

Hebrews 13:1-4
“Sympathy, Empathy and Harmony”

I. Introduction

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I. Introduction

The first 11 chapters of Hebrews are doctrinal in nature and address Jews specifically but the 12th and 13th chapters are fully of practical exhortations that apply to Christians. This is a common pattern with most New Testament letters as they seemed to always be ***doctrinal then duty, position before practice***. On my outline of this letter I’ve called this section “***Faith that Functions***” as the exhortation is directed at the church.

1. Vs. 1-4 Here we are given three areas where Christians need to exercise love; ***strangers, the suffering and marriage***. Applying; ***Sympathy, Empathy and Harmony***
2. Vs. 5-9 Next we see how the church needs to behave in society, without covetousness, being content with their position and possessions.
3. Vs. 10-21 This last section the writer deals with how they are to practice their faith among others by not trying to offend those who disagree with you, by being a blessing and praying for folks.
4. Vs. 22-29 The final section is the writers closing remarks.

It is interesting to read this section with its “*practical exhortations that apply to Christians*” in light of the first century Christians position in society as they were viewed as they were rebuked by the immoral societies in which they lived. ***The reason for this was that these believers lived up to the standards that their doctrine demanded***. This is what was behind Peter’s statement in 1 Peter 2:15 where he wrote, “*For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*”. The standard of Christian behavior is brought forth in the 13th chapter and they are done so with ***two presuppositions***:

1. ***These standards are based upon biblical truth established in the first 12 chapters of this letter.***
2. ***These standards apply only to the true Christian believer.***

II. Vs. Vs. 1 The Standard is LOVE

Vs. 1 Paul wrote to the church in Rome, in Romans 12:2, “*...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” ***The world is unloving and Jesus is calling His followers to not conform to this but rather be transformed by His love!*** The follower of Christ is not to live isolated from those that are unloving towards them they are to live among them loving them anyway. We are not to exclude ourselves from people living life hiding behind the walls of the church we are called to infiltrate society and penetrate their hatred with love. There was no mystery to Jesus’ intentions for His Church when He said in Matthew 10:16 “*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*” We are to be IN the world just not OF the world! ***The primary standard for Christian behavior is LOVE and the specific word used here is Philadelphia or brotherly love.*** The fact that the writer says that it should “*continue*” suggests that ***such love already existed among the body of Christ.*** They were ***not*** being told to “*make it happen*” but ***allow it to continue which tells us***

that such affection was a natural condition that accompanied faith in Christ! The apostle John in his first letter said, “*He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*” The believer’s life is not to seek God’s blessings but to distribute them to others. 2 Peter 1:3 tells us that, “*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness..*” We have no need to ask for God’s blessings but that such blessing be used by us for others. We in correctly sing the song “**more love, more power**” as if our problem is that we have used up all that was given us from God but truth be told our problem is not a “**supply problem**” from God it is a “**distribution problem**” from us! We need to distribute what is already ours in Christ, that’s the statement that the writer makes here in 13:1. Such love is first on the list in the authors exhortation for three reasons:

1. John 13:35 “*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” **God has given the world the right to evaluate our authenticity based upon how we treat each other!** It is of critical importance that each and every believer follow Paul words in Philippians 2:3-4 “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, **but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.***”
2. 1 John 3:14 “*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.*” **God has chosen love as the basis that reveals our true connection and spiritual identity too Him.** The proof of our salvation is His love within our hearts that loves others. We can and should ask ourselves, “*Do I have a greater concern for others than I do myself?*”
3. Psalm 133:1 “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*” **God has chosen Christian love as the basis behind our unity and joint fellowship.** We truly love each other to the degree that we lay down our lives for each other.

Biblical love only grows in the garden of humility and never in the weeds of sentimental and superficial affection. It has no room to grow where Self-righteousness and self-pity occupy the heart. Such love is illustrated in three social venues:

1. Vs. 2 “**Sympathy to the stranger**”
2. Vs. 3 “**Empathy to the oppressed**”
3. Vs. 4 “**Harmony in the marriage**”

III. Vs. 2-4 Making love visible

Vs. 2 “**Sympathy to the stranger**”: A stranger can refer to unbelievers as well as believers. **A stranger is by definition is someone that you don’t know personally!** The First area on display is in the are of hospitality towards strangers where we are to display Sympathy and comfort in their situation. Hospitality was something that the ancient world practiced as people would put up guests for the night as there weren’t many Inns. **Christians are being exhorted to be no less hospitable than the world even though they were far more miss treated by the society.** It was being included as a mark in which **ALL Christian’s should practice as it is a basic trait.** The phrase, “*for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels*” is **NOT being put forth as a motivation for such hospitality but for the sake of aiding God’s glory!** We can never know what a simple act of hospitality can help further God’s work in human hearts. In a real sense **we are not ministering to mere angels but Jesus Himself as we are told in Matthew 25:40** “*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.*”

Vs. 3 “**Empathy to the oppressed**”: This is closely related to the above practice but **looks beyond just the stranger and has a heart for the oppressed.** The Christian needs to do their best to identify with those in need, to put ourselves in their place. We must not look like the Pharisee of the parable of the Good Samaritan who, out of a sense of religious

concern, shut their eyes to the need of the stranger and walked by on the other side, and thus earned the scathing rebuke implied by the Lord Jesus. **This verse serves as a warning against spiritualizing and sanitizing the Christian life where we like some Eastern Religions don't touch the person who is in pain and going through oppression.** There are far too many Christians that when they see the need of the oppressed make a call to the church as if that alone resolves their participation! They need to remember the words of JFK when he said, “ask not what your country can do for you —ask what you can do for your country.” **The church has no message to the world accept the gospel and it has no action towards the world that is not centered upon brotherly love! The Christian isn't called to have just a vocabulary of nouns; they must have with those nouns verbs!** One of the greatest cures for pity and “woe is me” attitude is loving service to others. It was not uncommon to see Christians in the first century to sell themselves in slavery to get the money to free another believer. We can demonstrate empathy in three ways:

1. **By simply being there for another:** To listen, encourage and strengthen a person who is being oppressed.
2. **By giving direct help:** Paul thanked the Philippians for sharing in his affliction by giving financial support to carry on his ministry. Such practical and financial help encouraged Paul spiritually to continue on.
3. **By prayer:** Paul wrote in Colossians 4:18 “*This salutation by my own hand--Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.*” He encouraged prayer as a basis empathy towards his suffering.

Vs. 4 “**Harmony in the marriage:** “*Marriage is honorable among all*” **may have been written to counter the reaction of some that instead of the sanctity of marriage were pushing the sanctity of celibacy.** Paul would warn in that some would in 1 Timothy 4:3 “*forbidding to marry..*” But here we are told that God not counts marriage as “*honorable among all*” but the bed as undefiled among the norm of promiscuity. God showed His intent for marriage by honoring it, Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding and the Holy Spirit used it as an illustration of the church as the bride of Christ to Jesus. The bible gives three reasons for marriage:

1. **Propagation of children:** Creation of mankind was commissioned by the command of God to be “*Fruitful and multiply*” Gen. 1:28.
2. **Prevention of sin:** Marriage is also provided as a means for the prevention of sexual sin and immorality. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians said in 7:2 that, “*because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*”
3. **Partnership and companionship:** In Genesis 2:18 “*The LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."*”

Marriage is honorable in three ways: The husband being the head as demonstrated by Jesus being the head of His church. By the wife loving yielding to her husband as the church does to Christ and by both husband and wife in mutual love for each other living together in respect and care for each other.

Finally, marriage is God’s way to promote purity and security in a relationship so that the God given plan for intimacy would not be manipulated into just pleasure without love. Go use two words to describe the worlds view of sex in “fornicators and adulterers” both of which find their root words in the Greek in the word “pornia and pornos”. It is in the Christian marriage where God has ordained the idea of security and fidelity where sexual drives are channeled though Christian love. When the purpose of God is acted upon in obedience intimacy as God intended is realized.

