2023 NYUBF SUMMER RETREAT

**PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING**

*(Subtitle: Living Out Your Faith)*

Hebrews 13:1-25

Key Verse: 13:8, 15-16

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever... Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

Good morning. Throughout this letter, the author seeks to persuade his audience, mainly Jewish Christians, of the supremacy of Christ Jesus over Judaism, with one argument after another. He emphasized that Jesus, the Son of God, is superior to everything, including God’s angels, servants, prophets, the high priesthood, and other heroes of faith. And the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross was the completion and fulfillment of the Jewish sacrifice system in the Temple. In the opening Chapter, the author declared Jesus as God, the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being (Heb. 1:3).

This morning, we will explore the concluding chapter. As the author concludes his letter, he utters practical instructions for living out our faith in a world that often challenges our beliefs. The guidance includes brotherly love, sexual purity, contentment, unwavering faith, and the vital importance of Christ in our lives. These are priceless spiritual wisdom for us even today. This morning, let us explore these truths and learn how to apply them in our daily lives. For our better understanding, I divided it into four small subdivisions: *1) brotherly love and hospitality, 2) sexual purity and contentment, 3) Christ, the firm foundation, and 4) the sacrifices of praise and good works.*

**First, brotherly love and hospitality. (1-3)** Look at verses 1-3. “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing, some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those who in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” The author begins the concluding chapter by exploring the importance of showing love and kindness within the Christian community. It reveals that Christianity is not a mere set of religious doctrines. It’s about relationships – a relationship with God through Christ Jesus and a relationship with others.

Particularly, the phrase “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters” reminds us of Jesus’ command in John 13:34 and 35, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” As God’s beloved children, we should continue loving our brothers and sisters. However, our love can become cold. Some people are hurt in a church and avoid close relationships that might cause pain. To keep on loving one another is not easy. We need to resolve grievances among spiritual family members through forgiveness, as Jesus taught in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Next, we are encouraged to extend our love beyond the Christian circle. Verse 2 reads, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing, some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” We consider ourselves hospitable if we invite our friends for a meal or take them to a nice restaurant. It’s lovely to encourage one another in love. But we are encouraged to extend our love beyond our Christian friends. We should not forget to show hospitality to strangers.

The Greek word for “**Hospitality” is “Philoxenia,**” which is a compound word from *“Philo (love)”* + *“Xenos (stranger).”* It means “love stranger” or “entertain stranger.” Hospitality to strangers has a deep value in the Scriptures. For example, when three strangers visited Abraham, he welcomed them to stay at his house and served them the choicest meals (Gen. 18). Later, he discovered that the three strangers included the Lord himself and two angels.

We surely want to imitate Abraham’s example of showing hospitality to strangers. But practically, is it possible to show hospitality to strangers, as Abraham did? In our culture, visiting someone without permission is considered impolite. At the same time, we don’t want to be too generous because our hospitality can be taken advantage of. We surely need genuine concern for people in general and proper guidelines for showing hospitality to unexpected guests.

Verse 3 states, “Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” This verse teaches us that we, as Christians, should have solidarity with those who are mistreated unfairly and suffer even if it’s their fault. There is no limit to loving others. God loves us unconditionally so that we may also love others. God is love. When we say, *“God is love,”* it means that God is the infinite energy of love. He never stops loving us, his children. So, he sent his one and only Son to demonstrate his love for us. So, as God’s children, we should love all people, especially those in need.

**Second, Sexual purity and contentment (4-6).** Read verse 4. “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” This verse emphasizes the importance of sexual purity, whether married or unmarried. Why is sexual purity so important? Can we be spiritually pure while sexually impure? No. Sexual purity is related to our spiritual purity. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.”

Look at verse 5a. “Keep your lives free from the love of money.” Here, we are warned against the love of money. Of course, money itself is not evil, but the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). In America and many parts of the world, greed is encouraged, and everyone wants to be rich. People are afraid of material poverty. They say, *“I don’t want to be poor.”* People are brainwashed by materialism. Extreme materialism is dangerous. The Bible warns that anyone who wants to be rich falls into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

How can we overcome greed? Look at verses 5b and 6. “And be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So, we confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?’” According to these verses, there are two ways to overcome greed. First, we need to learn how to be content with what we have. Most people think that the more money they have, the happier and more secure their life can be. But that’s not true. More money doesn’t guarantee happiness and true satisfaction. What makes us happy is not more money. It’s contentment. The opposite of greed is contentment. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:11-13, “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

Most of all, we need to seek God, not material wealth, as the source of our security and happiness. The author quoted Deuteronomy 31:6, which states, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,” and Psalm 118:6-7, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” Seeking God should be the primary goal of our lives. It’s most desirable because a great reward is promised to those seeking him earnestly. (Heb. 11:6) Jesus said to his disciples, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Mt. 6:33)

**Third, Christ, the Firm Foundation (7-18)**. In this segment, the author encourages us to remain steadfast in our faith in Christ and not be swayed by false teachings or worldly influences.

Look at verse 7. “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” We are encouraged to respect faithful leaders. By following their examples, we can grow in faith. But human leaders are not perfect. They have shortcomings and mistakes. Growing up as a Protestant Christian, I admired Martin Luther and John Calvin. Then I found that they were not perfect either. Yet, it does not mean that we should treat them disrespectfully.

Look at verse 17. “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” This verse shows that spiritual leaders are accountable to God for their leadership. Therefore, their spiritual authority should be upheld and not ignored. Faithful leaders are worthy of respect. While respecting faithful leaders, we should not idolize them because they are not the foundation of our faith. We should build our confidence on the firm foundation of Christ Jesus.

Read verse 8. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” What’s the implication of this statement? Like God the Father, who is eternal, Christ Jesus continues eternally – past, present, and future. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. (Isaiah 41:4, 44:6; Rev. 1:4, 8) It means that the promises Jesus made while on earth are eternally true and in force. He is still active with his power. He is the same yesterday and today and forever. He is the living God dwelling in us now and forever. It reminds us of Hebrews 7:24-25, “But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.”

In verses 9-14, the author reiterates the supremacy of Christ Jesus over Jewish religious practices. Read verses 9-10. “Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so. We have an altar from which those who minister at the Tabernacle have no right to eat.” Here, the author contrasts the grace of Jesus with Jewish religious ceremonies. People observing religious ceremonies may feel as if they are cleansed and sanctified. But the author said it’s not. Following religious traditions is empty and has no life-changing effect. Outwardly clean but inwardly remain unclean. But the grace of Jesus that is offered through the blood of Jesus is life-giving and transforms us from the inside out.

Hebrews 9:13-14 states, “The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.” The grace of God through Jesus Christ is life-transforming. Therefore, we should always depend on the grace of God.

So, how can we depend on the grace of Jesus? It’s by following the footstep of Jesus. Look at verses 11-14. “The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here do not here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.” The phrase “Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore” doesn’t mean that we do what Jesus did, offering blood sacrifices. No. Instead, it has a spiritual connotation. So what is it? How can we depend on the grace of Jesus? We can do so by following the footsteps of Jesus Christ, just as he said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mk. 8:34) For how long? It’s until we reach heaven.

**Fourth, the sacrifices of praise and good works. (15-16)** In verses 15-16, we learn that we, as God’s children, don’t need to offer blood sacrifices to God. But we should offer two kinds of sacrifices that are pleasing to God. What are they? The sacrifices of praise and good works. Read verses 15 and 16. “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” The author concludes Hebrews chapter 13 by encouraging his readers to offer sacrifices of praise to God continually and engage in good works. Our worship extends beyond our songs and prayers; it includes sharing our kindness and love with our brothers and sisters, showing hospitality to our neighbors and strangers, and expressing solidarity with those suffering and mistreated around us and in the world. It’s all about loving others.

James 1:27 states, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” God, our Father, looks after those who are hungry, sick, and affliction. True religion is to share God’s mercy with suffering people.

The instructions in this chapter are meant to shape our daily lives, transforming us into people who love, serve, and honor God in everything we do: *Brotherly love, sexual purity, contentment, the firm foundation of Christ, the sacrifice of praise, and good works.* The world we live in is challenging and unstable. But when we live out our faith, following these instructions, we can be strong and influential individuals and build a community that is pleasing to God. May we be a community that embodies brotherly love, pursues purity and contentment, the firm foundation of Christ Jesus, and the sacrifices of praise and good works.