

Hebrews Chapter Thirteen (vv.1-14)

The final **three** chapters of Hebrews are practical, following the pattern of the epistles: **doctrine then duty; position then practice**. The practical emphasis in the closing chapters of Hebrews is: **faith** (11); **hope** (12) and **love** (13).

Love for the Saints (v.1)

'Brotherly love' is the translation of the Greek word *philadelphia*. The word occurs **seven** times in the NT (Romans 12.10, 1 Thessalonians 4.9, 1 Peter 1.22, 3.8, 2 Peter 1.7) and means 'tender affection for one from the same womb'. Spiritually, we are all born from above of the same Father, therefore we should be characterised by care for one another. *Philadelphia* is the very opposite of self-love (Laodicea) and is demonstrated by valuing each other above ourselves (Romans 12.10). It is a sure sign of godliness (2 Pet. 1.7, 1 Thessalonians 4.9) and should be without hypocrisy or genuine (1 Pet. 1.22). The Hebrews were to 'continue' in brotherly love. In an epistle of things which *have* passed or *will* pass away (1.11, 12, 7.12, 19, 8.7-9, 13, 10.9), love must remain and abide. This is one of the eternal realities that remains 'unshaken' in God's eternal kingdom (12.27, 1 Corinthians 13.33).

Love for Strangers (v.2)

Verses 2 and 3 further describe how brotherly love might be manifested. The believers were not to 'forget' or 'neglect' the 'entertaining of strangers' (*philoxenia*). The Greek literally reads: *Love of brother let it continue; love of stranger do not forget*. This is **hospitality**. In these days, inns were places of 'doubtful repute, even positive danger'. Travellers would often seek accommodation in private dwellings. As such, the believers were not to neglect their responsibility to be hospitable. Hospitality is a characteristic of elders (1 Timothy 3.2, Titus 1.8) and spiritual sisters (1 Timothy 5.10) and is something we should be 'desperate to offer' (Romans 12.13). It should be done without grumbling (1 Peter 4.9) or expecting anything in return, not necessarily focussing on friends and relatives (Luke 14.12-14, Matthew 25.31-46). In being hospitable, Abraham and Sarah entertained the Lord and two attendant angels, although at first they didn't know it (Genesis 18). See also Lot (Genesis 19.1-3). This is not motivation for hospitality but suggests that one does not know just how great a blessing can be communicated and received through such an action, e.g. Luke 24.29!

Love for Sufferers (v.3)

A further manifestation of brotherly love is to 'actively remember' those who have been imprisoned on account of their faith in Christ. This is practical compassion for those for whom we deeply care (cf. Hebrews 2.6 where God is shown to have been 'mindful' of us in this way). *Prisons* were damp, dark and filthy. *Prisoners* were given no clothes and very little food. They needed the Christian's practical support. This was something the Hebrews had been actively engaged in (10.34) and is exemplified beautifully by Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1.16-18). This active remembrance could be manifested by **prayer** (Acts 12.5, Colossians 4.3), **provision** (Philippians 2.25) or personal **presence** (2 Timothy 4.11). The exhortation extends to all those who 'suffer adversity', or any physical 'mistreatment', whether in prison or not. In all this the Hebrews were to identify with each other, remembering those who were imprisoned as if it were them, and those who physically suffered as if they were suffering in body too. Truly the believers were a Christian brotherhood; what affected one affected another.

Love for Sanctity (vv.4-6)

4 *Marriage is honourable in all, and (thus) the bed undefiled: ~~but~~ (for) whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*

6 *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper. ~~and~~ I will not fear. What shall man do unto me?*

Verses 4 and 5 are framed negatively and present what can destroy brotherly love, i.e. sexual immorality and greed. The encouragement is given, indirectly, to pursue **sanctity** (holiness) and **satisfaction in the Lord**. The writer continues to exhort the believers that marriage should be 'honourable' or 'highly valued as of great price' and 'esteemed as especially dear' by **all**. The same word (*timios*) is used of the 'precious' blood of Christ (1 Peter 1.19). God honoured marriage by establishing it (Genesis 2). The Lord honoured marriage by attending one at Cana (John 2). The Spirit honoured marriage by using it to picture the church in relation to Christ (Ephesians 5). As believers hold marriage in such high esteem, there will be no sexual infidelity and the marriage 'bed' will remain 'pure'. God will judge any form of sexual immorality whether *within* the marriage bond ('adultery') or *without* ('fornication' or 'whoremongers').

vv.5-6: Furthermore, believers should not let their love for the brethren and their spouses be replaced by 'love for money'. Our whole 'manner of life' (conversation) should be without 'fondness for silver' (*philarguria*). This is a common form of covetousness which is an *attitude of wanting or longing to acquire things so that we constantly think on them*. A love of money is essentially a form of distrust in God's ability to supply our every need (Matthew 6.24-34, 1 Timothy 6.17). After all, 'He Himself' has said 'I will not, I will not' (double negative) 'leave them', i.e. 'let them sink' or 'loosen my grip' on them. Additionally, He has also said He 'will not' (treble negative) 'forsake' us or 'leave us in a state of defeat' or

'helplessness'. He will never 'abandon' us or 'leave us destitute'. We should therefore be 'content' or satisfied *in and with* our present circumstances (such things as ye have) whilst also 'confidently' affirming that the Lord is our helper, ever running to the aid of those who raise a cry heavenward (see 2.18, 4.16, Isaiah 50.7). What then do we fear from the persecutions of men (Matthew 10.28)?

Love for Scripture (vv.7-9)

There now follows an exhortation to be firmly established in the unchanging truth of Scripture, especially that in relation to the Lord Jesus. The Hebrews were to 'remember' (different word to v.3) those who 'had' (past tense) the 'rule' over them. This is a 'calling to mind' of former spiritual leaders, now passed away, who had spoken the word of God to them (see 2.3, 4.2). This is not a mere sentimental remembrance but an 'attentive consideration' of the 'total impact of their lives'. These were believers they had known, seen and companied with as opposed to those of which they had only heard (Hebrews 11). They were to 'follow' or 'imitate' their faithful examples (see 1 Corinthians 4.16, 11.1, 2 Timothy 3.10). This is all the more important when one considers that the truth and Person on which these spiritual leaders modelled their lives does not change.¹ The Man who was once down here (yesterday) is now exalted in glory (today) and shall be unto 'the ages to come' (forever). **Yesterday**, He 'learned obedience through the things He suffered' (5.8) and 'tasted death for every man' (2.9). **Today** He is 'bringing many sons to glory' (2.10) and is a 'merciful and faithful High Priest' (2.17). **Forever** He reigns (1.8) as Priest upon His throne (5.6) having obtained eternal redemption for us (9.12). He is the 'same Jesus' (Acts 1.11, 2.36). As such they were to 'stop being swept' or 'carried away' by all kinds of false teaching that was in stark contrast to the truth of the Word of God that centres on Christ who does not change! Some of this false teaching seems to have focussed on 'meats', i.e. regulations about eating and drinking which belonged to the old economy (see Leviticus 11) and had no spiritual benefit (Acts 10.10-15, Romans 14.17, 1 Corinthians 8.8, 1 Timothy 4.3-5). Their lives (hearts) were **not** to be built on a foundation of law and ceremony, but **grace**. It is only the grace of God that can effect true holiness (Hebrews 12.15) and spiritual beauty ('good' = *kalos*).

Love for the Saviour (vv.10-14)

10 ~~We have~~ (There is) an altar², whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

The exhortation of verse 9 reminds the writer of one such legal requirement in relation to food. The brazen altar was the place of 'meats', often providing food for the priests to eat (e.g. Leviticus 7.6). However, whenever a sin offering was made for the High Priest or whole congregation, and its blood was taken **inside** the Holy Place to be sprinkled before the Lord, then the body of the sacrifice must be taken **outside** the camp of Israel and burned (Leviticus 4, 6.30). The priests had no legal right to eat of it. The writer now makes the application to the Lord Jesus (v.12). Likewise, He shed His own precious blood to provide 'sanctification' for His people; a far greater provision than the blood of bulls and goats on the Day of Atonement (9.13-14, 10.10, 14). He also suffered and died 'without the gate', i.e. outside the city of Jerusalem.

vv.13-14: The 'camp' speaks of Judaism, which had no room for Christ. *David Gooding: Christ did not offer His sacrifice as a ceremony within Judaism. He left the whole thing. Those who still cling to Judaism have no benefit from His sacrifice, any more than the priests who ministered at the altar could eat the sacrifice that was burned outside the gate. True believers are therefore to 'go forth' unto Him. This implies complete abandonment of, and separation from, the Jewish system. Outside the camp was a place of reproach and shame. It was associated not only with the burning of the sin offering, but also with the leper, condemnation and execution (Leviticus 24.14, Numbers 5.2, 15.35-36). For the Hebrews to abandon Judaism and separate unto Christ and Christianity would mean the rejection of society and reproach of men. All this is foreshadowed in Exodus 33. Following the idolatrous worship of the golden calf, Moses erected a tent outside the camp (the tabernacle not yet having been built). God had been rejected by His people. All those who 'sought' or 'desired' the Lord (Exodus 33.7) must go out to Him. *God had been rejected inside the camp of Israel and as a result He revealed His presence outside it. The death of Christ again shows that God has been rejected by His people. His presence must therefore be enjoyed outside the camp.**

Being outside the camp of Jerusalem (representing the law and Judaism) was shameful in the eyes of men, but like Abraham their 'earnest desire' should be fixed on far greater glory (11.10, 14, 16). There is no 'enduring city' here on earth, Jerusalem was about to be destroyed (AD70), but there is an **eternal city** above (12.22). So the believer today should be outside the camp of the world, no longer a part of its system, standards and practices. This is what Christ did. As Christians we are to follow our Lord and separate ourselves from the things of this world... earnestly and habitually seeking after those things which are heavenly, eternal and abiding!

¹ **Gooding:** What the Lord Jesus was to Paul, Luther and Spurgeon, He can be to us. We do not ask God to send back again the worthies of the past. We watch their lives and see their triumphant end and thank God that we still have the source of all power with us today, unchanged!

² Many commentators would not agree with the above view, preferring 'we have' to refer to Christians and making the altar to represent Christ or Calvary. **MacDonald:** Our altar is Christ and therefore it includes all the blessings that are found in Him. Those who are connected with the Levitical system have no right to partake of the better things of Christianity.