

A WELL-BALANCED LIFE

(Ch. 13)

Imagine that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews had almost finished his letter. He had made most of the doctrinal points he wanted to make and had warned his readers against apostasy. At last, he must have asked himself, "How shall I conclude?" He decided, "I will give some practical advice that will help these brethren live for Christ every day." The letter concludes, as do many other New Testament letters, with practical exhortations. These admonitions cover so many areas of Christian life that we can look upon them as presenting suggestions for how to live a well-balanced spiritual life.

We can understand the need to lead a well-balanced life. We know, for example, that work is good. However, we may have seen some "workaholics" who are addicted to their jobs, who work sixty or seventy or eighty hours a week and neglect everything else. Others overdo their interests in hobbies or sports or physical fitness. All these people need to be encouraged to lead more balanced lives—to spend more time with their families, for instance.

We may also need encouragement to lead well-balanced spiritual lives. A Christian can become focused on one or two principles of Christianity, to the neglect of others. Some members of the church are eager to promote truth and to speak out against error, but they may neglect love and grace. Certain brethren are concerned about purity and constantly warn against immoral practices; others are primarily interested in Christian love. Some brethren are enthusiastic about the subject of worship, while others turn their attention toward benevolence and doing good to others. A few may want to be involved only in evangelism or mission work.

All the concerns of the church are good and should be emphasized. While a person's talents may turn him more toward one interest than another, the life of a well-balanced Christian will include a wide range of virtues and good works. We need to lead well-balanced spiritual lives, and Hebrews 13 tells us how we can do so. Let us consider the characteristics of such a life.

A LIFE OF LOVE

First, a well-balanced life is a life of love, especially love for the brethren. (Read Hebrews 13:1–3.) Chapter 13 begins with a general statement: "Let love of the brethren continue." As these Christians faced an uncertain future, in danger of both persecution and apostasy, they needed to continue to love one another! They already had brotherly love; they needed to keep it, perhaps to make it even more apparent in their lives. We must guard our love for one another. We must make sure it continues and that it is exhibited in our dealings with each other.

Next, two particular manifestations of brotherly love are given:

(1) "Show hospitality to strangers." When first-century Christians traveled, they had no wholesome place to stay except in the homes of other Christians. Probably, the "hospitality" spoken of here had to do with showing hospitality to traveling saints.

(2) "Remember the prisoners." Again, this exhortation was probably not to look after prisoners in general,¹ but to care for Christians who

¹Looking after prisoners is a good work, but that is probably not the meaning here. Many churches today are actively involved in "Prison Ministry."

were imprisoned because of their faith.

We, too, ought to show our love for the brethren by being hospitable to them and by caring for those who are experiencing times of trouble. *The Christian life is a loving life.*

A MORAL LIFE

Second, a well-balanced life is a moral life. The example found here relates to marriage vows. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” This passage suggests that one characteristic of the Christian life is that Christian marriage is special!

Christian marriage is not something to be looked down upon; rather, it is to be “held in honor.” It is not intrinsically holier to remain a virgin than it is to get married. The institution of marriage today is often disrespected. At a state university, my wife was in a sociology class in which marriage and the family were being discussed. Out of the thirty or so people present, she was the only person who had anything good to say about marriage and the family! Whatever the world thinks, Christians must always honor marriage!

In particular, Christian marriage is different because faithful Christians do not defile the “marriage bed.” They are not guilty of immoral or adulterous behavior. Why? Because they know that God condemns those who are guilty of sexual sin! Adultery is a sin—against God, against a wife or a husband, and against the person with whom one commits adultery! We are to avoid such sin! *The Christian life is a pure life!*

A LIFE OF TRUST

Third, a well-balanced life is a life of trust—in particular, with regard to money. Hebrews 13:5, 6 presents a two-pronged command: As Christians, we are to keep our lives free from the love of money and to be content with what we have. If I were to try to pick out the one command in the New Testament which is most ignored by people today, I think it would be this one! Nothing goes more against the tendency of modern life than setting aside the love for money.

What does it mean to love money? Obviously, to have money is not wrong; money is necessary to live in almost every society today. What, then,

is the *love* of money? Maybe the second part of the verse explains the first: To love money is to be discontented; it is to want more and more! Does that describe us?

These verses also give us a reason to obey the command. Why are we not to love money? Because God has promised to care for us (13:5b, 6)! If we love money, if we are discontented, always wanting more possessions or more financial security, does that not indicate a lack of trust in God? *The Christian life is a life of trust.*

A LIFE OF TRUTH

Fourth, a well-balanced life is a life of truth, especially in the realm of doctrine. To understand the teaching of Hebrews 13:7–14, we must realize that the first readers were in danger of falling away. Part of that danger apparently stemmed from the presence of false teachers, for here the letter speaks of “varied and strange teachings” (13:9).

What were these false teachers teaching? Apparently, their doctrine involved foods, for we read in verse 9 that the heart should “be strengthened by grace, not by foods.” The false teachers also must have been involved with Judaism. Verse 10 says, “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.” This statement must have been a response to some who were teaching and practicing Judaism. It appears, then, that some were promoting Judaism, with its food laws, and were in danger of leading saints away with their false teaching.

How could the readers withstand the temptation to be seduced by false teaching? (1) They were to remember those who had originally taught them (13:7, 8). Perhaps this exhortation also suggests that they needed to remember what those original teachers had taught. (2) They were to be aware that grace, not food, strengthens the Christian (13:9). (3) They were reminded that Christ’s sacrifice was “outside the gate” (13:12), meaning “apart from Judaism.” That fact meant that Christ’s gift of salvation did not depend on the Jewish system for its efficacy—and that those who remained connected to Judaism had no part in Christ. (4) They were to remember that here they had no “lasting city” (13:14). Perhaps the Jews were taunting the Christians by saying, “We have Jerusalem, the holy city, as the center of our

religion. Where is your city?" The Christians could answer, "We have a better city, yet to come, eternal in the heavens."

How does this passage apply to a balanced life? Since it warns against false teaching, we must conclude that one cannot lead a well-balanced spiritual life without being concerned about false doctrine. Some have said that teaching the truth is of no value if we are not loving and benevolent and evangelistic—and that is true. However, it is also true that being loving and benevolent and evangelistic is of no value if we do not teach the truth! Let us be concerned about doctrine! *The Christian life is a life devoted to truth.*

A LIFE OF PRAISE

Fifth, a well-balanced life is a life of praise offered to God. Consider Hebrews 13:15: "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." This verse speaks of something else in Christianity which is parallel to a practice in Judaism: sacrifices. There is an important difference, though: While the Jews offered sacrifices of animals, Christians offer sacrifices of praise.

The Christian's sacrifice of praise is to be offered (a) to God (b) with our lips (when we sing) (c) continually. *The Christian life is a life of constant praise.*

A LIFE OF GIVING

*Sixth, a well-balanced life is a life of giving to others. Look at verse 16: "And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." If our lives are truly Christian, we will constantly be doing good and sharing what we have. Notice, too, that doing good and giving to others are additional sacrifices offered to God. To help the needy is to offer a sacrifice to God. *The Christian life is a giving life.**

A LIFE OF RESPECT

Seventh, a well-balanced life is a life of respect toward our leaders. Verse 17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them. . . ." Notice that the leaders of verse 7 are mentioned in the past tense (they "led"); they had already gone on to their reward in heaven. However, these leaders in verse 17 are spoken of in the present tense; they were

still (at the time Hebrews was written) watching over souls. Who were they? This is most likely a reference to the elders of the congregation. This verse, therefore, teaches two concepts:

(1) *The responsibility of the elders:* Their job is to "keep watch" over the souls of the congregation. They are not merely bosses or decision-makers; they have a responsibility for the souls under their care. What an awesome responsibility!

(2) *The relationship of the congregation to the elders:* The members should "obey" and "submit" to the local church leaders. In other words, they should gladly follow the leadership of the elders. Happy is the church in which the elders do their job and the members respectfully follow them!

The principle of submission is applied in the Christian life both within the church and outside of it. *The Christian life is a submissive life.*

A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE

Eighth, a well-balanced life is a life of obedience. (Read Hebrews 13:20, 21.) The epistle concludes (aside from a brief personal message) with a prayer. The author asked God to bless his readers with everything good so that they might "do His will." That prayer should also be our petition and the aim of our lives: to do the will of God and to work "that which is pleasing in His sight." *Above all else, the Christian life is lived with a view to doing the will of God and pleasing Him.*

CONCLUSION

How do you measure up? Is your life as well-rounded and well-balanced as the Christian life portrayed in Hebrews 13? The best response we can make to a lesson like this is to review those areas in which we are weak and determine to work toward improving them.

The greatest danger Christians face is not that they might, for instance, concentrate too much on love and too little on truth, but that they might become so involved in the world that they neglect every Christian value. Let us conclude, therefore, with one other thought about being well-balanced. Some people's lives are out of balance because they leave no room for God. You may be perfect physically, rich financially, well-developed socially, and a genius intellectually—but if your life does not include Christ and the Christlike qualities described in Hebrews 13, you are lacking something essential. Coy Roper