

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Christian Behavior

Hebrews 13:1-3

Part 1 - Brotherly Love

1 Let love of the brethren continue.

**Lord, give us the meaning and spirit of Your Word while it lies open before us;
Apply Your Word with power to our souls, threatening or promise, doctrine or precept,
whatever it may be; lead us with trembling and with joy into the soul and marrow of Your Word.
(adapted from C.H. Spurgeon)**

I recall a time that I had the opportunity to share the gospel message with an unbeliever. I spoke of this person's sinful condition, of his being an enemy of God and yet of the love of God to cleanse and forgive that sin, that enmity, that hostile apathy toward God and of the willingness of God to give him a new heart that would desire to please God. The cost of this cleansing, forgiveness and regeneration of the heart – a confession with the mouth that Jesus is Lord, that God raised Him from the dead as the only sufficient payment for his sins; the willingness on this young man's part to believe and follow the example of Christ.

As I shared such thoughts, the repeated question of this young man was this, "If I become a Christian, are you going to tell me that I must stop smoking?" I tried to explain that the issue was not the matter of his smoking. At that moment I could care less about the condition of his lungs, but rather was concerned about the condition of his soul. I sought diligently to bring the conversation back to the question of whether or not he desired to be in right relationship with Christ, explaining that questions about smoking, partying and the like would be sufficiently answered once the Lord had his heart. And yet, he persisted to charge both me and Christianity with wanting nothing more than to control his life; to make him conform to some standard of right and wrong.

That young man made no profession of faith that night and to this day I do not know what has become of him. But I think often upon my experience with him; particularly of the issue of conforming to standards of right and wrong. For while I honestly was more concerned about his coming to know the reality of Jesus as Lord and Savior; and while I could confidently tell him that whether or not he would or could continue to smoke after making a confession of faith was not the issue at hand, I must confess to you this morning that conforming to a standard of right and wrong is most assuredly part and parcel of the Christian message and the believer's life. We are dishonest if when asked the question about what it costs to be a Christian, we say, "It costs nothing – just come as you are and continue to be what you are." The purpose of salvation, according to Romans 8:29, is that the believer be perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus Christ – to see less and less of our old selfish, sinful selves and more of what we see as the attitudes and actions of Jesus. We are to become increasingly more and more like Jesus in thought, in speech and in behavior. And while we will not obtain the perfection of Christ in this life but await the fullness of that perfection until the last day, it is nevertheless to be the goal, the intentional pursuit of our lives.

And so that young man was wrong in saying that it was my desire to make him conform to some standard of right and wrong, for I could not make him do anything. Rather, as I

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shared with him, coming to Christ does not make a person conform, but it will change his desires, causing him to want to live increasingly for God and according to God's precepts.

And beloved, to this point, we find the New Testament Epistles, the letters of Paul and a handful of other writers to the churches to be chalk full of two things: first doctrine; then duty; first an exposition of the truth of God followed by exhortations to apply that truth. The New Testament letters are the presentations of godly precepts followed by calls to faithful practice. They speak to us of creed and conduct; of what we must believe and then how we delight to behave.

If I might say this another way, in the New Testament, we are presented with a marvelously high and often overwhelming view of God and His ways and this high view of God and His ways are to impact how we live and interact with God and with others. The book of Hebrews is no exception to this practice. Hebrews 1-10 have been highly doctrinal, teaching great and glorious truths concerning God and the superiority of Jesus Christ. Beginning in Hebrews 11 and going on into Hebrews 12 we saw the beginning of a shift as the author, while continuing to be somewhat doctrinal, continuing to teach about the nature of faith, also became increasing practical, showing and exhorting his readers to manifest faith – that is to live according to Jesus. But the end of Hebrews 12 presented us with both a terrifying and gloriously high view of God as both the God of judgment against disobedience as well as the God of grace and mercy to those who obediently draw near to Him by Jesus Christ. The very last picture we have of God before coming to Hebrews 13 is this, **“for our God is a consuming fire.”** Our God is one who will one day ultimately shake and destroy all that is evil and all that is contrary to Him. And anyone who lives apart from Jesus, apart from His Lordship; apart from Him as the sole giver of salvation; and apart from pursuing conformity to Jesus is *contrary* to God.

With such a picture given, we might rightly desire to know some practical means of living in conformity to Jesus. I want to know what it means to live in communion with Christ, not to remain contrary to Him. I want to know what it means to have come to the grace of Mount Zion. I want to know if my vision of God and my experience of faith is right and real. How about you – do you want to know such things? The reality of our faith is expressed as we do those things that God commands, those things that delight our heavenly Father as we seek to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. And Hebrews 13 presents us with a series of exhortations, of calls, of imperatives that tell us in light of what we know of God and of Jesus Christ, this then is how we will live.

I submit to you that because the believer has experienced the blessings of God by coming to Jesus via the grace of Mount Zion and because he knows the judgment of God that awaits disobedience via the consuming fire of Mount Sinai – the believer is to be motivated to practice those things which please God and of which He approves. And Hebrews 13:1-19 offers us those things that please God. These are the things we will be examining over the next few weeks. And if find it very interesting that the very first exhortation is a call to the saints to love one another. One's love for God is publicly expressed in one's love for the saints. The first command then is to purpose to love the saints:

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I. The purpose to love the saints (13:1)

Let love of the brethren continue.

A. The Call – to continue

Our text begins with a very simple, forthright command. In light of the fact that God has called us to love and serve Him and that disobedience is met with the judgment of His consuming fire – let this be your first purpose; let this action be pursued with every fiber of your being – make sure that your love of the brethren continues. This is perhaps one of the simplest and most easily understood commands and yet it can be one of the most difficult to rightly perform.

The main action of this verse is found in the verb “**continue**.” You are perhaps more familiar with this verb than you might think as it is the very word Jesus used in John 15:4 –

Abide [continue] in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides [continues] in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide [continue] in Me.

This verb, “**continues**” implies intimacy and openness. The Greek word can be translated “to abide; to dwell; to live; to remain; to stand in.” The call to right behavior then for the believer who knows the God of Mount Sinai and Mount Zion is to purpose; to will, to strive to dwell, to live, to remain to constantly continue in his expressions of love for the brethren, his love for the saints.

B. The Content – “love of the brethren”

But what is the context of this call? The love of which we are to purposely strive for is “**love of the brethren**” or *philadelphia* in the Greek. This kind of love is a familial love; a family love; that is a genuine affection and desire to live with, work with and be associated with those related to you. And while *philadelphia* is not the same as what we call “*agape*” love – that is a one-way unconditional love that seeks the highest good of another regardless of the cost; *philadelphia* love is nonetheless a pure and high love that simply says that since we are related to one another, we can and should expect to enjoy blessings from one another. In John 5:20 we are told that God the Father “loves” or akin to our Hebrews 13:1 word, He *phileos* the Son. Such a love then is important and it is what we are called to. Let me tell then you four things about this kind of love.

1. *Philadelphia* is genuine affection and association with those related to you (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10)

First, to have a genuine affection and longing to be associated with others who profess Christ is to be the norm or standard for the believer. Such a love is not “optional” but is both the privilege and duty of every believer. It is not a duty that is to be directed toward some in the church and due to circumstances not directed toward others. Consider the commendation and exhortation of Paul to the believers at Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10:

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9 Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. BUT we urge you, brethren, to excel still more...[emphasis mine]

Paul states that their love for one another was alive; that they continued in it; that it was their practice. But simply having that love alive is not enough. We must purpose to “**excel still more**” in this love; that is to be more affectionate; more involved; desiring greater and more frequent associations with the saints. I remember a few years back when there were about 10 kids that lived in our neighborhood, all around the ages of Luke and Beth. There was just one problem. They were all girls. And so, for a number of years there was no one really for Luke to associate with. But in recent years, both in the neighborhood as well as at church, some guys Luke’s age have come on the scene. And it is interesting to watch the friendships develop, to see these guys want to get together; to play football; to play video games; to listen to music; to come to youth group. Luke longed for greater and more frequent associations with guys his age. He is always asking if he can have someone over; or go out with a friend and such. Beloved, how much more ought this to be in the church, that we would long for and purpose to build greater and more frequent associations with the saints. This is *philadelphia* – a love for the saints. Purpose to let love for the brethren continue.

2. *Philadelphia* is a sign of salvation (1 John 3:14)

The second thing I would point out to you about *philadelphia* is that such an expression of love for the brethren is a sign of salvation. The more we long to excel in our love for one another, the more certain we can be of our salvation. This is what 1 John 3:14 confirms:

We know that we have passed out of death into life [salvation], because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

How important is it that I see in my life an ever increasing desire to manifest love for the saints? Beloved, it is a matter of salvation. The dreadful commentary at the end of 1 John 3:14 is that “**He who does not love abides** - - - (that is continues, remains, dwells, lives) **in death.**” Let us excel still more in letting the love of the brethren continue, revealing to us the genuineness of our own salvation.

3. *Philadelphia* is a witness to the world (John 13:34-35)

But there is yet a third reason why we ought to purpose to express this brotherly love, for not only is it the believer’s standard and the believer’s sign of salvation, but it is also the believer’s witness to the world of the reality of faith in Christ. Consider what Jesus said in John 13:34-35 [pause]:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

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As we purpose to love one another, as we allow our affections for one another to grow and express themselves in tangible care and service to one another, we announce to the world the reality of a higher ethic, a greater standard by which to live, a standard that seeks the highest good for one another. It has been said by some historians that one of the reasons why Christianity spread so rapidly in the first couple of centuries was because people saw the community and care believers had for one another, something that was largely lacking in the secular community and because of the compassion the believer's had for the sick and destitute, in taking care of those who society had deemed beyond hope. Whereas the general community would allow their sick and poverty stricken to literally lie in the streets, the Christians took one another in to care for and provide for one another. And by and large, the high standards of the believers say then healthier, not being nearly as affected by disease as the secular community.

Beloved, we may know in our heads and even feel in our hearts the reality of this kind of love, but do you purpose to see it grow, to see it manifested in your life in such a way that the world might see and know the reality of living by faith in Christ? What are you doing to display this kind of love for the brethren?

Some time back we had a lady at the church that was suffering from fibromyalgia. Until recently there have been no medications for this condition, but she had found an herbal remedy that brought her some relief. The problem was that this product was only available in a store in Springdale and it was quite costly, about \$75 a month, out of the budget of this family. Laura and I had a great love and affection, a *philadelphia* for this lady and after praying about it, we determined that we would supply her monthly with this product. One time, upon asking for the product, I was asked how I was using it. I told the lady about our friend's condition and that we were simply making this purchase for her. The woman behind the counter was taken aback and I shared with her about the Church and a bit about brotherly love. I can only hope that this "*brotherly love*" – this commitment to care, provide and express concern - was and will be used by the Lord to show to this lady the reality of faith in Jesus Christ.

I know on another occasion a few years back, when I first was starting with some dental problems, the greatest problem being the cost, one of the families in the church came along side and gave us a substantial gift, one which I truly felt was out of their own "deep poverty" through which "overflowed in the wealth of their liberality" in order to meet our need. I remember sharing that with one of the workers at the dental office and the look of surprise and wonder on her face. I can only hope that this "*brotherly love*" was and will be used by the Lord to show the reality of faith in Jesus Christ.

Beloved, it need not be only monetary – but we must purpose to find a variety of means by which we might express such a brotherly love to one another, to have this be the testimony of Hope CBC, that these people dwell, live, abide and continue in such a love to the glory of God.

4. *Philadelphia* pleases God (Psalm 133:1)

And this then brings me to the fourth and final reason I offer you as to why we must purpose to continue in brotherly love according to Hebrews 13:1 – that reason being simply this – it pleases God. The genuine, tangible, continual expressions of mutual care and

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reciprocity among the saints delights the heart of God. Consider the truth of Psalm 133:1 which says,

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!

Or consider how Young's Literal Translation puts it -

Lo, how good and how pleasant the dwelling of brethren — even together!

There is nothing more delightful and satisfying to Laura and me than seeing Luke and Elizabeth working together, getting along, and looking out for one another. On the flip side, there is nothing more frustrating to us than seeing them bicker and bark at one another. If this be true for earthly parents, how much more delightful is it to our heavenly Father when His children care for, help and live in harmony with one another? Such unity, such brotherly love glorifies God. It honors God as Father. It reveals that we understand the reality that if God be our Father, then we indeed are brothers and sisters one to another, bound by the blood of Christ and therefore to be more involved, more closely knit and bound to one another in Christ than we are to blood relatives who are outside of Christ.

C. The Consideration – “let love of the brethren continue”

The command is this – this is our consideration – ***“let love of the brethren continue.”*** This is reminder to us that circumstances, busyness, difficulties and even sin must not be used as excuses to forsake such a practice. If Christ is superior; if He is first in all things, then let us also place in priority what is important to Him. And after glorifying God, I say to you that Christ's supreme priority was - - - the Church; His Bride. If the mission of Jesus, according to Ephesians 5:25-27 is so loving the saints so as to present them without spot or wrinkle, but rather holy and blameless, ought we also to have such a consuming love for the saints?

Beloved, let love the brethren continue. This is not some sloppy, sentimental, superficial, occasional affection. No, it is a tangible, visible, continual love of concern that is most characterized by practical commitment. In other words – how do you intend to see brotherly love continue in this place? Lovelessness is a sin. It does not matter whether your lovelessness is directed toward Christ or toward the Church – it is sin. Let us remember that the first exhortation given after seeing the God of judgment in chapter 12 is the call to live in mutual expressions of affection and care for one another. Let love of the brethren continue and may it begin afresh in each one of us to the glory of God. Remember, while such a love is our duty, it is not that we are made to do it; it is not that we are called to be clones or cookie cutter Christians, but rather we are to delight in using our gifts and talents for the mutual edification of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria

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