

## Brotherly Love

**Hebrews 13:1** Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels. 3 Remember the prisoners as if chained with them-- those who are mistreated-- since you yourselves are in the body also.

4 Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. 5 *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." 6 So we may boldly say: "The LORD *is* my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Among the many works that Charles Spurgeon's church began was an orphanage. One biographer called it the greatest sermon he ever preached.

During one of Spurgeon's visits to the orphanages he and a friend, a fellow Baptist pastor named Robert Shindler met with a young boy who was near to death. Shindler recounts the story, "We went into the cool and sweet chamber, and there lay the boy. He was very much excited when he saw Mr. Spurgeon. The great preacher sat by his side and holding the boy's hand in his, he said, " "Well, my dear boy, you have some precious promises all around the room. Now, dear child, you are going to die, and you are very tired lying here, and soon you will be free from all pain, and you will be at rest."

"Nurse, did he rest last night?" "He coughed very much."

"Ah, my dear boy, it seems hard for you to be here all day in pain, and to cough all night. Do you love Jesus?"

" 'Yes.' "

" 'Jesus loves you. He bought you with His precious blood, and He knows what is best for you. It seems hard for you to be here and listen to the shouts of the healthy boys outside at play. But soon Jesus will take you home, and then He will tell you the reason, and you will be so glad.' "

"Then, laying his hand on the boy, he said, 'O Jesus, Master, this dear child is reaching out his thin hand to find Thee! Touch him, dear Savior, with Thy living, warm clasp. Lift him as he passes the cold river, that his feet be not chilled by the water of death; take him home in Thine own good time. Comfort and cherish him till that good time comes. Show him Thyself as he lies here, and let him see Thee and know Thee more and more as his loving Savior.' "

"After a moment's pause he said, 'Now, dear boy, is there anything you would like? Would you like a canary in a cage to hear him sing in the morning? Nurse, see that he has a canary tomorrow morning. Good-by, my dear boy: you will see the Savior, perhaps, before I shall!'"

Spurgeon's friend writes, "I have seen Mr. Spurgeon holding by his power sixty-five hundred people in breathless interest; I knew him as a great man universally esteemed and beloved; but as he sat by the bedside of a dying pauper child, he was to me a greater and grander man than when swaying the mighty multitude at his will."

Christian love is truly one of the greatest sermons we will preach. If we have truly embraced the Gospel of knowing and loving God, then it must be that we will love one another. The command in verse 1 is the natural outworking of the faith that Hebrews has preached.

Let brotherly love continue. This simple command to continue in *philadelphia*, brotherly love, is the main command of this whole section. It's not a new subject as much as it is the application of what a life of drawing near results in. **Heb 10:24** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

As much as we think love comes naturally, and love needs no instruction, this passage gives us four forms of brotherly love. These might seem unexpected, but when we study these, it becomes clear why these are the Holy Spirit's inspired description of brotherly love.

## I. Love the Unfamiliar Unconditionally

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

His first command to us is to not forget, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers. In the ancient world, travelling Christians needed one another to provide clean and safe places to stay. Christian slaves had no homes of their own. Travelling preachers and evangelists were always on the road. But the public inns were immoral, expensive and filthy. So hospitality was very needful.

Even in the hospitable Orient, where hospitality of travelling strangers was considered a duty, there was still some caution and prudence applied.

The thought here is to show hospitality to those outside your group, outside your family, and your circle. The big idea is to extend fellowship and friendship.

In so doing, the writer says, some were actually hosting angels. He is likely thinking of the three men who came to visit Abraham, two of whom were angels, the third was the malach Yhvh, the angel of the Lord – the Son of God. Later on, during the time of the judges, Manoah and his wife hosted a man who turned out to be the Angel of the Lord.

Does this still happen that people host angels? There are far too many accounts from even recent church history to rule it out. We don't know a fraction of the way angels are involved in being ministers, or servants to those who are heirs of salvation – whether protection, or rescue, or something else related to spiritual warfare. We don't know, and God has not chosen to reveal much of it to us. He has warned us in Colossians 2:18 against the worship of angels, which is often what some people's fascination with angels turns into.

His point here is not to initiate us into the mysteries of the angelic world. Here he wishes to say that hospitality to strangers has often brought unlooked for and unexpected rewards. Those people had no idea of the dignity and power of their visitor, but their simple and humble hospitality meant that they experienced the privilege of having God as a guest, having great princes of the cosmos in their homes.

What does this look like in a dangerous society? The principle here is not how unknown or strange or foreign the person is to you. The principle is loving people outside of your immediate circle.

12 Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. 13 "But when you give a feast, invite *the* poor, *the* maimed, *the* lame, *the* blind. 14 "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Lk. 14:12-14)

Here is the idea: brotherly love is not cliquish. It is not restricted to a tight circle of me, my family, and my best friends. It opens up to include those who are of no immediate benefit or reward to us. It loves without the condition of trying to get back. This means reaching out to the one different from you in age, or first language, or wealth.

Hospitality doesn't only mean hosting someone in your home and having a meal. Once again, the main idea is extending fellowship and friendship. It is first of all making someone feel at home, even in conversation. It can be the acts of refreshment through messages or phone calls or notes. It can be taking someone out to lunch or coffee, it can be visiting someone who is more housebound; it can be helping with transport.

This kind of unconditional love to the unfamiliar is exactly how a local church earns the reputation

of being loving. It welcomes visitors. It reaches out to the needy. The teenagers love to minister to the elderly. The families love to host the singles. The young couples love to minister to the families. The children love to bless their elders.

**1Pe 4:9** Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

Outside of your local church, this can still be applied to those who are less familiar to us from our work and friendship circles. It can be applied when we have visiting missionaries and preachers.

Brotherly love is experienced when you look for whom you can invest in. It looks for an opportunity to make someone else feel more at home in your presence, and therefore in God's presence.

## **II. Love the Unfortunate Sympathetically**

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

Now he tells us, if you want brotherly love to continue, then you need to keep in mind, be mindful of two groups: prisoners, and the maltreated, those being tortured, abused, oppressed. The implication is for those believers who are now in jail for their faith, suffering hunger and physical abuse.

He says, love these ones sympathetically. Place yourself in their situation. Think on them as if you were in prison. Think on them as if you were being tortured.

If you were in prison for the Gospel, what would you want? If you were facing detention, trial, arrest, confiscation of finances, separation from family for the Gospel's sake, what would you want?

This was the practice of the early church.

William Barclay: "Aristides said of the Christians: "If they hear that any one of their number is imprisoned or in distress for the sake of their Christ's name, they all render aid in his necessity and, if he can be redeemed, they set him free."

Sometimes Christians were condemned to the mines which was almost like being sent to a prison exile. The Apostolic Constitutions (38) lay it down: "If any Christian is condemned for Christ's sake to the mines by the ungodly, do not overlook him but from the proceeds of your toil and sweat send him something to support himself and to reward the soldier of Christ."

When the Numidian robbers carried off their Christian friends, the Church at Carthage raised the equivalent of L1,000 to ransom them and promised more. There were actually cases where Christians sold themselves as slaves to find money to ransom their friends."

Brotherly love is sympathetic.

**Rom 12:15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

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

Moreover, in the Scripture we read earlier in Matthew, Jesus says that sympathetic love to the needy is love to Him.

'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' (Matt. 25:36)

"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.' (Matt. 25:40)

How do we do this? The first application remains to take care of the persecuted church. We have an obligation to support and love our brothers and sisters in North Korea, and Sudan, and south Nigeria, and India. I am convinced that in the next decade we will see more Christians imprisoned in so called 'Christian' countries or first-world countries or secular countries. Liberal lobby groups will not stop until believers deny what the Bible says, stop preaching repentance, renounce attempts to call sinners to change their ways and lives, and give full, public recognition to the sexual perversion. We will have massive opportunities in the next years to support and defend and assist Christians imprisoned for simply preaching the Christian gospel.

A second application is that we need to love the afflicted and suffering in our own circle. While caring for the persecuted church is vital, we will always be able to do the most good to those within immediate reach. Charity begins at home, and it begins in your local church, making sure that those going through financial hardship, suffering with debilitating sickness, those hospitalised, those unemployed are assisted wherever we can.

### **III. Love the Opposite Sex Unselfishly**

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

There are two kinds of human beings: male and female. Males and females are meant to come together in marriage for companionship, love, and the propagation of the human race.

From God's point of view, the institution of marriage is precious, valuable. The words among all can either mean all people should regard it as honourable, or it can mean it is honourable in every respect. But obviously a principle is being given for all men to take note of. The honourable and precious way of men and women entering into a union is marriage. The physical relationship between married persons is in God's eyes, undefiled, unspoilt, pure.

In other words, the way brotherly love continues between humans that are male and humans that are female is by joining in the covenant of marriage, and thereby enjoying an undefiled, unspoilt union.

By contrast, Scripture says, God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Pre-marital and extra-marital sex is the opposite of honourable and undefiled. It is debased and deformed sexuality. It dishonourable, disrespectful, even profane.

Here is the reason. Pre-marital and extra-marital sex is not loving to your neighbour. Now that sounds odd at first. Everyone understands that rape and abuse is wicked because it victimises someone else against his or her will, or exploits him or her as a child.

But what about when we have "consenting adults"? The problem is that the Bible still describes that as theft. It steals something. It takes away virginity, but gives no covenant. It takes someone's purity for selfish pleasure. It takes someone else's husband or wife and shatters that covenant and that home. It takes someone else's daughter or sister, or son or brother and uses them. The world sings and portrays fornication as the greatest pleasure, the greatest love, when it is actually one of the acts of supreme selfishness.

During the Reformation period, Henry VIII was a king given to rampant sexual sin and immorality. He had six wives and several mistresses. Bishop Latimer was courageous and bold, and gave the

king a finely wrapped Bible. Inscribed on the Bible were the words, "Fornicators and adulterers God will judge".

What does brotherly love look like between the two kinds of Christians, male and female? It looks like 1 Cor 7:2: "2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. (1 Cor. 7:2)

For those single, it looks like purity. As Paul instructed Timothy

but exhort [*an older man*] as a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger as sisters, with all purity. (1 Tim. 5:1-2)

We wouldn't have the morality scandals in churches if more pastors saw the women in their churches as sisters, and treated them with the protection and honour that brothers give to their sisters. Brotherly love between males and females in the church is celibate singleness until such time as God grants marriage, which is honourable and undefiled, and treating all others as father, mothers, brothers, and sisters. That's how males and females love each other.

#### **IV. Love Your Situation Contentedly**

5 *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." 6 So we may boldly say: "The LORD *is* my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Here is the command: let your way of life be free from the love of money, finding sufficiency in what is present right now. Let your entire outlook and thought life and desires and words and deeds not crave and thirst for or lust for money and the things money can buy. Instead, find a sense that what has been given to you right now is what you need and in that you can submit with gratitude.

What does this have to do with brotherly love? Discontent people are at the source of almost all human conflict, unrest, violence, and evil. When someone refuses to be content with what he has, he steals, injures or murders, he lies, deceives and commits fraud, he envies and hates and spread slander and gossip. he betrays and backstabs. He does all those things which he would not want done to himself. In other words, he hates his neighbour, he does not love him as himself. It is not a surprise that Scripture says For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. (Jas. 4:2)

On the other hand, content people are the safest neighbours to be around. They are the most likely to be kind, generous, honest, patient, enduring, grateful to their brothers and neighbours. Cultivating contentment is actually loving to those around you.

So what is meant here by, let your conduct be without covetousness, without love of money? This is confusing to many. Should we not love to earn? Should a salesman not love commission? Should a business owner not love making a deal? Should we not love getting a promotion or getting a raise?

Scripture has nothing against ambition, and a desire to succeed. The Bible expects those in business to seek profit, and for labourers to seek remuneration. But the Bible warns against a hunger in your soul that replaces your God-hunger. It becomes a faith, a trust, a strong desire for money that shifts your gaze from God to His gifts. It eventually becomes a master, that occupies your focus, and your love, and your heart. This is why Jesus said, " 24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate

the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matt. 6:24)

Charles Spurgeon said, "I have been to many testimony meetings and heard many people confess their sins. I've had Christians personally confess to me the sins they had battled. I have never in all my time heard a Christian confess that he is guilty of covetousness". Neither have I; never had a counselling session once where someone asked for help in fighting this.

How do you know if God really has your heart? Answer: contentment. Contentment is an attitude of the heart, not a reaction to circumstances. Contentment is the humility that accepts the slice of cake God has given you, little or large, without comparing, complaining or questioning. It doesn't stop working or being ambitious or seeking to succeed. But it accepts the slice God has given right now with submission. This explains why Paul could say he find contentment in opposite circumstances:

11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:11-13)

The second part of verse 5 and all of verse 6 give the secret of contentment: God Himself, not an angel or a saint or some intermediary, but God Himself has said, No, I will never desert, abandon, leave you, and no I will never abandon you. If you have God, what do you lack? If you have He Himself, what is truly missing from your life?

So therefore, with contented confidence, I can say whatever man may give or take from me, It won't cause fear or angst or longing. I won't be sleepless because money is not my saviour nor my protector. Money isn't even my provider. I am not at the mercy of man, government, society. God is my Helper. If I have God, I have infinite wealth, perfect protection, non-stop provision, assurances and insurances that the world cannot give. As Jesus taught in Luke 12, my life does not consist in the abundance of the things I possess."

I do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. I fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. I know and love the One who will one day shake all things, and give me as my inheritance those things that cannot be shaken.

Do you remember the Trojan horse? The Greeks lay siege to the city of Troy and couldn't get in, so they constructed a large wooden horse, and hid several men inside. They left the horse outside the walls and withdrew, giving the impression they had retreated and left a gift. When the Trojans brought the horse inside the city, the men inside the horse slipped out at night and went on to open the gates and defeat the city.

Discontent is a satanic Trojan horse. If you allow it into your heart, you are allowing a massive infiltration of your soul, to a host of sins that will work on you from the inside, and open the gates of your heart to a flood more to come in. Love your situation contentedly.

Let's take some inventory of our brotherly love. How is your love of the unfamiliar, especially in your church? How is your sympathetic love of the unfortunate, the suffering, the struggling? How is your love of the opposite sex, in purity to those you are not married to, and fidelity to the one you are? How is your love of your situation? Can you say, I submit with gladness? In these four ways, let brotherly love continue.

