

As we close out the book of Hebrews, which has made such a powerful case of **how grace is far superior to the law**, some have said this final chapter is leading us to proper moral conduct (verse 5). I don't think I can argue with that but would certainly say these first ones are regarding interaction with others. We will see that today.

- But I do like how some have equated **chapter 11** to **Faith** (being the hall of faith), **chapter 12** to **Hope** (telling us it could be dicey down here, but that the New Covenant in Jesus' blood is going to get us all the way home to heaven, **which will never be shaken**), and **chapter 13** to **Love** (because he is now going to address our relationships with others and how loving them is loving God) (see also 1 Cor. 13:13).
- And (as you know already) there is no way I'm going to get through an entire chapter in one teaching. But today we will cover the light subjects of **1)** the love we are to have for one another, **2)** hospitality for strangers, **3)** the possibility of interacting with angels, **4)** the sanctity of marriage, **5)** and sex inside and outside of marriage. I think that's likely enough for one day 😊.
- And as you can imagine, each of these is worthy of a sermon of its own. Which would still leave us far short of really getting into these subjects in depth. But I will try to bring in some other passages of scripture to flesh them out a bit more. So let's jump in.

¹Let brotherly love continue.

Please do see he begins with an assumption that brotherly love already exists here among these Hebrew believers. And I can guarantee that would be his assumption for every church family. So, **the instruction is to not allow that love to turn cold or to personally become indifferent to such a bond established in the blood of Jesus.**

- Which means if they could really just walk away from the church for what they thought would be a less complicated life, then **1)** either they never gave their hearts to the body of Christ, **2)** or their understanding of love and commitment was severely broken and not Christ like. And **aren't you glad that the commitment of Jesus, because of love, is never ending** (we will come back to that next week)?
- Where there's an absence of love among a church family, it is difficult to say that the Spirit of God resides there. Especially if we read passages like **1 John 4:7–8**, which say to us, *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love"* (see also 1 John 2:9–10, 3:10, 3:14–17, 4:20–21). And Jesus said that to *"love your neighbor as yourself"* was the **second greatest commandment** (Mark 12:31).
- So, a church family without love is in great danger, and (at the least) not representing God rightly. But **where brotherly love (tender affection) is abounding, the Spirit of God is certainly present.**

On a practical note, some inside the church are just going to connect with others more easily. We all know who the extraverts are 😊. Others struggle to connect for various reasons (personality types, fear, injury...). But we need to examine ourselves in this area, because in a church family, these dynamics do not negate this instruction for anyone. Those who connect more easily need to make sure they make room for those who do not connect so easily. And those who do not connect more easily cannot put all the responsibility on others to meet their social needs (Prov. 18:24).

- It's up to each and every one of us to actively and practically love one another. It's a give-and-take relationship type. That's why we try to provide so many opportunities to connect, eat together, come together for studies, serve together in the church and on missions... **But it's up to each of us to prioritize and even make additional opportunities to gather and operate as a family in God.**

- And we find examples of brotherly love in the body of Christ that extends beyond the local church. 1) The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to care for Paul when he was in prison. 2) The Corinthian church, although financially struggling themselves, collected and pooled their resources to send to those worse off than them in Jerusalem. 3) We find Paul asking Philemon to forgive the wrongs and debt of his runaway slave (an indentured servant), and receive him back as a member of his family now that he too had become a believer. 4) And in Acts we hear of the church living and giving sacrificially with each other as they adopted this new life and family in Jesus (Acts 2:40–47). These also are examples of brotherly love.
- Should we really believe God desires anything different for us? No. And the Holy Spirit is making that very point here. So how does that stack up with your life? I will say that the more it does, the more you will realize the treasure God has given us in the family of Christ. Don't miss out.

² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

Entertaining angels unaware is such a fun (and possibly terrifying) thing to consider. But don't let the angel piece become the focus. I believe it really is secondary to the call to *entertain strangers*. It's more likely the strangers you have hopefully entertained (or shown hospitality to) were not angels. But the byproduct of caring for the stranger is the possibility you could be entertaining (or showing hospitality to) an angel (the clearest example is in Gen. 18:1–19:11. And reveals that in both a positive and negative sense).

- Not too long ago Steve did a message on hospitality and really covered this subject so well, because the two are really one and the same.
- So the question might be, who is the stranger being addressed here? Well, it can certainly be believers (other followers of Jesus) we don't have relationships with. And since we are told to first do for those who are in the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), while not excluding doing good to those outside the faith (but rather deliberately including them), *this is where a good portion of our focus should be*. And we have to remember *the culture was a little different* at this time, so that if there was a follower of Jesus passing through that needed a place to stay, *he is encouraging them to take a chance on them and invite them into their homes*.
- But also, keep in mind that somewhere *around the break of the first century*, there were enough *con-men going around with false doctrines and an intent to fleece the flock*, that some of the 2nd generation church leaders wrote a document called the *Didache*, which provided *ways to test intent*. But either way, inviting a stranger into your home can still be risky. *Yet after due diligence, it's the calling of the believer to do so* (side note—don't outstay your welcome Prov. 25:17).

And truly, when I've been the recipient of this kind of gesture, it's been so wonderful. Jeanne and I have made some wonderful friends this way. And more importantly, **it's pleasing to God.**

But showing hospitality to the believing stranger is not the only thing he is addressing here, for listen to what Jesus instructed us in Luke 14:12–14, saying, *“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. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”* This hospitality is not to just be for those who you know and have mutual giving and receiving between (see also Matt. 5:43–47). It's sacrificial in nature. And should be extended to even those who are not in your circles.

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- And the way we deal with strangers is no small issue. Let's read what Jesus said to His disciples in [Matt. 25:35–40](#). And you will find a portion of this also carries over into the next verse we will cover. This is Jesus speaking, "... *for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.*" "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 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.'" And then afterward He said those who did not do so unto one of the least of these also didn't do it unto Him ([25:45](#)). Folks, this matters to Him, so it should matter to us. Are you being intentional in this area?

³ Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.

Who are we talking about here (that is a great starting point when trying to understand what the Bible is instructing us to do when it comes to others)? **1)** First, **we know it's addressing believers** because he speaks about them and us being in the same **body**, and that being the body of Christ. But **what is not absolutely clear is 2)** if this is just addressing those who were being persecuted. Or if it's also speaking about believers who were in chains for doing wrong.

- All of us have done things which could have, by the standards of the law, placed us in undesirable conditions. Some more so than others. But it's true of all of us somewhere. Spanking your children (which we are instructed to do in the Bible when necessary), drinking and driving, tearing the tags off your pillows 😊, talking on your cellphone while driving, not being completely honest on your taxes... If you have not come to the conclusion of the reality that "there by the grace of God go I", you haven't come to reality. **I'm not condoning such things** (except for ripping those stupid tags off your pillows 😊). But I'm trying to be real about the human condition. Even for the believer on what I hope is rare occasion.
- **3)** What about those wrongly imprisoned? Or **4)** even those who were justly put in prison while others who have done the same thing spent no time at all? Without a doubt we are to be in prayer and remembering those in chains for simply refusing to turn away from Jesus (which is certainly a focal point in this letter—making it the most likely factor to his bringing this to their remembrance). But it seems to me this is not the full extent of the focus he is bringing here.
- And there is something comforting in knowing that although you are isolated and maybe even in distress, that others are thinking about, and praying for you with passion and compassion. It doesn't change everything, **but it does something for the heart and our hope** to know you are loved and not forgotten! Yet not only are we to think about them in their suffering, **our depth of commitment is also to be the same as if we were sitting in prison alongside of them—because they are us.**

And here is something to consider. What would encourage you if you were the one in prison? Do that for your brothers and sisters in Christ. And maybe even those who have not yet received Him, so that they might.

⁴ Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. What is marriage and is there a difference between Christian and secular marriage? Does God recognize the difference or see the same required commitment? In other words, does "**all**" mean all?

- It seems to me when the believer tries to determine that secular marriage is less than Christian marriage, it is always used as an excuse to create philosophies or actions which are decidedly unbiblical.

- Gnosticism was one such example. You need to know Gnosticism had many camps and not all were in agreement with each other. **1)** Some said anything done in the body was evil and therefore should not be practiced. **2)** Others, with the same core beliefs would then say since the things of the natural world are not going to heaven then you can do whatever you want with the body (giving license for all kinds of immorality). Both are biblically incorrect.
- And the most logical outworking of any philosophy outside of God's truth is a defiling of our understanding of sexual relationships. So this is obviously where he goes here. And this is a subject which needs to be discussed regularly because of the vast number of people impacted by sexuality (which is everyone at some level or another). He is going to address this by covering three main points **1)** the marriage bed, **2)** fornication, and **3)** adultery.

The marriage bed—what he is talking about here is sexual intimacy between a husband and wife. And yes, only a husband and wife, because that is the only marriage God recognizes. Even in secular marriage He does recognize this union as holy. Absolute everything else is unholy. **1)** Same-sex marriage is unholy (and how there is a debate about this in Biblical circles is **textually dishonest**), **2)** union of more than two is unholy (and yes, I have had to deal with this as a pastor. In the Roman Empire, men were encouraged to have a wife, a concubine, and a mistress), **3)** and anything else other than a consenting man and woman, born as a man and woman (and having to say that tells you how much the holy institution of marriage is under assault).

- Folks, sex is not a dirty thing unless we make it a dirty thing. God created sex and assigned it to marriage for a blessing. When two people are intimate, the brain releases epinephrine and creates a sort of tattoo on the brain, imprinting yourselves on the other's mind. That's intimacy by God's design.
- And when you understand that **God gave this gift in the natural to reveal a supernatural truth**, you begin to understand why He has such parameters for physical intimacy. In **John 17:21** Jesus requests, while speaking to the Father, "*that they all* (that's every follower of Jesus) *may be one, as You, Father, are in Me* (Jesus), *and I in You; that they also* (every believer) *may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*"
- Human marriage, and physical intimacy in it, **are simply foreshadowing the spiritual intimacy God has created us to have with Himself**. Expressed with this understanding, it will be such a blessing. Because God intended it to be so. Sex was His design and His idea.

Now we come to the two problems listed here. The definition of **fornication** really comes down to any sexual activity outside of marriage. While the definition **adultery** is sex with someone who is married (possibly including themselves) with someone they are not married to (see also **1 Cor. 6:9–7:9** for more insight).

- And at this time, many of the Jews had given into **the cultural idea that prostitution was an acceptable "release"**. Obviously not because they believed it was really what God wanted them to do, but **because it's what they wanted**.
- And many in the church today are certainly no more innocent, for it has adopted stances on sexuality that the Bible clearly says are displeasing to God, and for which they **will have to answer to God for**.

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Folks, **1)** if you have tattooed others than your spouse on your mind, God is the best tattoo remover that will ever exist. **2)** If you have allowed yourself to treat sexuality in a way that dishonors God and His desires, we can look back to the time when the nation of Israel did so under the Old, and less grace-filled, Covenant and see that God wanted to forgive them if they would only repent. And under the New and better Covenant in Jesus' blood, there is a new beginning waiting for you. God wants to purge your sin and wash you white as snow. But it starts with repentance.

- **1)** If you are not married in accordance with God's plan, you are to be abstinent. End of story. Anyone, regardless of their title or expertise, who tells you something different is an absolute liar.
- **2)** But if you are married, you are to be having sex (obviously unless there is some reason that makes that physically impossible). **1 Cor. 7** tells us you are actually not to withhold yourselves from one another, just as Jesus has not withheld Himself from you. And it also tells us there that the goal of real intimacy is not self-satisfaction, but the satisfaction of the other.
- Ask yourself a question, does Jesus do so much of what He does for you, for His own pleasure, or to minister to you out of love? If you don't know that answer, you don't know Him. But for those who do, then ask yourself how you will minister to the one imprinted on your brain, who in the natural reminds us of the relationship God has made possible with Himself. That's when marriage is not just beautiful, but a testimony. Desire and cultivate that.

Folks, relationships with others matter deeply to God. That's why Satan entices us to abandon God's instruction and follow our natural, and often selfish, desires. And in some ways, it might seem easier to do that very thing.

- But if you fail to invest in the people of God, you will have fallen way short of His desire. **1)** If you choose to only associate with those who can give back to you, **2)** make little cliques, **3)** or fail to care for the stranger, behind that there is an issue with your heart. **4)** If you treat the marriage bed dishonorably instead of seeing how they speak of the intimacy God wants with us, then you're in real danger.
- But when you hear and follow God's instruction in these ways, you will be so blessed. Because being a part of the family of God is such a blessing. Having a marriage that testifies of Him is not just enjoyable, but it also helps others to desire the same. **And that very desire will reveal to them the desire of the Lord to have the most intimate bond possible with them.**
- Do not miss out on what God has for you and the glory that it will bring to Him when you follow and honor His instructions for a life of joy and peace in Him.

CROSS REFERENCES

Heb 13:5 NKJV - 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."

1Co 13:13 NKJV - And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1Jo 2:9–10 NKJV - (9) He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. (10) He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

Hebrews 13:1–4



1Jo 3:10 NKJV - In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

1Jo 3:14–17 NKJV - (14) We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. (15) Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (16) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (17) But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

1Jo 4:20–21 NKJV - (20) If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (21) And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Mar 12:31 NKJV - "And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Pro 18:24 NKJV - A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Act 2:40–47 NKJV - (40) And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." (41) Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. (42) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (43) Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. (44) Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, (45) and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (46) So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Gal 6:10 NKJV - Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Pro 25:17 NKJV - Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house, Lest he become weary of you and hate you.

Mat 5:43–47 NKJV - (43) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' (44) "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (45) "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?"

Mat 25:45 NKJV - "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'