

Text: Hebrews 13:1-3

Title: Christian Love in Action

Truth: Christians are to love one another, even in difficult circumstances.

Date/Location: Sunday January 15, 2012 at FBC

Introduction

Hebrews closes with a final section that contains general directions for Christian conduct. It is not a “tack on” to the homily of the previous 12 chapters, because it contains themes in verses 10-16 that connect it in an integral manner to what came before.

I. Brotherly Love Must Continue, v. 1

Love is an imperative. It has to keep happening, all the time. It can fall out of practice and needs continual maintenance.

A. It is reiterated all throughout Christian teaching (the Bible, historical tradition, preaching, etc.). Consider the following verses: John 13:34-35, 15:12, 15:17; Romans 13:8, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:12, 2 John 1:5, Matthew 22:37-40.

B. What is brotherly love?

It can be defined simply as “love of brother/sister,” as in love of a close blood relative; sympathy, a “feeling together”; affection for fellow Christians.

The Greek word is philadelphia, from two roots: philos which means love/friend (Exodus 33:11, Matt 11:19, Luke 7:6, 14:12, 23:12; John 15:14-15, James 2:23, James 4:4), and adelphos, brother (or sister).

The related verb phileo means to love.

The love idea is used of hypocrites who love public recognition for their deeds (Matt. 6:5, 23:6; Luke 20:46).

C. How do you learn love? It is inherent in being a Christian (1 Thess. 4:9). God teaches us. It is also a basic Christian virtue (2 Peter 1:7).

D. What kind of attitude is associated with love? Humility (Romans 12:10). The object of love is worthy of love, worthy of extending yourself in affection and service toward that person. Of course, theologically speaking, we all are inherently unworthy of any good thing because of our sin, but by God's benevolent grace we are given many things to enjoy that we do not deserve.

E. Such love could be costly (1 John 3:16).

F. Specific applications: greet one another when you see each other in the church; meet someone by sharing your name and asking about them. How do you think about a brother or sister? You find yourself always criticizing? Thinking the worst? Hoping for something to remove them from your life? Dreading even talking with them? Trying to avoid them?

The “philo” word group is interesting. Note how many words based on that root are found in the New Testament:

Philadelphia/philadelphos = love of brothers
philoxenia = hospitality (very similar to the next word)
philaxenos = love of strangers
philanthropia = love for man, human kindness (Titus 3:4, Acts 28:2)
philoneikos = love of strife, contention
philostorgos = loving dearly, devotedness
philosophos = love of wisdom
philophronos = in a friendly manner, hospitably
philotimeomai = to have as an ambition
philedonos = lover of pleasure
philaguria = love of money (1 Tim. 6:10)
philotheoi = lovers of God
philagathos = lover of what is good (Titus 1:8)
philandros = love for husband
philoteknos = love for children
philoproteuw = love to be in first place

The first two words are in Hebrews 13:1-2.

Transition: In addition to the general command to love, the Bible urges us to show love in two specific ways, outlined in the next sections. We encounter two groups of people toward whom exercising love can be difficult for various reasons. These two groups of people are strangers and prisoners.

II. Toward Strangers, Love is Exhibited as Hospitality, v. 2

A. What is this idea of “entertaining strangers?” It means to show hospitality. It is from the Greek word “love of strangers.” Lodging and sharing a meal with someone are probably the main things we think of as hospitality. It is entertaining guests, visitors, or strangers. It is the relationship between the guest and the host whereby the host serves the guest in some way, whether with food or a place to rest or whatever.

It is not entertainment in the sense of amusement or watching a theatrical production.

- B. The command is to not neglect hospitality. It means don't forget, don't overlook or be inattentive to this Christian responsibility. It is a subset of the larger responsibility we have as believers to do good. If you neglect this duty, then you have not continued in brotherly love (v. 1).
- C. The difficult part of this is to whom the virtue is to be exercised.
1. We can rather easily have family in for a meal or even (horror of horrors) have them stay overnight. But this verse directs us to show hospitality toward strangers.
 2. A stranger is someone we don't know well. It could be someone that we have good recommendation on, say a traveling missionary. Pastor has asked us to house this person, and by so doing he is saying that this person is a reputable believer in need of housing.
 3. It could be someone we don't have any references on, a *total* stranger. I do not believe it is prudent to put ourselves in a situation that would be dangerous or possibly look bad. But the context as relates to angels seems to indicate that we could be talking about complete strangers. The kind of hospitality Abraham offered was prudent and appropriate for the situation even though those people were total strangers, at least at first (Genesis 18).
 4. Inns throughout ancient Rome were often places of ill repute or dangerous for believers. We have easier and quicker travel in this day and age, and more options for housing, like decent hotels. As a result, some of the need for this has been reduced. But this should not be taken as excusing us from this timeless Christian virtue. I make it our policy and aim not to put missionaries in a hotel, but to have them in our homes. They might not be angels, but the blessing in both ways is not much less than if they were.
 5. And yes, someone could take advantage of us. But, on balance, the good experiences should usually outweigh the bad ones, especially if there is an angel or two thrown into the mix!
 6. False teachers are not to be treated with hospitality (2 John 10).
- D. The motivation to show hospitality.
1. To fulfill the command to let brotherly love continue.

2. A side benefit is that by so doing, you could be showing kindness, like others have in the past, to angels. This is very rare, but it did happen (Genesis 18:2-5, 19:1-3, in our OT reading for the past week). The examples our author is thinking of happened in a way that the hosts were unaware of it.
 3. The angelic visitor is a rare case. But if you are showing kindness to believers, that's even better because they are not just servants of the King of kings, they are His children! Or if you are showing kindness to unbelievers, I assume that includes witnessing to them, and that is doing the work of evangelism. Angels do not need our evangelism or sustenance in the way that believers and unbelievers need help.
- E. The Bible instructs hospitality in several places: Romans 12:13 uses the same term for all believers; 1 Tim 3:2 says hospitality is a qualification for a pastor. If the pastor has not offered you to come into his home or shared a meal with you, something is wrong. See also Titus 1:8 on that. 1 Peter 4:9 adds that it is a responsibility for all believers, without grumbling!
- F. This is an application of love—toward those whom you do not know well. That's right, virtual strangers!
- G. How about hospitality for those who are not strangers? When is the last time you opened your home to someone in the church? When did you invite them over for a meal or to "hang out" or whatever? If we are not doing that, I doubt strangers are getting much.
- i. Maybe you think your house is too messy. Here's the solution that many people use: don't invite people over. Then they cannot see it. How about another solution? Stop being lazy and clean it up! Make your home an open place for people to come and visit!
 - ii. Maybe you think your house is too humble? Really? Does that exempt you from hospitality?
 - iii. Maybe you think you don't have money to buy all the top-notch food and beverage? So what! Does that exempt you from this command?

III. Toward Prisoners, Love is Exhibited as "Remembering" Them, v. 3

- A. What does it mean to remember prisoners? It is certainly the opposite of forgetting, but it is far more than a mental remembrance. To remember means to "do something" for them—at least intercede in prayer for them before God (pause and do that now). It means to care for someone and be concerned about them, enough to do something, not just pay lip

service. The sense is that of Luke 23:42, Hebrews 2:6, Luke 1:72 (see Lev. 26:42, 45; Psalm 97:3). For the opposite, consider that God does not “remember” our iniquities against us (Heb. 8:12, 10:17).

If you do not remember, you are not continuing in brotherly love.

B. The parallel structure of the verse gives us a clue as to its meaning, particularly with respect to the last word, **body**. Here it is in diagram form:

Remember
the prisoners
as if you were imprisoned with them
the mistreated ones
as also yourselves being in the body.

I have always thought of the **body** as conveying the idea of the body of Christ. And it is true that we ought to bear one another's burdens as members of one body (1 Cor. 12:25-26, Gal. 6:2). But the parallel structure indicates, as some translations have noted, that this is something like "remember the mistreated ones as if you yourselves were also being mistreated." In other words, the whole verse is a solidarity kind of verse that is trying to get us to really feel the sufferings and imprisonment of our fellow Christians. The body is our own body, that is, that we feel for them as if our own bodies were being mistreated.

C. The idea is to have some sympathy and Christian imagination of how bad the situation is for the person who is imprisoned and mistreated.

Suppose I am imprisoned for the faith...please visit me...try to help me get out...etc.

Example: Bruce relays this account in his NICNT commentary, p. 372. Proteus Peregrinus was imprisoned. The believers “left no stone unturned in their endeavor to procure his release. When this proved impossible, they looked after his wants in all other matters with untiring solicitude and devotion. From earliest dawn old women (‘widows,’ they are called) and orphan children might be seen waiting about the prison-doors; while the officers of the church, by bribing the jailors, were able to spend the night inside with him. Meals were brought in, and they went through their sacred formulas” (probably meaning worship service and communion).

The Hebrew Christians had already proven their readiness to this kind of ministry, as mentioned in 10:32-34. Some of them had been mistreated themselves. They needed to keep it up.

D. Application: This is brotherly love toward those who are easy to forget, those who are difficult to love, those to whom showing love might bring "shame" from the culture, those to whom showing love might be dangerous... But they may be falsely accused, or put into jail for being Christians, or about to die for their faith, etc. In ancient Rome, provisions were quite spartan. Sustenance was probably required by outsiders to keep prisoners properly nourished (2 Tim. 4:13).

i. It would be easy to be ashamed of Paul as he was treated like a criminal. If he were in the Mamertine prison, he would have been considered a high profile criminal, but a traitor or rebel nonetheless (2 Tim. 1:16).

ii. Onesiphorus had to search to find Paul (2 Tim. 1:17).

iii. It would be easy to abandon him there (2 Tim. 4:16) and just go on with life.

Conclusion

Thus the Bible tells us how to exercise brotherly love—in all circumstances, and specifically with regard to strangers and prisoners. I want to encourage us all to be thinking about how we can do something about this later today or in the coming 7 days.

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