

Continue in Brotherly Love  
Hebrews 13:1-2

Romans 14:1-13  
1 Corinthians 13  
Responsive Psalm 47

This morning we are entering into the end of the book of Hebrews. We are going to be looking at the first 2 verses of the last chapter, but let us start this morning by reading from chapter 12 verse 25. The Author has spent most of this book instructing these Hebrews and teaching them about God's superiority and sovereignty over all things. As we have seen he has systematically taken various aspects of scripture and shows how each and every one points to the person Jesus Christ. Even the old covenant, and the law ultimately pointed to the new covenant in Christ's blood.

If we were to sum up this book in a few words, it would be, Christ is all. The thread running through the entire book is pointing to Christ's fulfillment of all that came before, and how everything that came before was pointing to him. Even chapter 1, verse 1, sets this tone when he writes, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds." Even creation itself was created through Christ, who is the heir of all things, and in whom all things exist. Having that understanding right from the start makes everything else just fall in line. How does the prophets relate to Christ, how did the law and the covenants relate to Christ, and what does a life in Christ look like.

These are all issues that this author has tackled and that we have seen as we have worked our way through this book. Now today as we get to the end we see there has been a slight shift, for now comes a series of exhortations and instructions starting with the main exhortation for all Christians. He says, "Let brotherly love continue." He lists this first, and I believe rightly so for just as he set the tone in chapter 1 pointing to the superiority of Christ in all things, he sets for the tone here as well pointing to the importance of brotherly love in all of our conduct.

It is a very important distinction to make, and one I think is something that the church often times can error on. Some, in their laser focus upon doctrine and a hyper sensitivity to the way Christians should live their life love is seemingly tossed aside for moral righteousness. There are many churches who have lost their heart, and belief in God has become mostly cerebral. Now there is nothing wrong with pursuing right doctrine, striving to remain biblical, and protecting the church, but we also must not forget brotherly love.

If we are not careful, such an environment usually becomes focused heavily upon law, looks to restrict and control the brotherhood to cause them to remain on the right path. But in the end, this system becomes abusive, and really ends up driving people away. It becomes much like the Pharisee's who took the law that was given by God, then interpret it, and impose more where they believe that the law is silent.

This ends up being the issue with such churches that are so law focused. Then on the other end, you have the hyper grace, or hyper love groups. Which end up throwing out pretty much all doctrine as being too harsh, or too esoteric and rely instead of having emotional experiences, and they judge their faith upon how they feel. In effect they end up opening up the church to all sorts of false teachers and false beliefs and allow themselves to end up not only condoning, but celebrating sinful behaviors in the name of love.

Both of these are a problem, and the answer is a true understanding of Christ, and love. It would seem that these groups that the Author was writing to seem to have a pretty good grasp on the idea of brotherly love, for he doesn't instruct them in it, rather he just reminds them to continue in it. And I think this is a good reminder as well, for as we know among them was various individuals who were bringing in some false doctrines, angel worship and the like. But even while the author is chastising them for this, and sets out to instruct and put them back on the right path, notice throughout all of this book the tone that he takes, that it is one of love and concern. Multiple times he has equated himself with them, and calls them his brothers.

The lesson to learn here, is that when we are dealing with such things, whether doctrinal or even interpersonal, or confrontation of sin in a believer, that we must let brotherly love continue. It should always be handled in love, seeking the best for the individual. It would be so easy for the church that he was writing to, to gather up everyone who was believing in false doctrines and kick them out, and I think that is why he is reminding them here....to remain, to continue to practice brotherly love. Instruct, be patient, and in love guide one another, remembering that the practice of godly love is indeed the fulfillment of the law, and the admonition of the new covenant. As Jesus said recorded in the book of Matthew. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets."

We must not forget this, especially when we are dealing with our Christian brothers and sisters. For we all are sinners, who have been saved by grace. None of us more worthy than another, none of us greater than another, all equally lost, equally condemned if it were not for the blood of Christ applied to us individually.

Even in our relationships with each other, Christ must be pre-eminant. It is pretty inevitable that we will at one time or another hurt or offend each other, for we are still in this sin stained body, but we must not seek retaliation or vengeance, but rather grace and forgiveness.

We must not forget brotherly love, we must remember that the very love of God, which saved us, is the same who saved your brother or sister and should be the same love which flows through each and every one of us.

But we also must be wary that we do not use love to allow and approve of sin either. A balance must be struck, and indeed I would even argue that such an allowance truly isn't love. If one were to out of some idea of love tolerate and look over some dire sin in someone are they truly loving them? I look at it this way, if your friend is about to jump off of a cliff...are you going to stand there and give them words of affirmation.. or are you going to try to tackle him to the ground to keep him from jumping? Even in our own society we see this at play with the idea of interventions. Sometimes, people need spiritual interventions as well, but we must not do it in such away that it is not done in arrogance or pride, but out of love and concern for our brother and sister.

We must be a discerning people, for just as the author said in the last chapter, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord, yet be discerning and be watchful lest anyone fall short of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness spring up and cause trouble and by this many become defiled, lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. It is a balancing act, between being at peace with all people, and also protecting yourself and others from people who may lead you or the church astray. But I think first and foremost when handling such situations if it is in the church, or with one who claims to be a believer is to treat them as such, and approach any situation out of love and concern seeking to regain that brother or sister which should be our goal, until they have proven themselves to be false.

We have tons of passages in scripture instructing us how to conduct such conflicts, and I just want to look at a few of them to show the biblical standard of striking balance between loving one another, and protecting yourself from ones like Esau. Galatians 6:1 "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself lest you become tempted." This is the very point I was making earlier how when we see a brother or sister tied down in sin, out of love we should approach them and seek to help and restore them, not condone and gloss over the issue but wrestle it with them.

Matthew 18:15-17 sets forth the standard of dealing with interpersonal relationships within the church. For there must be such a system for sin still remains in our members and we must strive against it, and fight it and here we are given instruction on how to do so. “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear a them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Or Titus 3:10-11 “Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.” We must approach all such situations in love toward our brothers and sisters, but as the example we see saw in Matthew, and here in Titus there is also the possibility that the love of God is not in them for they are unwilling to repent, unwilling to turn, and unwilling to reconcile. And in those cases, they are to be treated like tax collectors and heathens, no longer counted as brothers, but instead as lost sinners who truly need Christ. The ministry changes from seeking reconciliation with a brother and sister, to out reach so that hopefully a soul maybe saved. But we also must be wary that we are not dragged down into sin ourselves and at that point the principle set forth in Mark, chapter 9. “ If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands and going to hell.”

Sometimes there are those that must be treated as tax collectors and heathens, who even though we may even seek after in a ministry for their souls, they have responded in such ways that it is better for us to cut them off, then to be dragged into sin ourselves. We must always be wary, discerning people who guard ourselves against influences of sin. We must also be careful for we can be overconfident in ourselves thinking that this person, or situation would not effect us yet before we know it, it does. This is why Paul wrote in his letter to the Thessalonians, to abstain from every form of evil, or as some translations put it, even the appearance of evil. We must not forget that as Christians first and foremost we have this ministry and we must be wary that we do not ourselves be ensared in sin.

The Author goes on here in verse 2, and carries this concept a bit further saying, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” This is really an extension of verse 1 and the love your neighbor as yourself put to practice. If we truly practice such love as we ought, hospitality would also follow. And yes, even to strangers there should be an element of hospitality, for once again the purpose is our ministry. We have an obligation to show forth the love of God in all of our relationships, but the beautiful thing about it..

with the obligation also comes the power and love to do so. For God works in us, to will and to do, he works in us our love toward one another, and our love toward those around us.

This concept of Christian hospitality that is set forth here has a two fold purpose. First is for the witness of the gospel ministry, how will one believe unless one hears, and how will one hear unless one is told. Christians should be inviting, hospitable people, not given to outbursts of wrath, or have an heir of arrogance and pride, but rather should be compassionate and approachable, for it is through such encounters that God may open the door for the gospel.

The world see's Christians today as arrogant, bigots, but that should be the farthest from the truth. The image of Christianity has been tainted by many false teachers and false witnessess and even has been at times equated to violence. But as we know that is the complete opposite of what scripture teaches, and I think this is largely a deception of Satan. These false believers who parade themselves as Christians, yet do not display the fruits of the spirit, but are instead full of pride, and arrogance, who are given to anger are tools being used by Satan to discredit the ministry and to obscure the lost worlds perception of what Christ followers truly are, and it also opens up persecution, for if the church is painted as a radical, bigoted violent group of religious zealots, then in the eye of the world it is worthy to be burned down. And in some ways I would not disagree, for this description is not the true church, but a perversion.

That is why it is all the more imperative that we buck this trend, that we are known in our families, in our work places, in our neighborhoods and among our friends as peaceable, wise, patient, caring people. So, let us continue in brotherly love, so that those who see us, witness the love of God working through us. Let us not be a tool of Satan and in our sin do damage to the reputation of God's people. For as the Author said in chapter 12, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord."