

## 33. Living a practical Christian life

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Chapter 13 of the Book of Hebrews is like your garage or one particular room in your house – a catchall. From ch. 1 to ch. 12, the author focused on our vertical relationship with our Lord, but in this chapter, he shifted his subject and addressed our horizontal relationship with others.

The style of writing to this point has been lengthy and very theological, but it changed to concise and practical. As you read this chapter, you probably notice that there is no logical flow to it. It's almost like a literary collage, comprised of snippets of last-minute instructions and practical applications.

This is a kinda nightmare for a Bible expository student like me to find a central theme, because I can not. So, instead of coming up with a theme which really doesn't flow, we will learn whatever the Lord brings up to us.

### A. BROTHERLY LOVE

*Hebrews 13:1-3 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. 3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them--those who are mistreated--since you yourselves are in the body also.*

English words, especially American English words have many limitations if you compare them with the Greek counterparts. For example, an English word "love" covers from your affection and adoration for your spouse to your hobby or pizza.

Gentlemen, I hope that you don't love your hobby as much as you love your wife. Your wife is watching your reaction now. Don't even breathe hard.

In Greek, there are 4 types of "love", each one with a very different meaning:

- Eros – As you guessed, it talks about 'erotic love' and 'sexual love.' However, this word is not mentioned in the Bible.
- Phileo – Brotherly friendship and affection. It is the love of deep friendship. It has no nuance of homosexuality whatsoever. The Greek word of "brotherly love" in v1 derives from this word and it is "philadelphia."
- Storge – It defines "family love." The kind of love there is between a parent and child or between family members in general.
- Agapao – The word "Agape" derives from this. It is the most powerful word for love in the NT. And it is often used to describe God's love for us. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable; it is love so great that it continually loves even when it is rejected; it is love so great that it doesn't expect repayment. Agape love isn't about feelings, rather it is about decision. That's what our Lord has for us:

*Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Listen, a church fellowship based on anything other than love for Christ and for one another simply will not last. If you have a mindset that demands others to extend their loving hands to you while you do absolutely nothing, you have a wrong idea. As the followers of Jesus Christ, we should reach out to one another first. I know some of you have a concern about my comment, "What if I get hurt from doing that?" Our God can protect you and enrich you from it.

While I was ministering to the prison inmates of the AZ State Prison Wilmot Complex many years ago, a couple of the inmates who were released abused our kindness for their selfish gain badly. I actually thought about quitting the prison ministry. But the Lord didn't allow me to do so. The following Saturday evening, I went back out to the prison to minister to the inmates as if nothing happened. The Lord reminded me how often I hurt Him with my sins. I would not trade that intimate time with my Savior for all the money in the world, but I wouldn't give a dime to experience it again.

In v2, the Scriptures tell us that we should "entertain the strangers". The Greek word for 'entertain' is "philoxenia." Its literal definition is "showing hospitality." How are we going to show our hospitality to others? I've noticed that many Christians have droopy mouth and frowning look on their faces as if they just drank a gallon of sour lemon juice. The Christians should be the happiest people on earth. We have the hope and assurance that unbelievers don't have. Smile!

When I immigrated to the United States 'legally' with proper documents in 1981, my wife told me that the American people often smile at each other even if they don't know each other. That was a foreign concept for where I came from – the Southern Sweden, of course. So, I've been smiling at others for 34 years. Guess what? Nowadays, many look at me with a facial expression, "Why are you smiling at me?"

Listen, our acceptance of our fellow believers in Christ should demonstrate more than just our love for each other – it reflects the great love of the Lord who has permanently welcomed us into His family. The closer Christians get to Christ, the closer they get to one another.

I love the way that Billy Graham described angels as God's secret agents. That's a good description of them. They do not seek their own glory, rather God's. They can manifest themselves as humans if they need to. I am sure that you may have heard many stories of angelic encounters which none of them can be verified. One thing for certain, angels are here in this room. Don't look for a shiny white feather on someone's back.

In v3, this is the first reference to those who were imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus. But it can also be extended to all who are in prison. I'd love to see someone from our fellowship to start a prison ministry, the Lord willing. It is a great ministry. Here are the verses that the Lord used to encourage me to start it in 1989: *Matthew 25:35-40 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*

## **B. PURITY AND COMMITMENT**

*Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*

The home is the first place where Christian love should be practiced. It means commitment, purity, and loyalty. Any type of sex outside of marriage is sinful and

destructive. Don't think that all sex is wrong. God created and He called it good. Sex within the protective bonds of marriage can be enriching and glorifying to Him. Hear me, please. If you truly love your spouse, being faithful to that person is easy.

If you are taking a cue from the lifestyle of actors and actresses of Hollywood, you really need to examine your hearts. They don't have one bit of a guilty conscience about cheating on their spouses. The majority of the women in Hollywood dress worse than prostitutes and doing the things on the screen that should not be done and call it "art". They are the ones who are making the movies that promote fornications and adulteries as a sweet and genuine love. But in the eyes of God. The Bible calls them fornication and adultery. It is no wonder that they hate God and the Bible.

Then, what about those who have committed the sin of fornication or adultery? Is it over for them? No, if they really repented of their sins and asked the Lord to forgive them. He would forgive them and does not remember their sins anymore. Just as the Lord Jesus who told the woman who was caught in the act of adultery in John 8, He would tell them, "Go, sin no more."

Fornication covers a wide range of sexual irregularities, including sex before marriage and homosexuality. The Bible doesn't care what kind of excuses you might have, sex is reserved only within the marriage.

A few years ago, I received a call from a pastor whose congregation is predominantly elderly people in Green Valley. He asked me what I think about elderly people living together and shacking up. I told him what the Bible clearly says about fornication. I understand that many single elderly people have limited incomes, mainly the Social Security benefit for the surviving spouse or alimony. If a couple chooses to get married, they no longer can receive that benefit, so they just live together. It means that they are not trusting the Lord with their finances.

Satan knows what he is doing, unfortunately. He knows that if he can destroy families, he can destroy nations. The main reason for the struggles within the Black community is not racism against them. Black conservative writer and expert Larry Elder said that the biggest threat to the black community is absentee fathers.

By the way, sexual immorality can never be contained to simply physical consequences because it is not merely a physical act. It involves the whole person – body, emotions, will, and spirit. And it affects the whole person. That's why getting into pornography is as bad as committing an adultery.

*Matthew 5:28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Majority opinion may rule in America, but God rules heaven and earth. He has the power to veto any opinion – no matter how popular, no matter how prevailing. His decision in the Word of God, the Bible has the final authority. And what the Bible says IS NOT OUTDATED.

### **C. COVETOUSNESS AND CONTENTMENT**

*Hebrews 13:5-6 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." 6 So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"*

In today's culture, covetousness and greed are excused or even admired as "ambition." It is nothing more than a cover-up. The word 'covetousness' literally means "love of money." Covetousness comes from pride – thinking that a person deserves more than what the Lord provides. It runs with rebellion.

*1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

But contentment has much more to do with what we are on the inside rather than what we have. By knowing the original human sinful nature, we were not born with contentment, rather it is a learned virtue.

*1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.*

*Philippians 4:11b I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content*

In context of the Scriptures in v5 and 6, the Lord is telling us that He is with us so that we don't have to be covetous. But we can use this assuring verse for other occasions – when we feel deserted by others; when we feel that we are surrounded by those who want to hurt us; or when we just need assurance of His presence.

According to Charles Spurgeon, this verse has a very emphatic statement from the Lord. He said this, "You that are familiar with the Greek text know that there are five negatives here. We cannot manage five negatives in English, but the Greeks find them not too large a handful. Here the negatives have a fivefold force. It is as though it said, 'I will not, not leave thee; I will never, no never, forsake thee.'" Do you think that God means what He says?

You cannot find contentment in this world. Everything can go from 'Wonderful' to 'Horrible' in a matter of seconds. Remember the time when the dot-com bubble collapsed around 1999 and 2000? How about the housing market collapse in 2008 and followed by Obama's unsuccessful big company massive bailouts in 2009 and 2010? How about this now? The second biggest economy in the world is China. It is on a life support with a massive dose of steroid from its government. It already devalued their currency twice.

When, not if, China's artificial bubble economy collapses, it will drag down many US companies that rely on their productions from China, such as Apple computer. Then, the whole world stock market will take a deep nose dive and the certificates of your 401K and retirement fund may become worth less than toilet paper. You are thinking, "I really didn't come to church to hear this depressing prediction." But it's coming.

However, if you are a born-again Christian, you have the inexpressible joy and blessed hope and assurance from our Lord Jesus Christ. Because He will never leave you, nor forsake you.

## **D. APPLICATIONS**

**1) Extend God's love to others FIRST.**

**2) Keep your mind and heart pure to the Lord and to your spouse.**

**3) Godliness with contentment is great gain.**