

Hebrews

Let Love of the Brethren Continue

Hebrews 13:1-3

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Hebrews 13:1-3 (NASB95)

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CONCLUSION:

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INTRODUCTION:

Most of us probably over-rate ourselves in the area of love. We claim to love “mankind” in general but we tend to struggle when it turns to individual components of "mankind". Do you love your wife and kids? Do you love difficult family members? Do you love those in this church? If so, how did you show it in your words and behavior last week? If they irritated you, did you respond with patience and kindness?

Listen to the list concerning the characteristics of love found in I Corinthians 13...

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NASB95)

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

“Love is patient, love is kind”. Were you patient and kind with your interactions last week? Love “is not provoked”. Did you get angry with anyone? There are at least 55 New Testament commands to love one another! As you consider the characteristics of love as defined in the scriptures I am sure that all of us would have to admit that we all have room to grow in loving **people!**.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 13:1-3 (NASB95)

¹ Let love of the brethren continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

Prayer

Chapter 13 of Hebrews contains many practical commands. We need to remember that it is giving us instructions on how to use the doctrine that we were presented within the first twelve chapters. That is the usual pattern in the New Testament epistles: first, doctrine; then application. If you focus on the doctrine without application, it leads to spiritual pride.

1 Corinthians 8:1b (NASB95)

...Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

Some of the most difficult Christians to deal with are those who have a good knowledge of doctrinal theology and the New Testament Greek language. They can argue circles around the average believer. But if they have not applied their knowledge personally, they are prone to be proud and unloving. On the other hand, if you skip the doctrine and focus on application alone, you will lack the biblical foundation for godly living. Rather than your service to God being motivated from God's love and grace, your obedience will be a matter of duty. You will lack the **joy** of knowing Christ's love and serving Him. And there is great joy and satisfaction in recognizing God's love infiltrating our lives. There is a real joy when someone you have been praying for finally begins to listen to the gospel and turns their life around. If **only** we would understand how much we are missing when we fail to love God and others.

I want to remind you that the original text of Scripture did not have chapter breaks and verses. So the recipients of Hebrews would have read 12:28 through 13:1 as one passage.

Hebrews 12:28-13:1 (NASB95)

²⁸ Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire. 13 Let love of the brethren continue.

In effect, these are the two great commandments: Love God and love others. The first is the foundation for the second. If you have truly understood how much God must love us, despite all of our inadequacies, when He was willing to sacrifice His Son for your sins, and how much Jesus must love us to be willing to come to this world of sin and endure all of that pain for us, then we will want to show it by loving others.

In our passage of scripture this morning, the main command is in verse 1: "**Let love of the brethren continue.**" Then in verses 2-3 he shows **two** specific applications of biblical love that were especially appropriate to a church under persecution: (1) Show hospitality to strangers and, (2) remember the prisoners and those who are ill-treated.

BODY:

Next to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, biblical love is the supreme mark of the Christian. It is mandatory for every Christian to grow in love!

I. Place Your Focus on Loving Fellow Believers.

A. Biblical Love Requires Attention and Effort.

The Hebrew church had been practicing this virtue admirably. Back in chapter 6, the author commended them:

Hebrews 6:10 (NASB95)

¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.

In chapter 10, he reminds them of how, in a former time of suffering, they continued to love and trust God.

Hebrews 10:34 (NASB95)

³⁴ For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

Sometimes we think that love should be spontaneous and effortless. But biblical love is not automatic! If you do not focus on it and work at it, it easily escapes us!

B. Biblical Love Derives from God's Great Love for Us.

"Brethren" implies that God has caused us to be born spiritually into His family. To be a Christian means that God has performed a supernatural work of grace in your heart that the Bible describes as the new birth.

John 1:12-13 (NASB95)

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Being born of God means that God is your heavenly Father, and all others who have been born of God are your spiritual brothers and sisters. When my children were young, I was pleased when they would show love for one another. Our heavenly Father is pleased when His children love each other. On the night before He went to the cross, listen to what Jesus told His disciples.

John 13:34-35 (NASB95)

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."

The foundation for biblical love is the incomparable love of Christ! The Hebrews had been doing well in this area, but now the author exhorts them to continue in it.

The third way to grow in love toward our fellow believers is to...

C. Avoid the Hindrances of Our Love for Others.

There are many hindrances to love, but note these five:

1. We Must Fight Against Self-Love and Selfishness.

Once again, Christ is the prime example. Christ love was so strong for us that He was willing to die on a cross for us. He sacrificed Himself because He cared for us and was committed to redeem us and bring us to glory. His commitment to us was so strong that He was willing to bear the wrath of the Father in our stead on the cross!

There is no command to love yourself. The **two** commands are: Love God and love your neighbor. Loving yourself is assumed, because we all love ourselves quite well! If we could ever love our neighbor as much as we inherently care about ourselves, we will be obeying the second great commandment.

Almost all relational conflicts can be traced back to some degree of selfishness. "I did not get my way and I want it **my** way! We are like three-year-olds fighting over a toy! So if you want to let love continue, you have got to **fight** your **love of self** which manifests itself in selfishness.

2. We must Fight Against Pride.

Pride is closely joined to self-love, and is at the root of all other sins. Pride makes me think, "I know better than God does what is good for me, so I am going to disregard His Word and do what "I" think is best for me!" Pride makes me think, "That person is such a jerk! I would never behave like him!" But, I do not know all of the factors that led that person to behave as he did. The fact is, I am just as much a sinner as he is, and if it were not for God's grace, I would still be trapped in sin. Pride makes me a Pharisee, who sets up my own standards and then judges everyone who does not keep those standards. So if you want to practice biblical love, you must constantly judge your pride.

3. We Must Fight Against Intolerance of the Imperfections of Others.

"Love is patient, love is kind..." It is not by accident that Paul put those two qualities first, because they are usually enough to stop me in my tracks when I am acting in unloving ways. Husbands, are you patient and kind towards your wife? Dads, are you patient and kind towards your children? When we grow impatient and intolerant of the imperfections of others, we are judging them by our standards, which stems from our pride. When I get irritated and snap at my wife or kids, I am being unloving.

Another hindrance to our love could be our love for the world.

4. We must fight against the love of the world.

1 John 2:15 (NASB95)

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

That verse leaves no room to dodge its implications: If I love the world or the things in the world, God's love is not in me! And if God's love is not in me, it will not flow through me to others.

The love of the world includes the love of the praise and acclaim from the world. If I love such acclaim, I am loving myself, and consequently, I am not loving God or others. If I love the things of the world, I will be stingy and unwilling to give up those things for the sake of others. So to love God and others, I must constantly fight the lure that the world dangles in front of me.

5. We Must Fight Against a Belligerent Spirit.

For some reason, God determined to save people who do not agree with me on every point of doctrine! If He had checked with me first, I would have told Him to save only those who agree with me! Follow me carefully: Since biblical love means seeking the other person's highest good, and since holding to sound doctrine is essential for the other person's highest good, it is right to seek to help my fellow believers grow in adherence to sound doctrine. But, if in my attempt to help the other person understand and embrace sound doctrine, I rudely alienate him, I have failed to love him biblically. There is a far greater chance that he will come to embrace the truth that **I love** if he first **knows** that I love him.

Why should we dispute, when there is no possibility of convincing? Will it not, in the end, destroy brotherly love, and insensibly take from us that cordial union and sweetness of soul, which I pray God may always subsist between us? How glad would the enemies of our Lord be to see us divided. An inflexible spirit stems from pride and causes division.

Biblical love seeks to help others know God as He has revealed Himself in His Word, but it does not divide over non-essential doctrines.

ILLUSTRATION:

Last week I talked to one of my customers on the phone who was Catholic. He said something like "I know. All you non-Catholics think that all Catholics are going to hell!"

And I thought to myself "Whoever he heard that from definitely did not exhibit brotherly love toward him". There is a far greater chance that he will come to embrace the truth that **I love** if he first **knows** that I love him.

Thus, biblical love requires attention and focus. It is founded on God's great love for us and the fact that we are brothers and sisters in His family. Biblical love will not continue unless we remove the common hindrances to it.

Finally, another way to grow in love toward our fellow believers is to...

D. Cultivate Biblical Love for Others.

The entire Bible can be summed up in the two commands, to love God and love others.

1. Grow to be Like Jesus.

We must work at our ability to truly love God and others. Jesus Christ is our example of what God's love looks like in human life. If you think that love is always syrupy sweet, read the gospels again! Jesus always acted in love. Listen to how Jesus rebuked Peter in love...

Mark 8:31-33 (NASB95)

³¹ And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³ But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and *said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

I am not suggesting that you go around suggesting that someone is speaking for Satan and then claim to be loving! I am only pointing out that Jesus' love was not wimpy, and that by studying His life, you get a complete portrait of biblical love.

2. Seek to Serve, not to be Served.

Mark 10:45 (NASB95)

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

This is a basic mindset that you have to develop. Get your focus off of yourself and onto the needs of others. **Servants sacrifice their own desires and time to please their masters.** Are you a servant in your family, to your wife and kids? Do you come to church to have your needs met or to help meet the needs of others?

3. Develop a Genuine Interest in Others.

Practice the golden rule.

Matthew 7:12 (NASB95)

¹² “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

When you see someone who is new at church or someone in the church in need, how do you react to their situation? How would **you** feel if you were in **their** situation? How would you want to be treated? Treat them like that! That is pretty simple, isn't it? And yet our selfishness blocks us from practicing it.

So the first and main thing is, focus on loving fellow believers. But there are two further extensions of that:

II. Focus on Being Hospitable.

Hebrews 13:2 (NASB95)

² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

This command stemmed from the fact that in the first century, inns were notoriously dangerous and immoral. They were targets for thieves and prostitutes. So Christians would welcome traveling believers, especially those laboring in the gospel, into their homes, even if they had never met them before.

The command to hospitality must be blended with some common sense about fallen human nature. We should be generous and ready to share, but we should also be cognizant that we do not encourage someone's irresponsible habits!

2 Thessalonians 3:10-13 (NASB95)

¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

That may seem a little harsh to many of us. But we must be careful not to support bad habits. If someone is fully capable of working and refuses to support themselves and their family, if becomes necessary sometimes for them to learn the consequences of trying to depend on others for their sustenance. When they get hungry enough, and no one is willing to continue to support their laziness, they will eventually learn to earn an income and live within their means. No one is entitled to a free ride.

But that does not take us off of the hook. Listen to the next verse.

¹³ But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.

We must continue to do good to others. So we help them to become responsible.

The author adds that by showing hospitality to strangers, “**some have entertained angels without knowing it.**” He is referring to the stories of Abraham and Lot. These men

welcomed strangers and treated them as family, not knowing (at first) that they were angels. The author's point is not that we should be hospitable to strangers in the hopes of meeting an angel. Rather, he is saying that we often do not "know how important or far-reaching a simple act of helpfulness may be". As Jesus said, when we minister to the needy, we are actually ministering to Christ Himself.

III. Help Those Who are Suffering Due to Their Faith.

Hebrews 13:3 (NASAB95)

³ Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

By "the prisoners" and the "ill-treated," the author means those who are suffering because of their faith in Christ. He is not referring to criminals, although we should go to prisons and share the gospel with them. Remembering Christians who suffer persecution requires thinking about their situation and applying the golden rule: How would you want to be treated if it had happened to you? That is the point of, "**since you yourselves are in the body.**" He means, "It could happen to you, so treat those who are victims of persecution as you would want to be treated." In that day, prisoners depended on family or friends to bring them food and clothing. The author is saying, "Do not let **out of sight** be **out of mind**. Think about them and meet their needs."

At the present time we do not suffer much persecution in our country, although it could soon come to that. We can apply verse 3 to mean that we are to help those who are suffering for any reason. But around the world, there are thousands of believers suffering for their faith. We can read such stories and pray for our brothers and sisters who are suffering for the name of Christ. God may put it on your heart to help support those who can assist these saints and their families.

CONCLUSION:

When we fail to love we miss a great opportunity to bear witness for Christ. We often dodge opportunities to show Christ's love to others in the family of God. Instead, we must focus on loving fellow believers, on being hospitable, and on helping those who suffer, especially those who suffer for their faith.

What a Day That Will Be!