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MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

Analysis of Hebrews: Chapter 13



Part 23/23

God's Last Word: An Exposition of Hebrews By Derek Prince

We're continuing now in Hebrews 13:7–8. We just glanced at these verses at the end of the last session. We'll continue there; I'll translate them once more. Verse 7:

> "Remember those who lead you, who spoke to you the word of God; and as you watch the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith."

Then the next verse is just on its own. I can't explain the peculiarities of Greek, but it doesn't link up with the previous verse and it doesn't really link up with the verse that follows. It's just there on its own and it doesn't have an "is" in it. It's just:

> "Jesus Christ, yesterday and today the same, and for the ages. I'll just say that again."

Jesus Christ, yesterday and today the same, and for the ages.

It serves as a kind of link between the previous verse and the verse that's following although it stands also entirely on its own. The verse that follows, which is verse 9, I'll translate those and then we'll make some comments. It's not immediately obvious, I think, the connection.

> "Do not be carried away [or carried aside] by various and strange teachings [or doctrines]; for it is a good thing for the heart to be established [or made strong or firm] by grace, not by foods, in which those who have occupied themselves [or been busy] have not been helped."

Now let's look at the place of verse 8 for moment. If you are a person with a rather short memory but you like memorizing Scripture, I suggest Hebrews 13:8 is a good verse to memorize. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today, and forever." I believe that it has a reference to the previous verse where the writer says, "Imitate the faith of

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your leaders, observing the outcome of their way of life." What is the outcome of their way of life? It's Jesus Christ, yesterday and today and forever the same. In other words, one responsibility of spiritual leaders of God's people is by their way of life to point you to the eternal, unchanging Christ so that it is related to what's said before.

I think that's very important. We'll see later on people are not asked to imitate or obey all spiritual leaders. This chapter lays down certain very clear requirements as to the kind of spiritual leaders that we're asked to imitate and to follow.

Now, going on to verse 9, we are warned against various strange doctrines, particularly relating to food. I think this again follows on from verse 8 because what the writer is saying is: Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the Christian faith and He never changes. Don't be too changeable; don't be continually aiming at something new. There are, I think, a good many people in the body of Christ today who are always interested in what's the latest doctrine or the latest revelation. In a certain sense, the writer is warning us against always looking for something new and strange.

When my first wife came to know the Lord as a teacher in Denmark, she became the object of the concern of the entire school—which was quite a large school. People used to say to her, "What's the news today?" She always gave them the same answer: "The grace of God is new every day." That's a good way to avoid being carried away with an interest in something new and strange. Bear in mind Jesus doesn't change, His grace doesn't change; the best news is true news.

If you look for a moment in 1 Corinthians 3:11 you'll see there what I mean about the foundation of the Christian faith.

> "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

The foundation of Christianity is laid already, there's no options, there's no possibility of changing it, nothing has to be adjusted or revised, we just have to build on that foundation. That's true of the church as a whole; it's no less true of our individual lives. The only secure, stable life is one that's built on "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever."

Then, with regard to the warning against strange and new teachings, let's look for a moment in Ephesians 4. This chapter, verse 11, lists the five main ministries Christ has set in the body for the building up of the body. In verse 13 Paul states the aim of these ministries, where we are headed.

> "... until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

So we're headed for maturity, completeness, adulthood.

Then, Paul gives the alternative if we don't come under these ministries and receive what they have for us.

> "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming."

I believe there really only are two options in the Christian life. Either you grow up into maturity or you're one of those who never grow up, you become a perpetual babe, your case is one of arrested spiritual development and you're always being carried about by some new and strange doctrine just like a ship without an anchor is carried about by the winds and the waves. Each of us really has to make a determination in our own lives which kind of Christian we're going to be. Are we going to be the kind that is always looking for something new and dramatic and exciting, or is it our aim to grow up into stability and maturity?

Over the years I have encountered so many Christians of the kind that are always looking for something new, always wanting something dramatic. I have to say, the end of most of them is usually rather disappointing. Praise God, there is new truth that's brought to light by the Holy Spirit and God does do things that are dramatic. But our life needs to be founded on Jesus Christ the unchanging Christ.

Then the writer of Hebrews warns us against being too much interested in things like dietary laws.

> "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited."

I need to be very gracious and charitable in what I say, but living more than half the year in Jerusalem, we are in continual rather close contact with people—Jewish people, Orthodox Jews—who really are primarily occupied with dietary laws, that's their main preoccupation. That and the observation of the Sabbath. I love them dearly and I respect their convictions, but I have to say it really hasn't helped them much. So, the writer of Hebrews warned them nineteen centuries ago that isn't the way to be established.

There's always a tendency amongst Christians to get over-involved in something like dietary laws. I'd like to say I personally believe in eating sound, good, healthy foods. I don't indulge in junk food. But that is not a religious matter for me; it's a matter of practically cultivating my health and my body. We have to make a clear distinction between these two.

Grace doesn't come through the kind of food we eat—that's what the writer is saying. Remember, grace is what we need.

Let's look at just three Scriptures there that are referred to in your outline. John 1:17, I don't need to turn to it, I know it by heart.

> "For the Law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Notice the "but." You can choose the law or you can choose grace. But grace doesn't come through the Law. Grace comes through Jesus Christ.

Then Ephesians 2:8, which is another Scripture that I know by heart.

> "For by grace you have been saved through faith; that not of works, lest any man should boast."

We are saved by grace through faith. Never let anything ever move you away from that basis. By grace through faith.

And then a specific warning in 1 Timothy 4:1–3.

> "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron... That's very strong language. Now, what are the typical doctrines of demons? Two are mentioned."

Verse 3:

> "... men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth."

So, we are warned against being, I would say, super-spiritual by a kind of abstinence that God doesn't ask, whether it's from the married life or whether it's from certain kinds of food. And again, over the years, the last twenty years, I've encountered many Christians who have wandered off into a super- spirituality. I have to tell you, I have no ambition to be super-spiritual. If I can just keep both feet on the ground and obey the plain, written Word of God, that's my ambition. Super-spirituality is a snare. And really, when you analyze it, the appeal is to human pride.

I believe, as a matter of fact, this is a personal opinion of mine, that error comes always through pride. Pride is the wedge that opens the door that lets error into our lives. Because of my involvement in the Middle East, I've often asked myself, What is the attraction of the Muslim religion—Islam? It's never made anybody happy, it's never done anybody any good. It's a religion of iron slavery, especially for women, who are treated worse than slaves. And yet, it holds in bondage hundreds of millions of people. Do you know what my conclusion is? It has an appeal because it appeals to human pride. You can do something to earn favor with God. See, the message of the cross deflates all human pride, because it says there's nothing you can ever do of good works that will earn the favor of God. That's why the cross is an unpopular message. It brings all the blessings of time and eternity with it, but people turn it down because it pricks the balloon of human pride and we're left without anything to boast of. Paul said, "God forbid that I should boast, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We have to move on. Now we come to a rather complicated couple of verses. Verse 10, talking about not being occupied with food for the body, the writer goes on:

We have an altar, from which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle. To understand that, as with many passages in Hebrews, you have to know the Old Testament.

There's a reference to Numbers 4. Let me read the outline. The altar represents the source of all true grace. Grace comes by Jesus Christ through the cross, not by any other means. The tabernacle represents the physical externals. You see, one of the problems with the Hebrew Christians was they were still hung up on physical externals. Under the Levitical law, there was a separation between the Kohathites, who ministered at the altar, and the Gershonites and Merarites, who were responsible for the furnishings and structure of the tabernacle. Those are the three main branches of the Levites: the Kohathites, the Gershonites and the Merarites.

Now, when the tabernacle moved in the wilderness for forty years, each group had its own specific, allotted task. They had certain specific things they were responsible for. If you turn back, for a moment, to Numbers 4 and we'll look very briefly at the responsibilities of the three groups. Beginning in verse 2:

> "Take a census of the descendants of Kohath ..."

That's the first section of the Levites. Verse 4:

> "This is the work of the descendants of Kohath ..."

Verse 5:

> "... they ... take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it..."

Verse 6 is the other various ways they have to cover the ark. Verse 7:

> "... the table of the bread of the Presence ... [or the showbread]."

And then verse 9:

> "... the lampstand ..."

Verse 11:

> "... the golden altar ..."

And verses 13 and following:

> "... the [brazen] altar ..."

So they dealt with the altars and all the most sacred pieces of furniture in the tabernacle. They were so sacred that they were not allowed to see them. Only Aaron and his sons were allowed to see them. Aaron and his sons covered these sacred pieces, then the Kohathites came in and carried them. They had the most sacred task of all the Levites.

Then in verse 22, the Gershonites.

> "Take a census of the sons of Gershon ..."

Verse 24:

> "This is the service of the families of the Gershonites..."

Verse 25:

> "... they shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting ..."

Verse 26:

> "... and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway ..."

So they carried all the curtains and screens.

And then in verse 29 we come to the task of Merarites:

> "As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families ..."

Verse 31:

> "Now this is the duty of their loads ... the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its sockets..."

So you see, each group had a different burden to carry. The Gershonites and the Merarites could put them on carts but the Kohathites had to carry them on their shoulders because they were too sacred to be put in a cart. And you remember the tragedy that happened when David allowed the ark to be put on a new cart? So, although they had small items to carry, their burden was greater because they had to carry them on their shoulders.

Now, what the writer of Hebrews is saying with this is: if you want to partake of the altar—and only those who

ministered at the altar ate from the sacrifices of the altar—if you want to be one of those that minister at the altar, don't get involved with the tabernacle and its furnishings. So it's a typical Talmudic Jewish way of saying, Don't serve the body, serve the spirit. Don't be the slave of your body, don't be the slave of material things, because if you are, you have no right to partake of the altar from which the grace comes. I hope I made that clear to you.

If you're in the least bit familiar—and I suppose most of you are not—with the Talmudic way of interpreting Scripture, you can see that Hebrews was written by a real religious Jew. He was a believer in Jesus but he certainly reasoned and thought like a scholar of the Talmud. I think that's one reason why there are so many Jewish lawyers, because their whole background is training in analysis and, in a certain sense, hairsplitting. But, it's just a perfect preparation for being a lawyer.

I must also say, in my experience, that lawyers tend to understand the gospel better than other people because there is a very strong legal element in the truth of the gospel.

We have to go on to Hebrews 13:11. There's another pattern taken from the services of the Levitical priesthood. Verse 11:

> "For those beasts whose blood is carried by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin into the holy place, their bodies are completely burned up outside the camp."

So again, what the writer is doing is trying to make us aware of the distinction between the truly holy and the profane and to be careful that our priorities are right.

I'll read now my outline. We've talked about the separation between the Kohathites, the Gershonites and the Merarites. Now we're talking there is a similar separation between the blood of the sin offerings which was taken by the high priest into the holy of holies and their bodies which were burned outside the camp. We must distinguish between that which belongs to the holy of holies and that which belongs outside the camp. It was a constant charge of the law against the children of Israel, especially against the priest, that they did not observe the distinction between the holy and the profane. It runs almost all through the Old Testament. There is a corresponding problem with Christians. In the spiritual realm we have to be sensitive to that which belongs in the holy of holies and that which belongs outside the camp and not ever get the two mixed up.

Look in Leviticus 16 for a moment. A long way back, some of you will remember, we spent some time in this chapter. This is the chapter that speaks about the ordinances of the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16, beginning at verse 11.

> "Then Aaron shall offer the bull of the sin offering ..."

He shall slaughter it and so on. Verse 12:

> "And he shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of finely ground sweet incense ... [verse 13:] And he shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD ... [verse 14:] Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times."

That's what the writer of Hebrews is saying. The beasts that were offered as the sacrifice for the sin of the priest and of the people on the Day of Atonement, their blood was taken right in beyond the second veil into the holiest place and sprinkled there in the presence of the Lord. That was the only time, once in the year, that anybody ever went through that second veil. It's a type of Jesus making atonement for us and taking His blood into the presence of God as a propitiation for our sins.

Also, it says in verse 15 there he will slaughter the goat of the sin offering and do the same with its blood. So, both the bull and the goat had their blood carried by the high priest into the holy place.

Now, what happened to the body? Looking at verses 27 and 28 of Leviticus 16:

> "But the bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp, and they shall burn their hides, their flesh, and their refuse in the fire."

They're totally burned, nothing is left. And the man who does it still has to be sanctified from it.

Verse 28:

> "The one who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water, then afterward he shall come into the camp."

It's a very vivid presentation of how totally unclean sin is. There is no way to make it clean, there is no way it has any place inside the camp. It has to be taken right outside the camp and burned. What the writer of Hebrews is saying is: Remember, the blood belongs in the holy of holies but the body of the bull or the goat is to be burned outside. In other words, the blood provides propitiation for sin, but if we become involved and place the physical and the material where the blood should be, we are desecrating the presence of the Lord.

I don't know how it is with you. You either get excited about these pictures in the tabernacle, whether it's in Exodus or Leviticus or Numbers; or else you just wonder why they ever were put in the Bible. Their effect on me is always to make me aware of God's demand for holiness in His people. I don't know if you could find a more vivid way of saying how totally unacceptable sin is to God than the fact that those animals whose blood was taken for sin into the holy place have to be totally burned outside the camp, and the one who burns them has to wash himself all over before he comes back into the camp again. That's all a physical ordinance but it has a deep spiritual significance.

We're going on to verse 12 in Hebrews 13. Applying the truth of verse 11, the writer goes on:

> "Wherefore also Jesus, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So when Jesus became the sin offering for the world, not merely for Israel but for the world, symbolically that was typified by the fact that they led Him outside the city to crucify Him, just as the body of the bull was taken outside the camp to be burned."

Let me read my comments there on Page 13/2. The fact that Jesus became our sin offering was attested by His being led outside the city to be crucified. Likewise, the fact that He was made a curse for us was attested by His being hanged on the tree. You see, a Jew who knew his Old Testament Scriptures and had spiritual understanding would learn from the events that led up to the crucifixion of Jesus the real significance of what was taking place. Just look for a moment in Deuteronomy 21:22–23.

> "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree..."

And bear in mind that in Hebrew the same word tree means a tree that's growing and a tree that's cut down. So, it can mean a gallows. Verse 23:

> "... his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God) ..."

The fact that Jesus was hanged on the cross testified to those who had knowledge of the Scripture that He was made a curse. First He was made sin and the curse always follows sin, so then He was made a curse.

Turn to the New Testament for a moment in Galatians 3:13–14. I preached on this Scripture last Sunday in Lakeland on identifying curses and being released from them. The service was broadcast on their radio station and a lady in Tampa heard it, was so convicted she turned her car around and drove all the way to the church to get help. It took her an hour to get there. Fortunately, we had one of our long after services which lasted about three hours, so she made it in time. It really impressed me that this message could so touch a person that they could turn around in their car and come back. This is what I was preaching on, this Scripture. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree"—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles ...

So, Paul says the fact that Jesus was hung on the cross indicated He was made a curse. He was made a curse that He might redeem us from the curse. He was made sin that we might receive His righteousness. He was made a curse that we might inherit the blessing.

Now, returning to Hebrews 13:12, the outline. On the other hand, His blood sprinkled in the heavenly sanctuary gives us access to God. We'll look at two passages in Hebrews we've already looked at on our way through, but we'll just

refresh our memory. Hebrews 9:23–26, speaking about the earthly tabernacle as a copy of the heavenly tabernacle.

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these [the blood of animals], but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own.

So the message is that Christ entered with His own blood into the holy place in heaven. Then in Hebrews 10:19 and following:

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh...

So, you see the exact fulfillment of the types of the Old Testament took place through the death and sacrifice of Jesus.

We come now to verse 13 which is our eleventh "let us" passage. In the original analysis of the entire epistle I stated, amongst other things, there were twelve "let us" passages in the epistle. It's one of the distinctive features of Hebrews. Chapter 13, verse 13 is the eleventh such "let us" passage. Let us go out to Him. While we're in that place we might as well look at the twelfth, which is coming two verses later. Hebrews 13:15, Let us offer up a sacrifice of praise. That's the final "let us" passage of Hebrews.

Now, going back to Hebrews 13:13:

> "Therefore, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach."

As followers of Jesus we must expect to share the reproach attached to His cross. The most despised emblem in the Roman world was the cross. It was used only for executing people who were not Roman citizens. Roman citizens were not crucified. That's why according to tradition Peter was crucified upside down, but Paul was executed because he was a Roman citizen. He was executed by beheading. That's tradition, which I believe is reliable. Why I say that is because it's hard for us to conceive how totally disgusting the cross was to Roman citizens. Because, we're used to centuries where people carry little crosses around their neck and adorn various things with crosses. But, bear in mind, that was not the significance of the cross in the days of the New Testament, it was the most hated, despised and feared emblem of shame. But, Jesus carried His cross and again, that was normal. When a person was to be crucified they would take the crossbeam of the cross—not the whole cross, but the crossbeam—and put it on his shoulders. And he had to carry it out to the place of execution, which was what happened to Jesus.

Let's look at two passages that refer to the cross. Luke 9:23:

> "And He [Jesus] was saying to them all..."

Please note the word all, there are no exceptions.

> "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

So to take up your cross daily is daily to take the road that leads to execution. I heard Charles Simpson say, "What is your cross? It's the place where your will and God's will cross. It's also the place appointed for you to die." So, every day expect to die. Paul said, "Behold, I die daily." Take up your cross, the place where your will and God's will cross, and be prepared to die to yourself. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me.

You cannot follow Jesus unless you first take up your cross. There is no way to do it. The first step is taking up your cross.

I've often observed in my own ministry that the time it suits me least is the time when God tends to bless most. When it's most inconvenient and I feel least like it and there are so many reasons why I might not do it, that's the time to do it. God will bless in a unique way. God cannot bless human flesh; it's corrupt. The flesh has to be put to death before God's blessings will come in our lives.

The cross is both the place of execution and also the place of liberation. It's the only way of escape from carnality and self-pleasing.

Then one other Scripture, Galatians 5:11:

> "But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished."

That's really right in line with what we were talking about, the appeal to human pride. You see, the cross cuts away the ground from all human pride; you've got nothing to boast of. See, that figure on the cross in shame and agony? He's paying your debt and you have no other claim on God. Paul said if I would only add something else, people wouldn't object. If I would just say, yes, Jesus died, but in order to be reconciled with God you have to believe in Him and be circumcised. He said my Jewish brothers wouldn't criticize me. The reason why I'm attacked is because I say nothing but the cross, there's no other way and nothing else is needed. The cross is unique, it's all-sufficient.

I really feel somehow as we come to the end of these studies that God somehow—to me at least—is emphasizing the uniqueness and the centrality of the cross. I think, in a way, that was probably the problem with these Hebrew Christians. They believed in Jesus, they believed in His crucifixion but they wanted something else as well. You see, God won't meet you on that basis. God says you only have one claim on My mercy, only one. It's the cross. If you add anything else it's no longer a stumbling block. But, on the other hand, its power has been taken away.

Let's go on, I think we can take at least one more verse—which we must do. That is verse 14.

Hebrews 13:14:

> "For we do not have here an abiding city, but we are seeking the one that is to come. That, of course, takes us back for a quick glimpse at Abraham in Hebrews 11:9–10."

By faith he [that is, Abraham] lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

What the writer of Hebrews is saying is if you're at home in this world, then you're not looking for a home in another world. Abraham's testimony and the testimony of Isaac and Jacob was that was not their permanent resting place, they didn't build houses, they only pitched tents. They always said they were aliens, they were strangers. That word is continually used in the book of Genesis of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. The word "a sojourner," one who is just there but not permanently.

I think we could also look at the next two verses. This is the twelfth "let us" passage. That's verses 15 and 16. Have you noticed the succession of therefore's and so then's? Almost every sentence begins with a therefore or so then or something like that.

> "Through him therefore, let us offer a sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess His name. But doing good and sharing do not forget [do not overlook], for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

There we have three sacrifices that we are required to offer as Christians. They're not physical sacrifices, they're not animals. What are the three sacrifices? First of all, praise. Second, doing good. And third, sharing with others who need what we have. I'd just like to look at my outline.

The first one, praise. We praise God because He is worthy, even when we do not feel like it. It's very important to understand praise should not originate from your feelings but from your convictions. Look quickly for a moment at Psalm 100:4–5. It's talking about approach to God.

Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name. We are required to come to God with thanksgiving and praise. Those are the sacrifices that admit us to His presence. Now notice the reasons in verse 5:

> "For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness to all generations."

Three reasons for praising the Lord that don't depend the least bit on our feelings or circumstances. Whatever we feel like, whatever our circumstances may be, it still remains true; the Lord is good, His lovingkindness is everlasting, His faithfulness to all generations. If we really believe that, we will praise. Praise is a sacrifice that costs you something. The more it costs you, I think, the more God appreciates it.

Let's look also at the passage quoted by the writer of Hebrews that's found in Isaiah 57:18–19. This is speaking about the restoration of Jacob, that is, of his descendants Israel. It speaks about Jacob as one who has forsaken God and gone his own way and turned away from God but is to be healed and reconciled. This is what the Lord says:

> "I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and

> to his mourners, creating the praise of the lips."

That's the translation but I prefer the literal version, which is "the fruit of the lips," which is what the writer of Hebrews says.

> "'...creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near,' says the LORD, 'and I will heal him.'"

So when God heals us, restores us to His favor, He creates fruit for our lips which is confessing His name. I think it's very important that we learn to confess the name of Jesus. When we pray, assert that Jesus Christ is Lord, assert He's king of kings, He's my Lord. The more you magnify and confess to His name, the freer access you have to His presence.

Then let us just look quickly at the other two sacrifices. Doing good. Let's compare Galatians 6:9–10: Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. Bear in mind you can do good and not reap if you grow weary. So, you have to hold on. Otherwise, you can lose the harvest that you would have gathered.

> "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

That's the second sacrifice, it's doing good.

The third one is sharing, we'll look briefly in Romans 12:8–10. Romans 12:6–8 lists eight different charismatic gifts. You can look at the list for yourself. In the middle of verse 8 it says:

> "... he who gives, [let him do it] with liberality..."

Or generosity. The word translated "gives" means literally shares. And again, in verse 13 of Romans

12:

> "... contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."

Those are the three sacrifices that are appropriate at all times in this age for Christians: praise, doing good and sharing.

We'll go on now in natural order to verse 17. I'll translate it first.

> "Obey your leaders [or those who lead you], and yield [or submit]; for they themselves spend sleepless nights [or stay awake or watch] on behalf of your souls, as those who will give account [for your souls]. That they may do this with joy and not groaning [or grieving], for that is unprofitable for you."

Before we comment on that at any length, let me just ask you a personal question. Do you have those who watch for your soul? Or are you a soul that has no watchman? It's really an important provision of God for most Christians—there are some Christians who lead lives who are in positions where that's not possible. But for the majority of Christians I think it's very important that you have those who watch for your souls and if you know who they are and they know who you are because you really can't give an account for somebody if you don't know that you're responsible for them. There's a two-way responsibility for the one who watches and for the one who is watched.

I tell you, if there are those that are capable and willing to watch for your soul, you'll be very foolish if you don't avail yourself of them.

This verse states two further requirements in relating to leaders. We've already had one previous verse, verse 7, which dealt with that theme. Let's look back for a moment at verse 7.

> "Remember those who lead you, who spoke the word of God to you; considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever."

So, if you put together these two verses, verse 7 and verse 17, first of all we notice something which is almost universal in the New Testament, the description of church life, which is that the leaders are plural. I would challenge you to find a single place in the New Testament where it speaks of the leader of the church. I'm not saying it can't be done, but I guarantee most of you couldn't find it.

I happen to be doing a different outline which relates to this theme and I just wrote down from memory all the passages I could think of in which the leaders of the church, the local church, are referred to in the plural. I came up with 21. I doubt whether you can find one that uses the singular. It's not my purpose to dwell on this, but it brings out a very important principle that the human leadership of a local congregation, in the New Testament, is normally corporate. It is not singular. There is singular leadership but it's in the unseen realm, it's Jesus. He is the Head, but under Him in most of the churches, which are pictured in the New Testament, there is a plurality of human under-shepherds. If you're interested, check on that for yourself. If you have a concordance or a Bible with marginal references and a little time to spare, you can find it out for yourself.

Now, going on with my outline. Taken together, Hebrews 13:7 and 13:17 reveal five marks of the kind of spiritual leaders to whom we should submit. This is extremely important.

Number one, they speak God's Word to us.

Number two, they set an example of faith which is to be imitated. Please note, not an example of unbelief.

Three, taken from verse 8, their lives point us to the unchanging Christ.

Four, they keep watch for our souls.

And five, they are accountable to God for us. The language indicates that they take this responsibility very seriously.

I passed a Methodist church building somewhere in the Carolinas some time ago, which was a very large building. A person who knew the church and its people told me that it was built in a rather unusual way. The pastor—and it was "the" pastor—never went anywhere or saw anyone before 10 o'clock in the morning unless it was a major emergency. He spent the first three hours of the day praying for the members of his congregation. And he had photographs of every member of the congregation. As he went through the photographs he prayed for people. I'm not suggesting everybody should do that, but it was obviously a man who took his responsibility seriously.

I want to suggest to you as I've said here, it's in our own best interest to submit to such leaders. If we have such leaders available to us, we should thank God for them every day because there are not too many like that in the world today.

But, and I want to emphasize this, Scripture does not require us to submit to religious leaders who lack these qualities. The Scripture is not so indiscreet as to say submit to your leaders in the church irregardless of who they are. Submit to your leaders if their leadership is along these lines.

Some years back I was involved in a situation in a camp meeting where there was a tremendous move of God amongst the young people, teenagers and thereabout. God touched many of them, marvelously saved them, delivered them from drugs, filled them with the Holy Spirit. Then they went back to (quote) their "church" and the pastor of the church—if I gave you his title you'd know what kind of a church it was—just turned thumbs down on the whole thing, poured cold water on them and did everything he could to undo the work that God had done. Then people said, "Well, they have to obey their leader." I said, "Oh, no. They have to obey a leader who fulfills the scriptural qualifications." One who sets an example of faith, not unbelief. One who points them to the unchanging Christ, one who truly cares for their souls and so on. I want you to see how very circumspect the Word of God is. It does not place an unreasonable burden of obedience on Christians to leaders who are false shepherds. But where there are true leaders, then the Scripture places a real serious responsibility upon us.

Let's go on now to verses 18 and 19.

> "Pray for us, for we trust [or we are persuaded] that we have a good conscience, desiring to live uprightly [or honorably perhaps] in all things. But I beseech you all the more to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner."

We conclude from this and some other passages that this letter was probably written while the man who wrote it was in prison for the gospel. Quite a number of New Testament letters were written from prison. That is, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Philemon, Hebrews. So, it isn't always a disgrace to be in prison; it depends what you're in prison for.

The writer is asking for prayer for himself as a spiritual leader. He says, "Pray for us because we trust that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things." Notice that he says one reason for praying for us is that we have a good conscience. Again, I think we need to be discriminating in the people we pray for. The primary object of prayer for Christians was, first of all, the government under which they lived. And second, the

ministers of the gospel. Prayer for the sick and for other people came lower down the list—not that it hasn't a place. But you know, you can only do so much praying. Any of us is limited by physical limitations and limitations of time.

I recommend to you that you pour your prayer into a good channel. I'm sure many of you have members of your family that are a heartache and a problem and you pray for them. That's right. But don't spend all your time praying for problem people because it's really like trying to pour a large quantity of fluid down a small pipe. Most of it gets spilled. What the writer is saying is of himself, "We are a good pipe, we can take a lot. We're leading the kind of life which will enable us to receive all the prayer you give us. It won't be wasted, it won't be spilled." I think sometimes if you're sensitive when you pray, when you pray for somebody you'll know whether they're a good receiver of prayer or not. There are some members of my family—I'm certainly not going to specify them—they're really good receivers of prayer. Whenever we pray for them, something happens. Others you kind of have to force the prayer on. Some of you are smiling, you've got a kind of feeling you might have a similar case. I trust you aren't a similar case!

I think this is an important principle. Being a minister of the gospel, I'm aware of how much prayer we need. When I was a younger minister and more conceited in those days, if I was successful I used to think, "Now I'm really getting there!" When I have success now I think, "I wonder who was praying for me." I have come to learn that our success is very directly in proportion to the prayer that supports it. And so, for those of you who are not in ministry, (quote) "in ministry," I want to suggest to you that this is a very good prayer investment. It's to pray for ministers who are leading upright, honorable lives, who are channels of prayer that can receive all the prayer you pour into them. And that channel will direct the prayer where it will bring forth fruit in the kingdom of God.

Just taking the example of Paul, he almost always asked the people that he wrote to to pray for him. I am happy to say in our newsletters, Ruth and I almost always do the same. Sometimes I think, "Am I overdoing it?" Then I think, "No, it's what needs to be said."

Turn for a moment to Ephesians 6:18–19.

> "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints..."

We are to pray for all the saints. No saint has to be left out. But he goes on specifically:

> "... and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel..."

Notice there, he particularly asks for two things. For utterance, for the ability to say what he knows needs to be said. And for boldness.

Now let's turn to Colossians 4:2–4.

> "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it [or staying awake in it] with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak."

Notice, his prayer request there is slightly different; he prays for the opening of a door. He prays not so much for boldness as for clarity. I can really identify with that prayer request because if I have one ambition it's to be able to make the message of the Word of God clear. If I were to choose one word that represents my personal ambition, that would be it.

I just had news the other day which I'll share with you. Many of you know my radio broadcast Today With Derek Prince is already being heard in China, but it is being translated into Chinese to be voiced and broadcast to the whole of Communist China in Chinese. Well, it appears that if you ever minister in China and you're not Chinese, you have to take a Chinese name. There is no other way you can get there. My Chinese name has been allotted to me. I didn't have any choice but if I'd had a choice I couldn't have chosen better. I'm not good at pronouncing Chinese but in Chinese it's apparently Ye-Gwang Ming. And you ask what Ye-Gwang Ming means, it means "clear light." So that's my name in Chinese. If I ever go to China they won't say, "Here's Derek Prince," they'll say, "Here's Ye Gwang Ming."

I really could not by any means have thought of a name that better described what I hoped my broadcast will be to the Chinese.

We'll look also at just one other passage there in 1 Thessalonians 5:25. This is a very short one. Brethren, pray for us.

He was probably running out of ink or something at that point! But he still didn't want to leave it out.

I comment there and we'll pass on with this comment. Prayer for the servants of the gospel is both a duty and a privilege of members of Christ's body, particularly in times of special need. As, for instance, in Paul's case when he was imprisoned.

Now we're going to make a little summary at this point which will go back to verse 1 and continue through verse 19. Note the main aspects of Christian living emphasized. We'll see that there are fourteen practical instructions based on the spiritual truths that have been unfolded. Nearly all New Testament letters go that way, they unfold spiritual truth, then at the close they give practical ways in which that truth should be worked out in our lives. If you study most epistles, that's how they are. I think it's important to understand the truth of the Word of God is never intended merely to be theory or theology. Personally, I have great reservations about theology, to be honest, because so often it remains in the realm of classroom teaching and abstract theory. I don't believe that there's anything in the Bible to justify that. All truth in the Bible, in some way or other, should reflect the way we live.

We'll look now through these fourteen practical instructions based on the revelation of Hebrews which is the revelation of Jesus Christ as our high priest and all that's related to that. The first, right at the bottom of Page 13/3, in one simple, important word is love. Remember, without love everything else is empty.

Two, hospitality.

Three, identifying with prisoners and those who are persecuted.

Four, observing the sanctity of marriage and sexual purity.

Five, a right attitude toward money and freedom from covetousness.

Six, confidence in the Lord's all-sufficiency.

Seven, a right attitude to God-given leaders stressed in two words: remember and imitate.

Eight, avoid strange new teachings that nullify God's grace. Let me say that I spent quite a while trying to find the right phrase to sum up this teaching.

Nine, make the flesh the servant of the Spirit, not vice versa.

Ten, expect to share the reproach of the cross.

Eleven, live as aliens in this world looking for a city not yet manifested.

Twelve, offer the three sacrifices of praise, sharing and doing good.

Thirteen, again, right attitude to leaders summed up in the two words: obey and submit. Notice: obey is outward action, submit is inner attitude. Some people obey without submission. That was the elder brother in the story of the prodigal. He obeyed but he was never submitted. See? It all came out when he got jealous of his brother. And it is possible to be submitted but to say on grounds of conscience, "I cannot obey."

And fourteen, pray for the servants of the gospel.

Now, this is going to be a little personal application. I'm going to read them through again without pausing to comment. I would invite each one of you to check—inwardly check. You can check your outline later. In fact, it might be a good thing if you went home and placed a check against the outline for everything you can say, "Yes, I'm doing that." If there are any gaps, then you need to find out why. As I read them out, don't look at me, don't look at your neighbor; just look inwardly at yourself for a moment.

Number one, love.

Number two, hospitality.

Number three, identifying with prisoners and those who are persecuted.

Number four, sanctity of marriage and sexual purity.

Number five, a right attitude to money and freedom from covetousness.

Number six, confidence in the Lord's all-sufficiency. How many of you can put a check next to that?

I shouldn't have asked, forgive me.

Number seven, a right attitude to God-given leaders. Remember and imitate.

Number eight, avoid strange new teachings that nullify God's grace.

Number nine, make the flesh the servant of the Spirit, not vice versa.

Number ten, expect to share the reproach of the cross.

Number eleven, live as aliens in this world looking for a city not yet manifested.

Number twelve, offer the three sacrifices of praise, sharing and doing good.

Number thirteen, a right attitude to leaders. Obey and submit.

Number fourteen, pray for the servants of the gospel.

Now we come to the closing benediction which is a most beautiful benediction. Verses 20 and 21.

> "May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead [or brought back from the dead] the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant [or by the blood of the eternal covenant], that is, our Lord Jesus, may He equip you in everything good to do His will, working in you that which is pleasing before Him [or in His sight], through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for the ages of the ages."

There's at least three different phrases in Greek that can be translated "forever." I'd like to just show you because each one goes further than the one before. There's one which is "for the age." That means as long as this age lasts. There's one "for the age of the ages." That's an age which is made up of ages as an age is made up of years. Understand, if your mind can grasp that. But this is the furthest, this is "for the ages of the ages." It's absolutely impossible for the human mind to comprehend what's included in that phrase. When I read it, I feel good, I feel my future is taken care of for as long as I can possibly measure.

Let's go back and look at the outline on that benediction. First of all, let me read what I have there. The God of peace offers us the peace of God. Let's look at the Scriptures there. First of all, Romans 15:33.

> "Now the God of peace be with you all."

Notice He is the God of peace and apart from Him there is no peace. James tells us every good and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights. One of those good and perfect gifts is peace. There is no other ultimate source of peace except God Himself. He is the God of peace.

Then we look a little further on in Romans 16:20 which is a remarkable statement. And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

Notice He offers peace to His people; He makes no peace for Satan. Satan has no opportunity for peace. It's an interesting statement, let me just comment. Remember, this epistle was written to the Christians in Rome, the heart of the Roman Empire, about the middle of the first century or a little later. Within less than three centuries they had crushed Satan in the Roman Empire, they had become the ruling power in the Roman Empire. A tremendous miracle of history if you pause to consider what was involved. A little persecuted handful of despised people who believed in a Jewish carpenter who died on a Roman gibbet took over the Roman Empire. It's a tremendous example of the supremacy of spiritual power over material life.

We see the world today in many areas dominated by tremendously powerful and ruthless political forces. But ultimately the church of Jesus Christ is stronger than all of them. God's strength is made perfect in weakness. When the church became strong was when it lost its real strength.

Then Philippians 4:7.

> "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

So, from the God of peace comes the peace of God. That is God's protection for our hearts and minds. And we need to have them protected.

When you get sudden, unexpected bad news—which happens to most of us at some time or other— how do you respond? Does the peace of God guard your heart and mind in a moment like that? It's in moments like that we really know how much peace we have. None of us ever knows when we'll suddenly be confronted with something like that. Many of you can look back not many years—perhaps some of you can look back in 1983—some sudden tragedy, accident, bereavement. How did you respond? That's when you know how much faith you have. That's when you know how real God is to you.

You can observe religious people, they've got all the right language until a disaster happens. And then, so often they fall apart because their religion was mainly a matter of words, not of reality. We wouldn't be critical of somebody

who did fall apart, but there is a remedy, it's the peace of God that guards your heart.

Okay. We have to go on with this benediction. I'm going to read my outline. By raising Jesus from the dead God demonstrated two things: first, His power and faithfulness; second, the efficacy of the blood of Jesus, because it was through the blood of the everlasting covenant. The blood was the one token that Almighty God could not ignore, the shed blood of His Son.

Notice that Jesus is called the Great Shepherd of the sheep. The Great Shepherd. There are many shepherds but only one Great Shepherd. This leads us to a paradox which I'd like to direct your attention to for a moment. If you turn to John 10:7, this is the parable of the sheepfold.

Jesus therefore said to them again, "Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep." But in verse 11 He says:

> "I am the good shepherd ..."

That's a deliberate paradox. When you come across a paradox in the Scripture, you need to seek God because there's a reason for it. How can Jesus be both the door and the shepherd? Well, I'll tell you the answer. I'm sure it is the answer. Crucified, He's the door; resurrected, He's the shepherd. And you notice He's called "the shepherd" when He's resurrected from the dead. If you want the resurrected Jesus as your shepherd you have to enter the sheepfold by the door of the crucified Jesus. Jesus said in the parable, "If anybody climbs up some other way and doesn't come through the door, he's a thief and a robber." That's not talking about heaven, that's talking about the company of God's people on earth, the sheepfold. It is possible to get in by some other way but the one who does it is a thief and a robber. He's a thief because he's trying to appropriate the blessings to which he has no rights. Those who come through the door have the right to the inheritance.

Now, going on with this benediction, going back to Hebrews 13:20–21. I'll read from the New American Standard, it's too complicated to follow the outline in English and translate from the Greek at the same time. Verse 21 is what the resurrected Jesus will do for us.

> "... equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever."

Again let me turn to the outline. God is able to equip us completely but on four conditions, all of which are stated there. It's to do His will, not necessarily our will. It's to do what is pleasing to Him, not to please ourselves. It is through Jesus Christ—and there is no other way—that His blessing comes into our lives. And it's for His glory. When you're seeking God for His blessing in your life, for His equipment, for His provision; you need to check on whether you're meeting the stated conditions. Are you praying for something to do His will? Are you seeking to do what is pleasing to Him, not what is pleasing to you? Are you receiving the provision through Jesus Christ? And will it be for His glory that you use whatever is provided?

Then, as I said, forever and ever is unto the ages of the ages. We go back now to Hebrews 13:22.

> "I beg of you, brothers [I beseech you, I entreat you, or I urge you. But it's a word of entreaty really more than a word of command], put up with this word of exhortation ..."

Or entreaty, it's the same word again. Whatever word you use one place you need to use the other.

> "... I entreat you, brothers, put up with this word of entreaty, after all I've written to you only briefly."

I've commented on that before. Thirteen chapters is a brief letter by an apostolic standard, you understand. My comment: New Testament apostles pleaded more often than they commanded. By their standards, Hebrews was a brief letter.

I think it's very important to understand that apostles don't walk around giving everybody orders. They have the authority but that's now how they use it. I'm always impressed by the fact that when Paul landed on the island of Malta after the shipwreck and they all needed fuel to make a fire, Paul was one of those gathering fuel. So typical. He didn't stand back and say, "You fellows do it, I'm an apostle." He was out there gathering fuel.

Somebody said once, a minister, a friend of mine who'd been brought up in what's called the Apostolic Church of Wales—you're probably not familiar with it much in this country. It emphasizes apostles and prophets and every church has to have its apostle and prophet. Like many young people growing up in a rather legalistic religious

atmosphere he became a rebel. Then he came back to God and his comment was this. He said, "One day I realized that apostles were not people on top of us keeping us down, they were people in the foundation holding us up." See, the lowest level of the New Jerusalem is the apostles. It's very, very important because I believe we're going to see more and more real apostolic ministry on earth. It's very important that it be linked with real humility.

Then verses 23 and 24 are personal news and greetings. Verse 23:

> "You know that [or accept the news that] our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. [verse 24:] Greet all your leaders and all the saints."

Notice leaders are plural again.

Those who are from Italy greet you.

New Testament letters were never mere abstract theology but always related to the real lives of real people. Turn for a moment to Romans 16 and just look at the list of greetings at the end of that letter. Romans 16 is the doctrinal or theological exposition of the gospel. Notice that it ends with a chapter almost totally given over to people. We don't have time to read it all but I'll just read the beginning. Beginning at:

[Verse 1:] I commend to you our sister Phoebe

[Verse 3:] Greet Prisca and Aquila

[Verse 5:] Greet Epaenetus [Verse 6:] Greet Mary

[Verse 7:] Greet Andronicus and Junias

[Verse 8:] Greet Ampliatus

[Verse 9:] Greet Urbanus and Stachys

[Verse 10:] Greet Apelles and the household of Aristobulus

[Verse 11:] Greet Herodion and the household of Narcissus

[Verse 12:] Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa [ladies], Persis [also a lady]

[Verse 13:] Greet Rufus

[Verse 14:] Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.

You might say that an apostle was wasting a lot of space on just names in a way, wouldn't you?

[Verse 15:] Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas

[Verse 16:] Greet one another with a holy kiss.

I counted this evening in those verses there are 29 persons individually specified to be greeted. That's a very vivid demonstration of how personal God's concern is for all of us. We're not just numbers. When I was inducted into the British Army I lost my name and I became a number. As long as I live I will never forget my number. 7385778. They took away my distinctive personal clothing and clad me in a uniform. It was very symbolic. I really, in a way, was deprived of my identity. God doesn't give you a number and He doesn't give you a uniform. You are a person to God and to the true servants of God.

Then if you look in Romans 16:21–23, all the greetings from the people with Paul. Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius, Gaius, Erastus, Quartus, the brother. I heard somebody once say that as a young minister he'd been so ambitious to be something important in his denomination. As he moved on in life he thought the best thing he could ever be was a brother. If you count there, there are eight persons who send greetings. So you put it together, there are 37 persons mentioned individually in that chapter. That's no accident.

We move on to the last verse, can you believe it! Hebrews 13:25, a very short verse. Grace be with you all.

A very appropriate close because that final salutation sums up the letter's theme. Grace, not mere law or religion. And as I close this whole series let me just remind you what I said right at the beginning, what kind of people the Hebrew Christians were. They were people who had a background in the faith, a knowledge of God, an awareness of spiritual things, a knowledge of God's standards. All the Scriptures were available to them. The problem was they had it all. I suggested that the boot today is on the other foot. It's professing Christians who are in that position. The problem of the Hebrews was negligence, not availing themselves of all the spiritual blessings that God offered them and God provided for them. I suggest the corresponding problem is the main problem of the church, especially in America. It's not really being totally committed, being totally in earnest and availing yourself of all that God offers you.

The Hebrew Christians tended to be this way. They had knowledge, religion, ritual but not living faith. And for living faith there is no substitute. It's no accident that the great

faith chapter, Hebrews 11, was written to them. I suggest to you that multitudes of church-going Christians in this nation and the Western world are very much in the same situation. Knowledge, religion, ritual but where is the living faith?

I would like to close this series—which has been a real test of endurance for all of us, but a good one. I'd like to close it by praying for all who have heard these messages or will hear these messages because they are on tape and they will ultimately go out probably right across the world. Some of you know we are working on a new outreach of our ministry to make this teaching material available free of charge to the Third World, to suitable Christian leaders and chosen people. So who knows where these teachings will end. They may end up at the equator, they may end up in Alaska, who knows?

Let's pray together for ourselves who have heard this message and for all who will hear. "Heavenly Father, we want to thank You as we close this long series of studies in Hebrews for all the spiritual riches, the riches of truth, grace and faith that You've made available to us. Lord, I pray for myself first and then for all who have heard this teaching or will hear it that they will not receive the grace of God in vain, but that this word will take deep root in their hearts, penetrate deeply to every area: spirit, soul and body. Do what needs to be done in every life. Not return to You void but accomplish Your pleasure and prosper in the thing to which You sent it. Let it revolutionize men and women all around the world and bring their lives into conformity with Your highest will for them. And for all the good that's accomplished Lord, we will be careful to give You the glory in the name of Jesus. Amen."

The Lord bless you. If I don't see you now I'll see you in the millennium.

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Sermon

Transcript: MA-1123-100-ENG
Last Updated: 16 Sept 2026
Website: Derekprince.com/en/resources



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