A Word-Study of Hebrews 13

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It has recently been argued that Hebrews 1-12 is an exhortation or homily rather than an epistle. But Hebrews 13 is certainly epistolary in form. Can we divorce this chapter from those preceding, and argue that it was added by another hand, perhaps by the person who sent this homily to Rome? Did the person who added this chapter write in imitation of the closing exhortations and messages of Paul’s epistles to imply the Pauline authorship of the whole?

A word-study of the chapter offers certain interesting suggestions bearing on these questions. The study is not intended to cover every word contained in the chapter, but only those which are significant. The material is drawn mainly from Thayer’s Lexicon.

I. N.T. words found only in Hebrews.

Of the 169 words peculiar to the writer of Hebrews, 7 are found in chap. 13.

Of these 5 are found only in Hebrews 13: συνδέω, αἴνεως, εὕροιτα, ἱπτέω, and ἀλυσιτελῆς. One, αἴνεως, is taken from the Septuagint.

Two of the 7 occur in Hebrews 1-12: κακοῦχεω, found in Heb. 11 37, a good parallel (cf. συγκακοῦχεω, Heb. 11 25), and εὐαφεστέω, found in Heb. 11 5 6, in a quotation from the Septuagint. In 2 Tim. 2 2, we have κακοῦργος, which is a fair parallel to the former word.

II. Meanings and usages peculiar to Hebrews.

The words of Hebrews 13 show a surprising number of meanings and usages not found elsewhere in the N.T.
many cases Paul uses other words or constructions to express the same or similar ideas.

1. λαμβάνω. Here found, according to a well-known classical usage, “joined in a finite form to a participle.”

2. γάμος. Here means “marriage,” elsewhere in the N.T. a wedding or a wedding banquet. Found in no other epistle, though common in the Gospels. Paul employs γάμεω and γαμίζω.


4. ἡγεμόνας. The participle with the genitive of the persons over whom they rule is used three times in this chapter of the overseers or leaders of the church. The nearest N.T. usage is Acts 15 22. Paul, Peter, and Hebrews 1-12 use the word in the sense “to consider.”

Paul in 1 Thess. 5 12 uses προιοντάμενοι in a similar sense.

5. ἐκβάσις. Elsewhere only in 1 Cor. 10 13, “a way out”; cf. ἔχοντας in 2 Pet. 1 15.

6. ἀναστροφή. “Life in so far as it is comprised in conduct” (Thayer). Paul, Peter, and James use the word in the sense of behavior or conduct.

7. παραφέρω. Only here in the N.T. of being led aside from the truth; but compare Jude 12.

In both these cases the Rec. has περιφέρω, which Paul uses in 2 Cor. 4 10, Eph. 4 14. Did the wish to conform Hebrews to Paul’s style have any influence here?

8. θυσιαστήριον. This metaphorical use is not found in Paul’s writings, though the word is used thrice. The word is found in Heb. 7 13.

9. σεμνή. If it here signifies the temple, this is its only N.T. use in this sense. Never used by Paul, though common in Hebrews 1-12, and five times in Luke-Acts.

10. συ νείδησις. A common word, but only here used with
WILLIAMS: A WORD-STUDY OF HEBREWS 13

καλῆ. The Pastorals use ἀγαθῇ and καθαρά. Peter uses ἀγαθῆ.

11. ἀποκαθιστήμι. Only here "of a man at a distance from his friends, and to be restored to them" (Thayer). In the Gospels and Acts of restoration to a former state. Paul in Philemon 22 expresses a similar thought, using χαριζομαι.

12. διὰ βραχέων. "In a few (words)," i.e. briefly. So Plato, Demosthenes, and Josephus. 1 Pet. 5 12 says δι' ἀληθείαν ἐγράφη. Paul does not use βραχίων, though it is found in Heb. 2 7 9.

13. ἐπιστεύλλω. "To write a letter" as in Plato (who adds the cognate acc.), Clement of Rome, and often in Greek authors, but nowhere else in the N.T. Paul uses γράφω, found in Hebrews only 10 7, and there in a quotation. Peter, John, and Jude also use γράφω.

The number of usages and meanings peculiar to Hebrews 13, and the fact that Paul and other writers express the same ideas in different words, would imply that the writer was not consciously or unconsciously imitating any other author of the N.T. His thoughts are common to the writers of other letters, but his presentation of them is peculiarly his own.

III. Words common to Hebrews 13 and Paul, but also found in Hebrews 1–12.

This list indicates that these words contained in Hebrews 13 may be explained as due to the influence of Hebrews 1–12—that is, to the writer of that section or one who imitated him—rather than to an imitation of Paul's style. The fact that many of these words are used in a manner unlike Paul adds weight to this argument.

1. ἐπιλαυθάνομαι. In Heb. 6 10 this word is used with the genitive as in Heb. 13 2 and 13 18, while in Phil. 3 13, its only appearance in Paul's writings, it is used with the accusative.

2. μυµνήσκω. Heb. 2 6 8 12 10 17, always in O.T. quotations. In 1 Cor. 11 2 Paul uses it of remembering
himself. In 2 Tim. 14 it is used of remembering Timothy's tears. Paul prefers μνημονεύω; see below (5).
3. δέσμος. Heb. 10 34 is parallel.
In Ephesians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy, it is used of Paul as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ."
4. πόρνος. Found in Heb. 12 13, but the closest parallel is 1 Cor. 6 9, where as here it is coupled with μοιχή.
5. μνημονεύω. Heb. 11 15 23.
Paul prefers this verb to μμνήσκω; see above (2).
6. σήμερον. Seven times in Hebrews 1-12, three times by Paul, once in a quotation.
7. ποιμέν. Heb. 2 4. Also 2 Tim. 3 6, Tit. 3 3, James 1 2, 1 Pet. 1 6 4 16.
9. διδαχή. Heb. 6 2. Also Rom. 6 17, 16 17, 1 Cor. 14 6 26, but here used of true teaching. In Eph. 4 14, Col. 2 22, διδασκαλία is used of false doctrine, or doctrines of men. This latter word is frequently found in Timothy and Titus.
10. βεβαιώ. Heb. 2 3. Also Rom. 15 8, 1 Cor. 1 6 8, 2 Cor. 1 21, Col. 2 7.
11. βρόμα. Heb. 9 10. Also Rom. 14 15 20, 1 Cor. 3 2, etc.
12. ὀφελέω. Heb. 4 2. Also Rom. 2 25, 1 Cor. 14 6, etc.
13. ἀγιάζω. Five times in Hebrews 1-12, several times by Paul.
14. πάσχω. Three times in Hebrews 1-12, common in Paul and Peter.
15. ἔξορχομαι. Four times in Hebrews 1-12, used by Paul, James, John, not Peter.
16. ὁνειδισμός. Evidently parallel to Heb. 11 23; cf. also 10 33. Paul uses it in Rom. 15 3 in a quotation from the O.T. Found also in 1 Tim. 3 7.
17. οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν δοῦ μένουσαν πόλιν. Evidently a reference to Heb. 11 10; cf. 10 34 12 27.
18. ἐπικήπτεω. Evidently following Heb. 11 14, though the word is found in Rom. 11 7, Phil. 4 17.
WILLIAMS: A WORD-STUDY OF HEBREWS 18

6 12, Tit. 1 16; but Paul prefers ἔξομολογέω for this meaning.


21. ψυχή. Hebrews 1–12 five times. Peter, James, and John use the word in the same sense as Hebrews 18, but not Paul, see Thayer's N.T. Lexicon.

22. ἀποδέξωμι. Heb. 12 11 16 with λόγον in 1 Pet. 4 5, Lk. 16 2, Acts 19 40, and according to Lchm. and Treg. in Rom. 14 2, but the best editors do not find it in Paul.


24. παρακαλέω. Heb. 3 13 10 23. Paul and others use it commonly, but 1 Pet. 5 12 is the closest parallel.

25. καταρτίζω. Heb. 10 5 11 3, but in a different sense. Best parallel 1 Pet. 5 10.


27. εὐδρέστος. Frequent in Paul, but the closest parallel is Heb. 12 23, where the adverb εὐδρέστως is used.


This list seems to imply that the writer of Hebrews 1–12 wrote also Hebrews 18, or that it was written in conscious imitation of the writer of the first section.

IV. Words common to Hebrews 13 and Paul, but not found in Hebrews 1–12.

This list bears on the question whether this chapter was written in imitation of Paul or not.

1. φιλαδελφία. Rom. 12 10, 1 Thes. 4 9, but this word is found also in 1 Pet. 1 22 and 2 Pet. 1 7, and the grace is enjoined by all the apostles and by most early Christian writers.

2. φιλόζευια. Only in Rom. 12 13, but φιλόζευια is a qualification of a bishop, see 1 Tim. 3 2 = Tit. 1 8, and compare 1 Pet. 4 9. Another common grace of early Christianity.
3. τίμως. 1 Cor. 3 12 of costly stones. In 1 Pet. 1 19 is found a usage similar to that found here.

4. κολύτα. Rom. 9 10 13 13.

5 and 6. πόρνος and μοιχός, parallel to 1 Cor. 6 9, where both words are found, but probably a not infrequent association.

7. τρόπος. Used in a different sense by Paul.

8. ἀρεέω. Similar use in 1 Tim. 6 8; see also 2 Cor. 12 9, 3 John 10.


10. ἐκβασις. 1 Cor. 10 13 uses this word in another sense. A true parallel is found in Wis. 2 17.

This, and the following words found in lists II and III, are here inserted for the sake of completeness.

11. ἀναστροφή. Paul uses the word in a different sense; see above II. 6.

12. μμυνήσκω. 2 Tim. 1 4, but Paul prefers μνημονεύω; see above, III. 5.

13. τόλμην. Paul uses once, but after the first word of the sentence.

14. κοινωνία. Paul uses frequently, but this was a common word.

15. στενάξω. Rom. 8 23, 2 Cor. 5 2 4; also James 5 9 and Mk. 7 34.


17. καλέω. Compare Gal. 4 17, James 2 8.

18. θεός τῆς εἰρήνης. Common in Paul’s epistles, but by this time a liturgical form probably.


20. ποιμήν. Eph. 4 11, but not of Christ, but of pastors.


21. πρόβατον. Rom. 8 36 in a quotation, but a close parallel is 1 Pet. 2 23.

22. εὐφρεστός. Paul uses this word seven times, but its parallel can be found in Heb. 12 25, εὐφρέστως.
23. \( \text{ἀνέχομαι} \). Found in Acts 18 14, and 2 Tim. 4 3, in the sense “to listen,” but not elsewhere.

24. \( τὸν \text{ἀδελφὸν \ ημῶν \ Τιμάθεων} \). Parallel to 1 Thes. 3 2, but more commonly Paul calls Timothy ὁ ἀδελφός.

25. \( \text{ἡ \ χάρις} \), etc. Parallel to Col. 4 18, but a common benediction.

This list indicates that the parallels between Hebrews 13 and Paul are not as many as is commonly supposed, and that most of them are very easily explained as commonplaces of Christian letters in the apostolic and post-apostolic age. There is not in any of Paul’s epistles a doxology in which we find phrases woven from the Septuagint, as in the doxology of Heb. 13 20. 21.

V. The following twenty-one words are common to Hebrews 13, Paul, and Peter, but not always with the same meaning:

- φιλαδελφία, μένω, τίμως, ἀναστροφή, ἔνος, ἀγιάξω, πάσχω, λαξ, θυσία, χείλος, ψυχή, ἀποδίδωμι, συνείδησις, ἀναστρέφω, παρακαλέω, ποιμήν, πρόβατον, καταρτίζω, θέλημα, ἐνώπιον, ἀσπάζομαι.

I do not claim completeness for this list, but it shows how many of the words of this chapter are common property to writers of epistles.

VI. The following nine words find closer parallels in 1 Peter than in Paul’s writings:

- παρακαλέω, τίμως, ἀμλαντος, ἔνος, ἀναφέρω, ἀποδίδωμι, ποιμήν, πρόβατον, καταρτίζω.

Again, completeness is not claimed, but the list seems to indicate, not literary dependence, which no one claims, but that the two epistles came from similar conditions, and, as I believe, from about the same period.

The above study then tends to show:

1. That Hebrews 13 offers so many differences from Paul’s writings in vocabulary, usages, and constructions that it is improbable that it was written by one who designed by affixing it to a homily to indicate the whole as a work of Paul.
2. That Hebrews 13 has a sufficient number of characteristic and peculiar expressions to make it improbable that it was written merely in imitation of Hebrews 1-12.

3. That Hebrews 13 has so many connections with Hebrews 1-12 that it is very difficult to divorce it from the preceding chapters.

4. That while Hebrews 1-12 may be an exhortation or homily rather than an epistle, Hebrews 13 as a whole is by the same writer, and was written to accompany the earlier chapters.