

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part fifty-five

Sunday, June 10th, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2053

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WHAT DOES "ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP" LOOK LIKE?

Hebrews 13:1-6 - "Let brotherly love continue. [2] Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. [3] Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. [4] Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. [5] Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' [6] So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

In our text last week our writer gave the lead-in idea for today's passage - **Hebrews 12:28** - "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe...."

What does acceptable worship look like? This is the theme of today's text. In the typical pattern of laying down doctrine first and application second, our writer gives six concise summary statements of how thankful recipients of grace respond in worshipful allegiance to their Lord. In other words, our writer immediately wants to do away with the extremely common false notion that the *liberty of grace* eliminates the need for *carefulness in obligations*.

1) IT IS EASIER TO BEGIN IN BROTHERLY LOVE THAN TO CONTINUE IN ITS GROWTH

Hebrews 13:1 - "Let brotherly love continue."

Just the nature of the command seems to imply a difficulty in *preserving* this grace in any local congregation. Starting is easy. Continuing isn't. Our writer describes brotherly love in terms that make us aware this is a grace apt to weaken and fade, or even collapse with over the passing of time or difficult circumstances.

"Don't let this happen! Don't give up on brotherly love. It's easier to feel the first emotional impulse than to continue in the high cost of pouring out forgiving, self-sacrificing love toward imperfect people!"

Brotherly love in the body of Christ is like love in a marriage. Think of the hoards of people who couldn't wait one more minute to get married who come to a place years later when they can't stand one more day together. Bursts of love can be like that. *Beginning* isn't *continuing*. So our writer says a mouthful when, in four words, he presents this mountainous challenge - **"Let brotherly love continue" (1).**

Who is there in this church body to whom this speaks? Who is there whom you once loved as joyful members of a warm family of God toward whom you no longer *continue* that love in Christ? It was there once. But the sweetness is gone. There is a blank space where love used to be - an awkward silence.

Here's all I know for sure. Wherever the blame lies in your mind - whatever reasons you can spin - whatever they did to hurt your heart - you need to remember the *kind* of love commanded in this verse: **"Let brotherly love continue."**

Read those words with understanding. Our writer doesn't mean *duty* love as opposed to *romantic* love. He doesn't mean a *religious* love as opposed to a *passionate* love.

There are clues in this letter that define the roots of this brotherly love:

Hebrews 2:11-13 - "For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, [12] saying, I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.' [13] And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Behold, I and the children God has given me.'"

Our love is brotherly (or sisterly) because we are all linked up together in Christ's love for us. We didn't just get a relationship with *Jesus*. We got a relationship with *each other*. What you are seeing in these verses is the *family love* created by our Redeeming Lord. It has its roots in the very nature of Almighty God as He pours out transforming

redemption on His **“children”** (2:13). We are adopted and made **joint heirs** with our Incarnate Lord.

And to the point I **don't continue** brotherly (and sisterly) love in this church I am affirming I no longer need the **continuing love** of Jesus, my ongoing Heavenly Intercessor and bearer of my present sins. Where would we all be if **He** didn't continue in divine love toward us? Where would we be if **He** turned away at every offensive attitude and twisted affection and careless word?

Look at Jesus again. There's your model for continuing brotherly love. And then run to wherever that love is breached with whomever in the body of Christ. Either that or change your family name. Stop calling yourself a child of God through Christ Jesus.

2) WHAT KIND OF ENTERTAINING DO ANGELS NEED?

Hebrews 13:2 - **“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”**

My issue with this verse isn't that I would doubt either the existence or presence of angelic beings in the way they are presented in this verse. I believe this verse is true. My question is different. What would motivate our writer to mention the angels in this context?

Do angels **need** entertaining? Think of how you entertain your guests. Are angels lonely? Do angels need cookies? Do they love to drink caffeinated beverages? Do they prefer lattes to tea? And do they need pizza after a Sunday night church service? Are they just dying to see the latest movie with you?

That's what I'm wondering. What is the real reason for the angel reference in this verse? Because I don't think angels need our entertaining in that sense.

Here's what I think is going on. And it's precious. The emphasis in this verse is clearly on showing brotherly love, but to **“strangers”** (2). And there's a **reason** for this emphasis. Remember our first readers of this letter. They were persecuted Jewish believers. And many were driven out of their own dwellings:

Hebrews 10:32-34 - **“But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, [33] sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. [34] For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”**

We have New Testament record of the kind of driving out these early converts experienced - **Acts 8:1** - **“And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”**

Where do you go when you have no place to go? These scattered believers found the only places they could. They went to other believers. And God, in His incredibly wise providence, allows **some** Christians to escape this kind of persecution while **others** go through it. In that way there will always be **some** Christians who can **offer** hospitality and shelter to **other** Christians who **need** it.

These seem hard verses to relate to our present situation. Do **you** enjoy an abundance right now? You may not always. And do you think it's just the result of blind luck you have more than you need? Or do you think God might - just might - plan to use you to be the supplier to someone in a land you've never visited - to bless some **“stranger”** who is presently in need? Just asking.

Now, back to the angels. And no, I don't think angels **need** entertaining. But here's what I **do** think. I think so lovely in God's eyes it is when blessed saints find their role in reaching yet estranged saints that God honors those times with angelic ambassadors. It is **more special** to God than we can possibly imagine. Angels want to see it. Somehow our unsung ministry is divinely flagged and celebrated. One day we'll hear about it from those angels.

3) SEEK OUT THE PERSECUTED AND THE POWERLESS

Hebrews 13:3 - “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”

We are called to *risk* in these words. Our writer has already praised his readers for their costly identification with persecuted brothers and sisters - **Hebrews 10:34** - “For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”

Follow the thread of logic in these words. There were Christians who *could* have kept their own property had they just decided *not* to visit their mistreated brothers and sisters in Christ. But they “*joyfully accepted the plundering*” of the properties they could have kept.

We sing of Christian love like it's the inside of a Hallmark Card. It usually isn't. Our world hates Christian love *inside* the body of Christ because it hates Christ and His church. It is a risky thing to love mistreated fellow-believers. You will stand out. You will share in their mistreatment.

To love the mistreated is to come out of the safety of the silence. It's to come out of the Christian closet. This is the toughest *coming out* of all. You will be recognized. You will be judged. You will be spotted. The first disciples ran when they saw their Lord abducted and beaten. They knew they would be *recognized* as those who loved the one the world hated. Nothing has changed. Most Christians are silent when the cause of Christ is mistreated.

4) **YOU CAN'T TRUST YOUR HEART TO AUTOMATICALLY RESPOND IN LOVE IN THESE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS**

Hebrews 13:1-3 - “Let brotherly love continue. [2] Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. [3] Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”

“*Let it continue - Do not neglect - Remember...*” You cannot count on the situation to just draw out the kind of loving response required. Our hearts cannot be trusted to rise to the occasion once in a while. Our last minute response will probably not be the right one.

These verses call for a *trained mind*. They are *direction setting* verses. Our *self-centeredness* is never finally defeated. These verses are calling you and me today to *not be caught unready or frightened* when costly love is called for. They're calling you and me to keep our minds *engaged* on this issue - to *expect demanding choices to arise*.

5) **MORAL PURITY IS A GROUND ZERO MUST IN THE BODY OF CHRIST AND GOD WILL NEVER CHANGE HIS MIND ON THIS**

Hebrews 13:4 - “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”

Remember where we are. Our writer is still unpacking what it means to “*...offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe*” (12:28). Acceptable worship isn't just singing worship songs in church with your eyes closed. There is a life behind the worship gathering. And moral purity is close to its center.

The two directives regarding marriage refer to the *creation institution* of marriage - “*Let marriage be held in honor among all*” - and the *sexual purity* of the marriage relationship - “*...let the marriage bed be undefiled...*”

First, the *creation design* of marriage is to be *honored*. And it is to be honored “*among all*.” Our Creator's design is to be “*held in honor*” as a vital center of a life of worship. This *honoring* of the creational design of marriage is crucial for both those who are *married* and those who are *unmarried*. All are accountable to the Creator for their view of marriage - not the state.

Pride is the term our culture has chosen to assert its willful rejection of our Creator's loving design for human sexuality and marriage.

Second, our writer specifically mentions again the *judgment of God* as the subject of sexual purity is introduced - **Hebrews 13:4b** - “*...and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.*”

There is so much here. And I have to hurry. But I'm anxious to speak deeply into the heart of younger men and women who aren't yet married and hope to be. Please hear me. Your **preparation for a great marriage doesn't begin with you pre-marriage counseling**. And the preparation doesn't begin when you're **engaged and looking for a place for your reception**.

Preparation for a great marriage **begins now with a life dedicated to honoring the Lord with your sexuality the same way now you hope you will honor Him with after the wedding ceremony**.

Put your finger under those words and make your lips say them quietly - **"let the marriage bed be undefiled."** You can **bring defilement - rot - with you into your marriage. You can pollute it before it begins**. Don't sow **unfaithfulness** into your marriage before you even get there!

To the married of this church - recently or scores of years ago - your ongoing love and faithfulness to your spouse is linked forever to your faithfulness to Christ. Protect faithfulness to your spouse. Guard it in your mind and in your social life. Time given to your spouse **daily** is as important as time given to **Christ** daily. Be **unreasonably cautious** about this.

6) KEEP YOUR LIFE FREE FROM THE LOVE OF MONEY

Hebrews 13:5-6 - "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' [6] So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

When I was growing up my parents dragged the four reluctant Horban boys off to prayer meeting on Wednesday night. I wish I could tell you we didn't find it incredibly boring. Of particular interest was that unpredictable time when people would give their **"testimony."**

If I had a buck for every person who quoted, **"I will never leave you nor forsake you,"** I could have retired years ago. But that's the only part anyone ever quoted. I never heard the rest of the verse - **"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"**

Isn't it interesting just to say the first four words out loud - say them with me - **"Keep your life free...."** Who wouldn't want that? Only we don't link **freedom** with the rest of the command - **"Keep your life free from the love of money...."**

I know you're smart enough to plan your strategy for **success**. We have a plan to **make more money**. But that's not the part of the plan our writer addresses. What's your plan to **keep your life free once you have the money?** As a devoted follower of Christ do you even **have** such a plan? Your supposed to.

Apparently, if I don't have such a plan I will end up with the opposite of freedom. I will end up with lots of money and a tiny little shriveled up life with nothing but **bondage** to a cruel set of **covetous desires**. You and I do not have it in ourselves **not** to become lovers of our money. That's what the first word **"Keep"** means. This wonderful discovery of **freedom** won't just happen.

Look carefully at these words of Jesus with me - **Luke 16:13-14 - "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."** [14] **The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him."**

Jesus points out the spiritual antagonism of the Pharisees. He's bold enough to expose its root. They were lovers of money (14). **Question** - How can you **know** if you're a lover of money? **Answer** - You will find some way to tune out what Jesus says about the love of money. You will dodge this part of the sermon. Look at these religious people. Jesus tells them the source of their bondage. And the best they can do is what lots of people do - **Luke 16:14 - "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him."**

Skeptics hear words like this and they think the pastor is fund-raising - trying to beef-up the giving. And Satan would love to have everyone here think that. The last thing in the world he wants is for materialistically inclined people like we to find the authentic freedom and the deepest eternal joy in God and using their money to extend Christ's kingdom and free their hearts at the same time.