

The Lifestyle that Should Characterize Every Believer

Hebrews 13:1-6

Hebrews 13:1-6 – *Let brotherly love continue.* ² *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.* ³ *Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.* ⁴ *Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.* ⁵ *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.”* ⁶ *So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”*

Background Notes

Hebrews 13 is a very practical chapter. It is a fitting conclusion to this great epistle. This chapter includes duties and responsibilities that are the result of a believer's position in Christ.

Leading up to chapter 13, Hebrews 11 emphasized that faithful believers are strangers and pilgrims here on this earth. Our home is in Heaven. Then in Hebrews 12 we learned that the Christian life is like a marathon race: *“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (12:1)* Like pilgrims, we are on a journey. Like runners, we are in a race. We are strangers and pilgrims who are traveling through this world, which is under the judgment of God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God.

So – as pilgrims and runners, how should we live? In Hebrews 13 the author listed a number of duties and responsibilities for believers in the Christian community and in the local church. Verses 1-6 emphasize our social duties in the Christian community, and verses 7-17 emphasize our spiritual duties in the Christian church.

Doctrinal Point

There are social dos and don'ts for the believers in the Christian community.

a. Do love fellow believers.

“Let brotherly love continue” (v1). Have you ever heard Christians say that they love all their brothers and sisters in Christ - but that they don't like some of them? If they say that, they're not obeying the command of Hebrews 13:1. And notice - Hebrews 13:1 is a **command, not an option.**

The word that's used for "brotherly love" here is "philadelphia," and it means "tender affection." If we're showing tender affection to fellow believers, we'll not only be showing "agape love" for them (denial of self in their interest), but we will also be trying to like them as well. And we will be doing it to the best of our ability!

Some fellow believers are not easy to like. As the saying goes: "Living with the saints in Heaven - that will be glory. Living with the saints on earth - that's another story!" We have a social responsibility within the Christian community to love *and* to like our fellow believers. It may not always be easy, but it's a command. The name of the Christian community should be "Philadelphia." **Do** love fellow believers.

b. Don't neglect to show hospitality.

"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels" (v2). Entertaining strangers doesn't mean we're supposed to open up our homes to any and every drifter or freeloader who comes along! No - that could lead to all kinds of problems. By "strangers," the author meant fellow believers who are not family members or your closest Christian friends. Christians should be willing to open their homes to missionaries and other traveling servants of Christ, and to needy fellow believers, and for Bible studies, and for youth activities, etc. Hospitality is certainly a practical demonstration of the brotherly love of verse 1.

1 Peter 4:9 says that we are to be hospitable *without complaint!* Some Christians obey the first part of that verse - but not the last. They are hospitable – but only reluctantly so! Well, we can (and should) do better than that!

What's the "entertaining angels" all about? Most likely the author of Hebrews was thinking of Genesis 18. In that chapter the Lord and two angels, in appearance as men, came to visit Abraham. Abraham showed hospitality to the "men," even though they were strangers - not knowing at first that it was the Lord and two angels!

The Bible is not teaching that angelic visits of the same sort will take place today. On the other hand, the Bible is certainly not saying that there are no angelic visits today. Hebrews 1:14 says that angels are *"ministering spirits sent forth to give service to those who are saved."* So - we may experience angelic visits more often than we are aware!

However, angelic visits are not the main point of Hebrews 13:2. The point is that this event in the life of Abraham was a good example of what it means to show hospitality to strangers - and to be greatly blessed as a result. **Don't** neglect to show hospitality!

c. Do remember the prisons and the persecuted.

"Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also" (v3). The "prisoners" here were especially the believers who were imprisoned for their faith. By the time Hebrews was written, Christianity had been declared illegal in the Roman Empire, and the Roman persecution of Christians had already begun. Notice that we are to empathize with these prisoners of faith, and to care for their needs as much as possible.

Last week we received a letter from a prisoner in a state penitentiary. He became a Christian in prison after a suicide attempt. Although we have no idea how he got onto our mailing list, he was writing to thank us for sending him our publication, *Devotions for Growing Christians*. As I read his letter, I was moved to compassion for this man, as I realized what he was going through to stand as a Christian in that situation.

We should empathize with fellow-believers who are in prison, and do whatever we can to help them grow in faith. We should pray for and (when possible) care for fellow believers who are being persecuted in foreign lands, sometimes even to the point of death.

Do remember the prisoners and the persecuted.

d. Don't violate your marriage vows.

"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (v4). The Christian community has suffered greatly because this particular "don't" has not been upheld. Think of the scandals, the heartaches, the grief, and the damage to children that have resulted (even in the Christian community) because the marriage vows have not been held and honored.

Sex is good because God created it, but sex is only good when practiced within the boundaries that God has set for us. God laid down the boundaries for our protection. The boundaries were not created to deprive us, but to **bless us**. God knows us better than we do, because He created us. His laws were put in place to protect our physical and emotional well-being.

Fornication is a broad word. It includes all forms of sexual activity that are outside the protective boundaries that God has set up. Premarital sex, adultery and homosexuality all fall *outside God's boundaries*.

The Bible says that God will judge the fornicators and adulterers (v4). Regardless of whatever sexual norms are condoned in today's society, and regardless of what is politically correct today, **all sexual sin will be judged**. The pleasures of sexual sin will end in God's judgment.

So Christians have a serious social obligation and responsibility to control their passions. Don't even think of playing with the fire of sexual sin. We have a directive and a command from our Creator: **Don't** violate your marriage vows.

e. Do be content with what you have.

"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have" (v5). Are you content with what you have – or are you always looking for ways to get more than what you have? *"Be content"* in verse 5 is particularly a reference to material possessions, because the word *"covetousness"* literally means "loving money."

Why do I constantly try to accumulate bigger and better stuff? Is it *really* so that I can serve the Lord more efficiently and effectively? Or is that only an excuse or a mask for my covetousness?

We need to be very careful to guard against this sin, because we are all materialists at heart, to one degree or another. I often say, "I'm not hung up on how big my house is, or what kind of car I drive, or how nice our furniture is!" - but I want to have the latest and the best ski equipment! So we're all materialists to one degree or another. It's just a matter of what area we want more possessions.

Here's what 1 Timothy 6 says about godly contentment: *"... godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money 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 griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness."* We all need to guard against the insidious sin of covetousness. We need to be content with what God has provided for us.

Do be content with what you have.

Practical Application

Let "www" mean "we won't worry."

It's hard to read or see anything in the media these days without seeing the initials "www" – and as you know, "www" stands for "worldwide web." Often the news that we read online is very negative, discouraging and even frightening.

The message of Hebrews 13:5-6 reminds us that we don't need to be afraid. So from now on, every time you see the letters "www" – just say "We Won't Worry."

Two quotations from the Old Testament in verses 5-6 encourage us not to worry, regardless of the circumstances we may be facing. The Lord Himself promised: *"I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6).* And, *"The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 118:6).*

With guarantees like that, we can't lose! So why worry? We don't have to!

So - from now on when you see the initials "www", say "We Won't Worry!"