

• Chapters 1–12: theology

• Chapter 13: practical application

• The entire purpose of salvation – a people for God's own possession who are zealous for good works

• Faith worked out practically

### 1. Love

• The supreme position in all New Testament descriptions of Christian character

### 2. Hospitality

• Few things test our love more than the disruption of our routine!

### 3. Care for prisoners and for the afflicted

• The forgotten and neglected

Our writer's main arguments have come to an end – but he cannot stop yet! The Christian gospel does not finish when we have come to the end of our doctrinal argumentation. It always has practical implications for the way in which we live. Theologians might like to stop at chapter 12, but true theology is life-changing theology. It goes on to say things like: 'Let love...continue. Forget not to show love to strangers...Remember the people in prison...Let marriage be held in honour...Stay free from the love of money...'. These things are not very intellectual, but everything our writer has said in Hebrews 1–12 is worthless unless it reaches what is said in Hebrews 13! The entire purpose of salvation is 'to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works'<sup>1</sup>. The many chapters of our letter are all designed to bring us to the point where we are finding grace in time of need and learn how to 'share God's holiness'<sup>2</sup>. Holiness is not legalism or joylessness or severity in dealing with people; it is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. It works out in the practical ways that our letter goes on to mention. He mentions six topics in Hebrews 13:1–6.

1. **Love.** He says, <sup>1</sup>*Let brotherly love continue.* It is no surprise to find love mentioned first for it occupies the supreme position in all New Testament descriptions of Christian character. It is the source and heart of meekness, cheerfulness in relationships to others. It is freedom from envy, humility. It is the opposite of needless anger or a needlessly critical spirit. It makes us willing to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. The love that our writer is specially wanting is *philadelphia* – the love of brothers and sisters in Christ just because they are related to us in Christ.

2. **Hospitality.** <sup>2</sup>*Do not forget hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.* Few things test our love more than the disruption of our routine, and few things disrupt our routine more than hospitality! It is specially needed in times of persecution, and specially needed for travelling preachers! It often comes as a disturbance or interruption, and yet it often produces unexpected blessings and side-effects. It was because of Abraham's hospitality that he found himself providing for angels who had come to bring him what he had been wanting for decades<sup>1</sup>.

3. **Care for prisoners and for the afflicted.** People in prison and people who are suffering generally feel that they are forgotten. Our writer says: <sup>3</sup>*Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, and remember those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.* This is true godliness. If our Lord Jesus Christ is a great high priest who does not forget us, surely we must relate in a similar way to others. Godliness is in many ways god-like-ness. What God has done for us, we must do for others. It involves thought and imagination ('as though you were in prison with them'). It involves identification. Since 'you also are in the body' it should not be too difficult to imagine how we would feel if physically ill-treated or distressed.

<sup>1</sup> Titus 2:14

<sup>2</sup> 12:10

<sup>1</sup> see Genesis 18

#### 4. Respect for marriage

• After conversion, the most momentous event of our lives

4. **Respect for marriage.** <sup>4</sup>Let marriage be held in honour in every way, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. After conversion to Christ, marriage is the most momentous event of our lives. It will bring the greatest joys or the greatest pains – or a mixture of both. Our writer wants it to be honoured (regarded as a divine ordinance, approached with prayerfulness, regulated by love and respect). He warns that God will judge the immoral and the adulterous. He is speaking to Christians. Apparently he takes it for granted that Christians might need the warning.

#### 5. Freedom from covetousness

• Guard ourselves from greed

• Our grip on God and God's grip on us!

• Confidence

• Holiness in the practicalities of life – 'working out our salvation'

5. **Freedom from covetousness.** <sup>5</sup>Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have. For God has said, 'I will never leave you; I will never forsake you.' <sup>6</sup>So we may confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can any human being do to me?' Our writer's next concern is money. Most people love it too much, are deceitful about how they get it, and careless about how they use it. Our writer wants us to think about this matter and guard ourselves from wandering off into greed.

Back behind all of these things will be our grip on God – and our understanding of God's grip on us! If we truly believe God is constantly there for us, it will affect us in the practicalities of handling money, to say nothing of the husband or the wife, or the unexpected stranger who needs help. Our pastor-friend, the author of 'Hebrews', wants us to be confident in God, sure of his grace, certain that he will never leave us or forsake us. He wants it to affect our talk ('We may confidently say...'). He wants it to deliver us from every kind of fearfulness or timidity in the face of persecutors or critics. This is what Paul would call 'working out our salvation'<sup>1</sup>. This is holiness. It is not a matter of withdrawal from society or harshness or religiosity. These are the practicalities of life: love, care for people, respect for marriage, freedom from covetousness, confidence in God. We shall find ourselves growing in grace when we are convinced that we have a great high priest who cares for us.

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:12-13



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