

## EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #37

Hebrews 13:1-6

One of the books of the Bible that really is a fascinating and unusual book is the book of Ecclesiastes. In that book, Solomon takes us on a quest to try to find meaning and fulfillment in life “under the sun.” He tried everything and could not find it. However, when he looked “above the sun” he found what he was looking for. As Solomon signs off the book, he ends the book this way, “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: **fear God and keep His commandments**, because this applies to every person” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). There is no possible way one can say “I fear God” if one is not interested in obeying God’s Word.

In the previous context of Hebrews 12, the writer of Hebrews said that we are already, in the mind of God, at Mount Zion. We are not under law; we have received full grace. Our position has already seated us in the heavenlies. However, the reality of it is that there is a gap of time between where we are positionally and where we are practically. Practically speaking we are here on earth and we are waiting for the time when we will be transported into eternity.

While we are in this interval time period on earth, we have responsibilities. We saw last time that we have the responsibility to fear and reverence God. However, we also have the responsibility to function properly in this world in a way that reflects that we do reverence and fear God. That is precisely the point of these verses:

### **BELIEVERS NEED TO GOVERN THEIR LIVES IN A VARIETY OF RELATIONSHIP CONTEXTS IN A WAY THAT FEARS AND REVERENCES GOD.**

We need to relate to people in ways that demonstrate we fear and reverence God. In this context there are specifically five distinct relationship areas where we demonstrate that we do fear and reverence God:

#### **RELATIONSHIP AREA #1 – We are to continually love the brethren . 13:1**

First of all, I would like to read this out of the Greek text because it truly helps me understand what is being said here. The Greek text literally reads: “The brother love let it continually remain” (Ἡ φιλαδελφία μενετω). We have the responsibility to see to it that we continually stay in, abide in, and remain in the kind of love we are to have for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now the first thing that catches my eye about this verse is that the writer does not use the normal word we would expect to see for “love” (αγαπη) that is so often used in passages that challenge us to love one another (i.e. John 13:35; I Thessalonians 4:9).

In Greek there are four different types of “love.” There is eros (ερωσ) which is the erotic type of love. There is storge (στοργη) which is the natural affection family kind of love. There is agape (αγαπη) which is God’s kind of love, which the highest kind of love that always chooses to do what’s best. Then there is “philia” (φιλια) which is the friendship kind of love (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 3-4).

The word used for love here is “philia” (φιλια/φιλαδελφια) which refers to a brotherly and sisterly kind of friendship love. So we are to continually have a friendly kind of love toward our brothers or sisters in Christ. I understand this to mean that we have the responsibility to see and love every true believer as our brother or sister in Christ and seek to be a friend. Each person who comes into this church who is a believer is to be treated with the respect of being our brother or sister in the Lord.

The program of God was moving from the Hebrews to the Gentiles and the writer wants the Hebrews to know that they need to view Gentile believers as their brothers in Christ. Now of course if you track this theme of brotherly love through the New Testament, there are a variety of ways that we demonstrate this kind of love. For example, sometimes brotherly love admonishes the unruly and sometimes it encourages the fainthearted (I Thess. 5:14). Sometimes brotherly love refuses to even associate or eat with certain brothers or sisters so they will be ashamed of what they have done or said (II Thess. 3:13-15).

Frankly there are times we should be sickened by what some brothers and sisters are doing or saying. This is not teaching that we have to be a friend with someone in rebellion. What it is teaching is that we must always abide, generally speaking, in a friendly kind of way with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ must always be a high priority. This brother and sister kind of friendship love was one of the things the early church was known for having. This is a way we show that we fear and reverence God.

When people visit our church, we should be friendly with them and to them. That is our responsibility. Nelson Miles told me this week of a church out West that actually is unfriendly to new people who come in because they want the church to stay their church. What these people don't realize is they are in violation of this principle, which means they are not demonstrating they fear and reverence God.

**RELATIONSHIP AREA #2** – We are to continually be hospitable to strangers. **13:2**

We have the responsibility not to neglect hospitality. The actual word “neglect” (επιλανθανομαι) means to neglect something in the sense of forgetting something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 171). The middle voice of the verb indicates we have the responsibility in and of ourselves to see to it that we do not continually forget about the needs of people we do not know. If we fear and reverence God we will continually remember this responsibility. When Job was defending his integrity as to how he governed his life, he said, “The alien has not lodged outside; I have opened my doors to the traveler” (Job 31:32).

In the immediate context, we are to show hospitality to strangers if they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. The actual word used for “strangers” (φιλοξενος) has the philia (φιλια) prefixed to it that would specifically indicate brothers. In fact, the Apostle Paul referred to this same grace virtue to the “saints” that we are to practice “hospitality” (Romans 12:13).

The actual word “entertain” (ξενίζω) is one that means to offer someone lodging and the amenities that come with it (*Ibid.*, p. 307). In the early days of the Church Age, hospitality typically included providing some lodging and food (Acts 10:23; 21:16; 28:7).

It is certainly wonderful for us as a congregation and as individuals to help those who have need. We count it a privilege to have a benevolent program, and for a church it is a wonderful and loving thing to do. But back in this first century, showing hospitality was a necessity. It was critical because there were no nice places to stay. There were no Holiday Inns, or Hampton Inns, or Best Western Motels. If you were a Christian forced to travel in the first century, you certainly did not have this luxury. If one were a Christian and traveling, you could not stay in some clean and safe place.

Aristophanes writes in his work “The Frogs” that Dionysus asks if he can tell him the place to stay that has the fewest fleas. Plato in his writing “The Laws” cites instances where guests at an inn were held hostage. Theophrastus relates “innkeeping” to the same level as running a brothel (Cited from Kent Hughes, *Hebrews*, Vol. 2, p. 209). So there were no nice clean motels.

One problem we have in our day and the same problem existed back in N.T. times is that when you show hospitality to someone, you aren’t sure of their motives for wanting your hospitality. It is interesting that the first century pagan writer Lucian describes how Proteus Peregrinus, who was a very wealthy man, took advantage of Christians by traveling around and staying with them and taking advantage of their hospitality even though he was a very wealthy man.

There is in the “Didache,” which is a second century document that is based on the teachings of the apostles, some instruction on this point. The “Didache” says that a Christian should be willing to house someone for one night unless there was a special need and then maximum two nights. The person was to leave and be given some bread and if the person asked for any money, he was to be considered false (*The Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 155-156). This is still good advice.

When you have been burned by phonies as a believer, you can become calloused and hard. The old saying “Fool me once shame on you! Fool me twice shame on me!” can begin to become a hard and fast rule.

It is obvious from this that the hospitality of Christians was well known. Now one reason the writer cites for ministering to strangers is because some have actually entertained angels. As we said, that word “entertain” (ξενίζω) is one that means to entertain in the sense of giving a stranger a place to lodge (*Ibid.*, p. 307). The writer of Hebrews specifically uses the plural noun “angels” (αγγελους) here.

B. F. Westcott said when we entertain a stranger, “we only observe the outside surface of those whom we receive. More lies beneath than we can see” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 430).

If we were to actually come in contact with an angel, we would not know it.

**RELATIONSHIP AREA #3 – We are to continually remember the prisoners . 13:3**

Now the prison ministry being described here is not the evangelistic ministry that reaches thugs, murderers, rapists, and thieves who are presently locked up in jail. I certainly see the value of prison ministry to reach out to these kinds of sinners because the Gospel is the power of God and is able to truly transform the person. In fact, I think it is a wonderful thing to have a prison ministry that exposes the prisoners to the truth of God's Word. Obviously, had they known and responded to that, they wouldn't have been in prison.

But this is not the prison ministry that the writer of Hebrews had in mind here. It was a ministry that did not forget about those who were locked up for their faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, in verse 23 of this chapter it is brought out that Timothy had just been released from prison.

Prisoners in this time were not treated well. They didn't get clean clothing or regular showers or health checks or good food. Oftentimes prisoners depended on some family member on the outside to supply even the basic necessities for them. They did not get three square meals a day and a nice mattress on a bed with warm covering. You may recall, Paul was dependent on Timothy to bring him his coat (II Timothy 4:13).

Tertullian, who came to faith in A.D. 195 and became a great defender and apologist of Christianity, wrote a Latin defense called "The Apology" and in it he says that if a Christian is locked up for nothing but his "fidelity to the cause of God's Church" then that brother or sister becomes our "nursling" (S. L. Johnson, *Hebrews* 12:1-6, p. 4). In other words, we have the responsibility to take care of a believer who is in jail because of his testimony.

We must not ever forget about our brothers and sisters in Christ who are locked up for their faith.

**RELATIONSHIP AREA #4 – We are to continually honor and promote undefiled sexuality in marriage . 13:4**

There are two sinful extremes when it comes to sexuality and marriage and both are seen right here. First there is the extreme of a legalism that promotes a rigid view of sexuality in marriage. Second there is a licentiousness that promotes immorality outside of marriage rather than intimacy within the marriage. You will notice that the point of the verse is to honor sexual activity in marriage and condemn sexual activity outside of marriage.

In marriage the bed is undefiled. The word "bed" (κοιτη) literally refers to the marriage bed where physical things occur between a husband and wife (Smith, p. 251). The word "undefiled" (αμιαντος) refers to a total freedom from any defilement and contamination in the sight of God (*Ibid.*, p. 25). In other words, a husband and wife have every God-honoring, Biblical right to enjoy the physical pleasures of intimacy within the context of marriage. A husband and wife are one flesh and they have a legitimate Biblical right to be intoxicated with one another's love. They are free to enjoy one another.

However, outside of marriage God views sexual activity as fornication and adultery. He so views sexual sin in this way that He promises, in this Grace Age passage, that He will judge one who is involved in sex outside of marriage or one who is involved with someone else's mate.

Now in the context of showing hospitality and showing brotherly love, the challenge is keep all relationships pure and clean. I am telling you this based on the Word of God; there is nothing more evil than a brother or sister in Christ, in the context of the church, sneaking around trying to lure people into immoral things. Jesus Christ warned the church of Thyatira that He would start killing people who did this kind of thing (Rev. 2:20, 23). I have known of people in church and even ministers who are lust-crazed, sexual predators whose goal is to try and get sexually involved in immoral relationships. God will judge; you have His Word on it. There are multiple passages in Scripture that warn that God will judge and punish any of His people who are immoral:

- 1) I Corinthians 6:9-10 - No inheritance for one who is immoral.
- 2) Ephesians 5:5-6 - No future inheritance in the future Kingdom of God.
- 3) I Thessalonians 4:3-7 - God will punish any who are immoral.
- 4) Revelation 2:20, 23 - Jesus Christ will actually physically kill one who refuses to repent.

In fact in Hebrews 12:16-17, God warns that you can throw away your inheritance through immorality.

Any person who fears and reverences God will have a high and holy view of marriage and will run far away from sexual immorality.

A church that fears and reverences God should always protect the sanctity of marriage. A husband has his wife and a wife has her husband and our church should always protect that union. God will not tolerate an immoral adulterer to walk away unscathed and neither will we. This is one of those areas where the leaders must take a stand.

A few years ago, I got in a situation in which a woman from another church called me to get advice because of what was happening in another church in this area. A husband who had a lovely wife and children got involved with another woman at church and he was going to church and sitting in church with the woman with whom he was committing adultery. The church did nothing about it. I can tell you of a case where a minister went into a church and divorced his wife and took another man's wife. This same minister went to another church and got into an immoral relationship with another woman. This is evil, evil, immoral activity and there is no way that God will ever honor a church that just turns its head and doesn't do anything about it. Showing hospitality and showing brotherly and sisterly love must never become a license for tolerating sexual immorality.

Suppose you have failed in this area. What do you do? Judge yourself - flee immorality - go to God in confession - for if you judge yourself you will not be judged (I Corinthians 6:18; 11:31).

**RELATIONSHIP AREA #5 – We are to be free from the love of money. 13:5**

Ray Stedman made an interesting observation about the use of credit cards in this verse. He said credit cards tend to prove most love money and tend to cancel out a dependency on and trust in God (*Hebrews*, p. 152). People who love things more than God get themselves into deep trouble with credit cards.

Again it is interesting to me that that word for love uses that Greek word “philia” (φιλία). We show that we reverence and fear God by not having a love for the coins or for money. What we want to be known for is being a friend of God and not so much a friend of money. Kent Hughes said “miserly hoarding produces a metallic, lifeless heart” (*Hebrews*, Vol. 2, p. 22).

We may recall that when Jesus was here on earth He challenged His people to not spend their lives storing up treasures on earth, but storing up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21). What gets overlooked in this verse is that this is not just a negative to not love money, but also a positive to be content with what you have. Everything you have and everything I have has been given to us by God, so we don’t need to spend our entire lives worrying about and loving money.

One reason why we need to never worry about money is because God has promised I will never desert you nor forsake you. The Greek used in **verse 5**, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” is a particular construction that uses a double negative (ou may). In fact, in Greek, this statement has five negatives: ou, may, oud, ou, may (ου μη, ουδ, ου μη). If we were to actually translate this with its actual grammatical meaning, this says that God will never, never, never, never, never “desert” (ανημι), which means to let go, give up, desist from you (*Ibid.*, p. 38); and He will never, never, never, never, never “forsake” (εγκαταλειπω), which means to leave behind and abandon you. What this means is that there is no chance ever that God will ever leave and desert His people under any circumstance.

In other words, you may be absolutely certain and secure in knowing that God will never desert you in any financial crisis, and we can know that He is our helper so that there is nothing that should cause us to be afraid. Financial things can actually show us God is our helper and our provider. Financial trouble can actually show us and the world that God does not ever desert His people.

If God provides things for those who don’t know Him, you may be certain He will certainly take care of those who do know Him.

If we truly believe God is with us every step of the way of our life, we can live our lives thankful for everything He has given to us, and we do not need to waste our life worrying about money.

We are to fear and reverence God, and one way we do that is by how we govern our lives in a variety of contexts of life. May God help us all to live our lives this way.