

Hebrews 13:20-25 "The Importance of Living a Dependent Life" **

Main Idea: We are called to live a dependent life. In a sentence, that's the message of Hebrews 13:20-25, where we're brought face to face with three needs. Dependent people recognize these needs and what God has done to meet these three needs.

I. The final benediction shows that we need the Lord (20-21).

- A. We need to remember who He is, namely the God of peace (20a).
- B. We need to remember what He did, namely raise Jesus from the dead (20b).
 - 1. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's eternal plan.
 - 2. Jesus is our Shepherd.
- C. We need to remember what He is doing (21a).
 - 1. He equips us with everything good.
 - 2. He equips us to do His will.
 - 3. He equips us so we can please Him.
- D. We need to remember what He deserves, namely glory (21b).

II. The final greeting shows that we need each other (22-24).

- A. We need to be exhorted (22).
 - 1. I need to be taught God's Word.
 - 2. I need to be challenged to apply what I learn.
- B. We need to be connected (23).
- C. We need to be greeting each other (24).
 - 1. This highlights the importance of the local church.
 - 2. This highlights the importance of the universal church.

III. The final verse shows that we need grace (25).

Response: In order to live a dependent life, we must daily do the following...

- 1. We must admit our need.
- 2. We must look to the Shepherd.

There's an eye-catching wall hanging in the café at Scioto Hills Camp. It consists of three words, "Declaration of Dependence." Steven Curtis Chapman sings a song by the same title. Listen to the lyrics...

*Now just the other day, I overheard a flower talking to the sky
He said, you know that I would be nothing without you,
He said, you give me rain, you give the sun a place to shine
You're everything that my whole existence comes down to,
And then the flower started singing a song
Before I knew it, I was singing along
And we sang*

*This is my declaration of dependence
This is my declaration of my need
This is my declaration of dependence
On the One who gave His life to me*

*Now, let me say that I'm the kind of guy who wants to do it all myself
Don't want to ask for help, don't like to stop for directions,
But in reality, I'm nothing on my own
It's by God's grace alone that I can make this confession
All that I am and all I'm hoping to be
Is all and only what He's given to me
So I say*

*This is my declaration of dependence
This is my declaration of my need
This is my declaration of dependence
On the one who gave His life to me*

*And I know this is how my life was meant to be
I was made for this dependency*

On the One who has created me
So I'll sing my declaration song
For the One I am depending on
And I hope you'll sing along

This is my declaration of dependence

This is my declaration of my need

This is my declaration of dependence

On the one who gave His life to me

Let's be honest. That's not natural. What's natural is to live an *independent*, "I can do it myself" kind of life. We're prone to be like the woman who started a new job in a textile mill, who on her first day at work she noticed a sign on the wall that read, "When your thread becomes tangled, call the foreman." It wasn't long before it happened. Her thread became tangled but she thought, "I'll just straighten this out myself." She tried, but the situation only worsened. Finally she called the foreman. "I did the best I could," she said. "No you didn't. To do the best, you should have called me."^[1]

This morning we've come to the final passage in the book of Hebrews. As we've seen for many months now, this amazing book highlights again and again the superiority and sufficiency of Jesus Christ *and* our desperate need for Him. He is the Creator; we are dependent creatures. He is the Savior; we are people who need to be saved. The fact is, as Christians, we are called to live a *dependent life*. In a sentence, that's the message of the final passage in the book, Hebrews 13:20-25, where once again we're brought face to face with our need, three needs to be precise. Dependent people recognize these three needs and what God has done to meet them.

I. The final benediction shows that we need the Lord (20-21).

Verses 20-21 "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

This final benediction in Hebrews pulls together some of the key themes we've seen throughout the letter. It mentions *the blood*, and *the covenant*, and emphasizes the *Lordship of Jesus*. And it's worth noting that we're also introduced here to some truths we have yet to see in Hebrews, such as Jesus being our *Shepherd*. And this is the only place in Hebrews where Jesus' resurrection is referred to specifically.^[2]

A benediction is an act or pronouncement of blessing. In a benediction the name of the infinite, all sufficient, unchanging God is placed upon His people.

For instance, listen to the Aaronic benediction in Numbers 6:24-26, "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."

Paul loved to use benedictions and doxologies to express what he was praying for people he loved. He told the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through

and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And in 2 Thessalonians 3:16, "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you."

What's the purpose of a benediction? It's quite simple. Benedictions express to the Lord what we need, and they also express what the Lord alone can provide. In so doing they emphasize our need to live a dependent life. The benediction before us in Hebrews serves to remind us of four things we need to remember about the Lord.

A. We need to remember who He is, namely the God of peace (20a). "May the God of peace," the writer begins. That's who God is, the One who is the source of peace. In the Bible peace is more than tranquility and the absence of turmoil. As the Hebrew readers well knew, peace is *shalom* (the Hebrew word translated "peace"). Peace has a positive connotation. Peace is wholeness. Peace is being right with God and others.

Romans 5:1 "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 2:14 "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."

Isn't it ironic that God is the source of that which people so desperately long for these days? Peace. World leaders search for peace. Frustrated spouses look for peace. Teens look for peace. But so often, they look in the wrong place. Peace, real peace, *shalom*, is available only from the God of peace.

Ponder this, my friend. Who is our God? He is the God of peace. Our God is One who delights in bringing wholeness to those who are shattered by sin. He offers peace that passes all understanding. He alone can give us peace with Himself, peace with others, and peace within ourselves.

B. We need to remember what He did, namely raise Jesus from the dead (20b). "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant *brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus*, that great Shepherd of the sheep..."

What did the God of peace do? He brought back Jesus from the dead. And He brought Him back from the dead "through the blood of the eternal covenant."

We've seen the theme of the "covenant" emphasized throughout the letter. Back in chapter eight we learned that the old covenant has been replaced by the new covenant. But will the new covenant ever be replaced? No, says the writer. The new covenant is the "eternal" covenant. It will continue forever and ever.

And how was this new and eternal covenant established? Once again the writer emphasizes it was "through blood." To bring us peace God sacrificed His own Son on the cross. The blood of Jesus was shed.

This was a fulfillment of Ezekiel's prediction in Ezekiel 37:26, "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever."

And through Jesus, that's what He did. Please realize that...

1. *Jesus is the fulfillment of God's eternal plan.* The Old Testament predicted what Messiah Jesus would do and the New Testament reveals that He did it. He established the eternal covenant by shedding His blood.

Which raises a critical question. How do we know that what Jesus did was enough? After all, a dead Savior can't bring us peace. How do we know that our Holy God was satisfied with His Son's blood sacrifice? We know it because of what He did three days later. He "brought back from the dead our Lord

Jesus." The price of our peace was His blood. The proof of our peace was His empty tomb. The resurrection.

Back in Hebrews 12:2 we were exhorted, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and *perfector* [finisher] of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and *sat down at the right hand* of the throne of God."

So yes, what Jesus did was enough! He is the fulfillment of God's eternal plan, the author and perfector, the *finisher*, of our faith. But that's not all, for in addition...

2. *Jesus is our Shepherd*. The writer refers to Him in verse 20 as "that great Shepherd of the sheep." It's interesting that Paul never refers to Jesus a Shepherd. Peter did (1 Pet. 2:25 & 5:4). John did in Revelation 7:17. Jesus referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10:11ff. That's significant, for in the Old Testament, the Lord God Himself (Yahweh) is declared to be the Shepherd (Ps. 23:1). The New Testament declares that Jesus is the Shepherd, indicating His deity.

Let that sink in. Jesus is not only the Lamb, but the Shepherd, too. He's the good shepherd, for the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). Beyond that, He's the *great* Shepherd. Why is He great? Because there's no one who compares with Him, for He did what no one else could ever do. He not only lay down His life but He took it up again. In fact, He lay down His life *intentionally* so that He might take it up again. Through His sacrifice, He established an eternal covenant, and as the Great Shepherd he cares for the needs of those He died to save.^[3]

Do you want security in your life? Then look to Jesus. Are you searching for confidence and stability? Then remember what God did for you. He raised Jesus from the dead.

My friend, ponder that accomplishment. If God could raise Jesus from the dead, don't you think He can take care of any other problem we might face in our lives? If death itself was no obstacle to Him, why would we ever doubt His ability to care for us in our present challenges?

C. We need to remember what He is doing (21a). "May the God of peace...equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ."

According to verse 21, God has a plan for His people. He didn't give His Son for us on a whim. He had a purpose on mind. And He's committed to seeing that purpose fulfilled in our lives.

What is that purpose? Verse 21 says it is to "equip" us [KJV, "make you perfect"]. That's a fascinating word in the NT—*katartidzo*. The Greeks used it to refer to setting a broken bone. In Hebrews 11:3 it's translated "formed" ["framed," KJV]. In Hebrews 10:5, it's "prepared." In Galatians 6:1, the word is "restore."

If you were to trace the verb through the NT you'd discover three things. First, we are commanded to be perfect (2 Cor. 13:11). Second, we are responsible to perfect others (1 Thes. 3:10). And third, God is the one who makes it possible!

God is in the mending business. That's how the word *katartidzo* is used in Matthew 4:21--for fishermen who "mended" their nets. Ripped nets are useless for fishing, aren't they? They're no good *until* they are what? Repaired. Mended.

That's what God does. He's in the repair business. His goal is to restore lives that have been ripped apart by sin. He redeems. He recreates. He renews (2 Cor. 5:17). He's the mender of broken things. He mends broken lives, broken families, even broken churches.

Raymond Brown observes, "There may be a hint here about the corporate difficulties within the local church. It had become torn and divided by strife; the limbs had been dislocated (12:13) and some were beginning to wonder whether they could ever be made whole again. The superb final prayer of this letter assures these believers that things can be different; the God of peace can mend that which is torn and repair that which is broken."^[4]

How does He do it? What tools does He use to equip us? By tracing this word in the New Testament we find the answer. He uses His Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17), prayer (1 Thes. 3:10), and the ministry of pastor-teachers in our lives (Eph. 4:11-12). He also uses Spirit-filled brothers and sisters to mend us when we get out of joint (Gal. 6:1). He even uses suffering to equip us (1 Pet. 5:10).^[5]

But for what? What purpose does God have in mind as He repairs our lives? Notice the three modifying phrases in verse 21: "with everything good," "for doing his will," and "pleasing to Him."

1. *He equips us with everything good.* Lit. "in every good thing." Not some, but every. He's given us everything we need.

2. *He equips us to do His will.* Not our will, but His. He is equipping us for the purpose of doing His will. Philippians 1:6 "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:13 "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

3. *He equips us so we can please Him.* Do you want to live a life that pleases God? God wants you to. And He's committed Himself to working in us so we will please Him.

That was Christ's ambition in life and if we are to be Christlike, it must be ours. Hear His testimony in John 8:29, "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." According to Hebrews 10:7 He also said, "I have come to do your will, O God."

That's God's agenda for us, that we do what pleases Him. I love the Puritan prayer that I found in *Valley of Vision* a few years ago: "Teach me that if I do not live a life that satisfies Thee, then I will not live a life that satisfies me." Aquinas put it this way, "This is the will of God that we should will what God wills; for otherwise we have no good will. But God's will is our good."^[6]

D. We need to remember what He deserves, namely glory (21b). The benediction concludes, "To whom be glory for ever and ever." To whom is "whom" referring here? Is it referring to the Father or to the Jesus Christ? Grammatically it could be either. I lean towards it referring to the person of Christ. Regardless, this is what our God deserves, namely *glory*. It's why He did what He did and is doing what He is doing, that we might bring glory to Him.

Amen. That's how the benediction concludes. Amen was a response word in the Old Testament as it was for the early church in the New Testament. By definition it means "so be it" or "it is true." It's a word we ought to use. In fact, when you hear a truth in a message or in a song that resonates with your soul, that would be a good time to use the word *amen*. If you believe it, say "Amen!"

We're a needy people, beloved. If this benediction teaches us anything, it's that. We need the Lord. Warren Wiersbe offers a helpful suggestion when he says, "What a difference it would make in our lives if we would turn Hebrews 13:20-21 into a personal prayer each day."^[7]

Right after the benediction comes a greeting. Typically, we tend to overlook such greetings in the Bible as filler. But there is no "filler" in God's Word. There's actually an important lesson here for us, another lesson about living a dependent life.

II. The final greeting shows that we need each other (22-24).

The writer highlights three interpersonal needs for us in verses 22-24.

A. We need to be exhorted (22). "Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter."

That's interesting. He says it's a "short" letter. At first, we might not consider a thirteen chapter letter

short, not when compared with other New Testament letters. But when you consider the subject matter, it is short. There's so much more that could be said about the unique person and work of Jesus the Messiah. Remember John's conclusion at the end of his gospel? He writes in John 21:25, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

He urges his readers to "bear with" what he's said. That's because he's had to tell them some things that were both mind-stretching and challenging. He refers to this letter as "my word of exhortation." We find a similar expression in Acts 13:15 where it refers to a homily or sermon. So Hebrews is like a written sermon.^[8] It takes about fifty minutes or so to read through Hebrews, a typical time period for a meaty sermon.

I learn a couple of practical lessons from this charge.

1. *I need to be taught God's Word.* Just like the Hebrews who first received this letter, I need to place myself under the teaching of the Word of God. I need to bear with the Word that I hear, even if it steps on my toes. But learning isn't enough.

2. *I need to be challenged to apply what I learn.* That's what "a word of exhortation" is. An exhortation is a challenge to do something, and Hebrews is full of that.

Hebrews is a book, not of talk, but of *action*. The author used a special type of Greek verb called the hortatory subjunctive thirteen times in this letter. In English we can spot them as the "let us" commands.

4:1 "Let us fear."

4:11 "Let us labor to enter that rest."

4:14 "Let us hold fast our profession."

4:16 "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace."

6:1 "Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity."

10:24 "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

13:15 "Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise."

Those are things we are to *do*. Can we do it? By God's strength, yes. Remember, God equips us with everything good so we can do His will. But since we're prone to be passive, or negligent, or fearful, or distracted, we need regularly to be exhorted to do the things that please the Lord.^[9]

That's why it concerns me as a pastor when I see folks missing the preaching of God's Word, and not just those who are missing church services but also those who consistently miss the ministry of the Word because they're preoccupied doing ministry. Yes, it's good to serve in the nursery, teach children's church, be servant of the day, and so on, and we certainly need folks to provide those important ministries in the church, *but...* We're in trouble if we go for a period of time and fail to place ourselves under the exhorting ministry of the Word of God as administered through gifted servants who know His Word and know us. We need to be exhorted.

B. We need to be connected (23). "I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you." Apparently, this is Timothy, Paul's associate mentioned in a host of Paul's epistles. His mention here indicates that both the writer and the recipients knew him. The writer wants his recipients to know Timothy has been "released," a term that can refer to leaving for a journey (such as in Acts 13:3 & 28:25), but here it most likely indicates that Timothy has been let out of prison.^[10] When he arrives, we're coming to see you.

That's more than mere sentiment. It's a reminder that we who know Christ are *connected*. We're a

body, and as parts of the body we need each other.

C. We need to be greeting each other (24). “Greet all your leaders and all God’s people. Those from Italy send you their greetings.” The instructions in verse 24 might indicate that the letter wasn’t initially sent to the whole church and specifically that the leaders weren’t the original recipients. That’s an interesting command, isn’t it? “Greet all your leaders.” Did you realize there are people who don’t speak to their church leaders? That’s a direct violation of this charge. Wiersbe is right, “Every Christian should be on speaking terms with his pastor.”^[11]

But not just with his pastor. “Greet all God’s people,” says our text. Greeting each other is a simple act, but think what it accomplishes. It brings us together. It’s a visible expression of the connection we have in Christ.

This is a very straightforward verse. At face value, it’s not hard to understand, yet if you think about it, you’ll notice it communicates two very important truths about the church.

1. *This highlights the importance of the local church.* He mentions “leaders” and then the rest of “God’s people.” That’s what local church is. Local churches are made up of leaders and members. Notice that these members knew who their leaders were. They had to know them or they couldn’t obey this command to greet them. If you are a follower of Christ, my friend, it’s vital that you belong to a local church, where you have placed yourself under God-ordained leadership and in connection with a biblically-structured membership. Again, you can’t greet your leaders if you haven’t placed yourself under leaders in a local church.

We’ll be starting our next New Members class soon. If you’re interested in learning more about church membership and baptism, I invite you to sign up and come.

2. *This highlights the importance of the universal church.* At the end of the verse, the writer mentions that “those from Italy” send their greetings. These are believers outside of the local church of the recipients. They live elsewhere, but they too are connected and send their greetings, for they are part of what theologians often call “the universal church,” that is, all who know Christ as their Savior.

The point again is, we’re needy people. The final greeting in Hebrews shows we need each other.

III. The final verse shows that we need grace (25).

Verse 25—“Grace be with you all.”

I should point out that nearly all of Paul’s letters end with this prayer as the final verse (interestingly Romans doesn’t end with it, but Paul does cite it earlier in 16:20), a fact that might point to Pauline authorship.

Certainly grace has been a significant theme in this letter and we’ve seen it throughout. In 2:9 we were told that Christ died “so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” In 4:16 he mentioned that when we pray we’re coming to “a throne of grace” where we can “find grace to help in our time of need.” In 10:29 he warned against insulting “the Spirit of grace,” and in 12:15 said, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God.” He exhorted us in 12:28, “Let us be thankful (lit. “let us have grace”).” In 13:9 he explained, “It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods.”

Though brief, the final verse sums up our dependency. The words, “Grace be with you all” remind us that we need grace. We need to live grace-focused lives, for when we do it prevents pride, promotes unity, and brings glory and attention to the Giver of the grace. But it’s not just that we need grace. This final verse emphasizes that we *have* it. In the person of Jesus Christ, we have God’s unmerited favor and help.

What a great theme with which to close the message of Hebrews! We’ve heard some frank warnings

and challenges, and we might be overwhelmed were it not for this. God's *grace* is with us. God has provided us with everything we need in order that we might be everything He desires of us.

As the final benediction shows, we need the Lord. As the final greeting shows, we need each other. And as the final verse shows, we need grace. Simply put, we need to be living a *dependent life*. So let's take it to heart...

Response: In order to live a dependent life, we must daily do the following...

1. *We must admit our need.* To be saved you must admit your need for Christ and the work He accomplished on the cross and in the tomb. He died in the place of sinners and conquered the grave to give sinners new and eternal life. Have you admitted your need for Him? And are you continuing to admit your need for Him? When you answered the call to become a Christian, you answered a call to live a dependent life.

2. *We must look to the Shepherd.* He is the great Shepherd of the sheep. It's through Him that we are equipped with everything good for doing the will of our Heavenly Father. But we must look to Him, moment by moment. Do you have needs today? Then I have good news for you. You have a Shepherd who invites you to bring those needs to Him in prayer. Yes, do it now, and reaffirm your commitment to live a dependent life.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Taken from sermonillustrations.com

[2] Observation by Leon Morris, p. 154.

[3] The shepherd provides for his sheep. He cares for them, feeds them, guides them, and even mends their wounds. And something else we tend to forget, as pointed out by Leon Morris, the shepherd has absolute authority over the flock. Leon Morris, p. 155.

[4] Raymond Brown, p. 269.

[5] Observation by Warren Wiersbe, p. 330.

[6] Aquinas, taken from Philip Hughes, p. 591.

[7] Warren Wiersbe, p. 330.

[8] Observation by Leon Morris, p. 156.

[9] A good example of a proper response to exhortation is seen in 1 Thes. 2:13.

[10] It's worth noting that Calvin sees here a clue as to the book's authorship. He writes, "If this Timothy is the noble companion of Paul (as I am inclined to think) it is probable that Luke or Clement is the writer of this epistle. Paul is more accustomed to call him his son, and further, what immediately follows, does not fit Paul...It is clear that the writer was free and able to do what he liked...All these points could suit either Luke or Clement after the death of Paul." John Calvin, p. 216.

[11] Warren Wiersbe, p. 329.