



HOW TO BUILD A BETTER LIFE

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from Jerry Vines Ministries
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Let's Begin

The renowned artist, Michelangelo, left in his will, the following words, "I die in the faith of Jesus Christ, and in the firm hope of a better life." Everybody desires a better life. The question is, what does a better life look like according to the Bible? In addition, once we understand what the Bible means by a better life, how do we go about building it?

In chapter 13, the author of Hebrews runs at full speed, so to speak, and sprints toward the final lap of his own race. And, the final lap is made almost exclusively of practical matters. He wants assurance that the believers to whom he writes see the Christian faith not as a philosophy of ideas, but rather as a holistic perspective on living. Christian faith is about our spiritual life not cold, abstract theory.

Hence, as we make our way through the final chapter, let's focus on three key principles the author reveals for building a better life. Consider the outline below:

- I. We Must Build a Better Social Life (vv. 1-8)**
- II. We Must Build a Better Structural Life (vv. 9-17)**
- III. We Must Build a Better Spiritual Life (vv. 18-25)**

I. We Must Build a Better Social Life (vv. 1-8)

If someone personally asked us whether we desired a better life, we undoubtedly would respond positively. The Apostle Peter gives specific instructions to those who "love life" and desire to "see good days" (1 Pet. 3:10). The tragedy is, relatively few find the life that our loving God desires to give each one of us.

The Bible tells us how to build a better life, including a better *social* life. For example, the author of Hebrews writes, "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." (vv. 1-3). In this passage, the author

begins our construction project of a better life with discussing human relationships.

Why is it so important to emphasize human relationships? Because no human being is an island to himself or herself (cp. Rom. 14:7). All of us are bound up together in the bundle of human life. In fact, it is a demonstrable fact, people placed in solitary confinement for extended periods of time are seriously affected psychologically.

The author of Hebrews, therefore, begins with the believer's *social* standing. In building our social life, we *must first show love for all the brothers* (v. 1). Though the author mentions only "brotherly love," the obvious intent includes "sisterly" love as well. The point is, the church is a family of like-minded believers under the Lordship of Christ (cp. 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 4:7, 11-12, 20). While this seems apparent, this certainly is not always easy. All families have their squabbles!

But it is not only family members with whom the church is to relate well. The author also speaks of "strangers" (v.

Reflection Connection

Does your church have a healthy focus on fellowships which encourage building healthy social relationships? Explain.



2). Hospitality is expressed in the New Testament as a virtuous act. Widows who were supported by the church were to specifically have been active in “entertaining strangers” (1 Tim. 5:10). The author tells us the reasoning is we never know the blessings which are likely to come. Or, the way he puts it is, “for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (cp. Gen. 18; Matt. 25:35).

In how to construct positive social relationships, the author moves on to marital relationships. He writes, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” (v. 4). An all-out war is taking place presently against the family. The institution of marriage is continually assaulted by those who deny marriage is between a man and a woman. Permissiveness rules; casual sexual relationships abound; sexual perversion remains more and more acceptable; and sometimes even the church seems complacent about the moral crisis taking place. The author of Hebrews held no hesitation in calling conditions what they were—“whoremongers” and “adulterers.” Nor did he stutter in stating the end of such moral defilement: “God will judge.” If positive relationships are to occur, we must remain honest enough to deal in a straight-forward fashion with the issues we face.

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The author ends this section about building a better life by focusing on finances on the one hand (vv. 5-6), and emphasizing the spiritual element on the other (vv. 7-8). Clearly the spiritual saturates the entire chapter as we will see below. The fact is, our social relationships cannot be healthy if our spiritual relationship is unhealthy. The author writes, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (v. 7). The authority he speaks about is spiritual authority in the church. Church leaders are given an authority from God Himself. Understand: the authority they receive is not dictatorship but spiritual *leadership*. As our posture toward them, the author says to *remember* them (v. 7), *respond* to them (v. 17), and *respect* them (v. 24).

II. We Must Build a Better Structural Life (vv. 9-17)

The thread interwoven throughout Hebrews is, Jesus is better. From every perspective, giving one’s life to Christ means gaining a life which potentially gets better and better. The author continues, “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.” (vv. 9-10). Any teaching which minimizes the doctrine of Christ is a “strange” doctrine. In short, it is *alien*; that is, a *false* doctrine.

What keeps us focused on Christ? Grace! Grace keeps the structure of our life focused properly. Indeed grace is better itself because grace *stabilizes* our life (v.



Reflection Connection

Does your personal walk with the Lord center on grace? Why or why not?

9). Through grace our life is “established,” which means to “make solid” or “firm.” Grace is more glorious and more stable than law.

In addition, grace not only *stabilizes* the structure of our life, grace also *satisfies* it (v. 10). We have “an altar” better than those of the Old Testament. Our altar is Jesus! We lay our lives down upon Him. From the author’s words, we learn in Christ we have a better sacrifice. He writes, “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.” (vv. 11-14). Beginning with an *illustration* of the day of atonement (v. 11; cp. Lev. 16:27), he moves to an *application* to the cross of Christ (v. 12). All is fulfilled in Jesus. He was the perfect sacrifice.

Moreover, he extends an *exhortation* (vv. 13-14) to separate from the evil structures of this world (cp. 2 Cor. 6:14-15; 2 Tim. 3:12). If we are to have healthy structures in our lives, we must be willing to remove ourselves from the evil that exists all around us. Finally, the author speaks of a better service (vv. 15-16). The Old Testament priests served the Lord with animal sacrifices. In contrast, we sacrifice with spiritual worship, spiritual praise. He calls our praise the “fruit of lips,” a sacrifice with which our Lord is surely pleased.

III. We Must Build a Better Spiritual Life (vv. 18-25)

As we noted earlier, the spiritual focus in building a better life saturates this chapter. However, he especially drives this point home as he ends his message to his recipients.

First, pay close attention to his *departing admonition*. He writes, “Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner” (vv. 18-19). One of the greatest ways to build a better life socially, structurally, and spiritually is prayer. The author appealed to them to pray for him. In fact, his “trust” was built around the act of prayer. An appeal for a “good conscience” cannot be overestimated. The author knew the importance of living with moral excellence, including living “honestly.” In addition, he was concerned for restoration with them (v. 19). The author believed prayer actually affected circumstances; do we? It seems if we really believed prayer actually changed things, we would never hesitate to pray about any need we might have.

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Second, pay close attention to his *departing benediction*. Note well his words, “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (vv. 20-21).

Here the author brings together the major themes he has been addressing in the entire book, themes which naturally possess a spiritual dimension. First, he recalls the “God of peace,” a Divine title to which the Apostle Paul frequently alluded (cp. Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23). In Eden, man declared war on God through deliberate rebellion. But God sent His Son to declare peace (Luke 2:14), a theme Paul also developed (Col. 1:20).

In addition, he not only recalled the *provision* Christ made through His death on the cross, but also the *purpose* of God revealed through the Gospel. It was through the “blood of the everlasting covenant” God offered us eternal immunity from our sin, as He “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.” Consequently, we become part of His flock with Jesus Himself as the “great shepherd of the sheep.” God’s purpose for us is to become “perfect,” a continual progress in action presently. However, one day we will experience full perfection in glory.

Finally, pay close attention to his *departing exhortation*. He writes, “And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words. Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you. Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you. Grace be with you all. Amen” (vv. 22-25). The author refers to his message as a “letter,” though as we mentioned in the introductory material, Hebrews structurally is more like a written sermon. His specific purpose has been an exercise in “exhortation.” Hebrews is a book of encouragement.

Additionally, the author mentions the well-known “brother” to his readers, their brother Timothy (v. 23). Timothy had been under arrest but had been set free. The author plans to visit them as well. For now, he is content to encourage them to continue building a better life—better *socially*, better *structurally*, and better *spiritually*.

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Reflection Connection

Would you consider your relationship with God characterized by discontent or peace, conflict or contentedness? Be honest and take your time as you think about it.



Golden Greek Nugget

The author speaks of believers expressing their love by exercising the virtue of hospitality in entertaining strangers which, at times, is “entertaining angels unawares” (v. 2). The Greek term translated “unawares” is *lanthano*, which means “to escape notice” or “to lie hid.” One simply never knows what blessing God has for him or her who obeys the Lord’s commands.

Wrap Up

As we wrap up our study in Hebrews, how fitting the author ends with an exhortation to build a better life in every dimension. Christians must be proactive in building healthy human relationships with other people. However, we must also be cautious not to align with the evil systems of this world. Rather believers are called to separate themselves, organizing their lives around exclusively Christian ideals. Finally, believers must never lose focus on proper spiritual dimensions of their lives. No one possesses a better life who abandons the spiritual dimension of the Christian faith.

