

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 13:1-6**

To better understand the virtues of Christian living.

Read the Text:

Let brotherly love continue. 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. 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?" (Heb. 13:1-6, ESV)

Study the Text:**The Beginning of the End**

The final chapter of the Book of Hebrews begins with a flurry of reminders (actually in the imperative mood, so they are *commands*) for readers to consider in light of their faith. Most of these are disconnected ideas, though they all deal with the personal conduct of an individual believer. Think of these as “parting words” before the author finishes his address. Below is a breakdown of the first five commands contained in verses 1 through 6. Session 35 will cover the remaining commands before the benediction in Session 36.

UNITY

The first of the five commands reads literally: “The brotherly love let remain.” This is not just any kind of love. This love is typified by believers for believers in the New Testament. The underlying term is the Greek word *φιλadelphia* (*philadelphia*), from which we get the name Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (incidentally called “the city of brotherly love”). Brotherly love is *crucial* to the Christian witness. Jesus himself said in John 13:34-35: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” In other words, the “brotherly love” of Christians is, in and of itself, a witness to the Gospel. When Christians care for

one another in radical ways, it draws attention because selfless love is both truly rare and intensely desirable. Remember that the context of Hebrews includes great suffering. Conditions for living were not exactly great. And when tensions run high, people become more insensate by little disagreements than usual over all kinds of issues (after all, we are human). However, the unity of the church and the fellowship of the body can never ultimately be disrupted over anything. There must always be an effort to be at peace with all people, but especially other believers (Rom. 12:18).

HOSPITALITY

Verse 2 gives the second command, and it has drawn a lot of attention because of what it seems to be saying. The command is to avoid “neglecting hospitality to strangers,” which requires a little qualification. Hospitality in the ancient world was much more radical than it is today. Often, hospitality today means having people over or cooking them a meal. Sometimes churches have a “hospitality team” whose sole purpose is to welcome people as they arrive for the Sunday gathering. Hospitality in the ancient world, however, often meant taking in strangers who were traveling and needed a place to stay overnight before continuing their journey. Traveling was dangerous, especially at night, so travelers often stopped in villages or towns as the day grew late to avoid putting themselves at risk (Jdg. 19:15–21).

Given the reminder that by showing hospitality to strangers, “some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb. 13:2), the author likely has Genesis 18:1–8 and 19:1–2 in mind. In that story, Abraham welcomes three travelers who turn out to be the LORD and two angels. Those same two angels later end up in Sodom with Lot, although no one in the city knows they are actually angels. While we don’t necessarily take in strangers the way the ancients did, we still have a duty to show hospitality to strangers as Christians in other ways. The author’s point still matters. When we do so, we might be entertaining angels. It sounds crazy, but then again, the Bible is full of crazy-sounding things that are actually true.

COMPASSION

The third command also implies the suffering Christians often experienced at the time (Heb. 10:32–34). The command is to “remember those in prison,” which is in the present tense and is better understood as: “Continue to remember those in prison.” The author adds the qualifier: “as though in prison with them, since you also are in the body” (Heb. 13:3). The language of “body,” coupled with “brotherly love” in verse 1, almost certainly refers to the body of Christ. The point is that if one part of the body is suffering, the whole body should be aware of it and actively seeking to bring aid and comfort. If a part of your body is injured, your whole body knows it; the body of Christ is no different. It’s easy to forget about those who suffer when they are not present. The author reminds us to remember those who are not present with us and be compassionate toward them.

PURITY

The fourth command could not be more relevant today. The focus of this command is to hold a high view of marriage and therefore remain sexually pure. The word “marriage bed” in the Greek language is the word that literally means “sexual intercourse.” The verse could be translated: “Let marriage be held in honor by all and let sexual intercourse be undefiled.” The Christian life is characterized by commitment to marriage, a covenant God designed for our good. We are to revere marriage as we revere the God who instituted it. Grindheim notes: “Such (brotherly) love entails an uncompromising commitment to marital fidelity and represents a sharp contrast to Greco-Roman culture, in which extramarital affairs were considered to be acceptable.”¹ The author

¹ Sigurd Grindheim, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 666–667.

reminds his audience not to be taken captive by the world's approach to marriage, but to think Christianly about it.

CONTENTMENT

The fifth and final command in this passage concerns contentment: "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'" (Heb. 13:5–6). Many people mistakenly think the Bible condemns money, but it does not. The Bible condemns *the love of money*. The apostle Paul warns young Timothy: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim. 6:10). Christians should not be obsessed with gaining more and more money, but should remember that the most valuable thing one can possess is the Lord himself, and he has promised to be with us forever (Josh. 1:5; Matt. 28:18–20). To emphasize this further, the author quotes Psalm 118:6: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

What About Now?

The main thrust of this passage is very simple: continue living with Christian virtue. Life will become challenging. You might face persecution in many ways. You may have various disagreements with other believers. Through it all, you must maintain unity, hospitality, compassion, purity, and contentment.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 13:1. What are we to let continue? Why?

2. Read John 13:34–35. What does brotherly love accomplish, according to Jesus? What does Jesus issuing a "new commandment" suggest about his identity?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 13:2a. What are we not to neglect doing for strangers? What are some ways we might show hospitality today?

2. Read Hebrews 13:2b. Who might we be entertaining when we show hospitality to strangers?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 13:3. Who are we to remember? Why? What metaphor does the author use?

2. Read Hebrews 13:4. What are we to hold in honor above all? How is the Christian view of marriage different from the world's view of it?
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Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 13:5. What are we to keep our lives free from? Why? What reason is given for this?
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2. Read Hebrews 13:6 and Psalm 118:6. How does this Psalm reinforce our need to be content?
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Discuss the Text!

Session 34 Discussion: Virtue

The Christian life is a virtuous one. We are not justified by our behavior, nor is our holiness measured by our actions. But the Spirit transforms us. And our lives do produce fruit. As a group, talk about the five virtues mentioned in this text and how you live out (or don't live out) each one.

1. Icebreaker: Who is the most virtuous person you know? What makes them such in your mind?
2. Of the five virtues listed, which comes most naturally? Which do you struggle with the most?
3. Of the five virtues listed, which is the most counter-cultural today? Which is the most culturally accepted? Why do you think that is?
4. Have you ever considered that you might be “entertaining angels unaware” when you show hospitality to strangers? What do you think about that?
5. Is it possible to genuinely possess some of these virtues while violating others? Why or why not? Is it all or nothing, or no?
6. Kid Talk: Ask your child: “What is one way you can show someone love this week—especially someone who is new, left out, or hurting?”

Takeaways:

1. The Christian life is intended to be lived with virtue.
2. Even amid suffering and disagreement, we are called to unity, hospitality, compassion, purity, and contentment.