to surfeit with gross sexuality as ours is, at least in the Jewish parts, anyone who has studied the Greco-Roman civilization will be well aware that, while the manifestations of sexual aberrance were different in many ways, they were ubiquitous in that culture as well. And while our permissiveness and promiscuousness today is different from theirs, theirs was arguably even more outlandish in many respects.

When we add to the above the fact that Gnosticism in one of its aspects preached indulgence as a path towards holiness, we can see why weak believers in general (as those who were abandoning the truth to turn back to the Law) and Gnostic adherents in particular (as those who were being seduced by that false teaching) might require this dire warning: "For God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers". This chilling reminder of the need to have a proper fear of God is beneficial both for those who might be seduced and also for those tempted to do the seducing. In either case, nothing good would come of it – as we can all observe from our own experience in contemporary society today.

(1) Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe

to him through whom they do come! (2) It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones (i.e., any otherwise innocent brother or sister in Christ)."

Luke 17:1-2 NKJV

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

1st Corinthians 6:18 NKJV

To be a godly success, marriage needs to receive the "honor" it deserves from both partners, each doing his/her job in providing love and respect as appropriate (Eph.5:22-33), but also especially from all those outside of the union. Interference, "defilement", brings God's judgment on both the outside and inside parties guilty of adultery, but also all who behave in a sexually immoral way, even if there is technically no adultery or violation of a marriage involved. So this verse applies in all such matters to married and unmarried believers alike. Those married need to be true to their vows; those unmarried would be well advised to consider marriage if they are unable to restrain themselves.

(1) Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. (2) Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

1st Corinthians 7:1-2 NIV

### **Money:**

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

1st Timothy 6:10 NKJV

As the verse above demonstrates, it is not money per se but the excessive esteeming of it that causes spiritual problems.

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Matthew 6:24 NKJV

The Pharisees were known for their love of money (Lk.16:14), and so there was a tendency to put an ungodly value on it within the legalistic community of unbelievers in Jerusalem. Paul addresses this issue head on here in some detail because it was apparently a primary stumbling block for many in the Jerusalem church. Based upon how Paul tackles the issue, we are safe in saying that this was more of a security issue than one of absolute greed in the pattern of the Pharisees. Given how the economics of society then and now work, it is not surprising that many people equate money with security. But believers know – or should know – that all apparent security in this life is an illusion (Ps.49:5-20). God is in control of all things and absolutely so. That knowledge is a great comfort to believers when we apply it correctly.

(23) The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,  
And He delights in his way.

(24) Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;  
For the Lord upholds him with His hand.

(25) I have been young, and now am old;  
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken,  
Nor his descendants begging bread.

Psalm 37:23-25 NKJV

Were it not for our Lord's protection of us, the devil and his forces would make short work of us no matter how much earthly power we might possess . . . or how much money. With the Lord looking out for us, we have nothing to worry about whatsoever. We may be deprived for a season, we may struggle with debt and with making a living, our material lives may be challenging here in the devil's world, but God is with us – so who can stand against us (Rom.8:31)?

(6) Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. (7) They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. (8) Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.  
Psalm 112:6-8 NIV

Looking for security in earthly things, whether in money or possessions, is always inimical to spiritual growth. Because of their past experience, the Jerusalem believers, rather than learning from God's provision for them through all the troubles past, were now grasping for "tangible" security in material things. This was a very poor bargain to make, especially considering that the Romans were going to destroy everything in a few short years (absent a vigorous growth-spurt from the remnant of believers), and no amount of money, however vast, would be able to buy them off.

(6) Now godliness with contentment is great gain. (7) For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. (8) And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. (9) But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

1st Timothy 6:6-9 NKJV

Believers in the Great Tribulation will face a similar if not identical set of pressures, not only because of the economic hardships prophesied therein (Rev.6:5-6), but also because of the attempt on antichrist's part to force us to abandon Jesus Christ and take the mark of the beast in order to be able to "buy and sell" (Rev.13:16-17). Every believer needs to resolve ahead of time to trust the Lord to provide in spite of those dire circumstances to come. He is well able to do so, sending ravens with food, causing manna to fall from the skies – or whatever else might be necessary to sustain us. We need to make the Lord our security in all things (not just financial matters), not the things we touch and see, remembering our Lord's words to the Jerusalem church through His apostle:

(5b) For He Himself has said, "I will not forsake you nor will I abandon you" (Deut.31:6).  
(6) So with confidence we say, "The Lord is my Helper. I shall have no fear of whatever mortal man may do to me" (Ps.118:6-7).  
Hebrews 13:5b-6

Whatever it is we need, whenever it is we need it, the Lord is faithful. In His perfect integrity He could never be otherwise. We believers always need to trust Him and not allow ourselves to be stampeded into a panic every time something goes wrong or any time in His perfect timing we have to wait patiently for Him to answer. He will help us, even if tens of thousands are arrayed against us (Ps.3:6). Will we trust Him enough to wait on His deliverance?

(1) Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might. (2) Save me, O God; listen to the words of my mouth. (3) Arrogant foes are attacking me; ruthless people are trying to kill me – people without regard for God. (4) Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me. (5) Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness destroy them.  
Psalm 54:2-5 NIV

### **Verses Seven through Eight**

(7) Remember your [former] leaders, the ones who spoke the Word of God to you. Carefully consider the result of their conduct and imitate their faith. (8) Jesus Christ, yesterday and today [has always been] the same, and [will be] unto the [end of] the ages.  
Hebrews 13:7-8

We have studied the gift of pastor-teacher extensively in the past, its meaning, the responsibility of the recipient to prepare and then to diligently study and teach, and its area of authority.<sup>5</sup> It is this last element, namely, the authority of the teachers in the Jerusalem church, to which Paul is primarily referring here. Assuming that at least some of the teachers in that church were continuing to do their job as unto the Lord in spite of the poor attendance and worse application of their quondam followers, and in spite of the bullying and pressure they were receiving to turn away from the truth, these were worthy of much more respect than these backsliding believers were giving them.

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.  
1st Timothy 5:17 NIV

Paul will have more to say about the present leadership below (in Heb.13:17). Here, however, he is referring to leaders of the past, apostles and pastor-teachers both, many of whom had now passed from the scene. It was through the truth of the Word of God that these great men of the past had benefitted and guided this Church, and it was because of a lack of attention to spiritual growth that the present complement of believers in Jerusalem were falling by the wayside.

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<sup>5</sup> BB 6B: Ecclesiology, part II.B, "The Pastor-Teacher".

(13) But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. (14) He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (15) So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

2nd Thessalonians 2:13-15 NIV

As the Jerusalem church was demonstrating, one can never say how anyone's life will turn out, spiritually speaking, until it has ended. Many of these believers had started very well, as we have seen, having suffered much without turning back. But present circumstances were causing a goodly number of them to backslide. This situation is not unprecedented in scripture and, for our purposes, the best parallel will be the Tribulation, where it is prophesied that one third of the Church will abandon faith and be swept up in the Great Apostasy (Dan.8:10; Matt.24:10-12; 25:1-13; 2Thes.2:3; Rev.12:4).<sup>6</sup> Paul here encourages the Jerusalem believers to persevere by calling their attention to their beloved leaders and teachers of the past, men who taught them the Word and through their encouragement, guidance and examples helped them negotiate the difficult times and tribulation they had previously suffered. They did not give up, and so their reward is assured. That is what Paul's readers should have remembered and focused on, preferring to do as those did whom they once revered, preferring death to temporary relief from suffering, keeping their eyes on what is heavenly and eternal rather earthly and temporary.

(32) Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. (33) For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. (34) You suffered from my chains and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you possessed a more valuable estate and a more lasting one. (35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, "how short, how short [the wait]", and "He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay". (38) "Then my one [made] righteous by his faith will live because of his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.

Hebrews 10:32-39

**Jesus Christ the Same:** Jesus Christ is everything to us. Everything. And His death for our sins is the basis for everything. Everything. Every believer understands this when saved because Jesus Christ is the object in whom we believe in order to be saved. As we grow spiritually, we come to understand more and more about our precious Lord and what He has done for us. And as we come to understand more and more about God's truth, it should never be lost on us that all truth emanates from the central core of Jesus Christ and His death for us on the cross.

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<sup>6</sup> See Coming Tribulation, part 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy".

Jesus answered, "I am the way: the truth and the life."  
John 14:6b [index]

So much every believer should understand, and those who have been in the faith as long as many of the original recipients of this letter had been should have understood it in great depth and detail. For everything in this world is based upon the One who created, the One who saved it through the blood of His cross. In reminding his readers of how far they had fallen, Paul takes this essential truth about Him who is the truth one step farther by relating it to the past and the future as well as to the present. The Jerusalem believers were behaving much more poorly than they had in the past and were acting as if the eternal future were never going to arrive. But Jesus Christ was the same in the past when they were responding as they should have previously. He had not changed and He was not going to change. They were the ones who had changed . . . for the worse.

"I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed."  
Malachi 3:6 NIV

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.  
James 1:17 NIV

The Christian life is a journey, a pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world. We who believe have set our sights not on the things of this world but on the kingdom of God and the blessings of the world to come. We are determined to receive a good report from our Lord when He evaluates our lives, and we are doing our best to subordinate everything in our lives to that desire (Rom.12:1). When daily we pray "the Lord's prayer", we remind ourselves of that eternal direction in which we are pointed, and then we reorient ourselves if necessary.

(9b) Our Father, the One in heaven,  
May your Name be regarded as holy [by us].  
(10) May your Kingdom come [soon].  
May your will be done as it is in heaven so also on earth [when you return].  
(11) Give us today the bread [we need] for the coming day.  
(12) And forgive us what we owe you just as we also forgive those who owe us.  
(13) And don't bring us into testing [that we can't handle] but deliver us from the evil one.  
Matthew 6:9b-13

Today we need sustenance, and God provides. We need forgiveness for yesterday's sins, and God has provided. And we need to be helped through all of the trials and temptations ahead to that great tomorrow of salvation and deliverance, and God will provide.

(8b) For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance (lit., "salvation") of your lives (lit., "souls") – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.  
1st Peter 1:8b-9

Yesterday Jesus died for our sins. Today He is the Bread of Life who sustains us physically and spiritually. Tomorrow He will bring us safely home to be with Him forever as one perfect and united Bride in resurrection with Him along with all of our brothers and sisters in New Jerusalem forever. This is our Christian hope, founded on the unchanging Rock, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have a right, a duty, an obligation and an opportunity to put our entire trust in Him with all confidence because He does not change. Should it be our lot to face the terrible pressures of the Tribulation, we would all do well to hold fast to this basic truth without any vacillation in emulation of our unchangeable Savior – as the Jerusalem believers should have done.

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."  
Isaiah 30:15 NIV

Our Lord Jesus Christ *is* "the truth" (Jn.14:6). He is the truth behind the Old Covenant of the past just as He is with the New Covenant He has mediated on our behalf and in which we presently stand through our faith in that truth. And He is the One before whom we must stand on that great future day to come. We believed in Him in the past; we live in Him and strive to walk with Him in the present; we will shortly enough stand before Him in glory in the future – as long as we hold fast to our faith in Him who is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him;  
(12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.  
2nd Timothy 2:11-13

But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house – whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.  
Hebrews 3:6 NASB95

For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.  
Hebrews 3:14 NASB95

### **Verses Nine through Ten**

(9) Do not be led astray by strange, heterogeneous teachings. It is good for the inner person to be stabilized [by proper teaching], not by dietary regimes which have done no [spiritual] good for those preoccupied with such things. (10) We [believers who are not following the Law] have "an altar" from which those who serve the [present day, physical] tabernacle have no right to eat.  
Hebrews 13:9-10

**Led Astray:** Paul has used a nautical metaphor earlier in this epistle to warn his readers about getting "off course" spiritually.

For this reason, it is all the more necessary for us to pay attention to the [teachings] we have heard, lest we drift away [off course].  
Hebrews 2:1

In the earlier reference, the idea was their need to devote themselves to the teaching of the Word of God without close attention to which any believer would find him/herself drifting instead of plying their way forward as the Lord desires. Ships which are adrift without correction soon find themselves on the rocks.

(18) I give you this command, Timothy my child, in accordance with the prophecies that were made long ago about you, that you conduct a good campaign, one that is in keeping with [those predictions], (19) holding onto your faith and to a clean conscience – which [conscience] some have rejected and [have thus] suffered the shipwreck of their faith.  
1st Timothy 1:18-19

In our context, being "born/carried awry" (*parapheromai*) by a bad and dangerous wind while not exactly the same as drifting can be equally deadly. In the analogy, while drifters are aimless, those being carried away by baneful influences are allowing themselves to be propelled into treacherous waters by giving themselves over to such influences. Whether the distorted legalism of the unbelieving community in Jerusalem or the Gnostic perversion of scripture was the cause, either way those who were giving themselves over to these influences were liable to be swept to the left or the right of the only safe course: the truth of the gospel and the kingdom of our Savior Jesus Christ. Paul is exhorting these believers not to be carried away by such teaching which was strange (Gnostic) or divergent (false use of the Law) . . .

. . . that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong (*peripheromai*) by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit.  
Ephesians 4:14

False teaching, whether based upon tradition (as in the misuse of the Law) or diabolical fantasy (as in the case of Gnosticism), is often attractive to those who become bored with the hard work of pursuing the truth in a godly way. It may have an outer patina of glitter, but inside are deadmen's bones and the end result is spiritual wreckage.

(24) "And to the rest of you in Thyatira, as many as do not hold to this [false] doctrine, you who have not acknowledged Satan's 'deep teachings', as they call them. I am placing upon you no further burden. (25) Only hold fast to what you possess until I come."  
Revelation 2:24-25

(1) Then one of the seven angels with the seven bowls spoke with me, saying, "Look! I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters, (2) [the one] with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication even as the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk from the wine of her fornication." (3) And he took me off in the Spirit to a desert. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was covered with blasphemous names, [and which] had seven heads and ten horns. (4) And the

woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and was adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, [and was] holding a golden cup in her hand filled with abominations and [all] the unclean things of her prostitution and [the prostitution] of the earth. (5) And on her forehead a name was written: "mystery Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the world".

Revelation 17:1-5

### **Altar:**

We [believers who are not following the Law] have "an altar" from which those who serve the [present day, physical] tabernacle have no right to eat.

Hebrews 13:10

While not everything placed on the brazen altar was meant to be consumed (e.g., the "holocaust": Lev.1:3-17), and while only the priests and their families were allowed to partake in some cases (e.g., Lev.22:10-16), we have every right to assume that most of those returning to the Law were eating at least some of the Levitical sacrifices offered under its auspices (the Passover for one, e.g.). Being "deprived" of this benefit, especially for those of priestly lineage, was no doubt not only an inconvenience but an actual hardship (to the extent that prior to the cross they and their families had drawn a great measure of their material support from this source). In contrasting the physical altar prescribed by the Law with another "altar" – a spiritual one – Paul draws a vivid contrast between the desire to return to legalistic shadows and their mere material symbols on the one hand, and the eternal, spiritual reality we have as believers in Jesus Christ on the other.

(3) The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." (4) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone (Deut.8:3)'".

Luke 4:3-4 NIV

The unbelieving Levites of Paul's day had the right to eat the bread and other sacrifices the people brought before the altar, but we and our brothers and sisters before us who had turned away from the shadows of the Law to the brilliant light of Jesus Christ are partakers of the very Bread of Life Himself (Jn.6:35; 6:41; 6:48). No unbeliever has the right or the ability to understand let alone to partake of the blessings of the altar to which we believers have gained access, namely, the blessed fellowship we have with our Savior and with each other through the Holy Spirit.

(1) Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (2) through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Romans 5:1-2a NIV

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

1st Corinthians 2:14 NIV

. . . for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.  
2nd Corinthians 3:14b NIV

Paul had upbraided the Corinthians for their abuses in conducting communion (1Cor.11:23-34), the one ritual Christ has given His Church "to remember Me" (Lk.22:19). The bread recalls the Bread of Life, our Savior's perfect body "given for us" to bear our sins; the wine recalls His death for our sins, the "blood of Christ". The communion ritual's symbolism thus looks backward to the cross; the Levitical sacrifices looked forward to the hope of the cross, dimly seen and only foreshadowed – and so they were now obsolete and improper after our Lord's spiritual death for us had become a reality. It was truly a disgraceful thing for these Jerusalem believers to forsake the spiritual ritual given to them by our Savior Himself in preference for the now illegitimate sacrifices of the physical altar. It was impossible to have both (as in trying to serve God *and* Mammon), and compromise on this score risked the most severe divine discipline.

(23) For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, (24) and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." (25) In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." (26) For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (27) So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.  
1st Corinthians 11:23-27 NIV

### **Verses Eleven through Thirteen**

(11) For the bodies of those animals sacrificed by the high priest as a sin offering whose blood was brought into the Holy of Holies were completely burned up outside of the camp. (12) Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i.e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i.e., separated from fellowship). (13) So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i.e., likewise choosing God over the world), bearing His reproach.  
Hebrews 13:11-13

### **Outside the Gate:**

(27) "The bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried *outside the camp*. And they shall burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their offal. (28) Then he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. (29) This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. (30) For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord."

## Leviticus 16:27-30 NKJV

Paul had referenced the Day of Atonement previously (in chapter 9), using that memorable occasion as a way of contrasting the yearly ritual sacrifice of the high priest on behalf of all the people with the once-and-for-all atonement for all sin by our Lord on the cross. Here, Paul reminds his readers of the symbolism of Christ's great sacrifice whereby He delivered us from sin as exemplified in the removal and destruction by fire of the body of the sacrificed bull. Our Lord willingly allowed Himself to be removed from this life, suffering in symbolic separation from the community of the people outside the gate for the purpose of saving them by His blood, that is, His paying of the entire penalty for all of our sins. Jesus Christ atoned for all of the sins of the entire human race by this ineffable act of grace (Rom.5:16-19).<sup>7</sup> Because He died for all sin, none of us will ever have to face any such similar judgment (not that we would be able, qualified or willing to do so). What we *can* do, and what Paul was calling on the Jerusalem believers to do, was to follow His example in choosing the Father's will over their own seeming safety convenience.

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.  
1st Corinthians 11:1 NIV

"I have given you an example that you may do as I have done."  
John 13:15

### **Therefore Jesus:**

Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i.e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i.e., separated from fellowship).  
Hebrews 13:12

"Therefore", meaning that because the symbolic sacrifice that took away sin in a purely ritual way was burned up outside of the encampment of Israel, separated from the fellowship of the faithful to demonstrate what it would take for the Messiah to bear our sins, namely, being separated in His humanity from His beloved Father, that is where our dear Lord Jesus was destined to be crucified. As this verse makes very clear, it was not only the crucifixion itself, nor the terrible ordeal of multiple trials and abuse before and during that crucifixion which took away our sins.<sup>8</sup> It was our Savior's "suffering" in "sanctifying" us "through His own blood" that wrought for us eternal salvation. The blood here is "the blood of Christ", a metaphor which relates our Lord's ineffable suffering in the three hours of darkness when He was judged for all of our sins to the symbolic rituals of animal sacrifice which foreshadowed this monumental event

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<sup>7</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.3, "Unlimited Atonement".

<sup>8</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section I.5.k, "The Trials of Christ".

upon which the entire plan of God is based.<sup>9</sup>

### **Sanctify the People:**

Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints.  
Hebrews 13:24a NKJV

Saints, in the Bible as opposed to popular literature and religions, are believers in Jesus Christ who have been "sainted", that is to say, sanctified, through our faith in Him. Saint, sanctify, holiness, holy, as we have seen, while not derived directly from biblical words are the terms we use in English for all of the terms in Hebrew and Greek which are based on the roots *qdash* and *hag-* respectively. The key idea of all holiness/sanctification is separation, separation, that is, of what is undefiled from what is profane. For believers in the Church Age, the Holy Spirit is the Agent of separating us from the defilements of the world through helping us grow and empowering us to follow our Lord. Clearly, none of us is ever going to be completely "holy" on this side of the resurrection. And even more clearly no believer was ever close to living a sanctified life from the moment of salvation. As with salvation, sanctification is, as we have seen in the past, threefold. It is a fact for all believers "positionally" (1Cor.6:11); it is a process in which all believers need to engage (Heb.12:14); and it is an ultimate, eternal eventuality for all who maintain faith "firm until the end" (Heb.3:6; 3:14).

Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i.e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i.e., separated from fellowship).  
Hebrews 13:12

Our Lord's suffering of spiritual death in order to sanctify us is the basis for all three phases of sanctification: we are sanctified, separated from sin positionally when we become one with Him at salvation (Rom.15:16); we could not pursue ever greater separation from sin and evil without being believers and without having received the Holy Spirit (1Pet.1:16); and because we belong to Him, we will be with Him forever in resurrection and glory in New Jerusalem without a trace of "spot or blemish" forevermore in "ultimate sanctification" (Eph.5:27).

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.  
1st Corinthians 1:2 NKJV

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.  
2nd Corinthians 7:1 NKJV

### **Let us Go out to Him:**

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<sup>9</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.4, "The Blood of Christ"; and section II.5, "The Spiritual Death of Christ".

So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i.e., likewise choosing God over the world), bearing His reproach.

Hebrews 13:11-13

We are all, all who believe in Jesus Christ, saints, sanctified, having been made positionally holy and separated from the world by virtue of our faith in Him.<sup>10</sup> But for us to live up to our holy status, for us to "pursue sanctification" (Heb.12:14), to actually "be holy, for I am holy" (1Pet.1:15), requires that we follow the example of our dear Lord and Savior. He was separated from the fellowship and separated from life in bearing our sins in the darkness on the cross in order that we might be made one with Him and never separated from Him for all eternity. It behooves us then to follow Him "outside the gate", turning our back on the world and preferring instead to be outcasts and pariahs for His sake, not loving this world, but loving Him "with all our heart and soul and strength and mind and might" (cf. Lk.10:27).

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Luke 9:33 NKJV

As Jesus picked up His cross and went outside the gate to bear our sins, we who have been sanctified by His great sacrifice need to follow in His footsteps, choosing Him and what He desires of us and not the world and what we may desire for ourselves. That is what sanctification in this life essentially consists of. Choosing what is holy over what is profane, to the glory of God and our eternal reward. This is not an easy path we have chosen. Rather it is one that often brings reproach. But there is no other way unto life than the narrow way; the wide and easy path leads to destruction, after all (Matt.7:13). We who have chosen to follow our dear Savior no matter what may have some hard times in this life – but not without the comfort of the Spirit and not without joy in the Lord, if we are growing and doing things aright – but in the end we know of a certainty that it will all be worth it.

(10)"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (12) Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."  
Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV

(22) "Blessed are you when men hate you,  
And when they exclude you,  
And revile you, and cast out your name as evil,  
For the Son of Man's sake.

(23) Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!  
For indeed your reward is great in heaven,  
For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

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<sup>10</sup> See Peter 13: "Sanctification"; BB 3B: Hamartiology, under section V, "Sanctified"; BB 4B: Soteriology, sections III.2.g, "Sanctified"; and III.2.j, "Union with Christ".

Luke 6:22-23 NKJV

### **Bearing His Reproach:**

(21) From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. (22) Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (23) But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Matthew 16:21-23 NKJV

As was the case with Peter, most if not all of the Jews of our Lord's day had failed to understand the scriptures which spoke of the Suffering Servant's need to bear the sins of the world in order for us to be saved (e.g., Ps.22:1-31; Is.52:13 – 53:12). They praised Him on Palm Sunday as the promised King (Jn.12:13; cf. Matt.21:9), and when that hope did not immediately materialize, on the following Friday they called for His crucifixion. They wanted the crown but without the cross. As those who belong to our dear Savior, as those who have been called to share in His sufferings, following Him, bearing our crosses, it is inevitable that at some point we too will be called upon to separate from the fellowship of unbelievers and bear His reproach.

(2) Let each one of us strive to please his neighbor for [what is truly] good in order to bring about [that person's] edification (i.e., spiritual growth). (3) For certainly Christ did not strive to please Himself, but, just as it is written, "the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen upon Me".

Romans 15:2-3

For it is indeed to this purpose that you have been called (i.e., sharing in the sufferings of Christ); for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps.

1st Peter 2:21

For the Jerusalem believers who were temporizing to turn now and resume fellowship with their brother and sister Christians who were being ostracized for their refusal to follow the Law would most definitely have been a matter bringing harsh reproach – from unbelievers. As the verses cited above make clear, this is what our Lord did do, after all, and we are called to follow Him, not our own self interest.

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all].

Philippians 2:5-8

This righteous behavior, namely, of doing as our Lord did and choosing to associate with the people of God while turning our backs on the world, does have consequences in this world. It is the right thing to do, but it does result in suffering, specifically, "sharing the sufferings of Christ"<sup>11</sup> as we who belong to Him are subject to a small measure of the reproach that He bore in His perfect life, resulting in the gauntlet that led to the cross and culminating in His spiritual death in the darkness whereby He took away all of our sins.

For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

2nd Corinthians 1:5 NIV

We always receive a special portion of comfort in the Holy Spirit when we do suffer on Christ's behalf in whatever testing it pleases the Lord to put us through (for our benefit in growth and for the sake of the edification of His Church). And there is also great reward in so doing.<sup>12</sup>

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, (26) because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than [all the] treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26

Moses likewise chose to be a pariah – to the Egyptians – and instead of living a pampered life, instead threw his lot in with the people of God. For "reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ" really *is* of greater worth than "all the treasure vaults of Egypt". Worldly treasures do not last. But whatever reward we receive from our Lord on the Day He judges His Church will last forever.

(19) "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Matthew 6:19-21 NIV

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Revelation 14:13 NKJV

## **Verse Fourteen through Sixteen**

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<sup>11</sup> See Peter #36, under verse 13, "Rejoicing in Participating in Christ's Sufferings".

<sup>12</sup> See CT 6: Last Things, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

(14) For we do not have here [on earth] a city which [is meant to be] lasting; rather we are eagerly looking forward to the city that is destined [to come] (i.e., the New Jerusalem).

(15) So let us then always be offering a sacrifice of praise to God [the Father] through Him, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name. (16) And do not be forgetting to do good and to share [with your fellow believers]. For God is well-pleased with such sacrifices.

Hebrews 13:14-16

### **The City which Lasts:**

(8) By faith, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) By faith, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for *the foundation of that city* (i.e., the New Jerusalem) whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:8-10

(13) These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and salute them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. (14) For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the place they now occupy]. (15) Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. (16) But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, *prepared a city* for them (i.e., the New Jerusalem).

Hebrews 11:13-16

*New Jerusalem* is our eternal home. It is there that we believers in Jesus Christ will live forever in light and glory, rejoicing in our special unity as the Body of Christ, rejoicing in our Lord always in appreciation for who He is and what He has done for us, celebrating Him and enjoying His company and each other's forevermore. And New Jerusalem is a *city*.

(4) Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. (5) Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on *pilgrimage*. (6) As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. (7) They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion (i.e., the *city* of New Jerusalem).

Psalms 84:4-7 NIV

(4) Some *wandered* in desert wastelands, finding no way to *a city* where they could settle. (5) They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. (6) Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. (7) He led them by a straight way *to a city* where they could settle. (8) Let them give thanks to the Lord for his

unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, (9) for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.  
Psalm 107:4-9 NKJV

We may be wandering through the wilderness of the devil's world for the time being, but that sojourning here on this temporary earth will not continue forever. We have it from our Lord Jesus Christ that He has a place for us to dwell with Him forever.

(2) "There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also.  
John 14:2-3

We believers are awaiting a new and perfect body never subject to death and corruption again (1Cor.15:50-58), new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells (2Pet.3:13; cf. Rev.21:1). We are looking forward the glory of New Jerusalem and *not* to any poor substitute on this present earth. That is the hope that anchors us, which "penetrates beyond the [heavenly] veil into the [holy of holies], where our vanguard, Jesus, has entered on our behalf" (Heb.6:19-20).

And I saw the holy *city*, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, beautified as a bride adorned for her [future] husband.  
Revelation 21:2

But instead of fixing their hope on that blessed future reality, the recipients of Hebrews were for the most part so enamored of the temporary earthly city that they had lost sight of the glorious eternal one. Turning back to the Law and dishonoring Jesus Christ thereby may have provided some temporary respite but was shortsighted in the extreme. Whatever we have to suffer by doing things Jesus' way is well worth it in the end – and no "here and now blessing" however great could ever be more than a poor Esau-like bargain for some vile pottage in comparison.

(17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.  
2nd Corinthians 4:17-18 NKJV

No worldly and temporary city, however famed and beloved, could ever possibly hold a candle to "the lasting city of New Jerusalem", the "city which is destined to come" and upon which we have set our hopes. Compromising that glorious future for the sake of worldly relief was the foolish error of many in the Jerusalem of Paul's day, and will sadly also be the case for many who fall away from the Lord under the pressures of the Tribulation.

"For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?"  
Luke 9:25 KJV

## True Sacrifices:

(11) "The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. (12) When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? (13) Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations – I cannot bear your worthless assemblies."  
Isaiah 1:11-13 NIV

"Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings – boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do," declares the Sovereign Lord.  
Amos 4:5 NIV

No doubt the gratuitous offering of many freewill sacrifices of bulls and rams and goats were impressive – to human eyes. But God looks at the heart (1Sam.16:7). As in all things, it is what is in the person's heart that matters, not the monetary value of any gift or offering.

(1) As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. (2) He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. (3) "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. (4) All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."  
Luke 21:1-4 NIV

But instead of the sacrifices in which the unbelievers of Jerusalem took such pride being merely of no particular value to God (Ps.40:6-8; 50:7-15), now that Jesus had actually fulfilled the symbolism of all blood sacrifice through the offering of Himself for our sins, the true blood of Christ, these offerings were now worse than worthless – they were absolutely offensive to the Father (Heb.6:4-6; 10:26-31). Having made this point repeatedly throughout this epistle, Paul now calls upon the Jerusalem believers to embrace the new, abandoning the old. Just as he had urged them to relinquish the old and obsolete covenant for the New Covenant in Jesus Christ (Heb.8:6-13; 9:15; 12:24), and just as he had urged them to adopt the new day by day Sabbath of faith-rest in preference to the old one day a week ritual (Heb.4:9-11), so now Paul encourages his readers to give up the animal sacrifices of the Law which are now an abomination to God in preference for sacrifices with which our Lord will be well pleased, sacrifices of praise (Heb.13:15), responding to the Lord from our hearts with thanksgiving; and sacrifices of godly sharing with our brothers and sisters, benefitting them materially but also and even more importantly spiritually through the proper function of the ministries and gifts we have been given. For it is with such sacrifices that "God is well-pleased" (Heb.13:16).

"And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is *more* than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."  
Mark 12:33 NKJV

(4) Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and

precious, (5) you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up *spiritual sacrifices* acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.  
1st Peter 2:4-5 NKJV

### Verse Seventeen

(17) Obey the [pastor-teachers] who are guiding you and yield to them. For they are depriving themselves of sleep in keeping watch over your lives, as [is understandable in the case of] those who are going to give an account [to the Lord for how they ministered to you and how you responded]. [So obey them and yield to them] that they may do this with joy and not with groaning. The latter would be unprofitable for you.  
Hebrews 13:17

**Obey and Yield:** While these words are synonyms, and while the repetition of the command is definitely emphatic, the first, *peithomai*, has to do more with believing (so as to agree with the truth being taught and obey it), while the second, *hypeiko*, is more suggestive subordinating one's will to that of another.

For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them (i.e., the exodus generation); but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.  
Hebrews 4:2 NKJV

God's truth is the most valuable thing in the world, but it cannot do anyone any good whatsoever unless it is received in faith. It is faith, believing the truth one is taught, which converts mere knowledge into "full knowledge" (*epignosis*), the only sort of knowledge which can benefit a person. Accepting the gospel – believing it – is what saves us in the first place.

[God] whose will it is for all men to be saved and to come to acceptance (*epignosis*) of the truth [which is the means of salvation].  
1st Timothy 2:4

Accepting *all* of God's truth in faith thereafter is the *sine qua non* of spiritual growth.

(17) . . . so that, rooted and grounded in love, Christ may dwell in your hearts *through faith*, (18) so that you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height [of His love for you], (19) [that is], so that you may know the love of Christ which outstrips [human] understanding [in every way], and so that you may be filled up [to the brim] with the entire "fullness" of God.  
Ephesians 3:17-19

. . . that we may, *by embracing the truth* in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model.  
Ephesians 4:15b

But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way (i.e.,

you were saved through faith and you grow through faith)!  
Philippians 3:16

(6) So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way], (7) rooted and built up in him, established in *the faith* just as you were taught, overflowing with thanksgiving.  
Colossians 2:6-7

The reason why scripture consistently affirms the authority of the pastor-teacher is *not* so that he can "lord it over" his congregation – far from it! But because unless the truth he is sharing with his listeners is *believed*, it can do them no good at all.

(25) But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. (26) Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. (27) And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – (28) just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."  
Matthew 20:25-28 NKJV

Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is *by faith* [in the truth that] you stand firm.  
2nd Corinthians 1:24 NIV

Those pastor-teachers who follow the example of our Lord and his apostle Paul are worthy of respect, worthy to be believed in their teaching (and given the benefit of the doubt). What this verse is definitely *not* doing is giving any man who styles himself a teacher the right to dominate the free will of anyone who is listening to him. Pastor-teachers are to teach the truth; those who receive it are then accountable to the Lord and to the Spirit to live their lives according to it. All matters of application are entirely in the hands of the believers who partake of the truth. It is for them then to decide on every aspect of their lives – one hopes in response to what God wants them to do. That is why, for example, the book of Hebrews is addressed to every believer in Jerusalem and is not a special, private communication to the elders or pastors therein as is clear from this very verse: "[*you* should] obey [those who] are guiding you and yield to *them*".

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.  
1st Timothy 5:17 NKJV

While the "double honor" refers at least in part to the congregation's obligation to support their pastor-teacher financially, it certainly also includes giving them a measure of respect and reverence above and beyond that given to others, "especially those who labor in the word and doctrine (lit., teaching)" (cf. 1Cor.12:24 in the Greek). The men Paul has in mind who were ministering to the Jerusalem church were "depriving themselves of sleep in keeping watch over your lives". The Greek verb here, *agrypneo*, means to be on night-watch as a shepherd out in the field, protecting the flock while they sleep from wolves. If done well, this is a noble and self-

sacrificing thing to do and emulates our Lord and His protection of us.

(11) "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. (12) But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. (13) The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. (14) I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own."  
John 10:11-14 NKJV

(15) So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." (16) He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." (17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."  
John 21:15-17 NKJV

**Watch over your Lives:** KJV has "watch for your souls", but the word "soul" is here the Greek word *psyche*, corresponding to the Hebrew word *nephesh*. While both words are frequently translated "soul" in various English versions, they actually mean "person" or "life" or "heart", as there is no separate entity in the make up of a human being beyond the body and the spirit. As created by God, we are dichotomous: invisible spirits in visible bodies, the combination of which through the miracle of God's creation of our lives at birth (e.g., Zech.12:1) results in us becoming "living persons" (Gen.2:7). The interaction of spirit and body is what produces "life" and "personhood", the combination of which gives us the "heart" where we think and emote and decide as discrete individuals (i.e., "the soul").<sup>13</sup>

I have decided to turn such a person over to Satan for the destruction of his body, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.  
1st Corinthians 5:5 NASB20

The particular over-watch pastors provide is not for the physical well-being of their charges (although of course they are not disinterested regarding their congregation's general welfare), but their spiritual status, desiring all to mature, progress and produce for Jesus Christ and desirous that *none* should fall away into apostasy or suffer the sin unto death – as many in the Jerusalem congregation were in danger of doing.

### **Give an Account:**

(19) My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is

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<sup>13</sup> See BB 3A: The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man, section II. 4, "The Dichotomy of Man".

formed in you, (20) how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!  
Galatians 4:19-20 NIV

There is one big difference between sheep and people: people have free will, the image of God, and are free to use it to make their own decisions, however poor these may be. Every parent has some "hand-wringing" moments as their children grow up and begin to be responsible for their own actions. Pastors likewise, as Paul experienced with many of his charges (as with the Galatians above), often find themselves frustrated with the poor choices made by members of their congregations. That is so even in the case of exceptional leaders like Paul.

(7) In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness (8) and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.  
Titus 2:7-8 NIV

The Jerusalem believers certainly had some good examples . . . starting with our Lord and followed by His very own apostles. But even a perfect example (as our Lord was) and exceptional teachers (as the apostles were) can only do so much for those who are determined *not* to follow the example and the solid teaching they have been given. Pastor-teachers, as our context affirms, have to give an account to the Lord on the day of our collective judgment for the conduct of their ministries. Of necessity that involves the response or lack thereof manifested by their charges.

(47) "The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. (48) But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."  
Luke 12:47-48 NIV

Our Lord absolutely knows whether or not proper response to the truth was mostly the fault of the pastor (for poor teaching and setting a poor example) or the congregation (for failing to believe and apply the truth they were given and for failing to follow the example he set). But whoever is at fault, any less than a happy report will mean less reward for those being reported upon. If a congregation's pastor failed to teach as he should have and/or failed to give his sheep an example worthy of emulation, that will redound to his discredit but will still usually mean that the spiritual growth, progress and production which should have taken place did not. This may seem unfair from the point of view of a member of the congregation, but in truth we all decide which ministry if any to devote ourselves to. If we are in a place where no teaching or positive guidance is being given, that is ultimately our choice. God provides for anyone and everyone who actually wants the truth if only they but persevere in seeking the truth.

(9) "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (10) For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

Luke 11:9-10 NIV

It is also true that because of the principle of free will, pastor-teachers who do teach the truth as they should may have to report "with groaning" the poor response of their congregations, but they are not for that reason penalized or deprived of their own reward. If the ground is good, a crop may be more easily raised; if it is bad, much more effort and hard work may be necessary to raise even a minimal crop. Our "field" is assigned by us to the Lord in the case of all ministries (1Cor.12:5), and every believer has one such ministry (1Cor.12:7). So as long as we are "doing our job" in persevering in whatever we as believers have been called to do, we can rest assured of our Lord's mercy and grace in distributing the eternal rewards which we are legitimately due, even if we were called to work some very rocky ground. After all, Moses and Elijah faced more rocks and thorns and thistles than perhaps any of our Lord's servants, and who doubts but that they will be two of the most highly rewarded believers of all time?

(11) Then I answered and said to him, "What are these two olive trees – at the right of the lampstand and at its left?" (12) And I further answered and said to him, "What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?" (13) Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." (14) So he said, "***These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.***"

Zechariah 4:11-14 NKJV

One of the problems in the Jerusalem church as we may intuit from this letter (and also from the epistles of James and Jude and from the ultimate end of this church) is that the congregation, and specifically those members who were slipping back into following the Law, had taken to bullying their leaders and teachers, pressuring them *not* to say or teach things that were "controversial" to the unbelieving community with whom they were now attempting to reconcile. Instead of looking to their Christian pastor-teachers for guidance, leadership and instruction in the truth, they were doing what they could to silence "uncomfortable teaching", lest it cause problems for them with the majority population in Jerusalem who were not believers. This was an old and familiar problem in Israel.

(10) They say to the seers, "See no more visions!" and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. (11) Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!"

Isaiah 30:10-11 NIV

And it will be a familiar refrain repeated in the near future as well.

(3) For the time will come when they will not put up with sound teaching, but will [instead], desiring to have their ears scratched, heap up by their own [devices] teachers to match their specific lusts. (4) And they will turn their ears from the truth and resort instead to fictions.

2nd Timothy 4:3-4

Pastor-teachers have a difficult role to fill in such circumstances. On the one hand, they do have

to do their best to keep the sheep in line while seeking out those who are lost or starting to stray, and that requires some gentleness in how they deal with their charges. On the other hand, they are never allowed to compromise the truth, and there does come a time when it is necessary for a pastor to rebuke his congregation, even if it is painful for all involved (2Tim.4:2; Tit.1:13; 2:15).

(8) For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. (9) Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. (10) For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

2nd Corinthians 7:8-10 NIV

We do not know what sort of pressure the renegades in the Jerusalem church were placing on their leaders, but given the background of persecution of Christians in that city, we should not underestimate the level of courage which would have been required to stand up to the dangerous trend of returning to the Law which had begun to characterize the entire church. For that reason alone, God's graciousness in ministering to them this powerful epistle by the hand of Paul is all the more wonderful – just as it was all the more necessary.

(1) So I urge the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, even one who shares [with you] in the glory which is about to be revealed, (2) pastor the flock of God under your charge, overseeing them not out of compulsion but willingly in response to God, not eager for shameful material gain, but out of genuine enthusiasm, (3) not lording it over the charges [entrusted to you], but as genuine examples to your flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will carry off in victory the crown of glory which will never fade.

1st Peter 5:1-4

For this happy result, a pastor-teacher needs to be consistent in carrying out the particular ministry in the specific field the Lord Jesus Christ has assigned to him – just as the same is true for any believer: all have the potential of winning the three crowns on the same basis (only the ministries are different). For the Jerusalem believers to reach this pinnacle of reward, moreover, required them to follow the examples and respond to the teaching of their leaders. That is the essence of what "obey and yield" in this passage means, namely, to be accepting of the truth of their teaching and not making an issue of it when small disagreements arise but instead "putting aside those bones" for the moment for the sake of momentum in spiritual growth. "Obeying and yielding" does not require pastors either giving specific orders or their congregations accepting their commands, nor even their advice (except in the sense of appreciating it when asked for and considering it). The major exception involves situations such as the one in Jerusalem where instead of minor disagreements on lesser points, a large percentage of the congregation is actually determined to backslide into very spiritually treacherous waters. At that point, any pastor worth his salt will sound an alarm, warning and even rebuking the worst offenders where necessary, (i.e., when they refuse to repent of their dangerous behavior) for the protection of weaker believers who are at risk of being led astray.

(9) I wrote you in my [previous] letter not to consort with immoral persons – (10) not [that you should] altogether [refrain from having any contact whatsoever] with greedy, crooked, and idolatrous people, for in that case you would have to depart from this world [entirely]! (11) But as it is I have written you not to socialize [with him] if some brother [Christian] has the reputation of being sexually immoral, or greedy, or idolatrous, or slanderous, or a drunk, or a crook – not even to share a meal with someone like that.  
1st Corinthians 5:9-11

Rebuke those who have sinned in the presence of all (i.e., so as to make it known to the congregation) in order that the rest may [also] have fear.  
1st Timothy 5:20

(9) Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. (10) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them.  
2nd John 1:9-10 NIV

No pastor-teacher has ever handled every situation perfectly. Paul's stipulations in this construct to avoid "giving an unprofitable account with groaning" envision reproof from the Lord and regret on the part of the pastor for not being more forceful in rebuke when that was required so as to turn their charges back from the brink . . . the actual case in Jerusalem, it seems, which made this epistle necessary.

### **Verses Eighteen through Nineteen**

(18) Pray also for me (lit., "us"). I (lit., "we") am confident that my conscience is clear [in regard to all I have written you], as I wish to comport myself in a good way in all things. (19) I earnestly request that you do this (i.e., pray on my behalf) so that I may very soon be restored [to good favor] among you.  
Hebrews 13:18-19

**Clear Conscience:** Paul uses a "plural of modesty" here to describe himself alone, a demonstration of his humility manifest in not letting his ego get in the way of his overall objective of turning his readers back to the Lord. Although Paul was an apostle, the highest ever rank of authority in the Church (2Cor.10:8ff.), appointed by Christ Himself (Acts 9:15; 1Cor.9:1), he places the good of Christ's Church before pride or any other consideration and in spite of prior and anticipated future slander emanating from those in this church who sought to belittle him (on account of his contact with gentiles among other things). Paul means "small" in Greek, and this name which he chose for himself in place of his given name, Saul, bespeaks the humble approach he took throughout his storied ministry on behalf of Jesus Christ. Paul was more concerned with the well being of those whom Christ had bought than with his own health and safety (e.g., Acts 21:10-14; cf. (Acts 9:16; 1Cor.4:8-13; 2Cor.4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:16-33; Phil.3:7-11; 2Tim.3:11), let alone his ego.

"You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but

have taught you publicly and from house to house."  
Acts 20:20 NKV

(26) "Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. (27)  
For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God."  
Acts 20:26-27 NKV

We have posited that one of the reasons for the poor spiritual condition of so many believers in Jerusalem was the bullying that was being leveled on their teachers by the majority. Paul could rightly claim a clear conscience in this respect on account of his track record, claimed in the quotations above but also demonstrated in all of his epistles, of "telling it like it is" in spite of all resistance or bullying, and even if such truth-telling caused alienation and hard feelings (which hurt Paul as much or more as it did the believers he had to reprove: 2Cor.2:1-4; 7:8-10). And of course the book of Hebrews is also one such letter as we have seen, with Paul continually trying to thread the needle between reproof sufficient to demonstrate the need for repentance and encouragement sufficient to keep his readers from losing heart completely.

(15) For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. (16) To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? (17) Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.  
2nd Corinthians 2:15-17 NIV

Finally here, we note that having confidence of actually possessing a conscience which is justifiably unblemished as Paul's was is based upon first "wishing/wanting to conduct oneself in an honorable way" (Heb.13:18). Paul's conduct in correctly, faithfully and courageously ministering the truth on this occasion and all others was the direct result of him purposing in his heart to do what was right in the eyes of Jesus Christ. If we would emulate Paul in making our Lord's priorities and standards our own, we likewise would never need to be ashamed for conscience' sake.

I have set the Lord always before me;  
Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.  
Psalm 16:8 NKJV

**Prayers for Restoration:** While Paul has just told his readers that, regardless of what anyone may think, he had always sought to do what was right before the Lord, anticipating a possible hostile response on behalf of some, he now solicits prayers . . . from any and all who are willing to respond in whole or in part to his labor of love which is this epistle. What Paul is *not* doing here, however, is asking prayer for physical and geographical restoration. He is asking for spiritual restoration, that is, that he may be restored *to the hearts* of all in the Jerusalem church, that they may put away any and all animus towards him whether based upon his past relations with that church or in reaction to some of the things he has said so frankly in this letter. This is not the only time in scripture where Paul uses the seemingly geographical as an analogy to the spiritual. He does this also at 2nd Corinthians 10:12-16 where "reaching even unto you"

(2Cor.10:13-14) is meant in a spiritual and doctrinal sense when finally and fully understood. And this is also not the first time that Paul has requested his readers to put aside all hard feelings for the sake of the gospel and the truth of Jesus Christ.

(11) We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. (12) We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. (13) As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also.  
2nd Corinthians 6:11-13 NIV

Paul certainly understood that he was never going back to Jerusalem – not in his current body at any rate.<sup>14</sup> He also understood that only the Lord was capable of turning that congregation around and bringing them back to the truth, and that only such a complete repentance would ever fully restore him to the hearts of these people he loved so much. But here we see that greatest of the apostles "boldly approaching the throne of grace" (Heb.4:16) and asking all like-minded readers to join him in this petition in order that this restoration of love and good feeling might happen "all the sooner".

### **Verses Twenty through Twenty One**

(20) And the God of peace, the One who led up from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep in the blood of the eternal covenant, our Lord Jesus, (21) will fit you out in every worthy task in order that you may do His will, [even] as He produces in us what is well-pleasing through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen!  
Hebrews 13:20-21

**Doxology:** A doxology is, literally, a proclamation of glory, a glorifying (in formal fashion) of our God, singing His praises as a way that refocuses listeners and readers on Him at the close of a letter or lesson. Paul's doxology above, serves to remind us all of whom it is we serve and love and what He has done for us. God is our Father. He has called us to peace with Him, the very opposite of the spiritual turmoil many if not most of the Jerusalem church were experiencing on account of their backsliding. He raised Jesus from the dead after sacrificing Him on our behalf, and in response we should be ever grateful and focused as a result on our own resurrection and life eternal, not compromising it for the sake of temporary worldly relief. We should *always* be remembering the cross, "the blood of the eternal covenant", the great price our Savior paid to rescue us from darkness, death and the grave. We should be committing ourselves to following our Shepherd, obedient sheep that we should be, and not wandering off, putting ourselves beyond His protection where we will inevitably find ourselves at the mercy of wolves seen and unseen. If we do respond (change our ways for all who are in need of correcting course), He will help us grow and progress and produce, giving us "every good thing" we need to do what He would have us do (Rom.8:32; Phil.4:19). That is His will. That is what is pleasing to the Lord who bought us, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That, all of that, is certainly worthy of giving Him glory forever and ever. Amen!

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<sup>14</sup> See Hebrews: Introduction, section III, "The Background of Hebrews".

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,  
But to Your name give glory,  
Because of Your mercy,  
Because of Your truth.  
Psalm 115:1 NKJV

**God of Peace:** There is little better than peace, God's peace, the *shalom* of fulfillment and wholeness, health and prosperity, confidence and closeness to God that comes from pursuing what He finds important as opposed to the vileness this world worships (Lk.16:15). Our God is the God of peace, the One who provides peace and all of the wonderful things that attend to true godly peace. Jesus Christ is the "Prince of peace" (Is.9:6), the One who will bring in an era of unprecedented prosperity when He rules the world in person after His return (cf. Heb.7:2). We are told to "pursue peace" in this epistle (Heb.12:14), indicating that peace with God and being on the receiving end of the peace that He provides is something more valuable than anything else in this temporary world. Receiving God's favor/grace and the peace and spiritual prosperity that accompany it is the best thing one can have in this life and the best thing one can wish for another believer. That is why Paul frequently began and ended his letters with this very wish for those he cared for.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Romans 1:7b NKJV

And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.  
Romans 16:20 NKJV

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
1st Corinthians 1:3 NKJV

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
2nd Corinthians 1:2 NKJV

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.  
2nd Corinthians 13:11 NKJV

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,  
Galatians 1:3 NKJV

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.  
Galatians 6:16 NKJV

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Ephesians 1:2 NKJV

Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Ephesians 6:23 NKJV

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Philippians 1:2 NKJV

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the  
God of peace will be with you.  
Philippians 4:9 NKJV

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Colossians 1:2b NKJV

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body;  
and be thankful.  
Colossians 3:15 NKJV

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
1st Thessalonians 1:1b NKJV

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit,  
soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
1st Thessalonians 5:23 NKJV

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
2nd Thessalonians 1:2 NKJV

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be  
with you all.  
2nd Thessalonians 3:16 NKJV

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.  
1st Timothy 1:2b NKJV

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.  
2nd Timothy 1:2b NKJV

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.  
Titus 1:4 NKJV

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Philemon 1:3 NKJV

## **Resurrection:**

(1) Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of

**God** (2) which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, (3) concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, (4) and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, *by the resurrection from the dead*.

Romans 1:1-4 NKJV

In many ways, the resurrection is the proof of the validity of the cross and of the success and victory of the plan of God the Father. Mankind was created as the means to refute and thus to defeat the devil, and when mankind fell as we inevitably were going to do, Jesus Christ was the solution to sin and death, provided by our Savior's blood, His death for our sins in the darkness on the cross, with that victory demonstrated to be valid and effective through His resurrection – which could only take place as a result of that victory and which was the only way for us to share in resurrection through our association with the One who won the victory by dying on our behalf and who was resurrected on our behalf.

He was handed over (i.e., forsaken) on account of our transgressions (i.e., to redeem us from sin), and was raised up on account of our justification (i.e., so that we too could be raised, having been justified by His death).

Romans 4:25

It is therefore fitting that in this doxology, this formal singing of the Father's praises, the very first item Paul mentions in God's *res gestae*, His resume of glory, is the successful accomplishment of His plan for the ages, demonstrated by the fact that He is "the One who led [Jesus] up from the dead" (Heb.13:20; cf. Rom.1:4). Our resurrection depends on Jesus' resurrection, and His resurrection depended upon His successful mission to redeem mankind from our sins. The resurrection is thus the stamp of approval that the Father puts on the cross, proving that His plan has been gloriously accomplished by His Son's victory thereon. Everything that follows the cross is thus denouement, that is, the inevitable wrapping up of the plan in all of its outworkings: the calling out of the Church, the defeat of the devil and his antichrist, the second advent, the resurrection and the millennial reign of the Messiah, the thousand year reign, the final defeat of Satan, the destruction of the present heavens and earth and the creation of the new ones, the last judgment, the descent of New Jerusalem and the commencement of eternity. None of these follow-on developments can be stopped by the evil one and all of his forces nor even delayed now that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a reality.<sup>15</sup>

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:6 NIV

## **Great Shepherd:**

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<sup>15</sup> See Peter #20, "The Resurrection"; BB 4A, section I.5.n, "The Resurrection"; and CT 5, section 5, "The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride".

(13) Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. (16) They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; (17) for **the Lamb** who is in the midst of the throne **will shepherd them** and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Revelation 7:13-17 NKJV

Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God" (Jn.1:29; 1:36; Rev.5:6; 5:8; 5:12-5:13; 6:1; 6:16; 7:9-10; 7:14; 7:17; 12:11; 13:8; 13:11; 14:1; 14:4; 14:10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7; 19:9; 21:14; 21:22-23; 22:1; 22:3), a title which identifies Him as the One who has accomplished the sacrifice of sacrifices through His blood, His death for the sins of the world. And as a result of that victory to which we owe everything He has been resurrected and will shepherd us, His sheep, for all eternity.

(11) "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. (12) But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. (13) The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. (14) I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. (15) As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. (16) And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."

John 10:11-16 NKJV

Thus by employing this title for our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul at once both reminds the Jerusalem believers that our Savior is the true sacrifice, the efficacious one which all of the rituals of the Law merely foreshadowed, and also that He is our Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd of all of the other pastor-teachers in their extensive church whose guidance and teaching many if not most were currently flouting.

(2) Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; (3) nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; (4) and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

1st Peter 5:2-4 NKJV

The choice was clear then and it is clear now: follow the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd of the sheep to safe pasture, humbly submitting to His worthy under-shepherds, or turn away and wander – and be at the mercy of the wolves (Matt.7:15; Jn.10:12; Acts 20:29).

For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1st Peter 2:25 NKJV

If the Jerusalem believers had been willing to return once more, like the prodigal son, they would have found the Father graciously ready to receive them. Indeed, our Lord is ever searching out His lost sheep, and we have every reason to want to remain close to Him under His watchful eye. For He looks out for us.

The Lord is the One shepherding me.  
Therefore I will not be lacking [anything I need].  
Psalm 23:1

(4) "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? (5) And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. (6) And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' (7) I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."  
Luke 15:4-7 NKJV

### **Blood of the Eternal Covenant:**

Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted *the blood of the covenant* by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?  
Hebrews 10:29 NKJV

Literal blood was spilled under the Old Covenant to symbolize the actual blood of Christ, His death for all sin in the darkness on the cross, His spiritual death. Once our Lord had actually accomplished the salvation we so desperately needed which was only foreshadowed by the animal sacrifices of the Law, there was not only no need for such sacrifices going forward but they were actually a gross offense to the Father who gave up His Son unto death on our behalf (as the verse above declares). Therefore the Old Covenant, the Law, to which many of the Jerusalem believers were turning back, is *not* the "Eternal Covenant" to which Paul draws their attention in this doxology. That previous shadow covenant had been revoked by the blood of Christ, the true "blood of the covenant" which actually produced salvation rather than merely symbolizing it.

In that He says, "A *new* covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.  
Hebrews 8:13 NKJV

The "Eternal Covenant" is the New Covenant, the one under which the Jerusalem believers were saved and through which they had received the Holy Spirit as believers in Jesus Christ.

In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is *the new covenant in My blood*. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."  
1st Corinthians 11:25 NKJV

Thus with the phrase "in the blood of the eternal covenant" Paul drives home the key point of his letter for his readers one more time: they had been saved by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, **not** by the animal sacrifices and trappings of the Law which they were now preferring to the wondrous truths of their salvation and ours. Perseverance in this horrible course was dangerous in the extreme. Our God is merciful and good beyond our understanding, but His patience is not unlimited – just as it was not in the case of the exodus generation who likewise put Him repeatedly to the test.

(17) "And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, (18) 'The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.' (19) Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." (20) Then the Lord said: "I have pardoned, according to your word; (21) but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord – (22) because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, (23) they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it."  
Numbers 14:17-23 NKJV

### **Fit you Out in Every Worthy Task:**

(16) All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, (17) that the man of God may be complete (*artios*), thoroughly equipped (*katartismenos*) for every good work (*ergon agathon*).  
2nd Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV

[God] will fit you out (*katartisai*) in every worthy task (*ergon kalon*) in order that you may do His will, [even] as He produces in us what is well-pleasing through Jesus Christ.  
Hebrews 13:21a

Paul is expressing nearly the same identical sentiment in both of these passages. The KJV often translates this group of Greek *arti-* words as "perfect / perfection / make perfect", and that is not a terrible way of rendering them if one backs out the modern connotations of the word "perfect". The Greek verb *katartizo* and its cognates, as Paul uses them, have to do with perfection in the sense of completion: the completion of the believer through spiritual growth in order to be fit for the production the Lord has destined us for.<sup>16</sup> That is "[God's] will". That is "what is well-pleasing through Jesus Christ", namely, our spiritual growth, progress through the testing process, and eventual production of a crop for the Lord through the mature functioning of whatever ministry the Lord has assigned to us "every good work", "every worthy task".

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<sup>16</sup> See BB 6A: Peripateology, section II.1, "Spiritual Growth Vocabulary".

(20) And the God of peace, the One who led up from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep in the blood of the eternal covenant, our Lord Jesus, (21) will fit you out in every worthy task in order that you may do His will, [even] as He produces in us what is well-pleasing through Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 13:20-21a

As the broader context reveals upon close examination, the predicate for this "fitting out" of ours which will please our Lord Jesus is the cross: His victory which validates the New Covenant and as result of which He was resurrected to become our Great Shepherd. This passage thus looks backward to the spiritual gifts we have received as part of the "plunder" of our Lord's victory (Ps.111:5; Is.53:12; Lk.11:21-22; 20:16; Eph.4:7-10), and forward to the rewards we hope to win through employing those gifts in ministry when we are resurrected too, becoming "like Him" in eternal new bodies and no longer subject to death or suffering of any kind (1Jn.3:2). This is the "hope in which we were saved" (Rom.8:24), this is the "hope which anchors us" (Heb.6:19), this is the "blessed hope" (Tit.2:13) for which we yearn at all times and shall continue to do so until we see our Lord face to face at last!

(50) But I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (i.e., live in eternity with the Lord), nor can corruption inherit incorruption (i.e., we need the resurrection to live forever). (51) Behold, I tell you a mystery: not all of us will fall asleep, but all of us will be changed (52) in [that] moment of time, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet blast. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise incorruptible, and we (i.e., believers still alive) too will be changed [at that time (i.e., the Lord's Second Advent return)]. (53) For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortality must put on immortality (i.e., in order to live forever with our Lord). (54) And when this corruptible [body] puts on incorruption and this mortal [body] puts on immortality, then will be fulfilled this prophecy which has been written: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. (55) Where is your victory, O death? Where is your stinger, O death?" (56) Now the stinger of death is the sin [nature] (i.e., it produces our sin), and the power of sin is the Law (i.e., it reveals our sin). But thanks be to God who gives us *the victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ!

1st Corinthians 15:50-57

In the meantime, after reminding his readers in a somewhat delicate way of their need to re-embrace the New Covenant in preference to the obsolete and now defunct old way, with these words Paul encourages the Jerusalem Church to start moving forward again, in confidence that God the Father will indeed "fit them out", prepare them, complete them, make them sufficient for whatever task it is that our Lord Jesus Christ is asking of them, to the end of glorifying Him and earning an eternal reward that will be the cause of joy forever.

(9) Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (10) Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Galatians 6:9-10 NIV

If they had only listened – if *we* would only listen, then our Lord would gladly "fit us out" with

every good thing we need to accomplish every good purpose He has planned for us to the end of a good report before Him on that day and a bountiful eternal reward that pleases us and glorifies Him forever.

(8) "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. (9) Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. (10) Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. (11) Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!"

Psalm 32:8-11 NIV

(6) Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; (7) for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if only you would hear his voice, (8) "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, (9) where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did. (10) For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.' (11) So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.' "

Psalm 95:7-11 NIV

(28) Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. (29) He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. (30) Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; (31) but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:28-31 NIV

**To Him be the Glory:** Doxology means "saying/proclaiming the glory [of God]". We believers know and understand that everything we do or have done or will do that is worth something has been accomplished by God's grace through the power of the Spirit to the glory of Jesus Christ and our heavenly Father. Reminding ourselves of this daily is prudent and spiritually helpful. Had the Jerusalem believers been doing so, they might have realized that God was not pleased with their behavior in turning away from remembering Jesus Christ in communion and back to the sacrifices of the Law which He had fulfilled and which thereafter were bringing our Lord reproach rather than glory. Our God *is* glory, light and truth and holiness unapproachable. Whatever we have, whatever we have accomplished that is truly worth anything, all redounds to His glory and not our own.

Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

Psalm 115:1 NIV

"So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "

Luke 17:10 NIV

(5) [The Father] *predestined us* for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – (6) *to the praise of his glorious grace*, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Ephesians 1:5-6 NIV

(9) And whenever the living creatures give glory, and honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, the One who lives forever and ever, (10) the twenty-four elders will fall down before the One who sits on the throne, and will worship the One who lives forever and ever, and will throw their crowns before the throne, saying, (11) "[O] our Lord and our God! You are worthy to assume [this] glory, and honor, and power, because you have created all things, and because of Your will they exist and were created."

Revelation 4:9-11

And we *will* praise Him forever and ever!

(1) Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.

(2) Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.

(3) Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,

(4) praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe,

(5) praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.

(6) Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

Psalms 150:1-6 NIV

## Verse Twenty Two

(22) I beseech you, brothers, to put up with this message [meant to be one] of encouragement, even though I have sent it to you rather hastily [on account of my present circumstances of having not much time left].

Hebrews 13:22

The Greek phrase *dia bracheon* can be translated variously. It means, literally, "through short/concise [things]", where "short/concise" can refer to either the size of the letter (as it is usually taken here) or to the manner in which it was produced. I have translated the phrase "hastily" because, as we saw in the introduction, Paul did not have much time left to live so that producing a work of this magnitude and of this quality would possibly not be the same if Paul had had more time and been in better living conditions than a prison cell. Of course we understand that the Holy Spirit produced exactly what He wanted to produce, but He allows Paul here a bit of an apology because it gives an insight into the depth of his love for his readers: this is perhaps the greatest epistle from the greatest of the apostles done under the most difficult of conditions. . . and he still would have liked to have had more time to add to it and to improve it. Finally here it is also the case that *dia bracheon* can also mean "in few words", and any Greek reader of the time would probably have caught the double meaning, one that would have brought a sanctified smile to the face of anyone having listened to this longish letter read in one sitting. Paul also clarifies his purpose here, reminding those who read this letter that, in spite of the

rather stern rebukes he sometimes had to employ, he wrote it in the Holy Spirit to encourage them to do what was right, to the end of their spiritual recovery and eternal reward.

### Verses Twenty Three through Twenty Five

(23) Know that our brother Timothy has been released. If you come with him rather quickly, I will [be able to] see you [before my execution]. (24) Greet all the [pastor-teachers] who are guiding you along with all the holy ones (i.e., believers). The holy ones (i.e., believers) [with whom I am in contact] greet you [as well]. (25) May the grace [of God be] with you all. Amen!

Hebrews 13:23-25

In 2nd Timothy chapter four, verse nine, Paul had asked Timothy to come to Rome as quickly as possible, hoping to be able to spend some time with him and to give him some last instructions before Paul's pending execution. We see from this passage that the great apostle's prayers were answered. We can also glean from these verses that by visiting Paul in prison and standing by him, Timothy must also have been initially caught up in the malevolent scheme on the part of those who opposed Paul's ministry to have him put to death. We are not told exactly how Timothy was freed or why, but we know from, e.g., Romans 16:11 and Philippians 1:13 and 4:22, that Paul did have contacts within the imperial administration at Rome. We can also be sure that prayer was a great part of it. The Lord still had work for Timothy to do, even as Paul was nearing the end of his course (2Tim.4:7). Unless and until it is the Lord's will for us to depart, we have nothing to fear from anyone, all human impressions and worldly developments notwithstanding.

(14) Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. (15) You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words. (16) At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. (17) But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. (18) And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

2nd Timothy 4:14-18 NKJV

Note that Hebrews 13:23 actually says "if **you** come shortly" (not "he": Sinaiticus preserves the correct reading of the text: *erchesthe*). Now that Timothy had been released, Paul assures his supporters in Jerusalem that there will still be time to make one last visit to him if they hurry, and that Timothy will be their guide and aid them both in finding and in having safe access to Paul (through the right channels and individuals).

**Greet:** We have noted in the introduction the reasons for Paul omitting his own name as the author of this letter, specifically, to keep himself as much as possible out of the argument so as to let the truth speak for itself, inasmuch as there were many in Jerusalem who had personal "axes to grind" against him for whom this letter rejecting legalism would have been most incendiary.

Here he omits greeting individuals by name as he would usually be wont to do no doubt for the same reason, and not just for the sake of brevity at the end of this lengthy epistle. Then too speed was an issue. How long did it take Paul to craft this letter in the Spirit? Romans has an entire chapter largely devoted to salutations (chapter sixteen). To do justice to all of his contacts in Jerusalem could well have required another day or more of careful consideration, and time was of the essence if any of those he might have greeted by name were going to arrive in Rome before it was too late.

Paul therefore gives a generalized greeting from himself and from his team, breaking the recipients down into two groups, pastors/elders and all other believers. Why he does so can be intuited from the description he uses for each. The pastor-teachers are called "the guides/leaders" while the rest are called "the saints/holy ones". Thus with this short greeting Paul does what we so often find writers of scripture doing, namely, characterizing groups and individuals according to how they should behave in hopes of them living up to that characterization (as when John characterizes believers as "not sinning" in 1st John chapter three whereas he had told us all of our need to confess in chapter one and of our Lord's advocacy for us when we do sin in chapter two). Pastors should lead – but if all the teachers and elders in Jerusalem had been doing their jobs sufficiently, we are right to assume, the terrible spiritual situation existing there would never have come to such a dangerous pass. And all believers should be holy, separated from sin and evil experientially in matching our actions to positional holiness we have in Jesus Christ – but if the vast majority of believers in Jerusalem had been doing so, then there never would have been any such return to the Law in defiance of the Father and to the great discredit of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul thus writes this generalized salutation in hopes of it coming true as spiritual revival follows the receipt of this his last and perhaps greatest epistle. Those who received it are greeted in turn by those with Paul in Rome, "holy ones" themselves, so that the recipients are invited not so subtly to compare their own walk with that of the believers in Rome.

**May the Grace of God be with You All:** Paul with his final words expresses his wish, his prayer, for God's grace, God's good favor, to enfold and to embrace all of his fellow countrymen who belong to Jesus Christ. The statement is simple, and deceptively so. We are saved by grace (Eph.2:8-10), and it is in grace and by grace that we stand (Rom.5:1-2). No greater blessing, no more heartfelt wish, no more needful answer to prayer could be desired for them or for any of us than to find ourselves under God's good pleasure – rather than under his wrath (as the Jerusalem believers were at least flirting with).

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?  
Romans 8:31 NKJV

Amen! (*I believe it!*)  
Hebrews 13:23