

Keep Loving Each Other



SABBATH—MARCH 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Hebrews 13:1, 2; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:4, 5; Luke 16:10–18; Hebrews 13:7–17; Hebrews 13:10–14; Mark 8:34.

MEMORY VERSE: “Keep on loving your Christian brothers” (Hebrews 13:1, WE).



Paul asks his readers to show their love by praying for him (Hebrews 13:18, 19).

ALL THROUGH HEBREWS, Paul says we belong to the family of Jesus. Jesus is our Older Brother. He also is our High Priest, or Top Spiritual Leader. He is our King, too. As our Priest-King, “Jesus makes men holy. He takes away their sins. Both Jesus and the ones being made holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them His brothers” (Hebrews 2:11, NLV). The work of Jesus shows us He loves us the same as an Older Brother. Because of His love, we should love each other. We also should do for each other what Jesus did for us. That is why Paul says to us: “Keep on loving your Christian brothers” (Hebrews 13:1, WE).

How do we show this love? Paul tells us: “Encourage each other every day, while you still have . . . ‘today.’ Help each other so that none of you will be fooled by sin and become too hard to change” (Hebrews 3:13, ERV; Hebrews 10:24, 25; Hebrews 12:15–17). In Hebrews 13, Paul tells us more about this love. When we love as Jesus loved, we will: (1) help people (Hebrews 13:2); (2) visit prisoners and the suffering (Hebrews 13:3); (3) not be greedy (Hebrews 13:5, 6); and (4) obey our leaders (Hebrews 13:7–17). Finally, Paul asks his readers to show their love by praying for him (Hebrews 13:18, 19).

CARING FOR EACH OTHER (Hebrews 13:1, 2)

Read Hebrews 13:1, 2; Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; and 1 Peter 4:9. As these verses show, Christians should remember to welcome people into their homes. Why did Bible writers tell Christians to welcome people and strangers into their homes? How important was this special work during New Testament times?

In New Testament times, many Christians traveled from place to place to share the Good News. So, these Christians depended on other Christians and non-Christians for help. That is why Paul says, “Always remember to help people by welcoming them into your home” (Hebrews 13:2, ERV).

Paul wants his readers to welcome strangers, too. “Some people have done that and have helped angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2, ERV). For sure, Paul thinks about the visit of the three men to Abraham (Genesis 18:2–15). How do we welcome strangers and people into our homes? We share our belongings with them. We use our things to help the suffering. Jesus did the same thing when He lived on the earth (Hebrews 2:10–18).

What about prisoners? How do we show love to people who are in prison? Prisoners need our prayers, for sure. But they also need our support. When we take care of their needs, we show them that they are part of our family. When they suffer pain, we suffer with them. That is what Paul means when he says we should share their sufferings (Hebrews 10:32–34).

Paul also wants his readers to remember when they were in prison in the past. The Christians supported each other during this difficult experience: “People laughed at you and beat you. When others [Christians] suffered, you suffered with them” (Hebrews 10:33, NLV). The suffering Paul talks about in this verse helps us remember Moses. Moses “chose to suffer with God’s people instead of having fun doing sinful [wrong] things for awhile” (Hebrews 11:25, NLV). Finally, Paul talks about the best reason we have for showing love to prisoners: “Remember those [people] in prison. Think of them as if you were in prison with them. Remember those [people] who are suffering because of what others [people] have done to them. You may suffer in the same way” (Hebrews 13:3, NLV). We must do for prisoners the things we want people to do for us if we were in prison.

What can we, as a church, do to help prisoners?



Prisoners need our prayers, for sure. But they also need our support.

SEX SINS AND LOVE FOR MONEY (Hebrews 13:4, 5)

Read Hebrews 13:4, 5; Luke 16:10–18; 1 Corinthians 5:1; Ephesians 5:3–5; and Colossians 3:5. What two evil things do we read about in these verses?

Paul warns his readers against sex sins and love for money. These two sins destroy our love for each other. Both Christian writers and non-Christian writers saw a connection between sex sins and a greedy heart.

In Hebrews 13:4, 5, Paul says that Christians should honor marriage. We must not do anything to show that marriage is not important. We should not cheat on our husbands or wives. We should not get a divorce without having a good reason (compare with Matthew 19:9). Any sex we have outside of marriage is wrong (1 Corinthians 5:9–11; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:9, 10; Revelation 21:8; Revelation 22:15). Among the Greeks and Romans in New Testament times, the rules about sex were far different from the rules taught by the Bible. Roman men were allowed to cheat on their wives if they kept their cheating secret. Paul warns that God will judge cheaters. So, Christians should not follow Roman rules about marriage.

The love for money was another awful sin among Romans in the time of Paul. In another letter, Paul says that this love is the reason for all evil (1 Timothy 6:10).

So, how do Christians fight against this evil? Paul gives us the answer in several of his letters. First, Christians should “be happy” with the things they have (Hebrews 13:5, NIV; read also 2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:11, 12). Christians also must believe and trust this wonderful promise from God: “ ‘I will never be away from you. I will never leave you alone’ ” (Hebrews 13:5, WE). God gave this promise to His people many times in Bible history (Genesis 28:15; Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5; 1 Chronicles 28:20). God gives this promise to us today. We must answer this promise with the words from this song: “The LORD is with me, so I will not be afraid. No one on earth can do anything to harm me” (Psalm 118:6, ERV). The writer of Psalm 118 shows us his trust in God at a time when people hurt him and cause him to suffer deeply.

What can we do to protect ourselves against sex sins and the love for money?



Paul says that Christians should honor marriage.

REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS (Hebrews 13:7–17)

Read what Paul says in Hebrews 13:7–17 about leaders of our church. How should we feel about our leaders?

In Hebrews 13:7–17, Paul tells his readers to respect and obey the leaders of the church. Paul also invites his readers to “remember” their leaders (Hebrews 13:7, ERV). These leaders first preached Bible truth to the Christians. The leaders also started their local church. So, that is why Paul asks his readers to remember them. But the word “remember” shows us we must do more than think about the nice experiences we had in the past with our pastors. Paul explains that his readers should “remember” their leaders by copying their faith.

Paul believes that the best way you can remember someone is to copy his or her life. For Paul, the church leaders in the past also belong on his list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. As we saw, this list ends in chapter 12 with Jesus. Jesus is the best Example of faith. One reason why Jesus is the best Example is because Jesus never changes. He “is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, ERV). Jesus is completely different from the false teachers who change with time. These men teach “strange things” (Hebrews 13:9, WE). Their false teachings lead people “into the wrong way” (Hebrews 13:9, ERV).

At the end of Hebrews 13:7–17, Paul tells his readers to “obey” the church leaders they have now: “Do what they say. They keep watch over your souls. They have to tell God what they have done. They should have joy in this and not be sad” (Hebrews 13:17, NLV). The leaders are the pastors of the church. They must answer to God for the spiritual health and the growth of their church members (read also 1 Peter 5:1–4; 1 Corinthians 3:10–15).

Church leaders work for Jesus. Jesus is the “Good Shepherd of the sheep” (Hebrews 13:20, NLV). The leaders will feel joy when their members trust and obey them. The members will feel joy when their leaders show they care and are living examples of faith for the whole church. Then the leaders will serve the church members with joy. God will look at their work and feel joy, too.

What can you do to help leaders and members in your church trust each other? How also can we help our church leaders everywhere work together?



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BE CAREFUL OF STRANGE TEACHINGS (Hebrews 13:9)

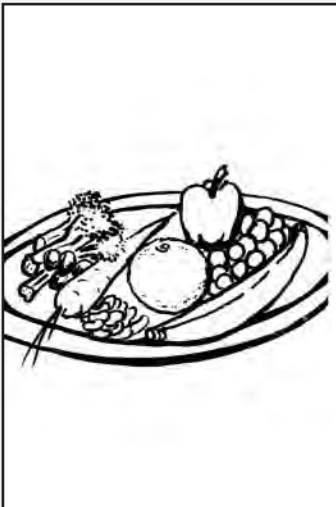
Compare Hebrews 13:9; Hebrews 2:9; Hebrews 4:16; and Hebrews 6:19, 20. In these verses, Paul talks about the mercy or loving-favor of God. How do we get this mercy from God? How are our hearts made strong?

Why does Paul scold his readers about food in Hebrews 13:9? Paul does not scold his readers for refusing to eat food that is not clean. We know from Acts 15 that the church in New Testament times said that Christians should continue to follow some of the food rules from the Old Testament (Acts 15:19, 20). So, why is Paul upset?

Paul warns his readers not to think that obeying food rules will earn them any special favor with God. Paul may be warning his readers against joining the Jewish religious feasts or meals. These meals were connected with the animal offerings in the Jewish temple. The Jews believed that joining these meals gave them special spiritual blessings from God. But Paul says that the favor of God does not come from eating these meals. The favor of God comes only by the offering and work of Jesus as our High Priest, or Top Spiritual Leader. “The priests, who are Levites, worship at the holy tent. But we have an altar that they have no right to eat from” (Hebrews 13:10, NIV). In this verse, the word “altar” shows us the offering of Jesus. Jesus gave His life to pay for our sins. The “altar” Jesus died on was the “cross.” This “altar” gives Christians the only “meal” they need to be saved: the Bread of Life, which is Jesus (John 6:47–58).

In Hebrews, the loving-favor of Jesus comes from the throne of God (Hebrews 4:16). Jesus gives us this favor. This favor gives us hope. This hope, as we saw, is the same as a “safe anchor” from a ship (Hebrews 6:19, 20; compare with Hebrews 4:16). This anchor gives us something to hold on to. When our hearts are made strong by holding on to this hope, we will not be led “in the wrong way” by strange teachings (Hebrews 13:9). Then “we will not be pulled away from the true [correct] way” (Hebrews 2:1, ERV).

Spend some time thinking about the offering of Jesus for you. This offering is complete and perfect. We can’t add anything to this offering to make it better. How does this idea help us see how wrong we are to try to earn praise from God with our good behavior?



Paul warns his readers not to think that obeying food rules will earn them any special favor with God.

GO TO JESUS OUTSIDE THE CAMP (Hebrews 13:10–14)

Compare Hebrews 13:10–14; Mark 8:34; Matthew 10:38; Luke 14:27; and Galatians 2:20. Paul says to go to Jesus outside the camp. What does this word picture show us?

The place outside the gate was the worst part of the whole Israelite camp. This place was very dirty. The skeletons of animal offerings were burned outside the camp (Leviticus 4:12). Lepers lived outside the camp, too (Leviticus 13:46). Lepers were people with an awful skin disease. The Israelites killed criminals outside the camp. People who insulted God were killed outside the camp, too. Read Leviticus 24:10–16, 23; 1 Kings 21:13; and Acts 7:58. The rules in these verses help us see that God lived inside the camp. God did not want any dirty thing inside (Numbers 5:3; Deuteronomy 23:14). So, the Jews threw outside anything that was dirty or not clean.

Jesus died on the cross outside of Jerusalem (John 19:17–20). The place of His death shows us the shame that Jesus accepted when He was nailed to the cross (Hebrews 12:2). The Jews said that Jesus should die because He insulted the name of God. So, the Jews rejected Jesus. They got Pilate to hang Jesus outside the city walls (Mark 14:63, 64; read Leviticus 24:11, 16). So, Jesus was sent to die outside the camp as something dirty and not clean.

Paul tells his readers to “go to Jesus outside the camp and accept the same shame that he had” (Hebrews 13:13, ERV; read also Hebrews 12:2.) This advice from Paul shows us where God is now: God is outside the camp. When we go to Jesus outside the camp, we accept His shame. We also join with Him (Hebrews 13:13). The story about the gold cow in Exodus 32 and 33 helps us understand this idea better. When the Israelites sinned against God with the gold cow, they rejected God. After they sinned, Moses put up “a tent a short way outside the camp. He called [named] it ‘the meeting tent.’ Anyone who wanted to ask something from the LORD would go [went] to the meeting tent outside the camp” (Exodus 33:7, ERV). In the same way, Paul invites Christians to go to Jesus outside the camp. Jesus will lead His people out of a dying city in search of “the city that will come” (Hebrews 13:14, WE; Hebrews 11:10, 16).

What does it mean to you to go to Jesus “outside the camp”? How do we join with Jesus to suffer His shame?

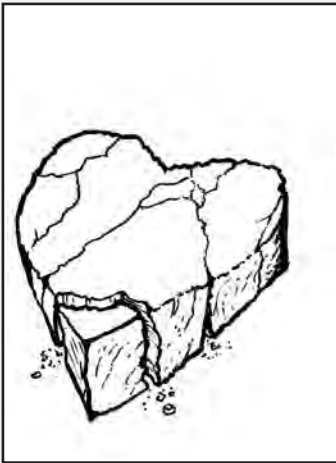


The place outside the gate was the worst part of the whole Israelite camp.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “God poured His Holy Spirit on His church. Then the followers of Jesus felt very close to each other. They were tender and kind to each other. They put God first in their lives. They were willing to give up anything for Bible truth. Daily, they showed each other the love that Jesus commanded them to show. . . .

“But slowly things changed. The Christians started to look for faults in each other. They looked at the mistakes other Christians made. They said mean and nasty things about each other. They forgot about the Savior and His love. Then His followers started to follow strict religious rules. They cared more about their ideas than about showing real faith. They were so excited to look for mistakes in other people. They failed to see their own mistakes. They stopped loving each other as brothers and sisters in Jesus. The Christians did not know they had lost Jesus or His love. The Christians shut the love of God out of their hearts. They did not see that they were losing happiness and joy. Their lives soon became dark.

“John saw what was happening in the church. So, he told the followers of Jesus that they needed the love of Jesus at all times. The letters John wrote to the church are full of this idea. ‘Dear friends,’ John wrote, ‘we should love each other, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has become God’s child. And so everyone who loves knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his only Son into the world [to all the people on the earth] to give us life through [by] him. True [real] love is God’s love for us, not our love for God. He sent his Son as the way to take away our sins. That is how much God loved us, dear friends! So we also must love each other.’ [1 John 4:7–11, ERV].”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages, 547, 548, adapted.



“The Christians shut the love of God out of their hearts.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Yes, God leads each one of us. But why do we need to remember that God leads us as a group? What do I owe the group? What may I expect from the group?
- ② In class, make a list of the things that show us that love is strong in our church.
- ③ How do we love the same as a brother? What causes this love? How does this love change lives for the better? How is this love different from false love?

GOD LOVES ME VERY MUCH!

God loves me very much!

I learn just how much God loves me when my friend moves to Australia from our home in Thailand. Thailand is a country in the southeast part of Asia. I agree to visit her parents here in Thailand. I have a hard time finding the house where her parents live. They live far away from me. I need a map to find the house when I go to visit them. For my first visit, I fill my backpack with groceries. Then I take a “tuk-tuk” to the bus station. A tuk-tuk is a special taxi with three wheels.

Halfway to the bus station, the tuk-tuk driver says, “I cannot take you to the bus station. Can I get you another tuk-tuk?” The driver does not explain why he cannot take me. What can I do? A second tuk-tuk picks me up. But the driver takes me to the wrong place. I get into a third tuk-tuk.

Two hours later, I finally reach the bus station. I am very mad when I get there. Why did it take two hours and three tuk-tuks to make the short trip to the bus station?

“Where are you going?” the ticket seller asks me.

I am so upset. I cannot talk to anyone.

“I will talk to you later,” I tell the ticket seller before I turn away.

After I calm down, I buy a ticket and get in a minivan with the other passengers.

Soon we are on our way. During the trip, we pass a crashed minivan on the side of the road. Our driver stops to see if he can help. When our driver comes back, he tells us that several passengers died in the crash.

“This minivan left just before we did,” our driver tells us.

In that instant, I understand that I should have been in that minivan. I was not a passenger in that minivan only because I had so many delays on the way to the bus station.

The parents of my friend are happy to see me. They heard about the crash. “We were so worried about you. We thought you were in that minivan,” the mother says.

“God is good,” I say. Then I tell my story to the parents, who are not Christian.

“The God or angel who protects you is mighty!” the father says.

For sure, God loves me a lot.

Saengsurin Phongchan was the principal at the Seventh-day Adventist school in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. Part of your 13th Sabbath Offering was given to this school three years ago. Your offering also helped build a new high school.

INSIDE Story

by SAENGSURIN PHONGCHAN



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have been in that minivan.**



