

## Mid Week • Hebrews 13

### INTRODUCTION

As we read the letters of the NT we see a common pattern – the writers *begin* with *doctrine* then move to *duty*, they go from *theology* to *practicality*, from *creed* to *conduct*, from *exposition* to *exhortation*.

They lay out the truths that frame the Christian life, then they move to apply them in practical ways.

Hebrews follows the same pattern.

While the author has dropped occasional exhortations into the midst of his teaching, he slowly builds a masterful case for the supremacy of Jesus Christ over the shadows and forms that were the Mosaic Law.

In Chapter 11, he brings the theological section to its climax – and then moves in Chapter 12 to urge his readers on to an application of all he's said in the preceding chapters.

As we've seen over the last two Wednesdays, he encourages them to follow in the footsteps and example of their heroes – the men and women of the past who have persevered in their faith in God despite tremendous trial and opposition.

Using the illustration of athletic competition, he urges the readers to press on and pursue God with all they've got – zealously stripping off and laying down any and everything that would get in the way.

The last verse of chapter 12 reminds them of their goal – God,  
Who is a consuming fire!

Now as we move to Chapter 13, the writer makes *another* transition; he reminds his readers that our pursuit of God is lived out here on earth and in particular, in our relationship with other people.

### CHAPTER 13

#### **<sup>1</sup>Let brotherly love continue.**

In the first 9 verses, we will see 7 specific exhortations.

The first one is the most briefly stated – “Continue to demonstrate brotherly kindness & affection.”

One of the most powerful evidences for the reality of the Christian

faith in its early years was the strong sense of *community* the believers exhibited.

“See how these Christians love one another,” was a common saying by unbelievers *about* Christians, so says one of the early church fathers.

Pliny the Younger was a Roman governor who did a thorough research of the Christian Faith and sent a report to the Roman emperor Trajan who was concerned about the growing new movement.

Persecution of Christians at this time was mostly done by Jews and was sporadic and irregular.

Trajan wanted to know what was making the Jews leaders so irate and if the new religious movement deserved Rome’s attention.

Rome frowned on new movements like this because they usually ended up being revolts.

So Pliny was really trying to find justification for Rome’s adopting an official policy of oppression of the Church.

After studying the practices of Christians Pliny wrote, “They bind themselves by an oath not to any criminal end, but to avoid theft or robbery or adultery, never to break their word or repudiate a deposit when called on to refund it.”

Although he was looking for a charge *against* them, he was forced to characterize them as a people who did not commit crimes and who paid their debts.

The more officials examined the lives of those early believers, the more it became obvious that Christians lived up to the high moral standards of their doctrine.

Of course, the reputation of the followers of Christ has not managed to maintain that of the early saints.

And there’s good reason for that – you see, the early church grew up in a hostile environment.

Being a Christian was a risky venture because persecution, if not in full force, was always just around the corner.

When being a follower of Christ is dangerous, it tends to drive away the fakes and frauds.

Persecution may be hard to endure, but it also produces a holy church.

While there are a lot of pretenders in American and European

churches today, you won't find any in the Sudanese or Pakistani Church!

The philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote a famous essay entitled, "Why I Am Not a Christian."

In it, he presented what he believed were *irrefutable* arguments for rejecting Christianity.

He focused primarily on the lives of Christians he had known or heard of who lived far less than exemplary lives.

He wrote, "I think there are many good points upon which I agree with Christ a great deal more than many professing Christians. I do not know that I can go all the way with Him, but I could go with him much farther than most professing Christians can. I do not profess to live up to them (that is, Christ's standards) myself, but then after all, it is not quite the same thing as for a Christian, is it?"

He goes on to say, "There is the idea that we should all be wicked, if we did not hold to the Christian religion. It seems to me that the people who have held to it have been, for the most part, extremely wicked. The Spaniards, for example, in Mexico and Peru, used to baptize infants of the Indians, and immediately dash their brains out, by this means securing for them a place in heaven."

With many other such examples, he argued against Christianity and the Bible.

Unfortunately, throughout the history of the church, the mean, prejudiced, and immoral lives of professed Christians have given the world an excuse not to be attracted to the claims of Christ.

The fact that critics usually pick out the worst examples means all the more we must live by the very highest standards—to keep the bad examples to a minimum.

We who are *true* Christians have a serious responsibility to live spotlessly to the glory of God, so that unbelievers never have a just reason for criticizing the way we live, because how we live *is a reflection on our Lord*.

One of my favorite preachers is Alexander Maclaren.

He wrote, "The world takes its notion of God most of all from

those who say they belong to God's family. They *read us* a great deal more than they *read the Bible*. They *see us*; they *only hear* about Jesus Christ."

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may give glory to your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:16)

One of the primary ways we do that, is to love one another.

The word used here for "brotherly love" is *philadelphia*.

It comes from two Greek words:

Phileo – which means tender affection

Adelphos – brother

In popular usage it referred to the kind of affection and loyalty demonstrated among close friends.

As practiced in the early church, brotherly love meant a tender-hearted care for one another to make sure practical needs were met and that the believers watched out for each other.

But such brotherly love wasn't exclusive to the community of faith – Christians saw outsiders as *potential* believers and treated all people with tenderness and care.

Note that the writer says such brotherly love is to *continue*!

They were already doing it, but they needed to redouble their commitment to one another because unless attended to, the stress of persecution could produce cracks in their fellowship and weaken their commitment to be a community of love.

Let's heed these words tonight!

For far too long the Church has borne a reputation for being petty and divided.

How else can the world read it when they drive around and see a dozen different churches with different labels?

---

A man was walking across the Golden Gate bridge when he saw a woman about to jump off.

The man tried to dissuade her from committing suicide and told her simply that God loved her.

He noticed a tear came to her eye and asked 'Are you a Christian?'

'Yes' she said.

'Me too! What a small world. Protestant or Catholic.'

She replied, 'Protestant.'

'Me too! What denomination?'

'Baptist,' she said.

'Me too!' the man said, '*Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?*'

'Northern Baptist.'

'Northern *Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?*'

'Northern Conservative Baptist.'

'Amazing!' he said, 'Call Ripley's Believe It or Not. This is incredible! Northern Conservative *Fundamentalist Baptist or Northern Conservative Reformed Baptist?*'

'Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist.'

'Remarkable! Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist *Great Lakes Region or Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Eastern Region?*'

She answered, 'Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region.'

'This is a miracle,' he said. 'Are you Northern-Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes -Region *Council of 1879 or Council of 1912?*'

'Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912.'

He said - 'Die, you heretic!' and pushed her over the rail.

---

Rather than splitting up the Body of Christ into labels and factions, we must be diligent to love and serve one another.

And of course, that begins right here – right in our own fellowship. One of the ways brotherly love can take form is in the area of hospitality – so the writer says . . .

**2Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.**

We go from the love of the brethren to the love of strangers.

In Galatians 6:10 Paul says, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

This is simply a call to *general kindness and hospitality*.

Listen to how Paul says all this in Romans 12 (10-13)

**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; rejoicing**

**in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.**

In the culture of the Middle East, hospitality was an expected virtue; a sacred and solemn duty.

In the OT, a failure to show kindness and hospitality to strangers by an individual or a village was seen as the evidence of *serious moral failure*.

In fact, in some cases, a lack of hospitality led to God's judgment! The writer says that hospitality is critical because some of the saints have actually entertained angels without even knowing it.

He's likely referring to the story of Abraham, who saw 3 men approaching his tent one day.

As it was meal time, he went out, greeted them and urged them to stop for refreshment.

It turned out his visitors were the Lord and two angels who then went on from Abraham's presence to the city of Sodom.

And we know what they found there – though Lot received them warmly into his home, the rest of the men of the city were desperately *inhospitable!*

It seems the writer means us to understand that Abraham wasn't the only one to have entertained angels.

Others had as well.

It may be that they traffic among us, passing through our lives in visible form, and by so doing, giving us an opportunity to demonstrate the virtue of hospitality.

We have a ministry here at CCO we call *hospitality*.

Their specific task is to greet people and to help new folks find their way around.

Every so often they plan special events where new people can meet the pastors, elders and staff in a more intimate setting.

But really, this is a ministry EVERYONE of us ought to be a part of. {Elaborate}

Another way to be hospitable is to open your home and have people over.

And instead of by-passing the homeless and those who stand outside the store begging for loose change, instead of ignoring them and treating them like a hole in space – purchase a bagel or some fruit,

and hand it to them on the way out of the store.

**3Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.**

With this verse I'm tempted to launch into a review of all the places in the world where our brothers and sisters in Christ are being persecuted.

Instead, I will encourage you to visit the Voice of the Martyrs website. – VOM.org

[Pray!]

**4Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.**

Some translations convert this from a *statement* about the sacredness of marriage to a *command* to *keep* it pure.

They render it – “Let marriage *be* held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed *be* undefiled.”

If you have a NKJ, note that the word “is” is in italics, which means it's supplied by the translators.

So – is this a statement or an exhortation?

Really - it doesn't matter, because as we've already seen, all the commands and exhortations of the Christian life *flow naturally* from doctrine.

God declares the institution of marriage to be honorable – therefore, we are to honor what God honors!

God declares the sexual relationship between a husband and wife to be pure, so let it be kept pure and understood as a joyous, healthy, holy thing!

The word “bed” is the Greek word “coite” from which we get our technical term for sexual intercourse – “coitus.”

---

I want to preface the rest of my comments on this with a word of caution and explanation.

The subject of sex gets very little attention in the Church, except in a negative sense.

We speak often and stridently about the sin of sexual immorality, and the impression we can leave is that the Christian view of sex is a *negative* and *prohibitive* one.

As often as we speak about the problem of sexual sin, we ought to affirm it's propriety within the context of marriage.

Here in Hebrews 13:4, the writer is dealing with an insidious idea that had already begun infecting the thinking of many Jews – that marriage, and specifically, sex, was immoral and to be shunned by the godly.

This idea had filtered in from Greek philosophy which considered everything physical and material to be inherently evil.

Any pleasure experienced by the flesh was immediately suspect, and the more intense the pleasure, the more evil it was considered.

Consequently, sex was the epitome of wickedness.

One Jewish sect called the Essenes had banned all marriage and prohibited sex of any kind!

As the church had embraced both Jews and Gentiles, the lingering effect of Greek philosophy hung on and many Christians were debating whether or not marriage ought to be a part of the Faith.

Those who came to Christ after they were married, began to think they ought to abstain from all sexual contact with their mate.

To all this, the writer affirms the essential sacredness of the marriage bond and the purity of the sexual relationship between a husband and wife.

The physical creation is not evil and sex is God's idea!

He is the one who created us male and female and gave us the command to propagate!

God designed out bodies they way they are, with their potential to give and receive such incredible pleasure.

And the God who designed us this way, also gave the boundaries for sex – marriage!

Quite frankly, historically, the Church has badly butchered God's plan for marital sexual harmony!

Augustine is largely to blame for the distortion.

Though he converted to faith in Christ, Augustine never really shed his neo-Platonic philosophical views.

His writings about the Christian life charted the course for the Church over the next 1500 years and so it was the Church's

official policy that sex was for the conceiving of children only. The idea of sex for pleasure's sake and for enhancing marital intimacy was stripped away.

Sex became a chore a woman was to endure and men were to steadfastly resist the urge to.

Because men are stimulated by what they *see*, and women are the focus of that stimulation, women were blamed for men's struggle with desire for sex.

They became evil temptresses, even when they were completely innocent – this is just the way women in general were perceived by the church.

Thus, women who wanted to be godly moved to nunneries while men who desired to be holy retreated to monasteries.

Priest were forbade marriage and took vows of celibacy.

---

You've heard the story about the modern day priest who wanted to do some primary research on the founding documents of the Roman Catholic Faith – haven't you?

He secured permission to enter the depths of the Vatican Library and began pouring over the ancient scrolls.

After two weeks of detailed study, one day the librarian heard this wailing and ran down to where the priest was huddled over a table on which a scroll was rolled out.

The priest was sobbing with his hands over his face.

The librarian asked, "Father – what's wrong?"

The priest replied with a moan – "It's CELE-BRATE!!"

---

While the Church has backed away from this negative view of sex, the modern church has remained largely silent when it comes to affirming God's plan for sex.

And in the vacuum left by a lack of Biblical counsel, a lot of nonsense and misunderstanding has been allowed to come in.

The world has no hesitation to talk boldly about sex, why then are we so silent?

It seems every where we turn, we are confronted with provocative images and speech.

One of advertisings chief tactics is to use sexual appeal.

Most schools and work places see a high level of sexual politics and maneuvering.

I think we in the Church have done the Body of Christ and the world

a grave disservice by our refusal to deal with this issue more forthrightly.

Let me try to rectify and correct some of that right now.

What does God's word say here?

**4Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.**

While God will judge sexual sin, He looks with favor on the physical union of a husband and wife!

Fornication is the word *porneia* from which we get our word "pornography."

It refers to any and all sexual activity outside of marriage, not just intercourse.

We had a President recently who said that he did not have sex with an intern because they never had intercourse.

That may be his definition of sex, but it's not God's!

According to this – he's a fornicator and an adulterer.

The word *adultery* refers to a married person who engages in sex outside the boundaries of the marital vow.

That's what's banned, what lies in the realm of sexual prohibition and sin – but now we see what lies within the realm of sexual purity – what a husband and wife do between themselves!

What are the boundaries – marriage!

In other words, we don't have here any kind of prescription on what constitutes pure sex except that it be between a husband and wife.

We ought to understand this a freedom – not bondage!

God is giving a man and woman great leeway and liberty here.

Therefore, for a married couple, sex ought never become merely routine, rote or boring!

While there is a certain element of "duty" to marital sex, it must never be ONLY that!

As Paul makes so amazingly clear in 1 Cor. 7. a husband owes his wife sexual satisfaction and pleasure as does a wife, her husband.

In fact, Paul clearly implies that marital sex ought to be regular and committed.

---

I am sick and tired of the way the world presents sex!

They depict marital sex as boring while illicit sex is where all the fun is at.

That's bogus and it's time for Christians to stand up and say so! Listen, if all people followed God's plan for sex, we would see an immediate end to a lot of disease, sorrow and death.

A whole host of social problems like juvenile delinquency would clear up in one generation.

Billions spent on welfare could be put to use in expanding the economy – on and on I could go.

**<sup>5</sup>Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." <sup>6</sup>So we may boldly say:**

***"The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"***

Verses 5 & 6 are my text for Sunday so I will leave them till then.

---

Now the writer turns to speak about specifically about church issues .

**<sup>7</sup>Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct.**

Preachers of the word must not be gauged only by their preaching skill.

Do they *practice* what they preach?

The writer exhorts his readers to take a look at the *conduct* of those who have preached to them.

If their conduct has been consistently faithful and godly, then follow their example.

Conversely, if they *haven't* practiced what they've preached – it's probably best to not give too much credence to their preaching.

It's passages like this that make me leery of those Christians who refuse to commit to a local church in favor of radio and TV Christianity.

Radio and TV do a great job of broadcasting teaching and preaching, but they don't allow for any kind of relationship

building.

We're on the radio on Sunday mornings and we have a very loyal listener base.

And while we rejoice in the fact that we have the opportunity to broadcast God's Word to this county, we steadfastly resist the idea that our program is enough.

People need to be committed to a local church, and their primary source of spiritual feeding ought to be their pastor who they can observe and examine his lifestyle, making sure it corresponds to his message.

No man is perfect and all of us will stumble and fall as we seek to follow Christ, pastors too – but is our general direction ever toward Christ and for the glory of God?

**8 Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever.**

**9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For *it is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.**

While this statement is quoted a lot, it comes in the context of church life.

The author is reminding his readers that they must be on guard against any leader in the Body of Christ who says he is sent by God but who wants to lead them in some radically new direction.

Jesus Christ does not change – His means do not change.

The methods will alter from place to place and time to time because as culture changes, the methods must adapt.

But the message and motivation never changes!

Keeping it in the context of this letter – the author is undoubtedly cautioning them against a Christian kind of *legalism*!

They were being pressured to revert to Judaism – they must not go back to the law now that they've found grace.

But they must also not start setting up for themselves new laws, Christian rules about things like diet and the celebration of certain days and then equate the Faith with these accepted behaviors.

---

Christianity isn't about going to church, or reading the Bible and

praying daily, or tithing.

It's a love-affair with Jesus Christ that sees all these things as natural outflows of that love.

I don't call my wife in the middle of the day to say "Hi" because we're married – I call because I love her.

I don't make dinner on Saturday nights and help wash the dishes other nights because we're married – I do it because I love her.

I don't read my Bible and pray because I'm a Christian – but because I love Jesus.

I don't go to church and tithe because I'm a Christian – I do them because I love God.

Friends, God doesn't change!

We need to make sure that the reason we do what we do is motivated by love for Him and doesn't degenerate into a mere form or ritual.

Again – it's all about relationship, not religion. [Say it "Relationship – Not Religion!"]

---

Now the writer launches once more into an allusion to the temple . . .

**10**We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. **11**For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. **12**Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. **13**Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. **14**For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. **15**Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.

This is a radical statement and one that marked a new direction for the Christian church.

You see, Jesus had come as the Jewish Messiah, but he had been rejected by His own countrymen.

The Church began as a Jewish institution – those first Christians were ALL Jews!

And there was a time, when the Church was a potential *reform* movement inside of Judaism that promised to fulfill all that Judaism had anticipated.

But now, as the writer pens this, he acknowledges that the Jews had proven themselves dire and steadfast opponents of the Christian Faith and there was no chance for it to be a reforming influence inside Judaism.

The writer is saying, “It’s time to GO OUT!”

Just as Jesus was taken outside the City walls a crucified – it’s time for us as the followers of Christ to accept that we must launch out on our own and distance ourselves from Judaism.

The City of Jerusalem, with it’s temple and altar, had missed out on the Lord of the Temple and focus of the altar.

As Christians, our City and the focus of our worship is heavenly. The offering we bring to God is not animals but ourselves – and we express this in our praise and worship – the fruit of our lives and lips!

He makes that clear in v. 16 . . .

**16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.**

Animal sacrifices are no longer needed because Jesus made Himself the final sacrifice.

Now, the only sacrifice God looks for from us is a life of worship and service.

**17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.**

In v. 7, he wrote, “Remember those who rule over you.” Here he tells them to follow those God had placed in leadership over them in the church.

I want to express my appreciation *for* all the appreciation you all gave this last month!

I am the most blessed pastor in this county because we have the best congregation!

You all exemplify what we find here to an amazing degree!

And I can say that with all joy, I seek to fulfill my duties as shepherd.

I tremble when I consider what's written here – that pastors will give account for how they have tended the flock.

I confess, this haunts me!

I have been charged with watching out for your soul and that is what I will give account for.

That one phrase ought to explain why we do what we do here at CCO:

Why we keep our emphasis on the study of the Word of God.

Why we urge people to get involved in small groups and pray for one another.

**18 Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.**

**19 But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.**

This gives us the clue that the author was in prison.

He saw prayer as the means of his release, apparently from an unjust charge leveled against him as a criminal.

This is one more clue that Paul wrote Hebrews.

**20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, <sup>21</sup>make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.**

I love the picture these words paint – God is at work *in* His people, and because of this in-working, they have what's necessary to accomplish every things He's set before them!

And the goal of it all is that God would be glorified in His Son.

In v. 21 he says that God will make us *complete*.

Some translations say that God will *equip* us.

The word means to make something good, to mend.

It's the picture of something incomplete or broken being filled out and fixed so that it can fulfill it's purpose!

A few weeks ago, Jack Moore took me fishing at Lake Casitas. He has about a gazillion fishing rods and reels and one of them is a bait casting reel I found a little challenging to cast.

Several times I allowed the line to get all tangled and had to hand it to Jack to untangle, then he would hand it back to me with instructions on how to cast without messing up.

Sin has broken and tangled up our lives.

But God sends His grace to heal and straighten us out and makes it possible for us to live profitable lives.

**22 And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words.**

In other words – LISTEN to what I've written! Hearken to it & DO IT!

**23 Know that *our* brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.**

**24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.**

**25 Grace *be* with you all. Amen.**

These final words again point to Paul as the author for it seems it was written in Rome, and the mention of Timothy, who was Paul's companion, all point in that direction.

## CONCLUSION

**20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead,**

**that great Shepherd of the sheep,**

**through the blood of the everlasting covenant,**

**21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever.**

**Amen.**