

Bear With this Word

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19 But I especially urge *you* to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

22 And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.

23 Know that *our* brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.

24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

25 Grace *be* with you all. Amen. (Heb. 13:18-25)

Few armies have been as disciplined and powerful as the Roman army. The secret of the Roman army was not superior weapons. It was the ruthless discipline and endurance of the soldiers. The secret behind that discipline and hardiness lay in the way they trained: Standards varied over time, but normally recruits were first required to complete 29.62 km with 20.5 kg in five summer hours, which was known as "the regular step" or "military pace". They then progressed to the "faster step" or "full pace" and were required to complete 35.544 km in five hours loaded with 20.5 kilograms. The typical conditioning regime also included gymnastics and swimming to build physical strength and fitness, daily weapons training, and punishments for poor performance – rations, beatings, or the worst – decimation. If a unit was to be punished, they would be divided into groups of ten, and then one of those groups chosen by lot. Out of that group of ten men, they would again draw lots, and the soldier who was chosen was to be clubbed to death by the other nine, who were then put on barley rations themselves. A ruthless, pitiless, merciless discipline within, made them a nearly unbeatable army without.

One of the ways of securing this unbending loyalty was something called the *sacramentum*. The *sacramentum* was an oath or vow that each soldier took. It made him 'given to the gods', so that his life was forfeit if he broke his promise. Soldiers pledged this oath of loyalty to the Senate, or to the Emperor, and it meant they were subject to harsher punishments and penalties than regular Roman citizens. He had put his life on deposit, dedicating himself wholly to the Roman people.

As Christianity spread through the Roman empire, before long, early Christian writers were calling baptism and the Lord's Supper *sacramentum* – sacraments. As the years went by, some began teaching that baptism and the Lord's Supper conveyed salvation. Believer typically avoid the terms sacraments because today it connotes the idea of receiving extra grace. But long before they gave the word that connotation, early Christians were comparing these two ceremonies to what Roman soldiers did. They were saying, in baptism a Christian makes a public vow or oath, to say, I am given to God. I am identified with Christ and with His church. I subject myself to greater scrutiny and greater discipline, because I have the privilege of belonging to Christ. I will not turn back, I will not draw back, because I am given to God.

It's fitting then that our last message in Hebrews should coincide with a baptism service, because if there is anything which the book of Hebrews has taught, it is be faithful to the finisher of the faith. Give yourself to Christ, draw near, and then hold fast. Hebrews could be called one long sacramentum: an argument to be given to Christ and not turn back.

As with most letters of the New Testament, the book's concluding matter is a mixture of personal requests, a last petition and a glorious promise. Here we'll see a summary of the book, and a promise as to how we can remain faithful to the finisher of the faith.

I. Concluding Requests

18 Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. 19 But I especially urge *you* to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

The writer firstly simply asks his readers to pray for him and his companions. Since they are not living deceptively or with hidden agendas, he feels free to ask for their prayers. Since they live honourably, and have a good conscience about their ministry, they simply say, pray for us. But of all requests, he asks they especially pray that he could be reunited with his readers. They knew him, he knew them, and he longed to be with them again.

23 Know that *our* brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. 24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

Here is one of the only clues in the book about who wrote it or who did not write it. He says that Timothy has been released from prison, and he will travel with Timothy to see these believers.

This is almost certainly the Timothy that Paul disciplined, travelled with, and even wrote letters to churches with. Four letters are signed “Paul and Timothy”, besides the two letters addressed to Timothy. The writer is a companion of Timothy, or part of the group that knew or associated with Timothy.

According to this text, Timothy was imprisoned. We don't know when, but it's never mentioned in Luke or any of Paul's epistles. But we do know that when Paul wrote his last letter, 2 Timothy, Timothy was not in prison, and Paul was. Paul was executed very shortly after that in the year 64.

Our best guess is that Timothy was imprisoned very shortly after Paul was executed, which is one of the strongest reasons for thinking that Paul did not write this book, but someone in that Pauline party did: Silas, Aristarchus, John Mark, Barnabas, Epaphroditus, Tychicus and Luke.

In verse 24, he states where he is writing from. 24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

He sends on greetings from those in Italy. Paul was imprisoned in Rome, Timothy was likely arrested there too, so this action is there. But at the end of his life in his Roman prison, Paul writes to Timothy and says that only one man is still with him: 11 Only Luke is with me. (2 Tim. 4:11)

Regardless of who it was, he makes one last petition.

II. Closing Petition

22 And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.

The word of exhortation here is the whole book of Hebrews. Since we've been studying Hebrews for over a year, we might not think of it as a few words. But it is 4987 words in the Greek, meaning you could read the whole book to a church in about 33 minutes. It's essentially one sermon, and he wants his readers to bear with this short sermon.

What does he mean by “bear with”? He means listen to the whole thing, tolerate it and accept it as valid. Take in this book of Hebrews. Receive it, believe it. What was this word? Like any sermon, it had three parts.

In the first 4 verses of Hebrews, he told us that God has spoken to the world in many ways. But the turning point in human history was when God spoke to us through His Son, who is fully and equally God, who is also the Creator and Sustainer of the world, and the Redeemer of God's people, and its

coming King. In other words, if you want to know God, and know what He says, and know what He wants, you must listen where He is speaking and has spoken. That place is a person, and that person is the Son. Jesus is God's Final Word.

The second part of the sermon was the longest. From 1:5 to 10:18 he showed why Jesus really is God's Final Word. He showed that Jesus is the fulfilment and completion of the true religion. He showed us that Jesus is a greater King than the angels. He showed us that Jesus is a greater prophet than Moses. He showed us that Jesus is a greater priest than Levi or Aaron, and has a final sacrifice, a new covenant and a heavenly tabernacle.

The third part of the sermon from 10:19 to the end of the book was exhorting everyone to trust in God's Final Word by faith. He exhorted his readers not to draw back to unbelief or the shadows of Judaism. Instead, we are to draw near to God in living faith in Jesus, and endure: hold fast the confession of our faith. We must believe God's final Word. We must copy the great cloud of witnesses, run with endurance, accepting God's training as part of the way we endure. We must give and receive encouragement from others, and let brotherly love continue. We must expect that if we embrace Jesus, we are embracing a pilgrim life in a pilgrim church.

Five times in the book, he exhorted us against the dangers of coming close to Jesus, but turning back, drifting from the Word, doubting the Word, being dull to the Word, despising the Word, and departing from the Word. He made it clear that there is no escape, no rest, no second salvation, no remaining sacrifice, and again, no escape for those who treat God's Final Word this way.

We must draw near, and then endure, faithful to the finish. How will we do this?

III. Comforting Promise

20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen. 25 Grace *be* with you all. Amen.

Verses 20 and 21 are among the most beautiful benedictions in all of Scripture. Here we have a prayer, a prayed blessing, which is also a promise of how God will keep us faithful.

Verse 21 is a simple summary of the book--enduring to the end: make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight,

Good works, doing God's will, doing what is pleasing to Him is a Christian life of faith and obedience. It's drawing near and holding fast. How will this happen? Here is what every baptismal candidate, and every believer listening to this can remember. You can remain faithful to the finish because of what each person of the Trinity will do.

First, God the Father will provide all you need to finish.

Here the Father is called the God of peace, the one who raised Jesus from the dead. This Father, like any good father will provide what His children need. What will He provide?

The text says that He will make you complete in every good work. The phrase make you complete translates one Greek word which means to equip, to finish, to complete. The Father will give you what you need to stay faithful. What sort of things will He provide?

He provides His Word, and He will provide you with the Spirit to teach you. He provides you with a sound local church to explain that Word. He makes sure that you know what is pleasing in His

sight, what is every good work. No Christian lacks what he needs to live a God-pleasing life. God the Father is not a delinquent, irresponsible father. If it is necessary for your godliness, the Father has provided it. **2 Peter 1:3** as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,
(2 Pet. 1:3)

Second, God the Son will pastor you to finish. Verse 21 tells us that God the Father will equip us, *through* Jesus Christ. Here Jesus is called the Great Shepherd of the sheep. The word for shepherd and for pastor are the same words. Jesus is the Great Pastor of the Sheep. What do shepherds do? Shepherds also provide, The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; (Ps. 23:1-2)
Shepherds guide. They lead and give direction. He leads me beside the still waters...He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (Ps. 23:2-4)

God the Son is the good shepherd, the chief shepherd and the great shepherd. When you think of different pastors, you notice how one is very strong in one area, and not so much in another. One is an exceptional preacher. Another is just an incredible counselor. Another is an amazing exhorter. Another is an unbelievable leader. But you never get it all in one package. When the man has strengths in one area, it is obvious he is weak in others. And sometimes you might wish you could combine the preaching of that pastor, with the visitation of that pastor, with the counseling of that pastor and make one super-pastor. Well, you can. His name is Jesus. He is the Great Pastor, the one who is the ultimate preacher, leader, encourager, counselor, all in one, with none of the flaws.

God the Son will use His Word and His Spirit in His church to provide, protect, guide, comfort, and enable you to finish the race. He won't let you wander off a cliff of destruction, or allow you to be savaged by wolves of false doctrine and apostasy.

God the Spirit will empower you to the finish. As often happens in the New Testament, the Father and Son are named, but the Spirit is implied. He is implied in those words, "working in you what is well pleasing in His sight," The Spirit of God dwells within you, prompting you to please God, convicting you to avoid wrong or confess wrong. He works in you to illuminate the Scriptures, remind you of the promises, warn you of evil. Philippians 2:13 tells us that He works in us in two ways: for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. (Phil. 2:13)

He gives you desires to please God and ability to please God. He gives you the motive and the means. Ever He is at work in you, forming Christ in you, cleaning out the old.

We baptise in the name of the Father, who will provide what you need to finish, and of the Son, who will pastor you to the finish, and of the Holy Spirit will give you the power to finish.

And if we have any doubt that this will take place, the writer reminds us that God brought up Jesus from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant, how much more can he bring you up out of your sin and old way of living. It's all grace, your and my part is faith.

We used to sing a song when I was a boy, and the song came from India. A man named Nokseng, along with his family heard a missionary preach, and chose to believe and follow Christ. The chief of the village called on him to renounce his faith, but Nokseng replied, "I have decided to follow Jesus". His two children were then killed in front of him, and his wife was threatened. He responded, "Though no one join me, still I will follow." His wife was killed, and as they came to execute him, he was singing "The world behind me, the cross before me." Supposedly, this led to

the conversion of the chief, and became the lyrics of that song, I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back. Though no one join me, still I will follow, no turning back. The world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back, no turning back.

I pray that will be the attitude of the three being baptised today, and of all of us who have taken in the message of Hebrews. That we would say, Jesus is God's Final Word, the Finisher of the Faith, so to whom else can we go?