

Hebrews 13:1-6

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 August 2014

Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's good to be back with you all. All the pastors are finally back from vacation, and we are not planning to go anywhere soon. On behalf of our families, I want to express our gratitude to the church for allowing and encouraging us to take some time off each year for providing that opportunity for us to be refreshed and renewed with our families.

We've been blessed by that, and hopefully we'll return that blessing to you. Please turn to Hebrews 13, page 1009 of your pew Bible. Sometimes 1 Corinthians 13 is known as the great love chapter, but Hebrews 13 is also a great chapter about Christian love.

It's also a fitting conclusion to the book of Hebrews. As we've seen over the past year, the book of Hebrews is about the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ.

But Jesus is the eternal Son of God, through whom all things were created, as our brother, who came to share our human nature and to bring us with him to glory.

As our great high priest, merciful and faithful, as our all-sufficient sacrifice, and as our soon-coming King. Now, the last three chapters of Hebrews, chapters 11, 12, and 13, call us to live in light of the surpassing greatness of Jesus, to live a life of faith, hope, and love.

[1 : 2 4] In chapter 11, we saw the call to live by faith in God's promises, and a series of examples of people who did. And chapter 12 focused on hope, about running the race with endurance, looking forward to the joy that God has set before us.

And finally, chapter 13 focuses on love. Costly, concrete, Christ-like love. The Apostle Paul said, now faith, hope, and love remain these three, but the greatest of these is love.

And that's what we're looking at this morning. So let's read together Hebrews 13, starting at verse 1 and going down to verse 6. Let brotherly love continue.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated since you also are in the body.

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

[2 : 3 7] 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.

So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me? One of the greatest obstacles to love is fear.

So we'll see in these verses three things. First, the love to which God calls us. Second, the fears that hinder us. And third, the perfect love that drives out all fear.

So first, the love to which God calls us. This passage is structured around five exhortations concerning love. They are crisp, clear, terse, memorable statements.

They could be translated literally as follows. Verse one, brotherly love, continue. Verse two, love of strangers, don't neglect it. Verse three, prisoners, remember them.

[3 : 42] Verse four, marriage, precious. Verse five, not loving money, that's the way. Those are the main exhortations of the passage. And they're not only crisp and memorable, they're also attractive in the picture they present.

Imagine and think about a community that is consistently characterized by all of those things. A community characterized by brotherly love, family-like intimacy.

You know, have you ever visited with a family that just really enjoys being together? They don't just reluctantly go through the motions of having dinner a couple times a week together. They love to spend time with each other.

They play games together. They have serious conversation with one another. They don't hide things from each other. They share their stuff with each other. They have each other's back. They support each other and work together as a team because they're bound together.

You see, brotherly love is not primarily a feeling. It's a bond that cultivates a feeling for one another. Now think about a church or a small group of Christians that's like that.

[4 : 50] A church characterized by family-like love. Knowing that we're bound together as brothers and sisters in Christ. Think about a church that intentionally cultivates our affection and care for one another.

Not just a group of individuals who gather once a week to hear someone talk and then go their separate ways, but people who treat each other like family. Recently, I received an encouraging email from an out-of-town visitor.

She had visited Trinity, forgotten her Bible, wrote to ask if we had it, and she said this. She said, I forgot my Bible because I was distracted by fellowship. She said, you have a wonderful congregation.

They really seem to have a small-town kind of feel to it. The instant rapport amongst them was truly genuine and so pleasant. I sense that your congregation really loves to be there.

They were also intent on fellowshiping and hanging out in the basement afterwards. You've created a special community that will feed on itself and grow naturally because the support is there. Hebrews says, continue that kind of love, that family-like love, that brotherly, sisterly love for one another.

[5 : 59] It's a beautiful thing. But then in verse 2, he goes on to talk about a contrast. Not just love for one another within the family of God, but also love for outsiders. It's not just a tight-knit community that's closed off to other people.

It's a hospitable community that intentionally welcomes and cares for outsiders. There's actually a play on words between verse 1 and verse 2. Verse 1, the word for brotherly love, is a Greek word, philadelphia.

It's a compound word, philo for love, and adelphia representing brother or sister. And then verse 2, the word translated show hospitality to strangers is also a compound word, philoxenia, love for strangers.

The word stranger could be translated outsider or foreigner or visitor. So this is a community characterized both by family-like intimacy as well as welcoming generosity.

Earlier this summer, I got another email from another visitor to Trinity. Now, we don't always get all these emails, but I thought I'd share both of them with you. It was a thoughtful and encouraging email, but at the end, she shared a concern.

[7 : 14] She said, we arrived 30 minutes early for the service. We saw a lot of interaction between people. We were surprised that no one greeted us, except the man who gave us a bulletin who said good morning, and a young man in front of us turned around and shook our hands during the greeting time.

With the sense of community we observed, this seems to be inconsistent with what we would have expected. Even after the service, we did not have anyone attempt to speak to us either.

We engaged ourselves in conversation with someone, and then we left unnoticed. She said, we are not complaining, just making an observation that may be helpful for those who do come and who do need to be noticed.

Brothers and sisters, let us not neglect to love strangers. To love visitors, to love foreigners, to love outsiders, to love anyone who is different than us in some way or another.

You know, one of the unique challenges we have as a church is that we constantly have people passing through. The church I grew up in, everyone knew everyone. There were 75 people, and if somebody new came in, everybody knew it.

[8 : 21] There were maybe one or two new people every week, at most. Here we have five or ten new people at least every week. College students, homeless people, refugees, young professionals, visiting scholars, extended family, probably half of you.

Right? Coming to New Haven and not planning to stay forever. Sure. But this is part of the mission that God has given us as a church. To love strangers until they become friends.

To welcome outsiders until they become just part of the family. I remember the first time I came to Trinity. I was a nerdy college student.

And someone who was not in college, who was quite a bit older than me, greeted me, engaged me in conversation, and even remembered my name the next time I showed up three months later.

That's part of what kept me coming back to this church. It was an attractive expression of Christ-like love. So we see the attractiveness of brotherly love, of love for outsiders.

[9 : 29] Third, remembering prisoners and the persecuted. In the context of Hebrews, some of the Christian believers had been imprisoned because of their faith in Christ. And back then, if you were in a Roman prison, you would get one meal a day from the guards.

Bread and water. And if that's all you ever ate, you would gradually start to waste away. Because it wasn't enough to sustain you. But chapter 10, verse 34, says you had compassion on those in prison.

That probably means they actually brought food to the prison to give to their fellow Christian believers in prison. And perhaps others as well. They brought food, comfort, and spiritual encouragement.

They endured the stench of Roman prisons. Roman prisons had no windows. And that means no air circulation. Think of a bunch of people stuck together, sometimes in a moldy basement, in the stocks, with no air circulation.

And going to visit them. Your clothes would stink as you left. The guards would sometimes demand bribes. There would be all kinds of hassles to visit someone in prison.

[10 : 43] But historians tell us that one of the ways that the early church spread in the ancient world was by the love that Christians consistently showed for one another. For prisoners.

For the oppressed. For the downtrodden. In the 4th century, the non-Christian Emperor Julian complained to his fellow government officials.

He complained that the Christians were far more devoted to caring not only for fellow Christians who were poor, but for pagans who were poor. Than the pagan priests and the pagan people themselves.

It was a powerful and attractive witness of Christ. And Christians today still go into prisons and minister to inmates despite the challenges. Christian Tabernacle, the church that we partnered with for the summer camp this year, has a monthly ministry, a Bible study, and mentoring program at the jail on Whaley Avenue.

They've invited us. If there are men who want to join with them, talk to me. And we can go work through that. They have some training. There's also opportunities to be a resource for people coming out of prison.

[11 : 52] And wanting to connect with the church and reintegrate into society. It's hard. It raises all kinds of challenges. But it's a call. And Christians today still go into hard places where people are mistreated.

Right? We have our brother, Hanum Asad. If you're on the Trinity email list, the prayer email list, you've been getting his updates. If you're not on the prayer email list, fill out a welcome card and say, add me to the prayer list.

And that way you can get these updates from the missionaries we support and be praying for them on a consistent basis. But they're on the front lines. They're bringing immediate care and bringing comfort and spiritual encouragement and truth to people in one of the hardest places in the world to live right now.

Fourth, honoring marriage. This is the fourth exhortation to love. The fourth kind of love that we're called to. Let marriage be held in honor among all.

And let the marriage bed be undefiled. Now that word held in honor could also be translated precious. Literally, it just says, marriage precious, the marriage to all.

[13 : 02] And let the marriage bed be undefiled. So treat marriage as precious, as something of great value and worth whether you're married or not. God invented marriage. He invented marriage to be a glorious physical expression of his unbreakable bond with his people.

And God also invented sex to be a regular reaffirmation of the marriage promises. To say, I would marry you all over again tonight.

I'm giving you everything I have without holding anything back and I'm loving it. That's what marriage means and that's what sex means. In the biblical picture. In the kingdom of God.

And it's a beautiful picture. That's also why marriage and sex always go together in God's kingdom and should never be separated. Verse 4 says, God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

What that means is that when the bond of sex is separated from the bond of marriage, it becomes inherently unstable. It lacks integrity. And it will ultimately break apart in the searching light of God's judgment.

[14 : 09] But sexual immorality and adultery will be revealed for what they are. A lie that will not remain into God's eternal kingdom.

So Hebrews says, let the marriage bed be undefiled. In other words, let it be free from whatever deforms and debases it or impairs its force and vigor.

Now there are all kinds of things that can defile the marriage bed. Not only adultery and sexual immorality, but also bitterness and grudges held against her spouse.

Impatience. Selfishness. Hebrews says, let the marriage bed be free of all those things. Sex and marriage is meant to be a loving act of worship to God.

Marriage is precious in God's kingdom. You know, one of the most beautiful things, I think, is to see an older couple who've been married maybe 40 or 50 years. And they're still in love with each other.

[15 : 13] Their love for each other has been refined over the years. Often through painful trials. And it's now a seasoned tenderness. A mature understanding. A secure bond.

Hebrews says, build into a marriage that may one day look like that. So this is the love that God calls us to for insiders and outsiders.

For prisoners and the persecuted. For marriage. But then in verse 5 he says, there's one thing that we should not love. Money. Keep your life free from the love of money.

Now imagine a society. Again, this is an attractive picture. Imagine a society that is free from the love of money. There would be no predatory, manipulative lending schemes.

There would be no impulsive overspending that results in crippling debt. There would be no deceptive advertisements that build on a continual craving for more and more stuff.

[16:18] There would be no half-hearted workers who just want to retire and get their pension. And no cutthroat bosses who make their employees work 90 hours a week and call it an internship.

This society would be characterized by a rhythm of work and rest. Sacrificing and feasting. Giving and receiving. This society would prioritize people over things.

The richest people would freely interact with the poorest with genuine mutual respect. The poor would be free of envy and entitlement. The rich would be free from pride and superiority.

Hebrews says that is the society that the church is called to be. The church is called to be God's new society, God's new community that is not ruled, that is free from the love of money.

That is not entangled by it. People who work diligently. Who give generously. Who are free to love one another and cultivate their affection for one another because they're not bound up and entangled in all their possessions.

[17:30] But can instead use them for the sake of loving others. This is the love to which God calls us. It's an attractive picture.

Love for insiders and outsiders. Love for prisoners and the persecuted. Love in marriage. Love for marriage but not for money. Now this is a beautiful and attractive calling.

But I think all of us would have to admit it's also extremely difficult to live these things out. In each of these categories there are numerous fears that hinder us.

I mean think about it. What hinders us from brotherly love? From being a tight-knit church community? Maybe it's the fear of being known. Over the years many people have come to me and said something like, I know my life is a mess and when I come to church on Sunday I feel like everybody else has it together except me.

And so I just sit in the back or sit behind a pillar and leave quickly afterwards. Or I just try to put on a good appearance like everyone else so they don't see who I really am.

[18:42] Because I'm scared that if people really knew me they'd reject me. Or maybe it's the fear of being called out. Held to a higher standard.

Maybe you know that there's some area of your life where you're not living to please God. And you don't want to be confronted about it so you keep your distance from other Christians so they don't figure it out and so they don't call you out.

Maybe it's the fear of getting into potentially difficult, painful relationships that call you to give of yourself. There's a vulnerability that's inherent in brotherly, sisterly love.

By opening yourself to other people you're also opening yourself to potentially being hurt. And in this fallen world there's no way around that. The only way around that is to close yourself in and become completely self-centered and hardened.

And that is the worst condition to be in of all. So there are fears that hinder us from brotherly love. There are also fears that hinder us from loving outsiders.

[19 : 50] Why are there people who come to our church services and aren't personally welcomed by anyone? Isn't fear one of the major hindrances that holds us back?

What will that person think if I approach them and say hi? Will they think I am weird? Maybe you've had a conversation like this. Hi, is this your first time here at Trinity?

No, I've been here for five years. I've stopped asking that question. I say, how long have you been coming? It's safe.

It's safe. Once I said to someone who I thought looked like a high school student, what grade are you in? He said, I'm a second year grad student.

I was like, oh goodness. I hope he didn't hear me clearly. I was redder than a tomato. Right? And when we move beyond just the greeting someone after church, there can be even greater fears.

[20 : 57] Right? If I get to know a family who's recently arrived from a foreign country and perhaps doesn't speak English well and isn't used to the culture here, their needs might become overwhelming and if I can't meet all of them, then maybe I should just not even meet any of them and not engage them in the first place at all because it's just too messy.

Or if I invest in people who might only stay in New Haven for a year or two, how will I ever have any long-term friends? So I'm just going to avoid them all.

Or if I invite people to my house, they'll see that it's a mess. And they'll see that my kids don't always obey. Or what about having someone come and live with us who needs a place to stay?

Yikes! There are all kinds of fears that can hinder us from loving outsiders. Or remembering prisoners and the persecuted on the service, it's much easier to forget prisoners and persecuted Christians.

Because if you live here in New Haven, you will probably not run into many of them on the street. And it's potentially inconvenient, costly, and even dangerous to care for them.

[22 : 14] Honoring marriage. Maybe you're single. When I was single, I worked in campus ministry. With college students. And one day, two of the student leaders began a small group meeting by asking a scary opening question.

A risky opening question. They said, what is your greatest fear? Hmm. If you're a small group leader, try that one out on your small group. That's a challenging one. You might need to use discernment whether your group's ready for that.

I said, honestly, one of my greatest fears is marriage. Being united to one person for the rest of my life. What if I choose the wrong person? But it's also pretty intimidating to think about being single for the rest of my life.

Now, ironically, one of the students leading that meeting became my wife. Only a couple of years later. So you never know who you're sitting next to in small group.

All right. Don't get, don't let your minds go too far. Don't get distracted. All right. Focus. I know it's a hot morning. We're hanging in there together.

[23 : 18] Right? But if you're single, is it the fear of being left alone that drives you to constantly date? Or is it the fear of lifelong commitment that makes you hesitant to even consider marriage or dating?

Or is it both? You fear being left alone and you fear commitment, so you end up in long-term, dead-end dating relationships. Or maybe you're married.

There are all kinds of fears that can hinder genuine intimacy in marriage. And I could go on and on listing fears.

Fears about money. Fears about the future. Fears about the economy. Fears about politics. Fears about blah, blah, blah. But I think you get the idea. And you can probably imagine some more yourself.

There are plenty of fears that hinder us from living out this love that Hebrews talks about. But I want to go on because this passage gives us good news. We see not just the love to which God calls us, the fears that hinder us, but finally we see perfect love of Christ that drives out all fear.

[24 : 31] Verse 5, he has said, I will never leave you. No, never forsake you. So we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper.

I will not fear. What can man do to me? You see, what we have here in this passage is not just a laundry list of commands to obey. Every one of these commands is rooted in the unchanging character and the saving work of Jesus Christ.

So first, brotherly love. What frees us from the fear of being known? The fear of being called out. The fear of being, getting drawn into potentially difficult and painful relationships.

Well, it's knowing that Jesus Christ has become our brother. Hebrews 2.11 says, Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. Children of God the Father.

He is the bond that holds us together. That can never be torn apart. As we sang, he will hold us fast. He knows you completely and he loves you completely.

[25 : 39] He's brought us into God's family forever and his love for us will continue without ever ending. And he's poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit so that our love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ will also continue without end.

You know, the word translated continue in verse 1 is the same as the word translated remain in chapter 12, verse 27. If you look up there, it's talking about the future day of judgment when God will shake the heavens and the earth.

And it says, Many things will be removed, but only what cannot be shaken will remain. Only God's unshakable kingdom will remain on that day.

You see, the love of brothers and sisters in Christ for one another cannot be shaken because it's part of God's eternal kingdom. Christ's love for us as our brother will outlast and overcome our fear of taking our place in the family of God.

So Christ is our brother. Second, love of outsiders. What can transform our fear of outsiders into love of outsiders? It's knowing that Christ came into this world as an outsider.

[26 : 50] And that when we welcome outsiders, we may actually be welcoming Jesus. Verse 2 says, By loving and welcoming outsiders, some have entertained angels without knowing it.

You might say, What does that mean? Well, it's probably a reference to Abraham and Sarah, who eagerly greeted three visitors who came to their door in Genesis 18. They prepared a costly meal and spent costly time with their visitors.

Two of the visitors turned out to be angels, who brought them a message from God that next year they would finally have a long-awaited son. The message came true. It changed not only the rest of Abraham and Sarah's life, but the rest of human history.

So Abraham and Sarah extended generous, costly hospitality to their visitors, but they received something far greater and more lasting in return. The point is, sometimes the outsiders, the newcomers, the foreigners that you welcome may prove to be true messengers of God to you, bringing a greater blessing to you than they receive from you.

And ultimately, it's not just about the possibility of welcoming an angel. It's not really saying, Go find the random person on the street that you've never met before and invite them into your house, and maybe there'll be an angel.

[28 : 21] And then you can go untouched by an angel and tell your story. That's not the point. Right? The point is, they might be some, an outsider that you welcome may be someone that God has sent into your life to give you a greater blessing than you can even give them.

And ultimately, you may even be welcoming Jesus. You know, when Jesus came into the world, he came as an outsider. As a child, he became a refugee, fleeing the persecution of Herod.

As an adult, he was often on the road and dependent on the welcome and hospitality of others. Even in his death, he was crucified outside the gate of the city.

The message of the gospel is that Jesus became the ultimate outsider so that anyone who receives him might be welcomed into the family of God. Jesus became a homeless refugee so that those who take him in might become citizens of God's eternal kingdom.

That's the gospel message. That's what Jesus came to do for us. And Jesus continues to live by his Holy Spirit in his brothers and sisters, in those who believe in him.

[29 : 33] And you know, many of Jesus' brothers and sisters are literally homeless or refugees or foreigners or outsiders. And in welcoming and loving outsiders, we're expressing our welcome and love for Jesus himself.

That's why Jesus said in Matthew 25, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. He says, Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.

So come and inherit the kingdom prepared for you. That's what transforms our fear of outsiders into love of outsiders, knowing that Christ became an outsider in order to take us in.

Third, what motivated us to remember prisoners and the persecuted is knowing that Christ came to liberate us. Hebrews 2, 14 and 15 says, We were captives to sin, death, and the devil.

We were subject to cruel masters who kept us in bondage. But Jesus came not just to visit us in prison and give us some temporary relief, but to liberate us from our bondage.

[30 : 38] At the cost of his own life, he took on our flesh and blood so that through his death he might destroy the devil and deliver all those who fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

And Jesus has become our merciful and faithful high priest. In other words, our advocate and representative. He paid a great price so that we might go free. And boy, that's a glorious motivation for ministry to prisoners.

That's a glorious calling to stand with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are mistreated and persecuted. Because Jesus Christ came to liberate us and free us.

Fourth, what motivates us to hold marriage as precious and to pursue sexual purity, it's knowing that Christ is our husband and we are his beloved bride. The scripture says in Christ that we are chosen and precious to God.

That he's pledged himself to us in unwavering and undivided loyalty. That he instituted the new covenant by shedding his own blood. He died to make us pure and whole.

[31 : 43] And he has said, never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you. I will never go back on my promise. His love for you will not fail. That's what can strengthen us.

To hold marriage as a precious thing. And to come to him with all our junk from the past. Knowing that he died to make us pure and whole.

And to wash us clean and make us new. And give us a life full of his spirit. And finally, Jesus came to be our eternal savings and retirement.

That will never dwindle or fade away. And so we can keep our life free from the love of money. Which, however you deal with it, is fleeting and temporary.

Even when our money fails, even when our bodies fail, even when this world is shaken, Jesus will remain. You see, the perfect love of Christ is this.

[32 : 50] He's our brother who holds us together. He's the outsider who's come to take us in. He's our liberator who paid our way out of bondage. He's our husband who calls us chosen and precious to him.

He's our savings and retirement that will never dwindle or disappear into all eternity. That's the perfect love of Christ that drives out all fear. It's knowing who he is.

Maybe you don't know him yet. Ask him today. Say, Jesus, I want to know you. If this is who you really are, come into my life.

Make me yours. Make me your brother, sister, part of your family. I want to conclude with the words of our sister in Christ, Sonia, who passed away earlier this week.

She faced her greatest fear, many of our greatest fear, death itself, on Thursday. She had been battling cancer for some time. This weekend, I looked through her Facebook page, and I happened to notice her last Facebook post.

[34 : 01] It was posted the day before she died. And it was just two sentences long. She said, I'm on my way to Smilo again. There's always something going on. But God is going with me, so I'm not afraid.

The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do to me? Brothers and sisters, let us not be afraid. But let us love one another as Christ has loved us.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your perfect love that drives out all fear.

We thank you that you have poured out your love into our hearts by your Holy Spirit so that we might be changed, so that we might be transformed, so that we might be a people who reflect your likeness, your character, your love.

Lord, would you make us into this kind of community as a church, a community defined by your love for us and characterized by living that out with one another and with all those around us.

[35 : 17] We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.