

Hebrews 13A (2014)

- We're approaching the end of this important letter
 - The final chapter is before us, where the writer issues a series of exhortations
 - These exhortations are examples of how the church is to fulfill the writer's instructions from Chapter 12:28-29

Heb. 12:28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; **Heb. 12:29** for our God is a consuming fire.

- As we saw in Chapter 10, the writer adds another "let us" command
- He asks that we render a life of service to God, as a show of gratitude for His love shown to us
- This exhortation sounds very similar to Paul's instructions in Romans 12

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- Throughout Scripture, Christians are commanded to establish our life's priorities based upon a recognition that we owe God everything
- That's why the New Testament authors' favorite Greek word to describe a Christian's relationship to the Lord is *doulos* (slave)
- Christ is our Master, and He commands our lives
- And if we choose to live in obedience to Him, we will soon discover that His burden is light and our service to Him will be one of joy
- But there's no doubt that our relationship with Christ, in faith, brings certain obligations and expectations
 - These expectations set the standard by which the Lord will judge His people

- Naturally, as those to be judged, we want to understand what those expectations are
- Which is one of the reasons we have the Word of God, and in particular, the New Testament letters
- Chapters like Hebrews 13 are important places to spend our time
- Passages we must ponder and prayerfully reflect upon, so we will have incentive to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord
- So let's first direct our full attention on the writer's exhortations, beginning in v.1

Heb. 13:1 Let love of the brethren continue.

Heb. 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

- As my introduction suggested, this chapter reads as a list of instructions
 - They are all loosely related to one another, in the sense that they are all self-sacrificial acts of Christian love, intended to show God gratitude for His sacrifice on our behalf
 - And v.1 serves as the topical sentence for the entire chapter
 - The love of the brethren is the overriding theme and goal of the writer's instructions
 - We are called as a Body to love one another
 - The Greek word used is *philadelphia*, which means "brotherly love"
 - And not merely in the sense of showing affection or friendship to one another
 - But in the full sense of *agape* love: making sacrifices for one another as a means of serving Christ
 - When we serve a brother or sister in the Church Body, from God's point of view, we are serving Him
 - So we must make our motive in all we do to love another believer
 - Let that love continue, the writer says

- He uses the word “continue”, because this was the way of the Church in its beginning, and so it should always be
- Our church body may not accomplish all the programs we desire
 - Not everything we attempt will be successful, at least not from our perspective
 - We may not grow as much as we like, or extend our influence as far as we hope
 - But those things are not the primary goal of our church
 - Our primary goal is to show the love of Christ, first to one another, and secondly, to the world
 - By this standard we will be measured
- So what does showing love look like?
 - The writer offers examples
 - First, the writer says don’t neglect to show hospitality to strangers
 - In Greek, the writer’s instructions are even more specific
 - He uses the Greek word *philoxenia*, which literally means “showing love to a stranger”
 - So in v.1, the writer emphasized love for brothers, while in v.2, he emphasizes love for strangers
 - In that day and culture, showing love to a stranger was synonymous with offering a traveling stranger shelter in your home
 - That was a cultural expectation
 - It was considered an honor to host someone in your home
 - But as we learned earlier in this letter, persecution was increasingly common in the Church, especially among the Jewish believers
 - So as enemies increased, the Church began to withdraw from the culture
 - Where before, the Church would show love to strangers, opening their homes to anyone, now they were suspicious of strangers

- They worried that strangers might be Jewish spies, who would report Christians to the authorities
- Their fear of persecution led them to withhold their witness from strangers
- The writer's concerns here are not merely a matter of hospitality or kindness
 - The very mission of the Church lies in the balance
 - If we are so fearful or mistrusting of unbelievers that we withdraw from them, then we have abdicated our responsibilities as witnesses
 - Now, we better understand why the writer emphasized the need to fear God more than men
 - Persecution is a reality, and it always will be, in various forms
 - So we accept it as part of the deal we received with our salvation
 - We don't invite it, but neither do we run from it, at least not when it requires we compromise our witness and service to God
 - For these believers, this meant opening their doors in love for strangers and taking the risk that this act of love could lead to persecution
 - If that happens, so be it, for it can only happen if the Lord permits it anyway
 - And He says in Scripture to rejoice, for your reward in Heaven is great when you are persecuted for His Name's sake
- Today, our culture is growing increasingly hostile to Christian teaching and Christian values
 - So as we open ourselves up to the unbelieving world, to strangers, we have a growing sense that their response will not be positive
 - Increasingly, we will be rejected and slandered
 - We will be misjudged (even as they accuse us of intolerance)
 - We will be persecuted
 - But we can't let that lead us to withdraw from these "strangers"

- We can't let that become an excuse to hide away in compounds, huddled together and away from scrutiny
- We aren't supposed to wall ourselves off from the world, as Jesus said

[John 17:14](#) "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

[John 17:15](#) "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.

- By showing love for strangers, even in the face of persecution, we follow in Jesus' footsteps
 - We place our trust in God to accomplish great things through our sacrifice
 - The writer cites the example of Abraham entertaining angels
 - This is a reference to Genesis 18-19, when the Lord and two angels appeared as traveling strangers at Abraham's tent
 - Abraham willingly received the "men", and as a result, he experienced a special encounter with God
 - The writer's isn't necessarily saying we should expect to entertain angels, as Abraham did, though this might be possible
 - His point is, that by showing love to strangers, we have opportunity to see God working in miraculous ways
 - We may influence a heart to change
 - We may witness miracles of one kind or another
 - Who knows how much God might be prepared to accomplish through us...if only we open our door to strangers?

[Heb. 13:3](#) Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

- Next, the writer asks the church to remember the prisoners and those who are mistreated
 - In both cases, he's referring to believers who are enduring trials as a consequence of their faith and witness

- When a member of the Body of Christ is suffering for their faith, the entire Body is to see itself as caught up in that suffering
- As Paul said in 1 Corinthians

1 Cor. 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

- We don't sympathize from a distance, saying to ourselves how unfortunate it is that our brother or sister is being persecuted
- We say to ourselves, "we" are being persecuted
- So therefore, we minister to them
 - We pray for and with them
 - We visit them in their distress and comfort them
 - We assure them they are not alone
 - And when it's our turn to endure, they will do the same for us
 - And in this way, we give them strength to persevere in the face of these trials, so that their witness is made sure and the reward is complete
- Next, the writer says our proper service to God requires living in sexual purity

Heb. 13:4 Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

- The writer says Christians are to hold the institution of marriage in high honor
 - The Greek word for "honor" is *timios*, which means "precious" or "very costly"
 - Imagine the most valuable, most precious thing you possess
 - How would you treat that thing?
 - You would protect it, cherish it, honor it
 - To God, the institution of marriage is just such a thing, and therefore, if you want to serve your Lord well, you must cherish what He cherishes

- And this requirement to cherish the institution of marriage must be cherished by all, the writer says
- Not merely by those who are already enjoying the institution as God created it
- But also by those who are not yet married
- A married Christian couple is under obligation to God to honor marriage until death do you part
- An unmarried Christian is under obligation to keep pure until the day he or she enters into a Christian marriage
- And all Christians are to respect and honor the marriages of others, not violating that marriage by defiling the marriage bed
- Notice, the writer calls out two different types of sins at the end of v.4
 - First, he says fornicators will be judged
 - Fornication is a concept largely lost in our society today
 - The Bible says any form of sexual activity conducted outside of marriage is a sin called “fornication”
 - Of course, our culture has become so accepting of sex apart from marriage, that it has become not only acceptable, but commonplace
 - In fact, the idea that sexual activity is dependent upon marriage is an absurd idea to most people today
 - But the Word of God has not changed, nor will it change, to suit our flesh’s sinful desires
 - So let’s be clear what “fornication” means in the context of honoring the institution of marriage
 - It mean taking something you do not have rights to take, according to God
 - It is never appropriate for a Christian to engage in sexual activity, which means any form of sexual arousal, outside of marriage
 - Christians may not live together prior to marriage

- Christians may not view pornography, before or even after marriage, for this is defiling the marriage bed
- And of course, this would cover any form of sexual activity, including homosexual activity, which is always sinful in any case
- In a world that is increasingly holding marriage in contempt, and wishes to repurpose the institution to suit their sinful desires, it becomes all the more important for the Church to witness to the truth
 - This does not necessarily require that we become politically active on this issue
 - But it does require that our own lives reflect the truth of marriage
 - How hypocritical is it for Christians to cry against homosexual relationships, only to return home to have sex with their live-in boyfriend or girlfriend?
 - The writer says God will judge us for these things
- Secondly, the writer says we must not participate in adultery
 - Adultery is the sin of violating the sanctity of another's marriage vows
 - Of course, the obvious example is when a person engages in sexual activity with a married person who is not their spouse
 - This is always wrong, and it does grave damage to the witness of the Church
 - How many hearts have been broken in the Church when a marriage is violated in this way?
 - It's even worse when this situation plays out publicly, as when a Church leader falls to this kind of sexual sin
 - But don't forget that marriage vows last until death, so this command to respect the marriage bed continues, even after a legal divorce
 - As Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians, we must respect another's marriage, even to the point of refusing to marry a divorced person
 - Once again, our culture reacts very negatively to the idea that "second chances" aren't possible when it comes to marriage

- But the Bible's teaching is consistent and clear: only upon the death of a spouse are we released to marry again
- Finally, the writer makes perhaps his most challenging demand of the church

Heb. 13:5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"

Heb. 13:6 so that we confidently say,
 "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID.
 WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"

- In the Greek language, v.5 begins "Without covetousness behavior..."
 - Christians are not to tolerate, much less indulge in, covetousness
 - Coveting is not merely jealousy over someone else's possession
 - The concept is broader than that
 - It means any sinful wanting
 - We can sinfully want for things, just in the way our desire for the world's offerings consumes our attention and drives our passions
 - That's why the opposite of coveting is contentment
 - Being content with what you have already
 - It's the difference between "more" and "enough"
 - So often, we have enough, yet we tell ourselves we need more
 - And it's in the pursuit of more, when we have enough, that we run the risk of compromising our character
- Notice at the end of v.5, the writer quotes Deut. 31:6, where the Lord promises to Israel that He will never desert, nor forsake, His people
 - The writer is alluding to the sovereignty of God in assigning to each of us what we have
 - Since we know that the Lord will not forsake our needs, and will always care for His people, then we must think carefully about our station in life

- God assigns to each of His children a provision adequate to our needs
- That provision is a sign of His faithfulness to never forsake us
- And our proper response to the Lord is contentment
- As Paul writes:

1 Tim. 6:6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

1 Tim. 6:7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.

1 Tim. 6:8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

1 Tim. 6:9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

1 Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1 Tim. 6:11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

- Good Christian character recognizes that God's provision is enough, so we should not devote inordinate time and effort to improving our financial or material status
 - For in doing so, we are potentially redirecting our energies away from more important and lasting pursuits
 - Like pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love and so on
 - It's not that having wealth excludes such things
 - It's about the opportunity cost
 - For example, a man looking at his week ahead could elect to spend more time at the job to earn more income, or spend more time in Bible study to deepen his relationship with Christ
 - There is only so much time in a day, so he can't do more of both
 - One pursuit is based in a love of money
 - The other pursuit is based in a love for the Lord
 - One is driven by desires for more
 - One is reflective of contentment

- One choice potentially leads to covetousness
- The other leads to godliness
- These same choices exist for mothers, children, students, single people, etc.
 - Obviously, the writer isn't asking for Christians to forgo earning a living or supporting their families
 - He simply asks that we not strive to gain more than is essential, for in moving beyond the necessary, we distract ourselves from the true mission of the Church
- And in the worst cases, our desire for more will lead us to compromising our character
 - Perhaps our love for money, or the comforts it brings, leads us to neglect our responsibilities to family or church
 - Perhaps we assume debts we can't repay
 - Perhaps we break laws, cheat clients, betray the trust of those we love
 - We may be prone to doing these things, because we aren't content to rely upon the Lord's judgment for how much is best for us
 - And because we aren't willing to patiently wait to receive our wealth in eternity
- In v.6, the writer reminds us from the Psalms that the Lord is my helper, so we have nothing to fear from the world
 - If you feel insecure, and that insecurity drives you to hold off retirement one more year, or to put in just a few more hours at the job, ask yourself why do you hold such concern?
 - Will the Lord neglect your needs?
 - Will He forget you?
 - Hasn't He promised you that He will meet those needs?

Matt. 6:31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'"

[Matt. 6:32](#) "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

[Matt. 6:33](#) "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

- I wonder how often Christians miss the blessing of seeing the Lord "show up" in the way He promised, because we've robbed Him of that opportunity?
- I've known men and women living on the mission field, who have learned to live in this promise on a daily basis
- It's amazing to hear their stories of how they encounter a need they couldn't meet, but then God showed up in an unexpected way
- Our service of gratitude to the Lord brings with it an expectation that we set aside our desire to pursue earthly wealth and the status and comfort it brings
 - We still work hard and provide for our needs, so that we will not be a burden on others
 - But we make our goal pursuing righteousness
 - Trust the Lord to determine our compensation, so to speak
 - And remain content in His provision
- Test your heart...are you content? Or just convicted?
 - Or have you made the pursuit of the world too great a goal?
 - Is your character at risk?
 - Is the opportunity cost for your way of life so great that you are sacrificing eternal gain for earthly gain?
 - Let's all consider these things carefully in the days to come