

INTRODUCTION

Much of Scripture reads as ancient history to be studied or obscure prophecy to be unraveled or deep doctrine to be pondered. But we must always remember that all Scripture is a communication by God to man, spoken through authors of His choosing. Therefore we must hear all Scripture as if it were, and is, God speaking to us directly. This approach we heartily affirm as a Bible church.

There are some Scriptures, however, that read and sound less like history, prophecy or doctrine and more like God simply talking to us as a loving father talks to his son or daughter to give wise counsel. And that is the flavor of our passage today. There are no hidden meanings or difficult innuendos to discern. There is only plain talking, “cookies on the bottom shelf”, practical instructions that hit at the most core issues of our lives - in today’s case: love, marriage (or dare I say “sex”) and money.

So let each of us sit humbly and respectfully before our Heavenly Father, and listen carefully to His easily understood yet profound advice. And may we each ponder how we may apply these simple but deep truths to our everyday living.

OUR TEXT

Hebrews 13:1-6 *Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.*

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?”

As I have already indicated, I see here three general areas of practical advice:

1. on brotherly love,
2. on marriage (and specifically its honorable and appropriate purpose), and
3. on contentedness with the money we have.

Let us consider each in turn.

BROTHERLY LOVE

We all know the Greek word of “agape” which is translated “love.” This is the unconditional love of God and the love that we as His children are to show in God’s power to all – patient, kind and forgiving. But there are other Greek words translated as “love” in our Bible, the most common one being “philia” which is used here in 13:1 and translated as “brotherly love.” It is the word used by Jesus when he taught that the second great commandment was to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Most commonly “philia” is used of the love between brother and sister in the family of God. It is the brotherly love of fellowship between Christians. And here, God says to us through the Hebrew author, “Let brotherly love continue.”

Now the easy response is, “OK, I’ll keep on being loving to my fellow believer.” But a harder look reveals that this may often be a challenge, and we are encouraged to “dig deep” in being sure that love flows rather than unfair criticism, words of discouragement, prejudice, jealousy, envy or perhaps the most common of all – disregard.

So I see this as God’s call to “regard” each one of our close proximity brothers and sisters as worthy of our respect, attention, inclusion and communication of love. “Yes, you are doing it to many or

most, but now let's be sure you're doing it for all," God is saying.

We really don't get to choose who comes to our church and becomes part of our local flock of "sheep." We could say that those who come in get to choose, but more truthfully it is God who chooses or draws our fellow worshippers to us. And sometimes, even often, we perceive these "sheep" as "not our type" or "smelly" in one sense or another. Or maybe we just don't take the effort to get to know them and therefore we hold no feeling about them one way or the other.

God is calling us to "regard" each brother or sister as important enough and worthy enough of our getting to know them and loving them as brothers and sisters of ours, whatever their faults or differences are. "Let brotherly love continue."

And I am convinced that God's idea of "brotherly love" is not just a smile and a handshake and a quick greeting on Sunday morning. "Continue" carries the idea of additional effort and energy put into the relationships. It puts the burden of each one finding opportunities and creating ways to deepen relationship with those God has put in our immediate church path. It means finding ways to truly help, and truly care, and truly include. "Let brotherly love continue."

That this charge is #1 on the list of super-practical advice is also worthy of note. God wants to be sure we don't miss it. "If you fall short on any of the other items, be sure you don't fall short on this one," He is saying. "Let brotherly love continue." I move on, but I trust you will linger long in your consideration of how you will put this simple "divine suggestion" into fuller practice.

SPECIFIC BROTHERLY LOVE EXPRESSED

Now our Heavenly Father, through the Hebrew author, moves on to delineate two specific ways He wants this "brotherly love" expressed: through hospitality to strangers and through remembering the prisoners and those ill-treated. Simple question: do you do this?

1. **Hospitality** is not only making available a room to someone who needs a night's stay, though it can be that as well. Hospitality is the disposition to welcome others you don't know so well or at all into your life – in offering help and time spent with them. Living a quiet and secluded life spending most of your time by yourself is contrary to a life of hospitality. We as Christians are called to be "people persons" even if we don't think it to be in our nature. Hospitality can be anything from stopping to help a stranger with a problem to inviting someone you don't know so well to dinner to offering a missionary a place in which to stay.

Examine the life of Jesus, which we as His followers espouse to follow, and see if He is not a "people person" continually making himself available to help others – even strangers – in need. Now we can't, like him, make the blind see and make the lame walk. But we can meet needs in the name of Jesus. That's hospitality. And that's true Christianity in action.

And we are asked to consider that "some," including Abraham in Genesis 18, "have entertained angels without knowing it." Remember that "angel" means "messenger," and particularly a messenger as one sent from God. When we open our heart to a stranger in need we might just be blessed by a messenger from God – possibly an real angel, but more likely someone who will bless us with having blessed him. God is saying, "don't miss the blessing of hospitality."

2. **Remembering** In 13:3 we are urged to "remember the prisoners" – as if you were in prison with them. I think this is certainly a call to have a heart of concern for all prisoners, for there is a calling to minister to those incarcerated for crimes, hoping to point them to Christ. You probably know that in our own congregation we have two long-time chaplains to our Santa Barbara County Jail – Dan and Ivan. These two brothers minister week by week, visiting, counseling and putting on services for those in our county jail. Soon, during our June month of highlighting missions we will have a more full report on this "remembering" ministry they carry on so gloriously for our Lord Jesus.

Many of you have "remembered" the prisoners when you have travelled with me in the past to take the gospel message by music and testimony to the prisons of California, including San Quentin, Soledad and Folsom. We recall those as very meaningful extensions of our faith.

But supremely, I think that our Heavenly Father is urging us here to remember those who are incarcerated and ill-treated for their faith in Jesus as Lord. “You yourselves also are in the body” just as they are – and so they are your brothers and sisters who need “brotherly love.” Neglect no to pray for them in their distress, which is our #1 way of “remembering” them. Give to mission organizations that ministry to Christians being ill-treated for their faith, as you are able and led.

And some of you might be led to join chaplains Dan and Ivan in their ministry right here in our own city. If God is calling you to consider this “remembering” ministry to prisoners for the sake of Christ – please seek out these two good, godly men in our own midst.

“Let brotherly love continue” and in “hospitality” and in “remembering.” This is your Father speaking.

HONOR MARRIAGE AS GOD INTENDED IT

Whether or not you are presently married, marriage has had and continues to have a pivotal role in your life. The marriages of your parents and those ancestors before them have profoundly influenced you. And whether they were Christian marriages or no, their example – both good and not so good – have shaped you as the Christian follower you are today. Likewise, marriages – both good and not so good – are all around us as examples that likewise teach us.

Regarding marriage, there are 3 specific ways that God calls us in 13:4.

- 1. Honor marriage among all**
- 2. Keep the marriage bed undefiled**
- 3. Don’t commit fornication or adultery, for God will judge**

1. Two verses early in Genesis clearly define and describe the marriage that God wants us to honor.

Genesis 1:27 *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

Genesis 2:24 *For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.*

Jesus quotes both of these verses in Matt. 19:4-5 and then teaches on them in the following verse.

Matthew 19:6 *So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.*

Marriage, as God defines it, is between one man and one woman. By the very definition of “woman” which is “out of man,” only a woman can complete a man, and only a man can complete a woman. Marriage is the supernatural bonding or joining or “wedding” of one man to one woman to make the supernatural union of “one flesh” which is the bond of marriage. Since this is a supernatural God-made union, Jesus taught that no one should ever attempt to separate this union.

This is the marriage that God calls us to honor. When a man and women vow to one another to come together by God in this holy union of marriage, this new creation of God is to be honored by all, for all time. As the well known theologian and pastor John Piper has rightly said, the term “same-sex marriage” makes no Biblical sense. It is an “oxymoron” – meaning that “same-sex” and “marriage” should not even be used together in the same phrase, for they are mutually exclusive. He calls all Christians to stop using that world-created phrase, for it does not describe Biblical reality.

I know this is a “sticky” subject in our “all-inclusive,” “politically correct” and “co-existing” society that seems condemn any putdown of “gay” or “lesbian” so-called rights. But I must be true to the Scripture, and without hatred in my heart or judgment upon any who might disagree I proclaim that God’s Word teaches that a marriage is to be between a man and a woman only, and that any other union called marriage is not Biblical marriage and is an aberration to God. According to Romans 1, a sexual union between a man and a man or a woman and a woman is called “impurity” (1:24), “a lie” (1:25), “degrading passion” (1:26a), “unnatural function” (1:26b), “indecent acts” (1:27a), “error” (1:27b) and “not proper” (1:28).

2. To “keep the marriage bed undefiled” is a fancy and perhaps more socially acceptable way of saying: “sexual intercourse belongs only in the confines of Biblical marriage – between one man and one woman.” But long and short, our Heavenly Father is lovingly and wisely saying “keep sex in marriage.” The only way the marriage bed is “undefiled” is when sexual contact is kept within marriage.

3. The 2 ways to “defile” the marriage bed is to (1) commit fornication or (2) commit adultery.

Fornication is defined (by Webster and other dictionaries) as sex outside of marriage. That would include sex before marriage, after marriage (after the death of one partner and before another marriage is initiated), or in a relationship that is not between a man and a woman, for “fornication” also refers to any sexual impurity, such as internet porn, telephone intercourse or any other aberration of sexual relationship between a man and woman who are married.

I guess I really should have called this message “Love, Sex and Money.”

May God help us honor the institution of marriage as God has defined it, keep sexual intercourse only within the confines of marriage, avoiding fornication and adultery at all costs, knowing that God will judge. Gladly, God can forgive even these sins if we repent. But as with all sin, there will be blessing lost, for God will judge.

3. BE CONTENT WITH THE MONEY YOU HAVE

By now it must seem that you have already heard at least two sermons and are weary for a third. Well, there is one more important urging that our Heavenly Father wants to give in His fatherly chat. Let me teach it with supportive Scriptures.

1 Timothy 6:10 *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.*

Proverbs 23:4 *Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it.*

Philippians 4:11-13 *Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am ... I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*

Matthew 6:26 *Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?*

Money is both a need and a want. In “Fiddler On The Roof” we find this interchange:

Perchik: Money is the world's curse.

Tevye: May the Lord smite me with it. And may I never recover.

I once found a cartoon that has a man saying to God:

“If money cannot buy happiness, I only wish that you’d give me the chance to prove it.”

Short version: Work hard. Save and invest for your family as you are able. Give joyfully and liberally to God’s kingdom. Be wise and frugal in your expenditures. Don’t long to gain wealth.

And trust God to take care of your need and He will give you even more than you need. But don’t force the issue. Keep free from the “love of money” (which is covetousness).

“LOVE THE BRETHREN, HONOR MARRIAGE and TRUST ME FOR YOUR FINANCES”

Thank you, God. I will.