

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 4 September 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Paul's Last Words (Part 1)

Hebrews 13:18-21

The last words that a person has to say often reveal what is on that person's mind in a powerful way. For instance, when a person writes a book, he usually restates the whole purpose of his book in the last few paragraphs. If you want to get the "feel" for what a book is all about without actually *reading* the book, you can just flip to the last page, and read the last words of the book.

Last words reveal more than just thoughts, though. They often reveal a person's *heart*. Even in a personal letter, the last words of the letter often reveal that person's heart toward the person to whom he is writing. When it comes time for someone to say his *truly* last words (before he departs this life), the words that are spoken are often words of confession, or forgiveness, or pleading, or other matters that had long been hidden in that person's heart. Martyrs who die for the name of Christ often reveal, in their last words, their love for Christ, and their confidence that Christ is with them to the end. For example, in the year 1525, a German monk named **Michael Sattler** turned from Catholicism, and placed his faith in Christ; and he soon became a powerful Baptist pastor, winning many people to Christ. For this "crime," he was burned at the stake by the Catholic Church in Rottenburg, Germany, on 20 May 1527. As a "warmer-upper" for his execution, they cut out a piece of his tongue, and ripped off many pieces of his flesh with red-hot tongs. As they were lighting the fire, Sattler prayed aloud:

"Almighty, eternal God, Thou art the Way and the Truth: because I have not been shown to be in error, I will, with Thy help to this day, testify to the truth, and seal it with my blood."

As Sattler was burning alive, he raised his two forefingers as a sign to his watching flock that a martyr's death is bearable; and he then uttered his very last words: "Father, I commend my spirit into Thy hands." Who could forget last words like this? (By the way, Sattler's wife did not deny her Lord, either. She was put to death by drowning eight days later, in the River Neckar.)¹

Last words are powerful. The last words of the book of **Hebrews** are powerful, too. The last verses of **Hebrews** not only sum up the main *doctrinal* message of Paul's letter, but they show his *personal heart*, as well. That is why we will be taking a close look at these "last words" this morning. We will *not* be skimming over them because "they're just the closing words." There is much doctrinal *and* practical truth that we can draw from these last words; and we need them both.

Sad to say, many Christians tend to feel "bogged down" when meaty doctrine is taught. They look instead for "practical" truth (that which they feel is "relevant" to their daily lives). However, you can't have practical truth without doctrinal truth. Practical truth is *grounded* upon doctrinal truth. If you've been here through this series in **Hebrews**, you've learned a wealth of doctrine about Jesus Christ; and if you will now take this doctrine to heart, and apply it to your life, it will *directly and profoundly* influence your relationship with the Lord, and the way you live your daily life.

¹ William Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 40-47.

It is my prayer that every Christian in this room will be convicted and encouraged in his walk with the Lord as we study the concluding words of this epistle. The title of this message is ***Paul's Last Words***.

Read Hebrews 13:18-21.

In these verses, Paul states a prayer request, then gives a blessing. First, let's look at...

I. Paul's prayer request (vv. 18-19)

In these verses, Paul is asking his readers to pray for a specific prayer request. In a few moments, we will examine the request itself: but first, let's look carefully at what Paul said in **verse 18**, just before he made his prayer request. There is much we can learn from it.

In this verse, Paul says, ***"Pray for us."*** When Paul says ***"us,"*** he is referring to himself and his missionary co-workers, who had traveled with him to Rome (people such as Luke, and Timothy). With this in mind, look at what Paul says next. He says, ***"For (or, "because") we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly."***

Now, let's not skim over this statement. This is important! Paul is saying that he and his missionary co-workers had the *right* to ask for their prayers "because" they had maintained a ***"good conscience,"*** and had lived ***"honestly."*** That, in itself, should be a convicting thought for every child of God! Why? Because oftentimes we don't really *deserve* others' prayers on our behalf, on account of unconfessed sin in our lives. Christian, have you ever found yourself asking *other believers* to pray about a problem in your life, because you knew that you yourself were not on good praying ground with the Lord? Sometimes we fear that God might not even hear *someone else's* prayer on our behalf, because we are not right with Him. Yet, we ask other believers for their prayers, anyway. We hope that God will listen to that *other* believer, since *he* appears to be walking with the Lord.

Now, *does* God show mercy to backsliding Christians, by listening to the prayers of others on their behalf? Yes, He does. There were *many* occasions when the children of Israel were in deep trouble with God because of their sin against Him; yet, God listened to *Moses'* prayer on their behalf, and had mercy on them! When God announced to Abraham that He was about to destroy Sodom, it was *Abraham's* plea for his saved, but backslidden, nephew Lot that saved his hide! It was because of *Abraham's* prayer for Lot that God sent the angels to Sodom to drag him and his family out of the city before the fire and brimstone fell down from heaven. So, yes, God *does* often hear other people's prayers for us, when we ourselves are not on good speaking terms with Him. However, this doesn't change the fact that when you are living in disobedience, there is a disconnect between you and the Lord. David said, ***"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"*** (Psalm 66:18).

This statement in **Hebrews 13:18** really reveals the heart and mind of the Apostle Paul. Paul wasn't asking for other people's prayers, with the hope that God would bless him for *their* sakes, even though he himself wasn't walking worthily. Paul wouldn't even think of such a thing! For Paul, maintaining a good conscience before God was the highest and most important aim in life. This should be *our* aim, too!

Now, what is needed in order for a Christian to have a "good conscience"? **Obedience to God** is what is needed! Not only does obedience result in a good conscience: it brings peace of mind. A "good conscience" and "peace of mind" go hand-in-hand. Obeying God may not

always be easy (in fact, it usually is hard); yet, it is not a *grievous* thing. For someone who truly loves God, obedience to Him is a labour of love. Jacob laboured fourteen long, hard years in order to gain Rachel's hand in marriage; yet, it seemed like only "a few days" to him, because of his love for Rachel. So it is in our relationship with the Lord. In **1 John 5:3**, John wrote, "***For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.***"

Because Paul was walking in obedience to the Lord, he was able to say, in all honesty, that he had a "good conscience." However, I believe that there was an area of obedience that Paul had *especially* in mind when he said that he had a "good conscience." Let's compare a few Scriptures, and see if we can find what *Paul* considered necessary in order to have a "good conscience."

Read Acts 23:1-2, 11

Read 24:1-16.

As Paul stood before the Sanhedrin, and before the Roman Governor Felix, they treated him as though he were a criminal. However, far from feeling ashamed, Paul boldly proclaimed to the Sanhedrin *and* to Felix that he had a "good conscience" before God. *Why* did he have a good conscience? Because he was doing exactly what God had commanded him to do! He was preaching the Gospel. Christ Himself appeared to Paul in the night, after his trial before the Sanhedrin, and reassured him that he was doing right. The Lord told him, "Cheer up, Paul! You're doing right. You're witnessing for Me. This is exactly what I commanded you to do. You will witness for me in Rome, too. Don't let these men intimidate you into shutting your mouth!"

Read 1 Corinthians 9:16-17.

To Paul, preaching the Gospel was not an optional thing. It wasn't something that he could tack onto his Christian life, if he felt like it: it was an *absolute necessity*, which had been laid upon him by the Lord. As Paul was writing to the Christians in Corinth, he was telling them, "Look, brethren: preaching the Gospel isn't something for which I deserve praise. I'm not doing something that is above and beyond what is expected of me. This is what is expected of me! If I do this job willingly and cheerfully, then God will reward me. And even if I *don't* feel like doing this job, it does not change the fact that I *must* do it. It is my duty! It is my *dispensation*."

By the way, that word "***dispensation***" means "stewardship." A "steward" is a servant who has been entrusted with the management of his master's entire household. Paul considered himself to be God's "steward"; and *preaching the Gospel* was the job that God had entrusted to him. He did not have the option of "taking it or leaving it." It was his duty; and there would be "***woe***" in his life if he did not carry it out!

Are you getting the picture? Paul believed, in the depth of his soul, that if he did not endeavour, with all his might, to preach the Gospel, then he could not truly have a "***good conscience***." Not only did he preach the Gospel in order to have a good conscience before *God*: he also did it in order to have a good conscience before *men*. In **Romans 1:14**, Paul said that he was a "***debtor***" both to the Greek and the Barbarian. Preaching the Gospel, in Paul's

estimation, was something that he *owed* to the Jews, the Greeks, and the Barbarians (the non-Greeks) alike. *Why* did he owe this to them? Because he knew that the same gracious God that had rescued *him* from sin and hell could rescue *them*, too. *Love* constrained him to preach the Gospel to them. He was also compelled to preach the Gospel because *God had commanded him*. As God's steward, he was obliged to obey.

Do you have the same attitude that Paul had, Christian? Please don't try to "pass the buck" by saying, "Well, it's a *pastor's* or a *missionary's* duty to preach the Gospel; and I'm not a pastor or missionary. I'm just Joe Christian. It's not my job to preach. I'm not a full-time Christian worker." No, Christian, it *is* your job! There is no elite class of "full-time Christian workers." *Every* Christian is a "full-time Christian worker"! There is no elite class of men whom God calls to "the ministry." *Every* Christian has been called the "***work of the ministry***"! You were called to "***the work of the ministry***" on the day you were saved; and the *local church* is the sphere in which you are to do your priestly work.

Jesus has commanded *every* Christian to "***go...into all the world and preach the Gospel.***" You may not be called to preach from behind a pulpit, in the position of pastor; but you have a duty, as a steward of God, to preach at people's doors; to preach on the lunch break at work, or during work, when appropriate; to preach at family gatherings; to preach in the shops, and on the street, and to your neighbours; and in many other daily situations. You cannot truly have a "conscience void of offence" if you are not endeavouring to be a witness to others.

By the way, a "clean conscience" goes both ways, where prayer is concerned. *Paul* had to have a good conscience before asking others to pray for him; and those who prayed for him needed to have a good conscience before praying for him! It is hypocritical to pray that God will give *someone else* courage to preach the Gospel, when *you yourself* are not endeavouring to share the Gospel! How can you pray, "Lord, send labourers into your harvest," if *you yourself* are not willing to go out into the harvest field, and labour?

Now, there was one more thing that enabled Paul to say that he had a "***good conscience.***" Not only did he preach the Gospel, but **he preached it in the right way**. He did not rely on the wisdom of men as he preached the Gospel; he relied on the power of God.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-9, 13-14.

Man cannot perceive spiritual truth with his natural senses. Man cannot understand or approach God through his own human wisdom. Only the *Spirit of God* can open our blinded eyes, and enable us to understand God's truth. What, then, does this mean for us, as we endeavour to have a "***good conscience***" before God? What it means is that unsaved people are not going to accept the Gospel because you are "smart" or "scholarly" enough to "impress" them with the merits of Christianity. They're not going to accept the Gospel because you're well-read and up-to-speed with the latest ideas or trends of the day. **There is no power in the philosophies of men!** There is no power in the *methods* of men, either! That's why we don't have a non-committal, entertainment-oriented, "seeker friendly" church service, with worldly music, dancing, plenty of pop culture references, and soft, "nicey-nicey" preaching. *That* kind of church service would be perfectly in line with the wisdom of men. The wisdom of man says, "You must have cultural acceptance and big numbers in order to fight the enemy"; but

the wisdom of God says, “We need nothing but the Word of God, the Gospel of God, the Spirit of God, and the church of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.” The power that truly changes men’s lives is the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit of God; and the *institution* that God has ordained to preach the Gospel, to baptize converts, and to teach them all things that God has commanded, is the small and despised local assembly of Jesus Christ. Doing things according to the wisdom of God doesn’t always bring big numbers; but it *does* convert souls for time and eternity!

With all this in mind, let’s look at Paul’s prayer request. In **verse 19**, Paul says, “***But I beseech you rather to do this*** [that is, “to pray for me”], ***that I may be restored to you the sooner.***” As Paul wrote this letter, he was sitting in prison in Rome, where he was waiting to be tried by Nero. It wasn’t looking good for Paul! Yet, he wasn’t giving up hope. Paul was asking his readers to pray that somehow, he would be released from prison. And why? So that he could enjoy his freedom, and shoot some golf, and take a holiday in the Riviera, and soak in some sun? No. He desired to be freed so that he could *visit these Christians*, and strengthen them in the Lord. Paul’s mind was constantly on the spiritual welfare of others.

In this request, we see the heart of the Apostle Paul. We see this same heart throughout *all* his letters. Never do you see Paul asking for material things (except for once, when he asked Timothy to bring him a coat that he had left in Troas, as well as some Bible commentaries, and some copies of the Scriptures). Paul was always asking believers to pray that the Lord would give him spiritual graces, so that he would be enabled to preach the Gospel.

If you’ve been here throughout this **Hebrews** series, you’ve learned much doctrine about our Saviour, and about His High-Priestly work; but what we see here is the doctrine put to practice. These truths affected not only Paul’s words and his actions, but his heart.

If Jesus Christ be the Messiah and Son of God; if he be God Almighty; and if he be the High Priest of our profession, then concern for the salvation of souls, and for the spiritual growth of other believers, should be of paramount importance to every Christian. There is no other Way to the Father except by Jesus. There is no other way to live a fulfilled, victorious Christian life, except through Jesus. *That* should profoundly impact the way a believer lives his life, and the way he views everyone around him. Do you have this kind of heart, Christian?

II. Paul’s blessing (vv. 20-21)

(Read verses 20-21.) As Paul so often did in his letters, he ended this letter to the Hebrews with a blessing. These aren’t just polite little words that Paul “threw in there” in order to wrap up the letter on a good note. This is a powerful statement. This is a divinely-inspired statement. This statement is full of rich doctrinal truth, straight from the Lord. We need this part of the letter just as much as we need all the other parts. Let’s take a look at it.

First, Paul invokes this blessing in the name of the “***God of peace.***” Seven times in the New Testament (in **Romans 15:33**, **Romans 16:20**, **1 Corinthians 14:33**; **2 Corinthians 13:11**; **Philippians 4:9**; **1 Thessalonians 5:23**, and here in **Hebrews 13:20**), God is called by this name “***God of peace.***” Obviously, God considers this to be an important name for Himself!

In using this title, Paul is reminding us that Jesus Christ has made peace between God and man. This “peace” is not merely a theory. It is not merely something that is *possible*, but

which we must strive to obtain by our own efforts. No, the Bible says, **“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** The enmity between man and God has been removed by the God-Man, Jesus Christ; and Jesus stands between us and the Father, beckoning to “whosoever will” to come and be reconciled to God. Peace with God is a “for sure” thing. It is the permanent *position* of every believer.

Secondly, look at what God has done for us. Paul says that He has **“brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep.”** This title **“shepherd of the sheep”** is a powerful one. Not only does this name imply that Jesus is our Provider, our Protector, and Guardian, and our Feeder, but it also implies that He *laid down His life* for His sheep.

Read John 10:1-2, 11, 15-18.

In this important passage, Jesus calls Himself the “good Shepherd”; and while He is making this claim, He foretells His coming death and resurrection. Three times He says, **“I lay down my life for the sheep”**; and not only that, but He says, **“I lay down my life, that I might take it again.”** Now, just hold on to this thought, and we will return to it in a minute. First, though, let’s look at an important “Shepherd” passage in the *Old Testament*.

Read Isaiah 63:11-12.

In this verse, the “shepherd” that is being spoken of is Moses. Moses was the **“shepherd of the flock,”** who led the children of Israel through the Red Sea. However, not only was Moses a “shepherd” to the Israelites of his day: he was a type, or picture, of *the Good Shepherd* Himself—the Lord Jesus Christ! Let’s see what Paul said about this in **1 Corinthians 10**.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4.

What did Paul mean when he said that the children of Israel were **“baptized unto Moses”**? Why would Paul take the New Testament idea of baptism, and apply it to Moses and the children of Israel as they went down into the Red Sea? Because **Moses was a type of Christ**. In **verse 4**, Paul comes right out and says, **“That spiritual Rock that followed them...was Christ.”** Just as Moses, the shepherd of Israel, went down into the sea, took the children of Israel with him, and brought them back out again, so the “Great Shepherd,” Jesus Christ, was submerged in the “waters” of death, and rose again; and those who believe on Him are submerged in death to sin, and arise to a new life in Christ! Water baptism is a *picture* of that spiritual reality. **Romans 6:3-4** says, **“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”**

Now, let’s see what Paul says next in **Hebrews 13:20**. (**Read Hebrews 13:20.**) Paul says that God raised up Jesus from the dead **“by the blood of the everlasting covenant.”** Please notice that there is a direct connection between the *blood* that Christ shed, and His *resurrection* from the dead. It was because Christ’s *blood* was shed for us that God’s justice against our sin was satisfied: and it is because of the *resurrection* that Christ’s shed blood is able to be applied to us. **Christ’s resurrection sealed everything that Christ accomplished on the cross!** Do you know why you can’t lose your salvation? Because Christ’s resurrection from the dead has *sealed* everything that His shed blood accomplished for your salvation.

In **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**, we are told that **“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures”**: and, we are told that this Gospel is the message by which we are **“saved.”** Christ’s *resurrection* has made our salvation complete! Those who trust in the shed blood of Christ, and in the power of His resurrection, are saved forever!

Now, notice what Paul says next. Not only does he mention the blood of Christ; he mentions the New Covenant. He calls it the **“the everlasting covenant.”** And why is it **“everlasting”**? Because it has been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and has been sealed with His resurrection. Christ’s blood is infinitely powerful to save. Christ’s atoning death is infinitely powerful to save. Christ’s resurrection is infinitely powerful to save. This means that the New Covenant (which is *based* upon the shed blood, the death, and resurrection of Christ) is *infinitely* powerful to save.

With all this in mind, Paul now states what He desires to take place in his readers’ lives. He desires that God would **“make you perfect [“fully equipped”] in every good work to do his will.”** Think about this, Christian! This same God who has saved you for time and eternity is also able to equip you for *everything* He calls you to do! Too many Christians, when confronted with God’s will, say, “I just can’t do it. Well, *maybe* I could try. But I know I won’t be any good at it. Besides, I just don’t know the Bible as well as other Christians. I have all these disadvantages. So, I’ll just sit on the sidelines, and live a mediocre Christian life.” Brethren, do we believe in the resurrection power of Christ, or don’t we? If Christ’s resurrection power was able to save us to the uttermost, is it not also able to *equip us* to serve Him victoriously? If we believe that His resurrection power saves us, we *must* also believe that it enables us to do those things that are **“wellpleasing in his sight”**!

You see, it is not *you* who are doing the things that are pleasing to God, anyway. It is *God* who is **“working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.”** Do you believe that? When you allow Christ to do *through* you what you, in your own power, cannot do, you are fulfilling the whole purpose for which Paul wrote this letter to the Hebrews!

Paul ends his blessing by saying, **“To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”** That is the whole point of our service—to bring glory to Christ. Are *you* bringing glory to Him?

Conclusion: Brethren, we are living in perilous days. There may come a time, in our lifetimes, when Christians in the Western world will *really* have to suffer for the name of Christ, just as our brethren in communist and Muslim regimes are doing at this very moment. When that time comes, our faith will be put to the test as it never was before. Christian, you need the doctrinal truth that you’ve seen in the Scriptures today. You need the *practical* truth that flows from these doctrinal truths. If you will trust in the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus, you will be equipped to do His will, regardless of the circumstances around you.

Perhaps you are not sure that you are on your way to Heaven. If so, you need to be saved. You must trust in the Gospel message. The “Gospel” is the message that Christ died for your sins, that He was buried, and that He rose again in order to accomplish your salvation. The Gospel is not Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, *plus* your own good works! If you are relying on your own good works to get you to Heaven, you are not saved. Place your trust in the great Shepherd, who died for you, and rose again! Let

Him plunge you into the waters of “death” (death to sin and self), and raise you up to a wonderful new life in Christ! The Bible says, ***“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation...For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”***