

Hebrews 13:1-6

“Serving God Acceptably; Serving One Another Practically”

Ch 13 of the book of Hebrews brings us into the final appeals of the epistle. and As you read over it you sorta get the impression that the writer (feeling as though he’s about outa time kind of like the end of a conversation with still much on his mind) just begins to issue forth all these exhortations that he wants to make sure and communicate before his time with them is finished. He may not have time to expound on them, but he wants to exhort them in them nonetheless. and It’s like, “Hey before I hang up don’t forget this, and that, and there’s another thing I want to make sure you don’t forget.” and He’s just issuing these exhortations that deal with day to day living.

If you’re not following the flow or keeping with the context you might get the impression that they’re basically random statements regarding good conduct before his final farewell. In reality if you simply follow the flow out of Ch 12 and basically ignore the Ch break it’s really not that way at all. You recall the author was making some doctrinal observations along with their practical ramifications there in the last ½ of Ch 12. How that there was an old covenant that basically amounted to what we referred to as the Mt of *bondage* (Mt Sinai) but now there’s a *new* covenant, what we referred to as the Mt of *blessing* (Mt Zion). and Everything about the new covenant is greater than the old covenant. *Including* (listen) including the penalty that’s incurred by refusing it and turning away *from* it. The old covenant was mediated by Moses, the new covenant by Christ Himself, the old covenant was temporal, the new covenant is eternal, unshakable. and So we read in Vs 28 of Ch 12 (read)

What’s the resource that we draw from which allows us to serve God acceptably, in a manner that’s acceptable *to* Him, in fact well pleasing *before* Him? Its grace; and you recall the fingerprints that will be upon the life of the one who’s operating in this sphere of grace. It won’t be wild and loose living after all God’s grace is upon me. No, that’s not operating on the basis of grace but upon the basis of presumption and it’s a dangerous realm in which to live. The fingerprints of grace upon a person’s life will be that of *reverence* and *godly fear*.

Now here’s where the context catches up to us for Ch 13. Because one of the very real ways that you and I serve God is through what? Serving *others*, remember Jesus said that regarding various acts of benevolence to our brothers and sisters in need that He would say to us on that day that we stand before Him, “*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*” Matt 25:40 Do you understand that when you serve the body of Christ, that’s tantamount to serving Christ Himself? It’s *His* body; you’re serving *Him* through serving those who are His.

So that's how the segue, the transition takes place from Ch 12 to Ch 13, it's in the context of serving God acceptably by His grace with reverence and godly fear, and in so doing we're to serve one another. He's coming out of doctrine into duty. The bible really makes no division between doctrine and duty, revelation and responsibility, because they're tied together so closely, 1 directly impacts the other. We've spoken before about how what we believe determines how we behave. and So from the principle to the practical we read.

Vs1

Vs 1, "Love the saint." and The reason the word "brotherly" love is used is because the Greek word is the word "Philadelphia" and that's what it means, the love of a deep friendship. As you know there are 4 basic words that the Greek language employs for our single word, "love." and They each mean something different, there is "eros" which is where we get our word, "Erotic" it's a sexual, sensual kind of love. There's "Storge" which is the love that a family shares, it's the love between the parent and the child, a brothers and/or sisters. Of course there's Agape, Agape love is the word used to describe God's love. and You can't know this love apart from the reality of Christ in your life. Because it's a completely selfless love based not upon what I can get from a relationship but solely upon what I can give. It's a choice, to love regardless of whether or not the individual is worthy *of* it, is thankful *for* it or responds positively *to* it. It's a love that seeks give and expects nothing in return, it's a love that's unchanging, never expects repayment, it's not about feelings, it's about decisions, it's a choice, and it's a verb, its self sacrificing. and As you might imagine it's the most powerful word for *love* in the NT.

As I mentioned the word here is *Philadelphia* which has as its roots the word "Philos" which speaks of the love and strong bond between friends. and This love (as well as Agape obviously) should be running rampant in the body of Christ. and You should note that the presupposition here is that it is, and that they're simply to *continue* in it. It's assumed upon the body of Christ that love is going to be a chief characteristic and a dominating quality. After all we understand that reverence and godly fear are fingerprints of grace, and what it takes to *serve* God acceptably, but 1st and foremost love is to be that which is seen in me *primarily*. Listen to what John said, "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*" 1 John 4:7-11 What's he saying? That if God showed His love *to* us by giving Himself *for* us, then that's how God's love *in* us will show itself *through* us, through service and sacrifice for others.

As a matter of fact love is so vital that Jesus went on record saying that the only way people would really know that you belong *to* Him and follow *after* Him is that you have love for your brothers and sisters in Christ. He said, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* John 13:34-35 and So the author here presumes this is already happening, after all it’s a non option for the body of Christ, Jesus commanded it, they’re to continue in it, so are we.

So let this question stir around in you. If you’re a believer, in what way (practically, tangibly) are you serving or sacrificing for your brothers and sisters? and I’m not trying to throw a legal trip on you, but in what way is the love of Christ on display in your life? Remember what John said, *“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”* 1 John 3:18 Paul said, *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;”* Rom 12:10-11 See how giving preference to one another is found in the context of serving the Lord? We serve God in serving each other, let brotherly love continue.

Vs2

If Vs 1 we labeled, “Love the saint.” Then let’s consider Vs 2, “Love the *stranger*.” The word here is “Philonexia” it speaks of hospitality, something that seems to be desperately lacking today in our modern American Christian culture. I just quoted to you from Romans Ch 12 Vs 10 and 11 regarding the command to love one another, in honor giving preference to one another and showed you how that was intertwined with our service to the Lord. In that same passage he continues on, “not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; *“...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”* Rom 12:12-13 “Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”

The word translated, “hospitality” there is the same word translated, “entertain strangers” here. Every now and then we’ll talk of someone being hospitable who’s had us over for dinner, and they were cordial and kind, and everyone enjoyed themselves and they were just really hospitable. Well, inviting someone you know over for dinner isn’t really what’s in view here (as great as that is, and encourage good godly interaction). The thought here is that of scanning the sanctuary for someone you don’t know, introducing yourself and saying, “We’d really like to have you over, get to know you, cook dinner for you and your family.” Its being a blessing, and showing kindness to that brother, that sister you don’t even know, yet you’re extending the love of Christ to them, desiring to be a blessing to them. When’s the last time any of us picked out a stranger here in the body (by stranger I mean someone you don’t know) and sought to reach out to them by extending to them an invitation into your home? For some of us it’s been a long, long time.

You see back in this day, when Christians would travel, they'd depend on other Christians to take them in and lodge them. Inns were fairly expensive and notorious for immorality so as a general rule Christians just avoided them. It was too dangerous to sleep on the street and so there was a need for hospitality in the body of Christ. and Here the exhortation to show love, not only to the saint you may know, but what about the stranger you *don't* know. Now in all fairness this is still within the context of the body of Christ. It's not saying pick up every hitchhiker you see because he might be an angel. As a matter of fact as a general rule in the culture we live in I'd encourage prayerful caution with any of that.

You should know that angels won't smell like alcohol, or a like a giant cigarette, they won't smell like they've just stepped out of a bar, or be foul mouthed, they don't work for food. As a general rule when you see people in the scriptures encounter angels even though they may not've known they were angels initially there was definitely something distinct about them personally that seemed to tip the person off as to the uniqueness of the encounter they were having. But as for people who've entertained (or been hospitable to angels unaware) you find Ab in Gen 18, Lot in Gen 19, you recall that Joshua had an encounter with the Angel of the Lord in Joshua Ch 5 as he was preparing to invade the Promised land. Gideon had such an encounter; Samson's folks had such an encounter. and The idea here is that not only are we to extend ourselves to the saints in *front* of us that we know, but those brothers and sisters *around us* who are strangers *to* us whom we don't.

He just throws in for good measure here, "Who knows there may be a Divine blessing in it for you that you weren't even expecting." and The word "angels" here is the same word used in the book of Rev in Ch's 2 and 3 when John was writing to the "angel" or the "pastor" "the messenger" of a particular church, the word literally means "a messenger of God." and So though it's probable that he's speaking of an angel in the traditional sense, we could also broaden this just a bit here so as to understand it as saying that as we take in that brother or that sister that we don't even know, God just might have a message to us through them, they may be God's messenger to us and though we were set to be a blessing *to* them we wound up being blessed *by* them because God spoke through them to us.

Vs3

Vs 1, "Love the saint" Vs 2, "Love the stranger," Vs 3, "Love the suffering." He says, "Remember the prisoner as if chained with them-those who are mistreated." Those who are *suffering* for the sake of the gospel. Of course it's difficult for us to read of the prisoners and those in chains with out thinking of this as a clue as to the authorship of this book. Again Paul was always so conscientious of such thing, probably because he was commonly in prison for the sake of the gospel. and Over and over again you read where he would ask the brethren to remember his chains.

Be that as it may the point here is that love cares for the suffering. We spoke in our time of introduction about the fact that Jesus said that when you or I do some act of benevolence to even the least of the brethren that we do the same to Him, be it for the bad in mistreating someone, or for the good in reaching out and ministering to them in Jesus name. and Again back in this day (and still in many parts of the world in our day) if you were a prisoner there was very good possibility that unless someone brought you the basic necessities of life (like food and or clothing) you just didn't get them, they weren't provided for by the state. and So those in prison depended upon people on the outside to be there for them and minister to them. They needed to know that they hadn't been forgotten about or cast off but that they were being prayed *for* and taken care *of*.

He even gives us a motive here for making sure we're reaching out to the suffering, "... since you yourselves are in the body also." Again back in that same passage of Romans we've been quoting from right after he spoke of being given to hospitality Paul said, "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*" Rom 12:15 To the Galatians he said, "*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*" Gal 6:2 Why? Because we're members of the same body, when there's something wrong with one part of your body, it will arrest the attention of every other member of your body until things are made right. You get the flu, and your stomach is swirling, the rest of your body doesn't say, "Well, sorry stomach we're gonna move on you can stay here and rest." Man your whole body is in this thing together, you either go as a whole, or you don't go at all. You don't discard certain aspects of your body because of an inconvenience, you get a deep cut, man you nurse that thing, take care of it lest it get infected and make for even more immobilizing problems. The body looks out for itself; various members take care of the others who may be in trouble. Same thing in the body of Christ, there are people who go and have gone to church here who've done jail time. and They'll tell you how important godly encouragement and communication is to them when they're isolated and feeling forgotten. Love the suffering.

Vs4

Vs 1, "Love the saint" Vs 2, "Love the stranger" Vs 3 "Love the suffering" Vs 4, "Love your spouse." All of these things are the overflow of our love and acceptable service to God through the resource of His grace flowing *through* us and resting *upon* us.

"Marriage is honorable among all," you know Satan has done so much to unravel the sanctity of marriage and I have to say he's done a really good job of it. Marriage in our culture is perceived almost old fashioned and irrelevant, why get married when we can just live together? Then if it doesn't work out, no harm no foul we weren't married anyway. The marriages people do have they don't honor, the divorce rate is still around 50% in America 1 out of 2 marriages on the average end in divorce, most won't make it longer than 8 yrs, some go as long as 15, but as a general rule 1 out of 2 marriages will end in divorce. I read on 1 web site that the rates were down a by a 1/3 over recent yrs but that's not because marriages are more stable, but rather marriages are down period by 30% because more people are just living together.

It staggers me the amount of professed *believers* that live together in defiance of the word of God. That's just the opposite of, "Marriage is honorable among all." That's to disrespect and defy the word of God, God is the One who instituted and ordained the marriage union.

It was a picture of His relationship with Israel, with Christ's relationship to the church, it's no wonder Satan is seeking to destroy the sanctity of marriage. and Notice, "...and the bed undefiled." and That means pretty much exactly what you think it does, sex with in the parameters of marriage is not only condoned, it's commended by God, again He created the sexual union between a man and a woman. But mankind has perverted the acceptable parameters, and I've shared this with you before but Satan's strategy is to *encourage* the sexual union as much as he can *outside* of marriage but *discourage* it as much as he can with in the marriage union. and It's a real problem. But you need to realize (if you're married) that there is nothing unclean or dirty about the sexual relationship between you and your spouse, again God's word both encourages and celebrates the sexual union with in the parameters of marriage.

However, "...fornicators and adulterers God will judge." You see there is a definite distinction in the eyes of God between being married and not being married. This whole notion of "We're married in God's eyes" is a deception from the pit of hell and a justification for sin in people's lives. If you were married in God's eyes there wouldn't be the distinction made between the *marriage bed* and fornicators and adulterers. and Fornication and adultery aren't synonymous terms. Adultery is what takes place when someone is unfaithful to their marriage vow and has a relationship with someone else while they're married. Fornication is a very broad word that pretty much covers every other arena of sexual activity of one who's not married.

But I think this is an important Vs to linger on here for a minute because of the sexual pandemic that's contaminating our country and the blatant disregard for the word of God even by professed believers. I'm not sure where it comes from but it seems that so many seem to have this, "Me and God have this little deal worked out," type mentality. "I know God doesn't approve of it generally, but He's ok with where I'm at personally." Don't be deceived, fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Leave the book of Hebrews and turn to Eph 5 (Vs 1-7)

Now understand that nowhere does the bible say that if you slip, you're sincerely seeking the Lord, but you stumble, you fall, you sin that God's wrath abides on you. Repent and move on, but there's a big difference between an isolated mistake, and a general lifestyle, a habitual practice with no regard for the word of God. If these types of things are a fitting description of your life, the word of God qualifies you as a son of *disobedience* upon whom the wrath of God will come. and You guys I know this is heavy, but this is where we are culturally and we need to wake up to the reality of what God's word says and be obedient accordingly. There is a definite difference between living together, having sex together, and being married, marriage is honorable (and it's to be honored, meaning esteemed and seen as precious and priceless, till death do you part) among all. But fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Vs5-6

What are we seeing here? Love is *satisfied*. Vs 1, Love the saint, Vs 2, Love the stranger, Vs 3, Love the suffering, Vs 4 Love your spouse (and stay pure); Vs 5-6 Love is satisfied.

It brings satisfaction, “Let your conduct be with out covetousness; be content with such things as you have.” Here we have 2 mutually exclusive positions; they’re polarized against one another, “Covetousness” and “Contentment.” Now again in a capitalistic society (and I’m not saying I’m against it, nor am I trying to just hammer on our culture today, but this is where we live) covetousness can be a real problem. Because it’s washed under the radar through terms like “ambition” and “aspiration.” Now don’t get me wrong the bible exhorts us unto diligence, but not a sinfully greedy drive.

We want to work hard for our employer, show them Christ in our work ethic and all of that. and Often times hard work is rewarded and that’s all good and well, but motive is important. Is it wrong to want to provide well for your family, have nice things? No, again it’s biblical to provide for your family to the best of your ability.

But be careful to guard against covetousness, because in reality covetousness is synonymous with idolatry, that’s what the bible teaches. Yet Paul told Timothy, “*Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.*” 1 Tim 6:6-8 and It’s not that having things is a problem, it’s that craving, that desire and drive toward riches, and the things of this world that will ensnare you. Jesus said, “*Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.*” Luke 12:15 A millionaire was asked how much money does it take to satisfy a rich man, and he answered, “just a million more than he has.” The flesh is never satisfied, and there’s no ultimate contentment in the things of this world, they just leave you wanting more. (Drink of this water you’ll thirst again, whoever drinks of the water I shall give him will never thirst, Jhn 4:13). To the Philippians Paul wrote, “*I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*” and You guys that’s the key, “Christ who strengthens us.” It’s in Christ that we find contentment.

“For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear, what can man do to me?’” and The idea there is that if you know the Lord, if Christ is in your life, what more (*really*) could we possibly want? How do you improve upon Christ in your life? Honestly now; what makes you feel more secure, a million bucks in the bank, or the sovereign God of the universe looking out for you, protecting and providing for you?

Isn't amazing how we'll place our trust in the almighty dollar but we struggle trusting in the Almighty God? Real contentment is found in Christ, seek 1st the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and those things you need, He'll provide. He never guaranteed your greeds, but He'll look out for your needs. Prioritize Christ and you'll be content. Let brotherly love continue; *care* for one another, be *considerate* of the stranger, show *compassion* for the suffering, be *committed* to your spouse, and be *content* in Christ.

Prayer Points:

God help us to walk in love, as Christ has also loved us and given Himself for us. Lord we understand that principle of serving you, but help us to make the transition into the practical. It's both easy and comfortable to be on the receiving end, and yet Lord you've called us to be on the giving end. Being a blessing to one another, serving one another in our service to You. I pray that Your love would course through this fellowship Lord, that brotherly love would continue, that hospitality would be a reality, give us a heart for the hurting and teach us to safeguard our marriages holding them in high esteem. and God grant us contentment, help us to see all that we have in You, again we're humbled *by* and thankful for Your word.

Before we close I just want to ask you a question, in what, in whom do you place your trust, what gives you that sense of security in this life? Are you looking to Christ, or hoping in something else? If you've not given your heart to Christ, if you're not trusting in Christ, then peace is really always just beyond your reach, there's no *real* sense of security for you because you're with out hope being with out God in the world. God has loved you with an everlasting love, Christ has laid down His life for you, and promised to *never* leave you nor forsake you, but 1st He has to have you, don't trust in the things of this world, turn from your sin and place your trust in Christ.