

XXXIV. Practical Christianity

May 7/8/9, 2019

Hebrews 13:1-6

Aim: To conduct our lives in accordance with our Christian faith by demonstrating brotherly love, neighborly hospitality, Christian sympathy, and maintaining personal holiness.

Hughes: Much of the New Testament, especially the epistles, follows the common pattern of giving theological instruction followed by practical application—theology, then *practicality*. The change can be expressed in many ways—from *exposition* to *exhortation*, from *creed* to *conduct*, from *doctrine* to *duty*, from the *indicative* to the *imperative*. This characteristic movement took place in Hebrews in the shift between chapters 11 and 12 where the writer began to exhort his people regarding their duty to run the great race marked out for them. Chapter 12 builds to an intensely theological crescendo with the statement that ‘God is a consuming fire,’ which is then met by the intensely *practical* command that opens chapter 13—namely, to ‘Let brotherly love continue.’ So now we move from *fire* to *function*—from *vertical* to *horizontal*—from *love for God* to *love for the church*.

MacArthur: The first eleven chapters of Hebrews do not emphasize specific commands to Christians. There is an obvious lack of practical explanation or exhortations. The section is pure doctrine and is almost entirely directed to Jews who have received the gospel but need to be affirmed in the superiority of the New Covenant. The exhortations in chapter 12 that apply to Christians are general, encouraging them to run the race of faith with patience and to follow peace and holiness. The specific practical exhortations for Christians are in chapter 13. This fits the pattern of New Testament teaching, which is always doctrine and then duty, position and then practice. Chapter 13 is not an afterthought, but is integral to the message of the book. True faith demands true living.

Bruce: Our author’s argument has now been rounded off, and if his work had been a written homily and nothing more, there would have been no need for anything further. What follows in ch. 13 resembles the usual assortment of ethical and practical admonition and personal information with which the New Testament epistles tend to close. Most probably chapter 13 is an integral part of the text of the document, and there is no good reason in either internal or external evidence why it should be regarded as in some way a separate composition.

Bruce: Like Paul and the other writers of New Testament epistles, our author is alive to the ethical implications of Christian doctrine. He does not systematize his ethical injunctions as some of them do, but he urges upon them certain Christian virtues which he presumably knew it was desirable to emphasize in their present situation—brotherly love, hospitality, help to those in need, chastity, and contentment.

A. Ecclesiastical Ethics

1. Brotherly Love (Hebrews 13:1)

¹*Let brotherly love continue.*

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a) *What to Do*

Schreiner: The main theme in Hebrews is perseverance, and here the readers are admonished to let ‘brotherly love continue.’ The word ‘continue’ (*μενετω, menetō*) is a synonym for the word ‘persevere.’ The readers are not exhorted to practice just any kind of love, for they are admonished to practice ‘brother love’ (*φιλαδελφια, philadelphia*; so also Rom. 12:10; 1 Th. 4:9; 1 Pe. 1:22; 2 Pe. 1:7). The emphasis on brotherly love is distinctly Christian, indicating the family relationship that marked out the early Christian movement. The remaining admonitions in 13:1-6 reveal how love expresses itself in various situations.

Bruce: Brotherly love was a virtue highly esteemed in antiquity. In the biblical area the classic passage is Ps. 133:1, ‘Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!’ The word used here (*philadelphia*) appears in the Pauline writings and in both the Petrine epistles; and the grace of brotherly love itself, whatever terms be used, is inculcated throughout the New Testament. If a weakening of faith and resolution among the recipients of this epistle led to a weakening of the bonds which united them to their fellow-Christians, this would add urgency to the plea that brotherly love should *continue* among them. Some specific forms of brother love are enjoined in the following verses.

MacArthur: The primary moral standard of Christianity is love, and the particular love exhorted here is love of fellow Christians. ‘Love of the brethren’ is one word (*philadelphia*) in the Greek and is often translated ‘brotherly love.’ It is composed of two root words—*phileō* (tender affection) and *adelphos* (brother, or near kinsman; literally, ‘from the same womb’). The primary teaching is love for fellow Christians, our spiritual brothers. The admonition to let brotherly love ‘continue’ indicates that such love already exists. Brotherly love is the natural outflow of the Christian life. It cannot be generated, but it can be stifled as well as nurtured. We are therefore not told to make it happen but to let it continue. Love of other Christians is vital to spiritual life (1 Pe. 1:22-23). One of the by-products of obeying God’s truth is increased love for fellow believers. Since we were given brotherly love when we were given spiritual life, we should exercise this love. The believers to whom the book of Hebrews was written were experienced in showing love (6:10). They had faithfully exercised love for the brethren in the past and are encouraged to continue. New Testament brotherly love is not sentimental, superficial affection. It is affection built on deep and continuing concern and is characterized by practical commitment.

Hughes: The structure of the command here to ‘Let brotherly love continue’ suggests that the brotherly and sisterly bonds in the little church were dangerously frayed among some of the members. This was not the way they had begun because initially the fresh experience of salvation in Christ had brought with it the discovery of a shared paternity, the joyous sense of being brothers and sisters with the same Father, and the experience of *philadelphia*—the word used here, meaning ‘brotherly love.’ What a glorious phenomenon brotherly love is—a sense of the same paternity (a brotherly and sisterliness taught by God, a desire to climb into each other’s souls), a sweet inner authentication, and the sign of the real thing to the world. But it had been waning in the little house-church with the years of stress and uncertainty. Some of the brethren had grown weary of each other. And a few actually seemed to exchange mutual hatred.

Phillips: Hebrews 13 begins with a command Christians are required to take seriously: ‘Let brotherly love continue.’ Christians are to live continually by this principle. Christianity is the family of God; the church is to be a community characterized by family love. We are to show love as an essential part of our witness, but more importantly because God is love and we are

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called to Godlikeness in the world. The apostle John puts this in challenging terms, writing in his first epistle: ‘Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love’ (1 Jn. 4:7-8). Loving others is an outflowing of our relationship with God, and it is how we show gratitude for His love to us.

b) *How to Do It*

Hughes: What to do? The answer given here is utterly volitional—they were to *will* to practice brotherly love! Inwardly this requires that we will to consider the stupendous implications of our shared generation—that we truly are brothers and sisters—that God is pleased when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity (cp. Ps. 133 and Jn. 17). Outwardly, we must will to say and do only those things that will enhance our *philadelphia*. We must will to love one another. The will to let brotherly love remain—this is a divine duty.

c) *Why Do It*

MacArthur: Brotherly love is important for three primary reasons: 1) it reveals to the world that we belong to Christ; 2) it reveals our true identity to ourselves; and 3) it delights God. Jesus said, ‘By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another’ (Jn. 13:35). In effect, God has given the world a right to evaluate us on the basis of our love for each other. As a witness to the world, and as a testimony for our Lord, it is of the greatest importance that we genuinely consider others better than ourselves, that we look out for their interests above our own. In so doing, our lives preach a powerful and eloquent sermon.

MacArthur: Loving fellow Christians also reveals our true identity—it gives added assurance to us of our spiritual life in Christ (cp. 1 Jn. 3:14). A sure proof of salvation is found in our own hearts. It is our love for each other. If we wonder about our salvation, we can ask, ‘Do I have a great concern for the welfare of the Christians I know? Do I enjoy their fellowship? Do I show my concern by ministering to their needs?’ If the answer is yes, we have no better evidence that we are children of God—because we love His other children, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

MacArthur: A third reason brotherly love is important is that it delights God. Nothing is more pleasing to parents than to see their children caring for each other (cp. Ps. 133:1). When His children care for each other, help each other, and live in harmony with each other, God is both delighted and glorified. When we love each other to the degree where we are willing to give our lives for one another, we exemplify God’s own Son (cp. 1 Jn. 3:16).

2. Neighborly Hospitality (Hebrews 13:2)

a) *Strangers (13:2a)*

²*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...*

Hughes: We may wonder, why this teaching on hospitality, and what motivated it some two thousand years ago? For starters, inns were proverbially miserably places from earliest antiquity on. Inns were not congenial or healthy places for Christians. This, coupled with the fact that many Christians had suffered ostracism by both society and family, necessitated Christian hospitality—which was happily provided by brothers and sisters who could do so. Predictably, such hospitality was sometimes abused. The effect was that some Christians had noticeably cooled in their hospitality. To counter this destructive trend among his congregation, the writer again frames his advice as a command: ‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers’—or

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more exactly, ‘Do not forget to show love to strangers.’ In Greek there is even a beautiful assonance between the words for brotherly love (*philadelphia*) and love for strangers (*philozenia*). The writer has phrased his language for maximum impact.

Phillips: Love is always expressed in concrete actions, and our passage provides two important examples. First, ‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers.’ Here we find that the scope of our family love is to be broad indeed, just as Jesus taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan. A Pharisee had asked, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ Jesus showed him that his neighbor is anyone in need and that we must show mercy to others as we have received it from God. That same principle animates the call to hospitality in the Book of Hebrews. The main idea here is bringing people into our homes. In the ancient world, where traveling was dangerous and there were few inns, this was an important ministry. Today, with our compartmentalized lives, hospitality is no less significant. Here is a diagnostic question: How many people could describe the inside of your home? This exhortation applies not only to other Christians, but it also includes all sorts of people whom, even if they are strangers, we must embrace with the love of God through Christian hospitality.

Schreiner: Love manifests itself in showing hospitality to others. Hospitality expressed itself in putting up traveling believers and caring for their needs. Those who are brothers and sisters show their concern for one another in meeting practical needs. The importance of hospitality in the early Christian movement is reflected by it being mentioned persistently as a Christian virtue (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pe. 4:9; cp. Mt. 25:35). One can’t serve as an overseer if one is not hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). Similarly, widows shouldn’t be supported unless they showed hospitality (1 Tim. 5:10).

Bruce: Strangers, and especially strangers belonging to the Christian brotherhood, must be shown hospitality. Among Jews and Gentiles alike hospitality to strangers ranked high as a virtue. Among the Jews, Abraham was regarded as outstanding for his hospitality as for his other virtues; a true son of Abraham must be hospitable too. In the New Testament hospitality is incumbent on all Christians (cp. Mt. 25:35ff.; Rom. 12:13; 1 Pe. 4:9), and Christian leaders in particular are required to be hospitable (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8). Christians traveling from one place to another on business would be especially appreciative of hospitality from fellow-Christians.

MacArthur: In the ancient world ‘hospitality’ often included putting a guest up overnight or longer. Inns were few, often had poor reputations, and were expensive. Among Jews and people of the Near East in general, hospitality, even to strangers and foreigners, was a great virtue. Christians are certainly to be no less hospitable. Hospitality is a New Testament standard for overseers, or bishops (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8). Pastors and other church leaders are to have open homes, ready to serve and meet the needs of others. Showing hospitality to strangers is the work of a spiritual woman (1 Tim. 5:10). In other words, hospitality should be a mark of all Christians, a basic characteristic, not an incidental or optional practice.

Hughes: Why this great premium on opening one’s home and life to others? There is a reason beyond meeting each other’s occasional material needs—it is in each other’s homes that we really get to know one another. In one’s home, over the table, relaxed amidst the décor and accoutrement of one’s persona—that is where exchange is naturally enhanced and brotherly love elevated. And finally, there is another reason for hospitality—sharing love with strangers who do not know Christ.

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MacArthur: ‘Strangers’ can refer to unbelievers as well as believers. Our first responsibility is to our brothers in Christ, but our responsibility does not end there (cp. Gal. 6:10). A ‘stranger,’ by definition, is someone we do not know personally. Consequently, it is easy to be deceived when helping a stranger. A person who asks us for ten dollars to buy food for his family may spend it on alcohol or drugs. We should use our common sense in deciding how best to help him, but our primary concern should be for helping, not for avoiding being taken advantage of. If we help in good faith, God will honor our effort. Love is often taken advantage of, but this is a cost that it does not count.

b) *Angels (13:2b)*

...for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Hughes: To the author, hospitality was so important that he tantalized his people with an enchanting possibility—‘for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.’ The primary reference here was no doubt to the cheerful hospitality Abraham extended to three strangers who unbeknown to him were angels—one of whom was no less than Jehovah Himself (Gen. 18)! The Hebrew mind would recall a chain of similar encounters—perhaps Gideon’s encounter with the angel under the oak in Ophrah (Jdg. 6:11ff.), or Manoah’s unstinting hospitality to the angel unaware who then announced that he and his wife would give birth to Samson (Jdg. 13). By presenting the delectable possibility of hosting a real angel, the preacher was not promoting hospitality on the chance that one might luck out and get an angel, but was simply saying that the possibility of its happening indicated how much God prizes hospitality in His people.

Phillips: Verse 2 includes an interesting statement about the spiritual value of these acts of love: ‘thereby some have entertained angels unawares.’ The most prominent examples of this, of course, are Abraham and Lot (see Gen. 18-19). The point is that there may be more to the people we meet than meets the eye. It is possible that when you sit in church, the person next to you will really be an angel, but he or she is likely something even more wonderful. There beside you in the pews is probably a saint of God in light. Across the room are those destined to serve as priests and kings in the very presence of the living God, who are now being prepared for their glorious raiment. To meet an angel is wonderful, but in the church are those whom angels are ‘sent out to serve’ and ‘who are to inherit salvation’ (1:14). There is a work going on in their lives that angels wonder at and rejoice to see.

Schreiner: The author reminds the readers of notable examples of hospitality in the OT. Both Abraham and Lot showed hospitality to strangers who ended up being angels (Gen. 18:1-8; 19:1-9; cp. Jdg. 6:11-14; Job 31:32; Is. 58:7). We see from the example of Lot how important hospitality was in the ancient world, for he was willing to sacrifice his daughters for the sake of his guests. His willingness to sacrifice his daughters isn’t commendable, but it does indicate how seriously he took his responsibilities as a host.

Bruce: The reference to entertaining ‘angels unawares’ is no doubt primarily to Abraham’s experience when he entertained ‘three men’ so hospitably by the terebinth of Mamre (Gen. 18:1-8), and found that one of them was no other than Yahweh, who promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son the following year. The author is not necessarily encouraging his readers to expect that those whom they entertain will turn out to be supernatural beings traveling incognito; he is assuring them that some of their visitors will prove to be true messengers of God to them, bringing a greater blessing than they receive.

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MacArthur: ‘For by this some have entertained angels without knowing it’ is not given as the basis or motivation for hospitality. We are not to be hospitable because on some occasion we might find ourselves ministering to angels. We are to minister out of brotherly love, for the sake of those we help and for God’s glory. The point of the second half of verse 2 is that we can never know how important and far-reaching a simple act of helpfulness may be. We minister because of need, not because of any consequences we are able to foresee. Abraham went out of his way to help the three men who were passing by his tent. He did not wait to be asked for help but volunteered. It was an opportunity more than a duty.

3. Christian Sympathy (Hebrews 13:3)

a) *Prisoners (13:3a)*

³*Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them...*

Schreiner: Brother love also means remembering prisoners. The author probably has in mind fellow believers who are imprisoned. It would be tempting to ignore or forget them because of the shame incurred by associating with them. The readers’ sympathy and concern for prisoners in the past was noted earlier in the letter (10:34), and such sympathy manifested the vitality of the readers’ faith (10:32-33). Presumably those imprisoned were incarcerated for their faith in Jesus Christ. Now they are enjoined to care for those imprisoned as if they ‘were in prison with them.’ The readers were tempted to avoid suffering and to fit in with society. The author calls on his readers to identify with fellow believers in prison, showing that their affections are toward the city of God instead of the city of man.

Bruce: The community addressed in this epistle had already, in earlier days, shown practical sympathy with their imprisoned friends (cp. 10:32-34). Here they are urged to go on remembering this Christian duty. In saying, ‘Remember those who are imprisoned, as though you shared their imprisonment,’ our author need not imply that his readers have themselves suffered imprisonment (this might be true of some, but not of all); we need see no more in his words than a specific application of the Pauline principle that if ‘one member suffers, all suffer together’ (1 Cor. 12:26). A capacity for putting oneself in another’s place and exercising imaginative sympathy is part of true charity.

MacArthur: Sympathy is closely related to sustained love. It is easier to help others when we ourselves have needed help. It is easier to appreciate hunger when we have been hungry, loneliness when we have been lonely, and persecution when we have been persecuted. The point is that we should do our best to identify with those in need, to try to put ourselves in their places. It is the principle of Jesus’ golden rule: ‘Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets’ (Mt. 7:12).

Hughes: In respect to empathy, the little Jewish church had earlier excelled, as the preacher averred in 10:32-34. And how important their sympathetic caring had been, because those suffering the abuse of prison were virtually dependent on the church for survival. Here we see the preacher giving his people a profound prod to a sublime empathy—an empathy so deep that they would will to project themselves into the inner life of those suffering mistreatment and imprisonment. The unadorned empathy commanded here was not based on the esoteric truth that Christians are members of each other in Christ, but rather on the truth of shared humanity. Project your humanity into the place where their humanity now is—in suffering or in prison.

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Phillips: The second example of love has to do with those in prison. If the first example is that of hospitality, here is the principle of sympathy for the trials experienced by others. It is probable that this refers to fellow Christians jailed and mistreated for their faith, but again we have no warrant for limiting this teaching only to believers. In this ministry Jesus is both our example and the ultimate recipient of our acts of love. ‘Truly I say to you,’ He said, ‘as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me’ (Mt. 25:40). Two key verbs go together here: ‘Do not neglect’ and ‘remember.’ It seems that the problem is the way we view our lives and each other—the difficulty is that we forget to love other people, probably because we are too wrapped up in ourselves.

b) *Persecuted (13:3b)*

...and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

Schreiner: In the same way they are to care actively for those who ‘are mistreated’ (των κακουχουμένων, *tōn kakouchomenōn*). The parallel in 11:37, which speaks of OT saints who were ‘mistreated’ (κακουχουμενοι, *kakouchomenoi*), indicates the author refers here to persecution. Ponce again the readers will demonstrate their allegiance to the gospel if they identify with and care for those suffering for the sake of the gospel. The ethic of the letter is not ethereal but concrete and practical. Believers should empathize and care for those suffering, for they too ‘are in the body.’

Bruce: This same imaginative sympathy should be extended to all who are ‘ill-treated,’ those who are themselves ‘in the body’ are in a position to imagine how they would feel if the same ill-treatment were meted out to them.

MacArthur: Among other things, Hebrews 13:3 is a warning against spiritualizing the Christian life. The Bible does not teach, as do some Eastern religions, that the person in touch with God transcends physical pain, hardships, and other such realities. Our true home is heaven, but we are still ‘in the body.’ We still get hungry, we still get lonely, and we still hurt, physically and psychologically.

MacArthur: We can show sympathy in at least three important ways. For one thing, we can simply ‘be there’ when others are in trouble. Sometimes the mere presence of a friend is the best encouragement and strength. Another way to show sympathy is by giving direct help. Paul thanked the Philippians for sharing with him in his affliction by giving him money to carry on his ministry in other places (Phil.4:14-16). By supporting him financially, they also encouraged him spiritually. A third way to show sympathy is through prayer (cp. Col. 4:18).

B. Personal Ethics

Hughes: In Verses 4-6 the author becomes even more intimate in his advice, giving very personal ethical directives about *marriage*, *money*, and one’s *mind-set*. He knows that nothing will sink a church faster than moral wavering in respect to sex, materialism or mental outlook.

Phillips: The church is called to love, but also to purity and freedom from sinful corruption. Love is not the only virtue, but it stands together with the holiness that is of God, who said, ‘You shall be holy for I am holy’ (1 Pe. 1:16).

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1. Marriage (Hebrews 13:4)

a) Honor (13:4a)

⁴Let marriage be held in honor among all...

Hughes: Here the command to honor marriage is directed at those who dishonored it in two opposite ways—*asceticism* and *libertinism*. Some first-century Christian ascetics considered ‘virginity as necessary to Christian perfection.’ This later developed in the second century into the Montanist movement, which later spawned celibate monasticism. To such, those who choose marriage choose inferior spirituality. Marriage was thus implicitly dishonored. But the greatest assault on marriage’s honor came from the libertines who saw marriage as irrelevant as they pursued unbridled sexual fulfillment. As Christians we celebrate marriage. We joyfully surround a couple as out of their depth they make those wild sacred promises to each other. And we celebrate the mystery with ancient invocations and feasting. Marriage is divinely given and deserves our greatest honor!

Phillips: Again, our passage provides concrete examples of personal holiness, first the purity of marriage. The first readers of this letter were in a position similar to ours, within a depraved society awash in sexual perversion and indulgence. Yet it has always been a mark of Christian purity that we should be dramatically different in just this area. Paul strongly denounces sexual immorality in many of his letters, often listing it first among the sins we must shun. Who is to honor marriage? All of us, says Hebrews 13:4. The whole church. We have a special interest in upholding the institution of marriage and the actual marriages among us. Marriage is the first institution established by God and the basic building block of the church and society. There may be no better gauge today for the spiritual health of a congregation than the health of its marriages. Husbands and wives hold a precious trust before the Lord and the church. One of our great needs today is the example of strong and godly marriages to encourage those who have never seen true love and to provide them with a model. One of the greatest witnesses in our age will be Christian couples who faithfully meet the struggles of marriage with the grace and power of God.

Schreiner: Perhaps the reference to the body leads the author to think of marriage and sexual morality. Here we have the kind of general exhortation that characterizes Christian parenesis. At the same time we must note that he speaks to an ordinary and yet vital dimension of everyday life. Christians should hold marriage in honor and do all they can to preserve it.

Bruce: The injunction to honor the marriage union and abstain from sexual sin may also be brought under the general heading of brotherly love; chastity is not opposed to charity, but is part of it.

MacArthur: ‘Let marriage be held in honor among all’ may have been a reaction to certain ascetic influences in the early church that held celibacy to be a holier state than marriage. But God holds marriage not only to be permissible, but honorable, and we are to have the same high regard for it. Marriage can be held in honor in many ways. One is by the husbands being the head. God is glorified in a family where the husband rules (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23). Another way is a corollary of the first, namely, that wives be submissive to their husbands (1 Pe. 3:1, 6). A third way marriage is honored is by being regulated by mutual love and respect (1 Pe. 3:7). The concern of both husband and wife should center on the welfare and happiness of the other, on what can be given rather than on what can be obtained.

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b) *Purity (13:4b)*

...and let the marriage bed be undefiled...

Schreiner: The marriage bed must not be defiled by sexual sin and unfaithfulness.

Bruce: Here is no exaltation of celibacy as something inherently superior to marriage; the marriage union is divinely ordained, and its sacred precincts must not be polluted by the intrusion of a third part, of either sex.

Hughes: Indispensable, of course, to the honor of marriage is purity, and thus the text adds, ‘and let the marriage bed be undefiled.’ ‘Bed’ is used here as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and in demanding that it be kept ‘undefiled’ our author is referring in sacrificial terms to married chastity. The bed—the sexual relationship—is an altar, so to speak, where a pure offering of a couple’s lives is made to each other and to God. This was radical stuff in the pagan context—and Christians lived it out. We Christians are called to be outrageously pure—to be a source of wonder and even derision to this glandular world.

c) *Judgment (13:4c)*

...for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Hughes: That we are called to radical purity is nothing to trifle with because the call concludes, ‘for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.’ This means that everyone—ostensible Christians and non-Christians alike—will be judged for adultery (extramarital sexual relations) and sexual immorality (other illicit sexual relations, including perversions). Further, those who have taken up adulterous lifestyles and remain unrepentant will suffer ultimate judgment and damnation, for despite their insistence that they are ‘Christians,’ they are self-deceived. God’s Word is terrifyingly clear (cp. 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5-6; 1 Th. 4:3-7; Rev. 21:8; 22:5). All who are living in serial adultery or fornication and are unrepentant are under God’s wrath and ultimate judgment regardless of what they assert about a salvation experience. The judgment God metes out has both a future and a present reality. Notwithstanding the inexorable coming of the future judgment, the fact remains that infidelity and its attendant sexual immoralities also regularly inflict judgment in the present.

Schreiner: The seriousness of the admonition is captured by the last line, for God will judge those who give themselves to sexual immorality (*πορνους*, *pornous*) and adultery.

Bruce: Fornication and adultery are not synonymous in the New Testament: adultery (*μοιχεια*, *moicheia*) implies unfaithfulness by either party to the marriage vow, while the word translated ‘fornication’ (*πορνεια*, *porneia*) covers a wide range of sexual irregularities, including unions within bounds prohibited by law.

MacArthur: God is serious about sexual purity. ‘Immorality’ (*porneia*, ‘fornication’) is from the same basic Greek term as ‘fornicators’ (*pornos*). In other words, the same sexual described in 1 Cor. 6:18 is involved in this passage as well. Sexual sin not only is against God and other persons, it is also against ourselves. Part of our moral responsibility to ourselves is to be sexually pure. Within marriage, sex is beautiful, fulfilling, creative. Outside marriage, it is ugly, destructive, and damning.

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2. Money (Hebrews 13:5ab)

a) Covetousness (13:5a)

⁵Keep your life free from love of money...

Schreiner: The practical experiences of life continue to receive the author's attention, and he turns now to financial pressures. Sexual sin and greed were often closely linked in the ancient world (see 1 Cor. 5:1-6:20; Eph. 5:3-5; Col. 3:5; 1 Th. 4:3-7). We have been told earlier that the readers had been robbed of their possessions (10:34), presumably because of their Christian faith. Hence their financial straits may be attributed to their allegiance to Christ. Hence they are admonished here to keep themselves free from the love of money (cp. 1 Tim. 6:10).

Bruce: Covetousness, indeed in its New Testament connotation can refer to illicit sexual desire as well as to love of money. It was therefore a natural transition of thought for our author to pass from his injunction about chastity to his plea to his readers not to live for money. The adjective which our author uses here, means 'free from the love of money' (*αφιλαργυρος*, *aphilargyros*). It was therefore a natural transition of thought for our author to pass from his injunction about chastity to his plea to his readers not to live for money (cp. 1 Tim. 3:3; 6:10). The chief pang which pierces the heart of the lover of money is gnawing anxiety.

Hughes: The author knew that those who loved the world would not stand firm in a storm—that those with the greatest affection for wealth would be the first to turn aside when they understood that losses and crosses would come from sailing with Christ. Covetousness is plainly forbidden here and elsewhere in the Scriptures. 'Keep your life free from love of money,' begins the command. The Scriptures present a desire for wealth as a danger (Mk. 10:23-27; Mt. 6:19-21, 24). Wealth has its disadvantages. It is difficult to have it and not trust in it. Material possessions tend to focus one's thoughts and interests on this world alone. It can enslave so that one becomes possessed by possessions, comforts, and recreations (Mk. 4:19). Though wealth has its intrinsic disadvantages, the preacher here is not forbidding wealth but the love of money. In one sense, such love is no respecter of persons. It can equally afflict a homeless man sleeping on a grate or the man occupying the penthouse sixty stories above him. But, this said, it is difficult not to love what you have spent your life collecting (cp. 1 Tim. 6:10). The warning stands for all of us to hear, for we are all rich people.

MacArthur: 'Love of money' is one of the most common forms of covetousness, partly because money can be used to secure so many other things that we want. Loving money is lusting after material riches, whatever the form is. A Christian should be free from such love of material things. Love of money is sin against God, a form of distrust. Among other things, loving money is trusting in uncertain riches rather than the living God (1 Tim. 6:17), looking for security in material things instead of our heavenly Father. It is not wrong, of course, to earn or have wealth. Abraham and Job were extremely wealthy. The New Testament mentions a number of faithful believers who had considerable wealth. It is 'love of money' that '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 a pang' (1 Tim. 6:10). Whatever form love of money may take, the spiritual result is the same. It displeases God and separates us from Him.

Phillips: The second example of holiness has to do with contentment versus greed. In view here is an attitude toward possessions, the love of money contrasted with the grateful contentment that flows from faith. Paul describes greed as 'idolatry' (Col. 3:5), and it may also be said that content is one of the purest signs of true worship of God.

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b) *Contentment (13:5b)*

...and be content with what you have...

MacArthur: God tells us to be satisfied: ‘Be content with what you have.’

Hughes: The covetous, those who love money, will never be content. The author of Ecclesiastes informs us, ‘He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income’ (Eccl. 5:10).

Phillips: In his priceless book *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* Jeremiah Burroughs wrote: ‘You worship God more by [contentment] than when you come to heave a sermon or spend half an hour, or an hour, in prayer, or when you come to receive a sacrament. These...are only external acts of worship.... But [contentment] is the soul’s worship, to subject itself thus to God...by being pleased with what God does.’

Schreiner: Part of what it means to be devoted to the city of God instead of the city of man is to be content with what God has given, to give Him thanks and praise each day for the gifts granted.

Bruce: The greedy person can never be happy, but the opposite of covetousness is contentment. Here too there is a close affinity between this passage and 1 Timothy: ‘There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content’ (1 Tim. 6:6-8; cp. Mt. 6:31-33). ‘Be content’ with what you have,’ says our author. But the carefree contentment of which he speaks is not an irresponsible improvidence; it springs from an intelligent trust in God and acceptance of His promises.

3. Mindset (13:5c-6)

a) *The Lord Is with Us (13:5c)*

...for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Hughes: The Christian knows that true contentment comes from resting in God’s care, and this is evident when we follow the flow of verse 5: ‘And be content with what you have, for He has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”’ In other words, ‘Christians, be content because you have God—and He will never forsake you!’ Where in the Old Testament did God say He would never leave us or forsake us? Only occasionally explicitly, but everywhere implicitly! (e.g., Gen. 28:15; Dt. 31:6-8; Jos. 1:5; 1 Chr. 28:20). In no situation will God leave us, nor for any reason will He leave us. He will not leave us even for a little while. He may seem to hide His face, but He will not leave us.

Phillips: If this seems challenging, our passage contains an extraordinary promise that transforms our thinking. Verses 5 and 6 tell us: ‘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?”’ Here is the engine that drives Christians to both love and holiness, namely, God’s faithful presence as our sustainer and helper.

Schreiner: They can be content, for God has promised never to fail or forsake them. He will provide what they need every day. He is with them in the most pressing and difficult of times. The citation is closest to what is found in Dt. 31:6 (cp. Dt. 31:8; Jos. 1:5). In the context of Deuteronomy, which is actually the same context of Joshua 1, Israel is assured that they need not

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fear the impending conquest of Canaan, for God will not leave or forsake them. Just as the Lord took care of Israel in the conquest of Canaan, so the author assures his readers he will take care of their everyday needs.

b) *The Lord Is for Us (13:6)*

“So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

Hughes: Furthermore, our mind-set must be crowned with matchless confidence: ‘So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”’ This is the mind-set that will ride the waves no matter what.

Schreiner: Since God will never leave or forsake His own, they can confidently say that the Lord is their helper. And if the Lord is their helper, then they need not fear, for human beings can do nothing to believers that has not already passed through God’s hands. The comfort provided here fits with the circumstances in which the readers find themselves. They have already been robbed of their possessions because they are believers (10:34) and were tempted to turn away from the gospel in order to gain security and to be spared from difficulties. The last part of the verse is a citation from Ps. 118:6. In Psalm 118 the psalmist is surrounded by enemies who threaten to destroy him, but the Lord grants him victory over his foes, and thus he sings praise to God for His goodness. The connection to Hebrews is most interesting, suggesting further that what the author writes about finances is in a context where the readers face enemies. In other words, they are probably in financial straits because they are Christians, and thus their contemporaries stand against them. The word from the psalm reminds them, however, that they have no need to fear. Ultimately human beings can do nothing to and against them. The Lord is their helper, and He will strengthen them in the midst of every difficulty.

MacArthur: Many of those addressed in the book of Hebrews had lost most, or all, of their material possessions, because they knew they had ‘a better possession and an abiding one’ (10:34). Some of them might have been longing to get back what they lost, thinking the cost was too high. They are told not to return to trust in material things. ‘We confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?”’ If we have the Lord we have it all.

MacArthur: How do we enjoy contentment? How do we become satisfied with what we have? First, we must realize God’s goodness. If we really believe that God is good, we know He will take care of us, His children (cp. Rom. 8:28). Second, we should realize—not just acknowledge, but truly realize—that God is omniscient. He knows what we need long before we have a need or ask Him to meet it (cp. Lk. 12:30). Third, we should think about what we deserve. What we want, or even need, is one thing; what we deserve is another. The smallest good thing we have is more than we deserve. The least blessed of God’s saints are rich (see Mt. 19:27-29). Fourth, we should recognize God’s supremacy, His sovereignty. God does not have the same plan for all of His children. What He lovingly gives to one, He just as lovingly may withhold from one another (cp. 1 Sam. 2:7). If He were to make us rich, we might be of outstanding service to Him. On the other hand, our becoming rich might be our spiritual undoing. The Lord knows what we need, and will provide us with no less. Fifth, we should continually remind ourselves what true riches are. It is the worldly, including the wealth worldly, who are poor, and it is believers, including poor ones, who are rich. Our treasure is in our homeland, in heaven. Supremely, however, contentment comes from communion with God. The more we focus on Him the less we will be concerned about anything material. When you are near Jesus Christ, you are overwhelmed with

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the riches that you have in Him, and earthly possessions simply will not matter. Contentment is having confidence that ‘the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?’

Phillips: This is faith’s soliloquy: If God is my helper, then what can man do to me? The point here is that given God’s promise to be with us—the God who gave us His only Son and therefore surely will give us everything else He has—then God is my helper, and He never will leave or forsake me. If that is true, then why should I be afraid? Here is the antidote to the fear of man which otherwise so dominates our lives, which leads us from God into sin. If God is our helper, then what can man do to us? People can lead us into temptation, of course; but if God is my helper, I shall not fall, and if I stumble, He will surely lift me up. People can bring us into trials—they may threaten our temporal peace and prosperity, but is not God able to provide for our needs? People may shun us, but do we not have the love of God and the family love of the church? People may lock us up and mistreat us, but will not God come to find us? Does not God, right here, command His people so that they will seek us out to give us aid and comfort and joy? What can man do to me if God is my helper?

For next time: Read Hebrews 13:7-17.