In his book *Quiet* Strength, Tony Dungy tells the story of Art Rooney, owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers. At that time they were the best team in the NFL, and Dungy attributes that to the leadership and example Art Rooney. He says, “When new guys arrived, Mr. Rooney always brought them in and explained that they were now Steelers and that they were going to win and have a great time. But then he would continue. ‘We have a great group of guys here. But you have to understand that this is Pittsburgh. It’s a tight-knit community, and you are now *Pittsburg* Steelers. Wherever you go, you’re going to represent us as a team and as a community, so govern yourselves accordingly.’”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Art Rooney could have simply been happy that his team was winning. He could have only expected them to perform well on the field and then let them do whatever they wanted in their off time. After all, they were professional football players. Their job was to play the game and win. As long as they were doing that, he should be happy, right?

Art Rooney expected more from his players. He expected the players on his team to act in in a way that honored the team they were a part of. He expected their behavior to be respectable. He expected that they would be men of integrity and character. He knew that their behavior in the public eye would inform how people perceived the whole team. He expected their conduct and behavior to match up to what he wanted his team to be.

The Steelers couldn’t be men who only showed excellence on the football field. They needed to be men who showed excellence in how they lived their lives. They were representing more than just themselves and their own abilities. They represented the team and their community. Art Rooney wanted more from his team than a bunch of men who could do all the right things on the football field.

Francis Chan said in his book *Letters to the Church* that in many ways, the church has been reduced to an optional weekly meeting.[[2]](#footnote-2) We come and participate in worship and listen to a sermon, then we go home. Let me ask you a question: how often is your attendance on Sunday morning the only public expression of your faith?

We know that according to Scripture we are saved by grace through putting our faith and trust in Jesus. We aren’t saved by the good things we do. We don’t get gold stars for being in church every Sunday, reading our Bible every day, or spending lots of time in prayer. Our salvation is not dependent upon those things. The problem is when people assume that because our works are not what save us, that means they are not important. That couldn’t be further from the truth.

Just like all the players on the Pittsburg Steelers team represented the team and the city of Pittsburg, every person who claims to follow Jesus represents him to the world around them. One of the things you’ll hear Cassie Lipscomb say if you hang around her very long is that you might be the only Jesus someone ever meets. You represent Jesus to the world around you. The question is what do people think about Jesus and about Christianity after they have had an encounter with you?

As Christians we cannot be people who only show our faith on a Sunday morning. We have to be people who show our faith in Jesus in how we live our lives every day. We represent more than just ourselves. We represent Jesus and his Church. Jesus wants more from us than just a bunch of people who worship him on a Sunday morning

The author of Hebrews knew that very well, and his last words to his audience were instructions about how they ought to conduct their daily lives. He was pulling an Art Rooney. He was telling, or really reminding, these folks of how they should be conducting themselves in their daily lives as followers of Jesus.

These were not things that were going to save them. They wouldn’t earn their way into heaven by doing these things. What they would do is show the world around them what it meant to live as a follower of Jesus. They would be representing Jesus and his Church to the world around them. Their behavior and their conduct would determine how people saw Jesus.

This final section actually starts in Hebrews 12.28 and it starts with another ‘Therefore’. We talked last week about how when you see the word ‘therefore’ in Scripture, it means you are getting to the authors point. What he said before that is about to be concluded, and often times it’s a call to action like this final section of Hebrews is.

**Hebrews 12:28 ESV — 28** Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe

Just before this verse the author talked about how important it is that we don’t give up on our faith, that we have a faith that endures to the end. The end result if we have a faith that endures is that we will receive that kingdom that cannot be shaken. When everything else in this world that is temporary falls away, that new Jerusalem, the city of the living God will still stand. That’s where God will dwell with us and we get to live for eternity with God in a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Here’s where we connect with the last part of the letter to the Hebrews. Because of that hope, because of that promise that we will dwell with God for eternity in that unshakable Kingdom, there are certain things we should be doing right now.

First on that list is worship. He tells us to **Hebrews 12:28–29 ESV — 28** …offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, **29** for our God is a consuming fire.

Acceptable is the word εύαρέστως (euarestos) which means in an acceptable manner or pleasing. This word is almost always used to talk about God’s attitude toward human conduct. Paul talks about pleasing God often as one of the major goals and motives of Christians. The words for reverence and awe are two Greek words that speak to our attitude in worship.

Let me ask you this: Do you come to worship to sing your favorite songs and feel like you got something out of worship? If so, you’re coming for the wrong reasons, and you have the wrong attitude. These twin ideas of reverence and awe mean that we approach God with a holy fear. When we come to worship, we are coming into the presence of the Living God.

In Isaiah 6, when Isaiah was given a vision of the throne room of God, his first thought was of how unworthy he was. When John had a similar vision in Revelation 1, it says he fell down as if he were dead. That’s the kind of reverence and awe we ought to have when we approach God in grateful worship. The same God that Isaiah and John fell down before is the God we worship every week. How dare we be flippant or casual about how we approach him?

Francis Chan says it like this, “We want to be people who are committed to worshiping God, people who can’t get enough of Him, not people who worship only when it is convenient or when the right people are leading. (I think we add ‘or when I like the music we’re singing’). It must be the Object of our worship that makes worshiping exciting to us.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

When we worship, it must be for God’s sake, not for ours. We do this to bring glory to him, not to us. We ought to love God and worship him because he is God, not because of what we get out of the deal. We should worship him because he is righteous, holy, awesome, just, merciful, gracious, and loving. Bernard of Clairvaux says it like this, “No longer do we love God because of our necessity, but because we have tasted and seen how gracious the Lord is.” Those are not things God has done for us. Those are aspects of God’s character that do not change. The kind of worship the author of Hebrews is talking about here recognizes God for who he is and worships him for it.

What would change if we came to worship with this attitude? What would happen if that kind of worship didn’t just happen here on a Sunday morning, but continued throughout your week? What would happen if you worshiped like that at your job, at home, with your family, with your friends? There is no mention of an organized worship service here in Hebrews 12. The author simply calls us to worship God like this because of the unshakable hope that we have that we will live with God for all eternity.

That forms the bedrock of the rest of these instructions. If we love and worship God the way the author speaks of here, then the rest of these instructions follow. At first glance, these they might seem like a jumble that doesn’t really flow together. But if you look closely, you see that they are grouped by a common theme.

The first of those themes is love. **Hebrews 13:1–3 ESV — 1** Let brotherly love continue. **2** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. **3** Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

The word Hebrews uses here is the word φιλαδελφία (philadelphia). You might recognize it. The city of Philadelphia is called the city of brotherly love. That’s a direct translation right out of the Greek language. It’s a combination of the word φιλέω (phileo) which is the Greek word for mutual love, and the word άδελφός (adelphos) which is the word for brother. You didn’t know you knew Greek, did you?

The author wanted to make sure that the folks he was writing to continued to not only show love to God and worship him, but also show love toward one another. But it goes further than that. It’s pretty easy to show love to your family and friends, at least most of the time. It’s much harder to show love to those you don’t even know. It’s easy to be cordial and courteous to people you don’t know. Showing them love takes it a step further.

Hospitality can take all kinds of different forms. This word literally means to receive a stranger as a guest. It could look exactly like that in your life. It might mean being a foster parent so that the thousands of kids who need a safe place to live for a time will have a place to go. It might mean opening up the doors of our church for things like the food bank. There are all kinds of ways to be hospitable to people that we don’t know.

The opposite of that kind of hospitality is being closed off. Being selfish with what we have. People often avoid hospitality because it can be uncomfortable or even scary at times. You will be hard pressed to find a command in Scripture that says, ‘do this only when you’re comfortable with it.’ That’s not how following God works. In fact, it’s often the opposite. God uses situations that make us uncomfortable or even scared at times to help us grow and learn to know him more.

Verse 3 is a command to remember those in prison. Remember, there was a significant amount of persecution going on during this time in the Roman Empire. There were likely many believers in prison who were there because they continued to follow after Jesus even when it was criminalized. The temptation for these folks, and for us today, is to forget about the people that are locked away. Out of sight, out of mind, right?

The author of Hebrews tells us not to forget about them, but to be mindful, to continue to be concerned for those people. These folks had a more reason than we do to think that way. Associating with people who were in prison would bring the shame that was associated with being in prison upon the folks who were just trying to care for them. In many ways, choosing to support and care for someone in prison in the ancient world was a choice to suffer with them.

The same kind of kindness and love is also to be shown for those who are being mistreated. That word can mean someone who is made to suffer, or someone who is persecuted. It’s worth noting that this same word was used of the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11:37. This is one of the hardships they went through, one of the hardships the author wanted his readers to endure through. When we aren’t the ones that have to endure at the moment, we should be by the side of those who are in the midst of the struggle to help them endure as well.

The second section of these instructions are all about purity and holiness. **Hebrews 13:4–5 ESV — 4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. **5** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

This is one of those Scriptures that most of our culture would either laugh at or condemn as archaic and old fashioned. If you want an example of how not to act if you want to fulfill these commands of purity, just watch the news. Politicians, celebrities, and public figures of all kinds are leading the way for our culture to sink deeper and deeper into the mire of immorality of all kinds.

You know what people notice? People notice when you act differently than the culture around you. They might berate you and mock you for holding to a set of values different than everyone else’s, but they will notice. That’s exactly what they did when Mike Pence explained the boundaries he set in place for his marriage. He has drawn lines in the sand that he will not cross, like having dinner alone with another woman, for this very purpose.

Sometimes that kind of flak even comes from within the church. When Beth and I got married, we committed to each other that we would never be alone in a compromising position with someone of the opposite sex. That included driving alone in a car with someone. We put that in place to keep our marriage pure, to make sure neither one of us would ever cross a line that we shouldn’t. I have had people in another church ask me if Beth and I don’t trust each other that we would have a rule like that. I can’t tell you how frustrating it is when people who are supposed to be following Jesus themselves attack their fellow Christians for taking their faith seriously.

It would be hard to tell which has brought more leaders down, sexual immorality or the love of money. Both have a stranglehold on our society and most people think it’s just fine. Our culture thinks its okay for every person to make their own set of standards. That’s not what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus.

People may not understand why we want to be pure, why we want to be holy, but they will notice. They will notice precisely because our culture is so impure in every sense. They may mock and persecute those who try to hold fast to this kind of holiness and purity, but even while they do they will get a glimpse of the character of Jesus.

The third section is all about faithfulness and steadfastness. **Hebrews 13:7–9 ESV — 7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. **9** Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings… **15** Through [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. **16** Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

There are no shortcuts to building character and faithfulness. But if you want to learn how to be faithful and be a person of character and integrity, look to your leaders who exhibit those qualities in their lives. You might find leaders like that at your work, in your family, in social organizations. But one place I know you can find them is right here at Agape.

We are incredibly blessed at Agape to have an extraordinary group of elders who lead our church. Not only our current elders, but the men who have served as elders in the past are excellent examples of how to live out your faith in Jesus and be a faithful follower of His. I want you to know that if you don’t have much experience with other churches or other elderships, we are incredibly blessed to have the leaders we do. Not many churches have elders who are as biblical sound, as faithful, and as wise as the men who lead this church. These are men you can imitate as you follow Jesus.

Then we have this verse that seems a little out of place until you look at it in context. **Hebrews 13:8 ESV — 8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The church I served before I came to Agape had a banner up in the sanctuary with this verse on it. They had put the banner up in 1997 when the church had its hundredth anniversary. I’m pretty sure that banner was the same yesterday, today, and forever. I’m not sure it will ever come down. As much as that banner made me laugh, this verse has a serious message.

I want you to think about the implications of that. Jesus does not change. His character doesn’t change. His mission doesn’t change. His love for us doesn’t change. His heart for those who are far from him doesn’t change. Even when the tides of our culture seem to be shifting so quickly that we can’t even keep up, Jesus does not change. He doesn’t change his stance on controversial issues just because people protest or complain. He doesn’t change his instructions to us because it might be difficult or uncomfortable to follow. Jesus forms the bedrock of our faith and knowing that he will never change can keep us from shifting with the ever-changing whims of our culture.

On that note the author tells us to stick with the fundamental teaching of the Gospel. He warns us not to be led astray by new and strange ideas that are not a part of that fundamental Gospel. They dealt with these kinds of strange and new teachings in the first century. John in particular wrote quite a bit about the new and strange ideas of Gnosticism. It seems like every generation since then has had its own new and strange ideas that need to be checked against the solid foundation of the Gospel.

If we stray away from following the true Gospel of Jesus, then we aren’t going to do any good to those we are trying to reach for Christ. We have to stay faithful not only to Jesus, but also to what he teaches if we want to be faithful followers of his.

The final command the author of Hebrews gives his readers is to obey. **Hebrews 13:17 ESV — 17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

This is another one of those things that many people in our culture today would immediately scoff at. People want to be masters of their own destiny, commanders of their own life. They want to call the shots. To think about having to obey someone else is unthinkable for many people today. Again, that’s not what it looks like to follow Jesus.

**John 14:15 ESV — 15** “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. If we truly love Jesus and want to follow after him it should be a joy to follow his commands. As we learn to obey Jesus he also begins to change our hearts so that our desires align more closely with his desires all the time.

Obedience to our leaders is something that needs to be a part of our lives as followers of Jesus and a part of the church. Paul makes it clear in Romans 13 that God has put the authorities in place that are over us and he expects us to obey them as long as they align with the principles laid out in Scripture.

I told you we had excellent elders. What you may not know is that the men that lead our church do not make the decisions for this church lightly. They agonize over the decisions they make, they pray about them, and they lose sleep over them. They do not take leadership of this church lightly, nor should they. We owe it to them and to the God who placed them over us to follow their leadership well.

Now, these instructions were originally written for Christians who lived almost 2000 years ago. Lots of people look at the Bible as some ancient document that has no bearing on their lives in 2019. They don’t think it’s possible that a document written 2000 years ago could possibly be relevant to their lives today. They couldn’t be further from the truth.

The Bible is living and active, and the issues that the first century Christians were dealing with are issues we’re still dealing with today. The instructions written here are just as important for Christians today as they were for the first people who read this letter.

We constantly deal with the lack of love, impurity, lack of faithfulness, and disobedience of our culture. If we are going to claim to follow Jesus we have to live like it. It’s not enough to just come to church once a week. We can’t treat the church like just one more optional gathering. We have to live out our faith in how we conduct ourselves every single day.

That matters so much because, as we’ve been talking about throughout this series on Hebrews, it’s all about Jesus. It’s all about how much better Jesus is than anything else this world has to offer. It’s all about what Jesus does for us as our mediator of a new covenant. It’s all about the unshakable hope of spending eternity with Jesus in the city of the living God.

When we live as faithful followers of Jesus, people will notice. They will notice something is different about us. Something doesn’t quite line up with our culture. That’s our chance to let the word around us see Jesus on display through the way we conduct ourselves.

We cannot be people who only show our faith on a Sunday morning. We have to be people who show our faith in Jesus in how we live our lives every day. We represent more than just ourselves. Just like Art Rooney wanted his players to know they represented their team and their community in everything they did, we as followers of Jesus have to recognize that we represent Jesus and his Church in everything we do.

Show the love of God. Strive for purity and holiness. Stay faithful to the Gospel. And never forget that it’s all about Jesus.

1. Tony Dungy and Nathan Whitaker, *Quiet Strength: The Principles, Practices & Priorities of a Winning Life* (Carol Stream, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (David C. Cook, 2018), 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)