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The Long-Lasting Flavor of Fruitful Service to God Hebrews 13:1-6

INTRODUCTION

There is much that could be said regarding the book of Hebrews. It is a book rich in doctrine and descriptive imagery as it relates to our redemption. Rather than trying to deal with important issues pertaining to the book such as its authorship and its intended audience in the short time we have today, I simply want to help you get a big picture understanding of the book as a whole so we can better deal with our text this morning.

William Hendrickson sums up Hebrews this way:

The story of Hebrews is that Jesus is worthy of your faith. Have faith in Him and do not fall away. Jesus is worthy of your faith. Have faith in Him, therefore, and do not fall away.

Mark Dever, in his book, *The Message of the New Testament*, states it this way:

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament is, as it were, a religious Consumer Reports magazine. The author lays out the person of Jesus Christ and what He has done, and then sets Him against the Old Testament religious system that was native to most of his audience and to which some were feeling tempted to return...as the author himself argues, Jesus is the best choice.

Our passage this morning is coming off of a paragraph describing both a warning and a promise [see Hebrews 12:25-29]. The author warns us to take heed to the words God has spoken and do not turn your ears again to those things which are temporary and passing away. Those who have received full and lasting atonement through the sacrifice of Christ have received an unshakable kingdom. A time is coming when everything that is but a mere created thing will be consumed and give way to those things which are eternal. "...For our God is a consuming fire." [Hebrews 12:29] The author then seems to remind His readers of what they are to continue doing now that will survive the consuming fire of God and invest into the everlasting, unshakable kingdom.

1. THE GARDEN OF BROTHERLY LOVE [v.1]

(1.1) The subject of brotherly love seems to encompass the other commands in the text

The recurring pattern within the paragraph [v.1-6] seems to be a command followed by a motivating reason to take the command seriously. [v.2] "*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...*" because "*some have entertained angels without knowing it.*" [v.3] "*Remember the prisoners...and those who are ill-treated...*" because "*you yourselves are also in the body.*" [v.4] "*Marriage is to be held in honor...and the marriage bed is to be undefiled...*" because "*fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*" [v.5] "*Make sure your character is free from the love of money...*" because "*He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,'*". The exception to this is the first command, "Let love of the brethren continue". It appears that this command is expounded upon in the next four verses with additional commands. Then the statement in verse 6, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?", would seem to point back to the first command.

So I have in my mind here a picture of a garden. The garden is called "brotherly love" and within this garden we will find various fruits or vegetables that make up the garden, the roots from which these fruits or vegetable grow, and the different types of soil in which each one is cultivated.

(1.2) The reality of the Christian family

All of us who bear the name of Christ [Christian] are in a very real way brothers and sisters. Our family ties run much deeper than blood. We are those who have been born into the same family, not by natural birth, but by spiritual birth. Consider John 1:12,13: *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."* Therefore, we can clearly see that our relationship as brothers and sisters is derived solely from Jesus Christ. Biblical commentator Philip Hughes writes, *"Our brotherhood is first with Him [Christ] and then and therefore with each other, for it is the brotherhood of the redeemed."*

It is no wonder that we would want to associate ourselves with Jesus as brothers and sisters. the most amazing thing is that Jesus is the one claiming us in that way. The writer of Hebrews boldly declares, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father, for which He is not ashamed to call them brethren." [Hebrews 2:11]

2. THE SUN OF FATHERLY LOVE [v.6]

If the command of verse 1 encompasses the rest of the commands in the paragraph, then it would seem likely that the closing statement of the paragraph, verse 6, would serve as the motivating factor for striving hard to maintain our garden of brotherly love. Verse 6, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?", is a direct quote from Psalm 118. Let's look at it in its original context:

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- 2 Oh let Israel say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting."
- 3 Oh let the house of Aaron say, " His lovingkindness is everlasting."
- 4 Oh let those who fear the LORD say, "His lovingkindness is everlasting."
- 5 From my distress I called upon the LORD; The LORD answered me and set me in a large place.
- 6 The LORD is for me; I will not fear; What can man do to me?
- 7 The LORD is for me among those who help me; Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.
- 8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.
- 9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.

The picture I now have in my mind is of a beautiful garden called brotherly love. Shining above this garden is the warm, radiant, blazing sun of the Father's love. It is the Father's lovingkindness (or covenant love) that first established the brotherhood of the redeemed [see Galatians 3:26-4:7; Ephesians 1:3-8]. And it is the Father's love that sustains it [see Hebrews 12:4-7].

3. THE FRUIT IN THE GARDEN [vv.2-5]

(3.1) The fruit of unconditional love

I define this aspect of brotherly love as: A love for the brethren that invites all without distinction into table fellowship.

"The little pockets of early Christians survived because they cared exclusively for the love of the brethren and stopped their ears to the opinion of the pagan society all around them." —C.S. Lewis

Soil of Hospitality "*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...*" [v.2a]

This unconditional love of the brethren is cultivated within the soil of Hospitality. It is through hospitality that we can most readily and vividly express love to our brothers and sisters within the family of God. Alexander Strauch puts it this way: "*Unless we open the doors of our homes to one another, the reality of the local church as a close-knit family of loving brothers and sisters is only a theory.*"

Root of Unexpected Blessings "*For by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.*" [v.2b]

The root from which we are motivated to manifest unconditional love through hospitality is the many unexpected blessings that come from it. By using the example of entertaining angels, the author is probably pointing his audience back to Genesis 18-19 where Abraham and Lot both had encounters with angels in disguise. Both men showed incredible hospitality to the travellers, and both men received unexpected blessings in return. Abraham received confirmation that the promised child that he and Sarah had been anticipating for so long would become a reality within the year. Lot received a gracious warning of impending destruction that saved his own life and the lives of his daughters.

(3.2) The fruit of compassionate love

I define this aspect of brotherly love as: A love for the brethren that is characterized by empathetic acts of mercy and kindness.

Soil of Mercy Ministries "*Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated...*" [v.3a]

How do we remember the persecuted and the suffering among us? First, we have to know about their suffering. We cannot be ignorant or aloof to the present tribulations and difficulties of our brother across the street, across the country, or around the world. We must take the time to find out about our family wherever they may be. Second, we must think about their sufferings in such a way that would make us empathetic to their condition. Third, we must pray for them after we have become informed and empathetic.

How do we care for the persecuted and suffering among us? We encourage them, we bring relief when possible, we share in their suffering either in our bodies in our hearts, and we do not minimize their pain.

Root of Shared Sufferings "*...since you yourselves are also in the body.*" [v.3b]

The reason the writer gives us for why we should love the brethren with compassionate love is that we are also in the body. Here are three likely meanings that I took from the phrase. First, we can have empathy because we have physical bodies. We see the author referring to this thought in reference to Christ in His priestly role [see Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16]. Second, we should show compassion because we are all of one body. Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 12 when he says "*And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*" Third, we should show compassion because it may be us who are suffering the next time. It may be a reminder to us that we have not yet escaped the various trials that come with living in a fallen world and dwelling still in corruptible bodies. The cancer that plagues our brother today may be ours tomorrow. The false accusation that condemns our sister today may come our way tomorrow.

(3.3) The fruit of covenantal love

I define this aspect of brotherly love as: A love for the brethren that is sacred and binding.

Soil of an Honored Marriage "*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled...*" [v.4a]

The greatest display of covenantal love God has given us is the institution of marriage. It best reflects His own covenantal love to us. Therefore, we must give marriage its proper place of honor within the family of God, or we will never be able to properly love our Christian family with a covenantal love. How do we hold marriage in high honor among all? We must first establish a biblical understanding of marriage and seek to uphold that standard in our own marriages and among the marriages within the Christian family. We must refrain from bringing unintended reproach upon marriage by speaking of it mockingly. We must not minimize marriage by entering into relationships that neglect the covenantal aspect of the marriage relationship. Finally, we must not resist marriage by delaying it for reasons of self-indulgence, worldly expectations, or slothfulness.

Root of God's Purity and Holiness "*God will judge fornicators and adulterers.*" [v.4b]

Remember, Christ is our best choice! He is worthy of our faith. May we not be those who "*have tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away...*" [Hebrews 6:5,6] "*For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.*" [Hebrews 10:26,27]

(3.4) The fruit of provisional love

I define this aspect of brotherly love as: A love for the brethren that overcomes our love for personal gain.

Soil of Material Contentment "*Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have...*" [v.5a]

Let me just briefly answer the question, "How do we love people more than we love our wealth?" The short answer is that we use our material possessions as a means to love people. I think Paul makes this pretty clear in 1 Corinthians 13:3 as he speaks to the subject of the poor. He is not simply advocating that we strive to be generous with our possessions by giving some of them to those who lack. On the contrary, he is stressing the need for us to go beyond practical generosity. He would not have us feed the poor. Rather, he would have us love the poor by feeding them. There is a huge difference between the two especially as we are cultivating provisional love within the family of God. Therefore, our possessions must remain irrelevant to our measure of happiness. Likewise, the measure of our giving must not transcend or replace the measure of our love and happiness for and within the brotherhood. All material gain is a means to an end. Our contentment and happiness is found in the end not in the means.

Root of Christ's Faithfulness "*I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.*" [v.5b]

The writer of Hebrews is yet again pointing his readers back to the Old Testament Scriptures. This statement is the words of God given to both Moses and Joshua on two separate occasions as recorded in Scripture [see Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Joshua 1:5]. The context of both occasions is the reaffirming of the covenant by God to His people. In the midst of overwhelming obstacles, God is reminding them of His loyal, covenantal faithfulness. God's covenant promises trump our own

vain-glory. The writer has already given us a vivid example of this in chapter 11 of Hebrews in the life of Moses who *"by faith...when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward."* [Hebrews 11:23-26]

4. THE FENCE OF THE COVENANT COMMUNITY

God has graciously given us the fence of the covenant community, that is, the church, to help protect and guard our garden of brotherly love. For if we do not love our brothers and sisters, the love of the Father is not in us! He provides us with overseers to guard us from error, false doctrine, and pests who would come in and do great harm. He has established principles of conduct to preserve family harmony and principles of discipline to preserve our faith. He has given us the sacraments to feed and nourish us at His table until the great banquet feast is ready.

CONCLUSION

Let us press on today to show unconditional love to our brethren through hospitality and table fellowship because the Father's gracious election and adoption of us were also unconditional and restored table fellowship with Him.

Let us press on to show compassionate love as seen in our efforts to relieve and comfort those who are suffering for as we help even the least of our brethren we are serving Christ and displaying the kind of incarnational ministry which He took on Himself to be our great high priest and intercessor before the Father.

Let us press on to show covenantal love within the family of God particularly in how we uphold and fulfill the marriage covenant while preserving its purity; for by the honored marriage do we best display the honor and beauty we place upon the covenantal union we have with God through Christ.

Finally, let us press on to show provisional love, especially to our brothers and sisters, through a heart rich in Christ and for His people, that we may hold loosely to the material things of this world and find our happiness in them only inasmuch as they further the kingdom and love the saints.

Amen.