

Sermon Series on Hebrews

1.

By John Atkinson (June 2000)

Sermon Nine

Hebrews 13

Love

Background Outline

In the first address I dealt with the key theme of the sermon recorded in the book of Hebrews - Jesus is incomparably better than all that went before Him. In the second address in this series we looked at the issue of rest in God as a fundamental aspect of true spirituality

We saw how the preacher to the Hebrews stressed that two things keep us from this Sabbath-rest

A Unbelief – the refusal to believe and

A A Hardened Heart – a heart used to refusing God.

In the third address the preacher to the Hebrews looked at Jesus our High Priest in terms of Jesus' submission to His Father, even to death. He called us to enter into God's presence with confidence, because of Jesus our High Priest.

In the fourth section the preacher paused to deal with the problems of stagnation and apostasy.

In the fifth address we looked at Jesus our high Priest in the priestly order of Melchizedek.

In the sixth address we asked the question "Has the New Testament replaced the Old?" and "To what extent do we take the instructions in the Old Testament as personal obligations?"

In the seventh address I dealt with the introduction to the great Faith chapter of the sermon to the Hebrews - Hebrews 11. This chapter on faith is introduced by;

The three reminders which are a summary of what has gone before:

1. We have confidence (10:19)
2. We have a new and living way (10:20)
3. We have a great priest

The four challenges

1. Enter the Most Holy Place & draw near to God (10:19-22)
2. Hold fast to the hope (10:23-25)
3. Remember the earlier days (10:26-35)
4. Persevere (10:36-39)

We then looked at the beginning and end of the Faith chapter .

A. The Meaning of Faith (11:1-3)

B. The Promise (11:39-40)

In the last address we dealt with the Hope chapter. We looked at the issue of discipline as a sign of God's love and our response to it.

Discipline for the long-distance race.

There are three things that the preacher identifies that are necessary in order to reap the full benefit of their example

A let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, **A let us** run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

A let us fix our eyes on Jesus,

Discipline for God's Children (12:4-13)

The preacher points out that a caring father disciplines his children because they are his and he seeks what is best for them. On the other hand an illegitimate child goes without this kind of care.

Therefore we dare not treat God lightly (12:18-29)

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The preacher uses one last great contrasting image – the two great mountains of the Hebrew Scriptures. Mount Sinai and Mount Zion.

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Sermon Nine Christian Leadership ([Hebrews 13 : 1-19](#))

Love ([13:1-6](#))

Christian Leadership ([13:7-8](#))

Christian Sacrifice ([13:9-16](#))

Christian Obedience ([13:17](#))

Prayer ([13:18-19](#))

Introduction

The last three chapters of this written sermon to the Jewish believers focus on the application of Faith, Hope and Love. Today I am going to look at some of the demands that the law of love makes on us as Christians and as leaders or emerging leaders.

Love ([13:1-6](#))

A Brotherly love

The first three verses deal with the relationships we have with one another in the Christian community. "Let brotherly love continue" In other words don't do it once – continue to do it. Who are the brothers that are mentioned here? I think that they are other believers in Jesus, both Jew and Gentile. They are certainly associated with those the preacher has called Jesus' brothers earlier in the sermon

*Heb 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.***

Heb 2:12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."

We have a responsibility to those who are members of the congregation that is at once, spiritual, emotional, and material. Let's just say you lost your job – you were retrenched? Would you fear that your family would go hungry? If that is the case then the congregation here has fallen short of the law of love.

Are you willing to stand by and sacrificially support those who are in difficulty? Then you have learnt the law of love. Paul puts it this way;

Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

Not only are we to care for those in the Church but we are also told to care for strangers. The Church is not a mutual benefit society – it exists for its non-members as much as it does for its members.

You will, no doubt, have detected an echo of Jesus' words in the gospel of Matthew;

*Mat 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;*

*Mat 25:36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; **I was in prison**, and you came to Me.'*

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The word used for the love of strangers is the Greek word *philoxenia* from which the English word xenophobia is derived. It is the love of those who are different to us, who are outsiders and in some cases outcasts. In Judaism then and now, hospitality and generosity are seen as important virtues and mitzvahs (commandments or duties) which have religious significance. The preacher alludes to some who entertained only to discover that their guests were, in fact, angels. Jesus, who is far superior to angels, says that when we do this for the least we do it to Him.

The care for those in prison is expressed in a particularly Jewish way. To care as a fellow sufferer, or as though you were in prison yourself. We find this sentiment in Deuteronomy over the issue of strangers and slaves enjoying the Sabbath rest as well as their Jewish employers.

Deu 5:13 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Deu 5:14 but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.

Deu 5:15 'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

A Immorality, greed and lack of trust in God

In verse 4 the preacher addresses the issue of marriage and sexual immorality. We know from history that one of the major changes that occurred when people were converted from pagan society into the Christian community was their commitment to a highly moral lifestyle. This was an important part of their testimony. Though the focus of the verse is on marriage and adultery it concludes with “*for God will judge the adulterer and **all the sexually immoral.***” What you say must be reflected by the way you live. You cannot testify to the Holiness of God and His presence in your life if you live like a pagan. I believe that this is an area of our lives which is fundamental to the health of our own spirituality and therefore the health of the Church.

Greed is an attitude which is destructive and so the preacher warns against the love of money. Money hangs on to you as tightly as you hang on to it. The problem is that you cannot throttle money. In a society as materialist as ours we are called to be different – tithing a tenth of your income is a good place to begin – but that is another sermon.

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Christian Leadership (13:7-8,17, 24)

As one of your pastors this is not an easy passage to preach from. I do not want to appear to be saying “be nice to me.” However we often get or grow the leaders we deserve.

Leaders are like anyone else in the congregation except for the fact that they are called to fulfill a particular task. We need love, encouragement, appreciation, support and care in order to become the leaders that God has called us to be.

What responsibility have you taken for the development and growth of your leaders? Do you make unreasonable demands on us? Do you set standards for us that are different from the ones you set for yourself? Do you expect us to be available to you every moment of the day or night? Do you make comments about our taking legitimate leave or time off? Do you pray for us? Do you give so that we can be paid? Do you encourage us so that we will grow in skill and effectiveness? Remember that this is the love chapter – this is the law of love – not to take one another for granted.

There are two verses in this chapter that mention relationships with leaders;

*Heb 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.*

*Heb 13:17 **Obey** your leaders and **submit** to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of **no advantage to you**.*

Christian Sacrifice (13:9-16)

A Not carried away by strange teachings

We are easily distracted by less important things. The Jews of the early Church were under pressure to adopt certain Jewish dietary laws which were associated with the Temple when they had put their trust in a better sacrifice – Jesus’ death on the cross.

A Identifying with Jesus’ shameful death

To trust in Jesus’ death above the ceremonies and sacrifices at the Temple was to invite scorn and ridicule from Jew and Pagan alike. These Jewish believers were in the unenviable position of being in between – neither one nor the other.

A Offering the sacrifice of thanksgiving

To answer this situation the preacher to the Hebrews resorts to a Rabbinic midrash a commentary or teaching which would have been recognisable to his hearers and could be used to answer their accusers.

The teaching comes from Rabbi Pinchas, Rabbi Levi and Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Menachem of Gallia: “In the Age to come all sacrifices will be annulled except for the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Leviticus Rabbah 9:7)

*Heb 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-- **the fruit of lips** that confess his name.*

*Heb 13:16 And do not forget to **do good and to share with others**, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

Finally let me conclude with the words of the preacher himself.

Heb 13:22 Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.