

Pentecost 12 “Buyer Beware” Hebrews 13

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

Caveat emptor is an old Latin warning, “Let the buyer beware.” Today’s Epistle reading suggests, *caveat cultor*—“Let the worshipper beware!”

Beware of worship? No. Worship is where God especially gives us his gifts for forgiveness, life and salvation. It is where God’s Word is read and sung and proclaimed. In worship we hear a word different from other words. In worship we heard the words, “Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you” (13:7). We heard the witness of the patriarchs, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Noah, of Moses and of David. We heard of certainty in things promised, but yet unseen.

In our worship today, we come before our Savior, the fulfillment of the promises, the One come in the flesh to be seen. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (13:8). He is the Word, the promise made flesh. In worship God gives us grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. And we are reminded: “It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by His grace” (13:9). We are strengthened by the fact that He never changes. We are comforted by the fact that His promise to Moses for the Israelites, “I will be your God and you will be my people,” is still true today and that all who believe in the person and the work of Jesus Christ are ingrafted into that people and also become people of the promise.

True worship is more than rote ritual, like pagan or Jewish sacrifice (13:9, 11). In worship we center ourselves upon the sacrifice of Jesus for us. We are told, “Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood” (13:12). We are made Holy today in faith which comes by hearing God’s word. We are made Holy today by receiving the very body and blood of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread and the wine of Holy Communion.

In worship, we are motivated to live for God in our families, our neighborhoods, and our community, even if that means suffering. “Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore” (13:13). Everything in our lives, pleasant and unpleasant, is put into an eternal perspective in worship. Our suffering becomes a part of “picking up our crosses and following Jesus,” not to **save** us, but because He **has already** saved us.

Here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come (13:14). Don’t beware of worship; beware of quitting worship when you leave church. Beware of forgetting the forgiveness of sins when you drive away from this building. Beware of forgetting the prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Beware of forgetting the fact that we are sinful human beings who cannot save ourselves from this sinful condition. Beware of neglecting to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Caveat cultor, worshipper beware, beware of quitting worship by acting like your sins are okay because God has forgiven them. God, for Jesus’ sake, justifies you; God does **not** justify your **sins**. “You must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11).

Caveat cultor, worshipper beware, beware of quitting worship by not living the commandments. “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have” (13:1–5). Keeping the commandments, said Philip Melancthon, a close friend and coworker of Martin Luther, “is the true worship of God.”

And *caveat cultor*, worshipper beware, beware of quitting worship by quitting the daily effort to advance in your spiritual life and sanctification. Some recipients of the book to the Hebrews had become complacent about “fighting the good fight.”

It's the struggles we have during the week, struggles against sin, and struggles to keep the commandments, that impel us back to worship. God promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," (13:6, from Joshua 1:5). *Caveat cultor*—worshipper beware—lest leaving church, you leave Him!

The terms "strange" or "alien" in verse 9 of our Epistle reading reminds us of the writings of the 1st century historian Josephus who also speaks of "alien worship (θρησκεία ζένη)." Likewise, Hermas, the 2nd century writer and brother of Pius, Bishop of Rome, speaks about those who introduced "strange teachings" that led God's servants astray. We understand "strange teachings" (Heb 13:9) as those teachings that had not been authorized by Christ and his apostles. They included worship practices that had not been instituted by Christ for the life of the church.

The phrase, "do not be carried away" (μὴ παραφέρεσθε) is a passive form of the verb to "carry around (παραφέρω)," used to convey the idea of "do not carry around false teaching." In connection with false teachers, Jude, verse 12 uses the passive participle of this verb for being "carried along" by the wind, like being carried around by the passing fads of culture. The bulletin cover conveys that very idea through the picture of the dried leaves ready to blow hither and fro. Boy have we got some strange fads of culture today to carry us around!

And finally, in the phrase "for the heart to be made firm" (βεβαιοῦσθαι τὴν καρδίαν), "firm" can also be translated as established, strengthened, or sustained— It is a passive verb indicating that the action that makes the heart "firm" is done by God. And God performs this action through human means, through sound teaching, liturgy, and the Sacraments in the Divine Service. Those very things we have before us today, right here and right now.

This unique expression describes the provision of stability and certainty. As is shown by the use of this verb and its other forms elsewhere in Hebrews, this expression has to do with the confirmation of the heart, and the conscience with it, so that it is certain, because it rests on a firm foundation, a reliable Word that is a sure anchor for the soul, a message that is legally attested by reliable witnesses.

That reliable Word is the teaching of forgiveness that is written on the “hearts” of God’s people in the new covenant in Christ (8:10–12), people whose “hearts” have been sprinkled clean from a bad conscience (10:22) by the blood of Jesus, which speaks God’s forgiveness and grace to them (12:24).

Those who have this certainty can come near to God with “a true heart” in the full assurance of faith (10:22), or as we say in our liturgy, a clean heart and a right spirit.

So, come today! Come and hear the words, “Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sakes forgives you all your sins.” Come to His table and receive in bread and wine, His very body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of all your sins. This is for you! And, brothers and sisters, He knows you better even than you know yourself. Every flaw, and blemish and failure and sin, and yet He loves you still, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Amen!

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide in you to life everlasting. Amen!

John W. Kleinig, [Hebrews](#), ed. Curtis P. Giese, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 682.