

HEBREWS – LEVITICUS
“LOVE WELL. LOVE BIBLICALLY.”
Hebrews 13:1-6
December 10, 2023

Hebrews 13:1-6

Let brotherly love continue. ²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ³Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. ⁴Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. ⁵Keep 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.” ⁶So we can confidently say,

**“The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me?” ¹**

We are living in interesting, if not challenging days. Likely you already know this. Yet, at the same time, as culture shifts have taken place over time, the reality is that many just do not see changes as evident as others.

For instance, our county is changing rapidly. As Bob Dylan once said “The times, they are a-changin’.”

When it comes to the state of the church in America, major changes have occurred and are occurring as well. This impacts every local body of believers, and the statistics reveal that almost every major denomination and evangelical network of churches has declined in membership.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Heb 13:1–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

In the United States today, we are experiencing the greatest shift in religious identity since the positive shift following the Civil War. The movement today is one of dechuraching – a categorization where many declare they used to go regularly attend church, but no longer do. About 40 million adults in America today used to go to church but no longer do, which accounts for around 16 percent of our adult population. For the first time in the eight decades that Gallup has tracked American religious membership, more adults in the United States do not attend church than do attend church.²

But...you didn't come here to gain a presentation on current church attendance trends, right? So, why did I share this with you? As we read these first few verses in the epilogue, chapter 13 of the book of Hebrews, we are stepping down from the crescendo statement at the close of chapter 12 where it states, “Our God is a consuming fire.”³

It is a vertical statement for the children of God. It is the “look up” statement. God is holy. He is sovereign. He is powerful. We are rescued and redeemed FROM his wrath BY his good grace.

Then, chapter 13 gives us the application of **how** this great redemption is to be lived out by God's children—the Hebrew Christians of the first century who first received this letter and the Orange Park Christians of 2023 who are reading it today.

This is the why. This is the reality of the local church. Yet, this is not a “woe is us” moment as the local church, but a “get a clue” moment regarding reality.

The love for one another that we are commanded to have, to show, to express, is not truly possible from a biblical perspective *without* love for God. Thus, he empowers his church to live out the commands to love

² Davis, Jim, et al. *The Great Dechuraching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2023), 3.

³ Hughes, R. Kent. *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 433.

and serve one another, to live accordingly, and as addressed here and numerous other places in the New Testament, to understand the love He has for his bride, the church.

This is the forgotten reality of many. The bride of Christ, his church, is beautiful, worthy, and his plan. Yet, I fear that for decades many have been taught what church is, what the church members should do and not do, what activities, events, concerts, fellowship meals, and more the church is supposed to provide and yet, have drifted far from who the Bible states the church *to be*.

Three brief things from these passages today. All centered around action flowing from the pinnacle of the statement of God as a consuming fire. Commands to the Christians who received the letter and to the Christians reading it now.

- 1. LOVE GOD’S CHURCH**
- 2. LOVE GOD’S IMAGE-BEARERS**
- 3. LOVE GOD’S PROMISES**

LOVE GOD’S CHURCH

Hebrews 13:1

Let brotherly love continue.⁴

“Let brotherly love continue” leads us to understand that in this tight-knit group called the church of the first century could potentially lose the love for one another that intertwined them from the beginning of their gatherings.⁵ The words *brotherly love* brings to mind the city of Philadelphia, from the term phileo. The warnings here are clear – the love that unites one to another within the local church is in danger of fraying.

Why? Because...people.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 13:1). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁵ Hughes, 434.

This is just one of the elements in this portion of Hebrews that I think is often forsaken. One of the revealed issues with the American evangelical church over the last fifty years or so has been the clear commodification of faith. In other words, church is a business for some. In many cases, leaders have simply baptized business terms to function more smoothly. To put it bluntly, the wheels need to be greased, the growth needs to be clear, the finances need to be increasing, and the structures need to be fine-tuned. And someone needs to monitor all of that. What has been the result? A factory of faith where preschoolers are dropped off in nursery and as the years go by, they are moved from one room to another each week, one building to another, until they are in the final senior adult class where graduation from that classroom is heaven itself. This is the industrial revolution at work. And...God does use this and has blessed it, but by and large, I fear that not unlike the shift of American factories to other nations that have negatively impacted some communities, the faith factories we have built have begun to shut down and panic is setting in, especially for the generation of regular attenders with adult children who no longer darken the door of a church regularly. Can I get an AMEN? Because I am one of you.

How does Hebrews connect? By reminding us of the basics of what is expected in God's church. Perhaps we have the church situation in the nation we do today because we have built it to do exactly what it is doing?

What has happened is the doctrine of the local church has been redefined, if not ignored. This has led to the rise of parachurch groups that some view as their church, rogue evangelists, doctrinal fuzziness, communion with friends on vacation, virtual Lord's Suppers with Doritos and Coke Zero, baptisms at random times in random places with whomever a person can get to show up to create a crowd by falsely applying the "Ethiopian eunuch" example upon themselves, and more. This shift has created a taken all the elements of the local church without the local church at all. No wonder there is decline and confusion. We

have taken what God has gifted, supplanted it with the latest business plan based upon secular models and mindsets with just a spattering of Jesus sprinkled upon it to make it look churchy.

Back during the Red Scare, Christians feared communist regimes closing down churches. Ultimately, we know now that those movements did attempt that, but actually just pushed the church underground where it could grow more healthy.

Our concern is not such today, but the reality is that an agency, a government, a heavy-handed atheist organization is not the threat, but the idolatry of self that sells Jesus as a feel-good, positivity story and settles for pseudo-church where the superficial sells, but spiritual transformation does not happen.

American Christianity – it is who we are and who we fight not to be. To the glory of God. While the Hebrew writer was not addressing the fullness of what we face in our culture today regarding the church, the fact is God in his wisdom gave these strong words and clear reminders regarding how we should view the brethren, and in this case it speaks of the brothers and sisters who are the ones we know, in our local church. Not a marketing strategy, but a transformative, redemptive command.

“Brotherly love” is an intentional phrase for so many reasons. It is a revolutionary term because it speaks to the relationship Christians have with one another. It is a family-centered, relational love that unbelievers cannot understand. Christians are joint heirs with Christ. By virtue of this union with him, we are sons and daughters of God. Within the local church where God places us, we are the living, physical, visible embodiment of his bride. We are the church. Faith makes us family.⁶

When the writer said “let brotherly love continue” the emphasis on continue was on perseverance. The readers, and we of course, are not

⁶ Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Christ in Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: Holman, 2017), 220.

told to just love, but to practice brotherly love and to do so while persecution increases.⁷ And even if not overt persecution, the difficulty in loving one other is so strong because left to our own wants and desires...we will not love.

LOVE GOD'S IMAGE-BEARERS

Hebrews 13:2-3

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.⁸

Hospitality for those who bear the image of God is our command. And while some may have entertained angels (a reference to Abraham and Lot) our command to be hospitable is not solely so we can find some undercover angel.

Writer, speaker, and former professor at Syracuse University, Rosaria Butterfield has written about the lost art of hospitality in the west and how God drew her from her tragically sinful life to salvation through the hospitality of a pastor and his wife. Her story is summarized in her book *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* and is described this way: What did God use to draw a radical, committed unbeliever to himself? Did God take her to an evangelistic rally? Or, since she had her doctorate in literature, did he use something in print? No, God used an invitation to dinner in a modest home, from a humble couple who lived out the gospel daily, simply, and authentically.

Those who practice biblical hospitality recoil at reducing people to simple categories or labels. They see God's image reflected in the eyes of every human being on earth.⁹

⁷ Schriener, Thomas R. *Hebrews: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 411.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 13:2–3). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁹ Butterfield, Rosaria. *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 11.

This is what God is saying through his servant in Hebrews 13. Show love toward others not because they deserve it, because they do not...just as you do not, but because they too are image-bearers of God.

Show love and work to not forget the forgotten people. Remember those who need to be loved that most have abandoned and forgotten. The writer says prisoners, but we could extrapolate that to nursing homes, lonely neighbors, forgotten folks who used to attend your Sunday School class, and more.

LOVE GOD'S PROMISES

There are so many promises in Scripture and the list of what to do and how to act is long, but the Spirit gives the writer this focus and reminder.

Hebrews 13:4-6

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?” ¹⁰**

What is mentioned here makes us ask “Why did God mention marriage when there are other commandments and expectations. Why marriage?”

The chapter begins with focus on love of the church – the bride of Christ. Then, here the writer speaks to the married and those in the church who are not married, too. The message is clear – your vows do

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 13:4–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

not expire. Marriage is not an idol (can be for some) but is a picture of Christ and his church and a gift to his image-bearers.

So, if you were to come up with a list of things Satan hates most, it would begin with God. Second to God are those created beings that remind him the most of God and that would be the image-bearers – you and me.

And if there is an institution created by God that remains center of the bullseye for spiritual attack with the intent of destroying it, it would be the family, the married couple, the image-bearers living illustration of Christ and his church.

So it stands to reason that no Christian marriage is stress-free. Husbands and wives make vows to remain the rest of their lives together, but it seems that too often the “rest of their lives” lasts until one just gets their feelings hurt or they (as I’ve heard at times) claim some bogus, man-centered excuse for dissolving the union such as “I fell out of love.”

Newsflash – you don’t fall out of love. You choose to stop loving.

Notwithstanding the biblical reasons for divorce (not an extensive list) and the evil, verbally, emotionally, and sadly even physically abusive situations that arise in some marriages (and yes, those are not minor, God is not absent, and the simple fix is not “pray about it and behave” but more about that at a later time.)

For the command here is for the Christian to recognize marriage for what it is and to honor it, protect it, and to keep that marital union undefiled.

What does that mean? Much. Spouses cannot use one another. They cannot abuse one another. They cannot cheat on one another. Purity, despite all the hoopla recently decrying “purity culture” as bad from those who simply just want to have sexual freedom with no boundaries

for their own fulfillment, God’s promises remain. A promise of judgment and a promise of protection.

These commands run in the same lane – love God well and you will love his church. You will serve him within the family of God. You will see people as image-bearers and people of worth regardless of race, skin tone, economic status, or a person’s ability to do anything of worth for you. And...you will see marriage as a divine gift, worth fighting for. All while recognizing that idolatry (the worship of self and desiring things for self – which leads to discontent) is deadly and worth the fire and wrath of God.

But...God.

I love the last portion, as an encouraging reminder:

Hebrews 13:6

⁶So we can confidently say,

**“The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me?” ¹¹**

These commands do not live in a vacuum. They come with power, not a “I told you now figure it out on your own” theme. God is my helper. He is your helper. There is no need to fear others, circumstances, or the difficulty others may place on you.

Why child of God?

Because God is your helper. He will never leave nor forsake you.

Bet.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Heb 13:6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.