

BROTHERLY LOVE

Hebrews—Chapter 13

Study 14

The Service of Love

Paul's final words to the Hebrews are filled with exhortation, counsel and promise. These are his closing thoughts to his countrymen, and he seeks to squeeze into this final letter every last ounce of light and love from the throne of grace.

“Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also” (Hebrews 13:1-3).

Can you imagine entertaining an angel without even knowing it? I have sometimes wondered if here or there in this earth-bound life I have ever encountered an angel. Have you ever thought about that? The Bible indicates that in taking care of the needs of strangers there is a good chance we have entertained a heavenly visitant without even knowing it. They have come to this earth often on their missions of mercy. They ate with Abraham, rescued Lot, delivered Peter from prison, and have spoken words of encouragement and hope to countless others. They are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to mankind and to aid God's people in the gospel work.

In His service of love, Jesus was once asked, “Who is my neighbor?” He was asked this question not because the seeker wanted to identify whom he was called to love, but to identify those he didn't have to. This ruler wanted to avoid the practical duty of loving humanity by narrowing the benefactors of Jesus' love to a certain class of people (Luke 10:29). Strangers, prisoners, and those who are suffering from any of the many adverse effects of evil all need to know that God loves them. The more wicked you are, the more you need to understand the love of God for you. The selfish human heart, even in the believer, is ever seeking to avoid the basic Christian duty of helping the hurting. Religion is at its best when it is active in helping the oppressed. Religion is at its worst when it excuses this work because of spiritual pride.

Commitment

“Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 1:4).

“Marriage is honorable.” This is an important balancing statement coming from someone who stated that in some cases it was “better” not to marry (1 Corinthians 7:38). It is possible to draw the conclusion from some of Paul's writings that he was against marriage. This idea disappears when you read all of Paul's writings and consider their context. The apostle was in the biblical sense very supportive of the institution of marriage. In fact, Paul gives some of the best counsel in the Bible on how to make marriage work. He even covers the subject of being married to an unbeliever (see Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Corinthians 7).

Here are a few of Paul's guidelines concerning marriage:

- 1) Marriage commitment is an honoring of the sexual relationship between a man and women (Hebrews 13:4). This is because commitment in physical relationships bring a fuller, deeper experience of true love.
- 2) Submit to one another in the Lord (Ephesians 5:21). Submission is the keynote of the gospel, the key to overcoming sin. As we submit our lives to Christ by faith, we learn how to submit ourselves to one another in marriage. This builds respect, trust and love in our relationships.
- 3) Men love your wives as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25). As the wife

NOTES

“*God having provided something better for us.*” —Hebrews 11:40

All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

is especially called to submit to the husband, who is to be the head of the marriage, so the husband is especially called to love the wife as Christ has loved the church. This latter calling being the key to the former—a wife who is a Christian and has submitted herself to God’s love will not find it too difficult to submit herself to a man who loves her as Christ does.

- 4) Leave father and mother and become one in this new relationship of marriage (Ephesians 5:31). This is a direct reference to the original intent of marriage as it was instituted in Eden (Genesis 2:24). At times it can be very difficult to sever parental ties. While we still love and honor our parents, the time comes when the marriage relationship takes first place in our lives.
- 5) Maintain a healthy sexual relationship in your marriage (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). It is possible to be so spiritually focused that we lose sight of the physical needs of our marriage partner. Here is where temptation can come in and bring down a husband or wife. Communicate openly, encourages Paul, about your sexual needs and agree together about meeting those needs.
- 6) There is nothing wrong with remaining unmarried if God has called and gifted you for a life of singleness (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). Singleness for God is not odd, unnatural or unbiblical. It is a “gift” (verse 7).
- 7) God does not want us to experience separation in marriage (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). If this does occur, let everything be done to reconcile the relationship.
- 8) If you are married out of the faith and your spouse is pleased to remain married, don’t leave them (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). Do all you can to be a witness for God to your spouse. For they and your children will be greatly influenced by a godly witness in the home.

Christian Commitment

“*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’*” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

In these last two verses is found one of the keys to marriage and love—commitment. God has said that He will never leave us nor forsake us. That is commitment. God is committed to help us so that we need never fear the actions of man. God’s commitment to us, which is one of the seven love languages, is what empowers us to be committed to one another in marriage and ministry.

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Hebrews 13:7).

Paul is clearly advocating our responsibility to submit to leadership in the context of Christianity. Yet he gives us two clear conditions for doing so:

- 1) If they have spoken the Word of God to you.
- 2) If they have considered the end or fruits of their faith-walk with God.

Godly leaders who are committed to the Word of God and faithfully follow its teachings ought to be remembered and their faith followed.

“Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For *it is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them” (Hebrews 13:8-9).

Jesus is reliable, unchanging, consistent, trustworthy. He is not one way today and another way tomorrow. So don’t get carried away with all kinds of different and strange doctrines. Stick to the Word, to the way of Jesus Christ, to the grace of God. The current of the world is ever-changing—sometimes going in one direction and then in another. It is the same with people. They will fail you. But Jesus never fails. He is ever and always committed to you.

Forth to the Cross

“We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by

the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Hebrews 13:10-14).

Here is Paul’s final appeal to the Hebrews to make a full transition from the earthly sanctuary and its types to the reality found in Jesus Christ. Through this epistle, his theme has focused on earthly types of heavenly realities and the vital need to see through Jesus Christ something better—a better sacrifice, a better priesthood, and a better sanctuary. Every aspect of the earthly sanctuary has pointed to the heavenly realities. Paul began His appeal in chapter one by pointing his readers to the great sacrifice of the cross for our sins (Hebrews 1:3). And now he ends the book of Hebrews by pointing out that the altar found in the courtyard of the earthly sanctuary was a type or symbol of this same great sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. This altar where the animal sacrifices of lambs and goats were made for sin represented the cross where Christ was sacrificed for the sin of the world.

While the apostle’s language and tone are filled with love, his message is clear and uncompromising (as when he warned his brethren in Hebrews 10:26 that there is no more sacrifice for sin if we reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ). If you continue to serve the earthly sanctuary you have no right to partake of the heavenly. This is not an arbitrary statement. By placing confidence in the sacrifice of animals for sin, you lose faith in the sacrifice of Jesus. One or the other will become the reality of your life. Your entrance into the heavenly reality will be obscured if you continue to serve the earthly type. This was and is the reality of religious experience for multitudes of people. We must go forth to the cross and leave off all confidence in any religious system that is based on earthly sacrifice for sin, bearing whatever reproach is necessary for His sake.

The Continual Sacrifice of Praise

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:15-16).

In Christ, God has given the ultimate sacrifice, the very best, which is to bring forth from us the sacrifice of praise. The more we dwell upon the love of God, the more we realize the gift of heaven, the more continual and spontaneous will be our praise to God. In saying this, Paul is again drawing us to the reality of faith in Jesus and away from the symbols and types of the earthly sanctuary. In the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), specifically in Numbers and Leviticus, the “daily” (Strong’s #8548) is identified with the earthly sanctuary service. The sacrifices for sin, incense, lamps of light, shewbread and ministrations of the priests were all identified as “daily” or “continual” (#8548) aspects of the sanctuary service (Leviticus 6:13; 24:2; Exodus 28:29; 29:42; 30:8; Numbers 4:7). The earthly sanctuary and its divine ordinances all pointed to Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice, incense, light, bread and Priest (Hebrews 7:27; Ephesians 5:2; John 1:9; 6:51; Hebrews 7:24). Therefore the earthly sanctuary was God’s method of pointing us to entire dependence on Him. This is why the same word, “daily,” which means the “continual,” is found throughout the Bible in verses that direct us into close relationship with God. Here are a few examples:

In Psalm 40:16, we are to say “continually [#8548], the Lord be magnified.”

In 1 Chronicles 16:11, God longs for us to “seek His face continually [#8548].” To give Him thanks; to make known His deeds among the people; to sing unto him, to glory in God and remember His marvelous works (1 Chronicles 16:8-12).

When we look to God instead of man, “His praise shall continually” [#8548] be in our mouths according to Psalm 34:1.

God’s “loving-kindness” and “truth” is to “continually [#8548] preserve” us (Psalm 40:11).

And God alone is to be our “strong habitation” where we “continually [#8548] resort” (Psalm 71:3).

The entire sanctuary service was designed to point us to a continual relationship with Jesus Christ as our Savior, spiritual lover and best friend.

Leadership and Authority

“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

Parents, teachers, pastors, church leaders and all those who watch for the spiritual salvation of the soul deserve our respect. They are to give an account for you, a joyful account, not a sad one.

A Good Conscience

“Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge *you* to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner” (Hebrews 13:18-19).

There is probably nothing that brings peace to heart and soul more readily than a conscience that lives honestly before men and God. Amid the turbulent elements that were ever seeking to destroy his labors and life, Paul rejoiced that he was enabled by the grace of God to live according to a good conscience (2 Corinthians 1:12). This was his testimony when brought before the enemies of the gospel (Acts 23:1). Living with a clean conscience gave Paul a powerful testimony because he could speak truthfully to the conscience of every man (2 Corinthians 4:2). Conscience is the voice of God to our souls—the co-perception we have with God concerning the truth given to us by the Holy Spirit. The Bible warns us that in the end times many will depart from the faith and have their conscience “seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1-2). Yet, those who hold fast to the Word of God and choose to honor their conscience, refusing to have it “seared” or compromised, can rejoice in the message of the following verses:

“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, 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” (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Epilogue

And finally Paul ends this mighty epistle to the Hebrews with some personal words to the church and brethren who supported him in the gospel work.

“And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. Know that *our* brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly. Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. Grace *be* with you all. Amen” (Hebrews 13:22-25).

With these few simple closing words, the apostle recognizes the vital support that he has received in his ministry of the gospel. What a powerful book Hebrews is to those who believe and accept Jesus Christ as God, Savior and Priest. How wonderful it is to know that He is fully able to save all who come to Him by His grace.

Summary

Continue in the faith to share the love of God in Jesus Christ to friends, strangers and everyone in need. Motivated by the cross of Christ where God gave His all for us, we are to go forward to the world with this message of His unfailing love and with our conscience clean before God and man. The very foundation of human relationships is at stake in the home, in the marriage and among strangers. God’s love is the vital principle of healing for the world. So let the praise of God’s love be continually upon your lips. Then all will see in your heart and life the grace of God revealed.