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Sermon Notes

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Brotherly Love, Hospitality, and Compassion for the Persecuted

Hebrews 13:1-3

Hebrews 13:1-3 Keep on loving each other as brothers. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

What is Hebrews 13 all about?

Regular pattern of NT Epistles: Doctrine of salvation in Christ followed by application to daily life of Christians

Doctrine is meant to be LIVED OUT... but doctrine MUST PRECEDE the works

Without the doctrine, the works are legalistic attempts to justify ourselves before God

Without the works, the doctrine just puffs us up and makes us arrogant

LIFE of FAITH = “Serving God acceptably with reverence and awe” = SERVING EACH OTHER... the brothers and sisters in Christ

Appleby’s: Appetizer sampler... not a whole meal, but a sample of each verse

Context: Flowing from command of Hebrews 12:28-29:

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

The word translated “worship” can also be translated “serve”... though its home base is WORSHIP

The idea is that every area of a Christian’s life is “SERVICE” to King Jesus

And the author begins with the TIE of the CHRISTIAN FAMILY

I. Brotherly Love

Hebrews 13:1 Keep on loving each other as brothers.

ESV Hebrews 13:1 ¶ Let brotherly love continue.

A. What Is “Brotherly Love” Here

1. Greek word = “philadelphia” (from which we get “city of brotherly love”)
2. Not “fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man”
 - a. Though we are all descended from one man, Adam
 - b. Yet this brotherhood is more intimate
3. This refers to the family of BELIEVERS... sons and daughters of the living God
4. Many verses speak of this wonderful “family of faith”

John 1:12-13 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Matthew 12:48-50 "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

1 John 3:1 ¶ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Hebrews 2:11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Hebrews 3:1 ¶ Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling

B. How Did Brotherly Love Get Established to Begin With?

1. By faith in the Son of God, we are all made partakers of the divine nature and are adopted into the glorious family
2. Christ established it by His incarnation, and by giving us of His Spirit that we might be born again
3. He settled every single true believer into this one vast “family of God” that we might share all things in common in Christ

4. He gave us this clear command concerning love:

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

5. He also gave us this one clear mark that we are children of God

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

6. By His Spirit, we love the brothers and sisters in Christ; if we don't love them, we are not truly His children

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love

C. Why Must Brotherly Love Continue?

1. The bond of brotherly love between Christians is under constant assault by the world, the flesh and the devil

2. This bond of love is a powerful witness to the world... it puts our faith on display

3. The brotherly love displayed in the early days of the church was AWESOME

Acts 2:44-47 All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved

Acts 4:32-35 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

4. So also in this book

Hebrews 10:33-34 you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

5. THIS SUPERNATURAL BROTHERLY LOVE MUST CONTINUE

D. How Can It Continue?

1. FBC is a far sweeter place of fellowship now than it was fifteen years ago; there is far more biblical faithfulness, far more unity in the truth, far more devotion to the Lord and to missions and to growth in grace
2. Let's grow more and more in devotion to one another
3. 1 John envisions a sacrificial love in which we use our time, money, and energy to meet the needs of the brothers and sisters in Christ

1 John 3:17-18 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

4. 1 John also envisages a SPIRITUAL shepherding as well...

1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life.

Just as the author of Hebrews has been urging them to shepherd each other spiritually:

Hebrews 3:12-13 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

5. It has to do with a willing heart, a servant heart: we are constantly on the lookout for ways to build each other up and serve each other
6. We encourage each other in the Christian walk: we ask each other earnestly how we can be praying for that person's personal holiness and spiritual fruitfulness
7. We share generously at the time of the Deacons' Benevolent Fund at the Lord's Supper
8. We throw ourselves more and more into Home Fellowships and hospitality
9. We pray for each other daily and call each other on the phone or text or tweet someone to build them up in Christ
10. We show on our faces and with our bodies on Sundays that we are glad to see each other and that we deeply care for each other
11. We rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn

12. We keep doing the “Meal-Baby” ministry for families that have new babies or an illness in the family so they won’t have to cook
13. We pair up in discipleship relationships, men with men and women with women and hold each other accountable

II. Hospitality

Hebrews 13:2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

- A. The Author urges them NOT TO FORGET to show hospitality to strangers... literally “to love the stranger”
 1. It is easy to “forget” this... to leave it off because it is burdensome and can be trying to take outsiders into your home
 2. The Author wants this church to keep this ministry in mind and be active in it
- B. What Strangers Does the Lord Want Us to Entertain?
 1. In context here, it is referring to Christian brothers and sisters who were from other fellowships and who needed a place to lodge
 2. There were not as many hotels back then, and strangers counted on the hospitality of people in the town to care for them
 3. Christians in particular needed this kind of ministry; especially in 3 John there is a clear indication of traveling ministers of the word who needed lodging so they could carry on their ministries:

3 John 1:5-8 Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. ⁶ They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. ⁸ We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

4. Jesus especially mentions this in His “sheep and goats” teaching:

Matthew 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in...

- C. What is the Reference to Angels?
 1. In my opinion, this most likely refers to Abraham and Sarah showing gracious hospitality to the angel of the Lord and two other angels back in Genesis 18; this was when the angel of the Lord made His clear prophecy that Sarah

would hold a son in her arms a year later; she overheard in the tent and laughed

2. The angels appeared to be men to them;
3. There are many times in the Bible when angels appear to be ordinary men
 - a. The two angels visiting Lot before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah appeared to be ordinary men
 - b. The angels that appeared to Mary in the Garden where Jesus was buried appeared to be ordinary, young men
4. At other times, angels appear with awesome glory and overwhelming appearance; the angel that appeared to Daniel in Daniel 10 was stunning in his appearance:

Daniel 10:6-8 His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. ⁷ I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. ⁸ So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.

Daniel 10:16-17 I said to the one standing before me, "I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. ¹⁷ How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe."

5. BUT SOMETIMES angels can look quite ordinary... and some people have served them a meal or offered them lodging not knowing they were angels
6. SO... always be ready to entertain the godly visitor... he might be an angel!!
7. BUT don't take this too far!!
 - a. Some start to see "angels behind every bush"
 - b. It is pretty clear that angels are constantly ministering to us throughout our lives, serving us as we seek to inherit salvation

Hebrews 1:14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

- c. It is not so obvious that angels are constantly taking on human form and acting out human roles
- D. Why is Hospitality So Vital in the Christian Life?

1. By hospitality, Christians are able to put into practice so many marvelous aspects of the Christian life
2. We are able to meet physical needs and spiritual ones; we are able to grow in our knowledge of and appreciation for the worldwide Body of Christ
3. We are able to put on display the secret innerworkings of our family life: the husband-wife relationship, the parent-child relationship, the sibling relationships; we are able to do our family devotions before them and pray for them and encourage them in the Word
4. We can get much more “quality time” in for discipleship... “LIFE ON LIFE”
 - a. Some aspects of the Christian faith are “caught” by example far more readily than they are “taught” by word

Philippians 3:17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

Philippians 4:9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

- b. So elders in particular are called upon to be regularly practicing hospitality

1 Timothy 3:2-5 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

By this verse, we can see how the elder is able to put his family life on display for good role modeling!!

Titus 1:7-8 Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless-- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

- c. The next verse beyond our section implies a level of intimacy and example setting and display that is difficult without the leaders practicing hospitality

Hebrews 13:7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

E. FBC in particular needs this!!

1. We are a commuter church and people drive from long distances to be involved
2. As a result, it becomes more and more difficult to see our faith lived out in a real world setting; we only see each other here at church
3. Hospitality is the answer!! We need to be opening our homes to others

F. What Are Some Practical Steps to Make This Part of Your Life?

1. The “Ministry of the Pew”: notice on Sunday mornings 1) visitors; 2) people who you have seen before but whom you don’t know yet; 3) quiet people who seem to feel a little uncomfortable in the church setting
2. Go out of your way to be friendly, to reach out, to greet the person, to talk with them and listen to them
3. If you are going out with friends after worship, extend it and reach out to someone who has no one to eat with
4. MAKE VISITORS feel welcome!! The “HOST ministry” does a great job of this at the door; but we can go beyond that... not just in corporate worship but also in BFL and definitely in Home Fellowships
5. NEW MEMBER ASSIMILATION: we need to do a better job of drawing in new members into the life and ministry of the church; giving them ministry opportunities and meeting needs
6. Being open, welcoming, happy, engaging to newcomers
7. Missionaries: when these folks come back on Stateside assignment, to have a ministry of reaching out and refreshing them, “washing the feet of the saints” and refreshing them and making them feel loved
8. Open your home more!!! Have more people over for meals and for fellowship; share what you have with others, especially with those who would have a very hard time repaying your kindness in the same way

III. Remember the Suffering

Hebrews 13:3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

A. What is Commanded Here?

1. Like the previous verse, the idea is one of REMEMBERING
2. It’s amazing how much this is an issue in the Christian life: remembering to do the things God has clearly commanded!!

3. Here, the Author commands Christians to REMEMBER THOSE IN PRISON and those who are MISTREATED (persecuted)
4. It's so easy to be "out of sight, out of mind" with people who are going through active suffering... you forget, because it's not happening to you
5. The Author is greatly heightening this command, saying remember those in prison AS IF YOU WERE THERE WITH THEM!!! And those who are being beaten or persecuted AS IF YOU WERE SUFFERING THE SAME THING YOURSELF
6. Amazing: this is the exact

B. What "Prisoners" and "Mistreated" People Does the Author Have in Mind?

1. First and foremost, like the verse on hospitality, the home base for this verse is the Christian Body... not just the general populace
2. I don't think the author is talking about all prisoners, but Christian prisoners, and specifically those who have been imprisoned for the same sake of the gospel
3. This is the very thing they DID DO earlier in their experience in the faith:

Hebrews 10:32-34 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

4. Remember practically what we said at that time: perhaps the persecution was specific to only a few of their number: the authorities only knew a few Christians or had only specific charges against a few; those few were arrested, beaten publicly and humiliated, and then imprisoned for their faith; the rest of the church went into hiding, keeping a low profile
5. BUT those folks would need ongoing care: medical attention to care for their wounds; food to feed them:

Acts 16:33-34 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them

6. BUT to give that care would expose them to the charge of being Christians! In fact, that may have been the exact strategy the authorities were banking on for the capture of the whole church

7. The Author wanted them to have FAITH and COURAGE and care for their brothers and sisters who had been arrested; willing to risk health and freedom and possessions to show practical love to imprisoned brothers and sisters in Christ

C. Does this Verse Refer to Prison Ministry in General?

1. It COULD... because a healthy, fruitful prison ministry will result in conversions; thus we would have brothers and sisters in Christ who have been saved through the ministry and who now need ongoing shepherding and care
2. So for some people, this verse has become a rallying cry to involvement in a fruitful prison ministry; I know it's been that way for decades for Jack Evans and the others who have joined him for years in the prison bible study and ministry

D. Convicted Recently by Romans 15:30-31

Romans 15:30-32 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. ³¹ Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, ³² so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed.

1. The idea: to not “join in the struggle” means to leave a struggling person alone
2. Imagine someone lying bleeding by the side of the road and just walking by unconcerned... like the priest and the Levite in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan
3. So is prayerlessness in reference to 1) persecuted Christians; 2) unreached people groups

E. How Can We Live it Out Now?

1. Stay involved in praying for the persecuted church... REMEMBER THEM... be aware of their suffering and their danger
 - a. The church in Iran; arrested, tortured, persecuted; facing death sentences for converting to Christianity
 - b. The house church in China: also facing government opposition and crackdowns
2. Be aware of their plight... remember them, pray for them; study Voice of the Martyrs website or Persecution Project or others; simply obey the verse: REMEMBER THEM and consider what it would be like if you were suffering the exact same things yourself

3. FOR SOME OF YOU: get involved in prison ministry; Jack Evans and Peggy Pigg are our key contact people

IV. Summary

Hebrews 13:1-3 Keep on loving each other as brothers. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

- A. Come to Christ
- B. Keep Loving Each Other as Brothers and Sisters
- C. Offer Hospitality
- D. Remember those in Prison as If You Were their Fellow Prisoners