

#1797
Cf. #613

Hebrews 13:1-6¹
God will never leave you
or forsake you,
therefore, love others.
21st Sunday after Pentecost
Supplementary Lectionary
Series "B," Epistles

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^{13:1} Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not forget to be hospitable to strangers, for by so doing some people have been hospitable to 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.

⁴ Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure (undefiled), for God will judge those who are guilty of sexually immoralities and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for God himself has said,

“Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you”
(cf. Deuteronomy 31:1)

⁶ So we say with confidence,

“The LORD is my Helper;
I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?”
(cf. Psalm 118:6,7).

DEAR CHRISTIAN, PUT LOVE INTO ACTION
I. TOWARD OTHERS
II. TOWARD GOD

In the Name of Jesus our Savior, who promises to be with us always (cf. Matthew 28:20b), Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

The Book of Hebrews has a wealth and wide-range of topics. First, it is made clear that Jesus is God's Son from eternity (cf. Chapter 1), and, as St. Paul points out in his Epistle or Letter to the Colossians, Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is Creator and Preserver. St. Paul writes,

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

¹⁶ For by [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:16&17).

The writer to the Hebrews then makes it clear that this same Jesus is the brother of believers – those who have faith in him as their Savior. Jesus is the Redeemer of all mankind, and the one who defeated the devil who held the power of death (cf. Chapter 2).

The writer to the Hebrews states that Jesus is the builder of God’s House – the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, as we will confess later in the Apostles’ Creed² (cf. Chapter 3). Jesus is the One who fulfilled the Old Testament Priesthood by offering up himself on the cross once for all – the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (cf. Chapters 5 – 10). Now, at the right hand of God, having all power and authority, Jesus intercedes for believers (cf. Chapter 10 & Romans 8:34).

The writer to the Hebrews then shifts from a description of Jesus to a description of those who believe in Jesus. Similar to their Savior, believers will undergo tribulations, trials, temptations, troubles, turmoils – all for the sake of Christ (cf. Chapters 11 & 12; Acts 14:22b). Thus, believers in Jesus are called upon to continue in faith in spite of all that opposes them; and, as they continue in faith, believers are to bring forth good works the fruits of faith, especially toward those who are their fellow-believers in Jesus (cf. Chapter 13). It is this aspect that our text emphasizes, when we are told ... DEAR CHRISTIAN, PUT LOVE INTO ACTION. DEAR CHRISTIAN, PUT LOVE INTO ACTION ... I. TOWARD OTHERS; and, II. TOWARD GOD

DEAR CHRISTIAN, PUT LOVE INTO ACTION I. TOWARD OTHERS

The first issue with which we must deal is the question: How can we love one another, as God wants us to love one another? This question is answered when we perceive that any genuine love believers will have for others comes from God. The Apostle John writes in his First Epistle or Letter, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an Atoning Sacrifice for our sins. Beloved ones, since God so loved us, we ourselves also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10&11). The answer to loving

² Cf. *The Apostles’ Creed, Christian Worship – A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), pp. 19, 41, 146, 150; and, Kuske, David P., *Luther’s Catechism – The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther and an Exposition for Children and Adults Written in Contemporary English* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 3rd ed., 1998), pp. 4&5, 135, 151, 181.

one another is found in Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us (cf. Galatians 2:20b). With that as the source of love, believers then love others.

The writer to the Hebrews states that brotherly love is to continue (cf. 13:1). This means that believers are to love their fellow-believers. The kind of love being referred to is that love which has as its highest objective that which is in the best interests of those being loved – best interests both physical and especially spiritual. Jesus was speaking about this kind of love when he said, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3b). The objective of such love is to lead a brother or sister in Christ to repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus, and to encourage the brother or sister to continue in faith in Jesus through this Gospel. This love will also be extended to those outside of the Christian faith.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10). St. Paul emphasizes doing good to one’s fellow Christians – “those who belong to the family of believers” – but he also includes doing “good to all people.” The writer to the Hebrews states the same thing when he says, “Do not forget to be hospitable to strangers”; then he adds, “for by so doing some people have been hospitable to angels without knowing it” (13:2). “Be hospitable to all.” “Do good to all people.” When the writer to the Hebrews refers to the fact that in doing good to all, “some people have been hospitable to angels,” we are reminded of Abraham who was hospitable angels and the LORD himself (cf. Genesis 18:1-8), and Lot when he was hospitable to the two angels whom God sent to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-29) but to rescue Lot and his daughters.

The writer to the Hebrews also reminds believers to remember those who, for the sake of Jesus, are in prison or being mistreated for the sake of Jesus (cf. 13:3). St. Paul himself was an example of such mistreatment, imprisonment and, eventually, martyrdom for the sake of Christ; and, St. Paul mentions two fellow-prisoners with him, Aristarchus (cf. Colossians 4:10) and Epaphras (cf. Philemon 23). In addition, the writer to the Hebrews had previously referred to those who ...

³⁵ were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground (11:35b-38).

Believers in Jesus were to remind themselves of those being persecuted for the sake of their faith in Christ Jesus.

Then the writer to the Hebrews addresses an issue that has been a problem from the very beginning of mankind’s fall into sin. He states: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge those who are guilty of sexually immoralities and adulterers” (13:4). God instituted marriage when he created Eve from

the side of Adam and brought her to Adam as his wife (cf. Genesis 2:21-25). Marriage, therefore, is not a cultural custom; it is not an invention of man. Marriage is a sacred institution established by God. Those who defile marriage by sexual immoralities and adulteries face God's punishing eternal judgment (cf. 13:4b; Matthew 5:27-30; Romans 1:24-28; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10;15-20; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:3-7; Colossians 3:5&6; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 4:3&4; James 2:21; 1 Peter 4:3; 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 4,7; Revelation 22:15).

Then, the writer to the Hebrews gives a final warning. He says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have" (13:5a). St. Paul devoted additional comments regarding this in his First Epistle to Timothy. St. Paul wrote,

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

St. Paul states that even the desire for money leads people into "all kinds of evil" and causes many to wander from the faith. In addition, the love of money causes griefs to people, both in terms of trying to get more and more money and then in trying to keep the money they have.

APPLICATION

Do not love money or the things that money can buy. It is a warning for us too. We see something and want it – just like the small child you take into Walmart, who wants the things he or she sees in the toy section. Greed, covetousness, avarice, jealousy are part of our sinful nature. Along with St. Paul, the writer to the Hebrews says, "Be content with what you have." "Be content with what you have" recognizing that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). All things belong to God (cf. Psalm 24:1&2; 1 Corinthians 10:26; Haggai 2:8), and he gives them to us to manage (cf. Matthew 24:45-47; Luke 12:42-44 & 17:10). That means we are responsible and answerable to God for our management – our stewardship – of the things he has given us; and, it means that we commit a serious error when we begin to think that the things in our possession really belong to us.

Then you heard the writer to the Hebrews comment about the sacredness of marriage and the terrible judgment coming against those guilty of sexual immoralities and adulteries. Jesus added to the outward indulgence in such sins when he said in his Sermon on the Mount, "Anyone who looks at a woman [or a man] lustfully has already committed adultery with her (or him) in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Since this is true, you and I are already guilty. But then we also see the gross violations of the sacredness of marriage in our land: Children conceived outside of marriage; homosexuality and lesbianism, the use of birth controls (pills, IUDs, after morning pills) and prophylactics so that sexual desires

can be indulged without conception taking place. What wickedness! What hardness of heart. God's judgment and punishment are certainly coming.

We also need to ask ourselves if brotherly love is among us. If we see a brother or sister in Christ engaged in some sinful activity or falling into temptation, and we say, "Well, it does not affect me!" then where is the brotherly love that expresses itself in concern for the spiritual welfare of others? Are we hospitable toward our fellow-believers as well as to others? Are we passing up opportunities to be hospitable toward angels by not being hospitable toward all?

The writer to the Hebrews also spoke about those who are imprisoned and mistreated because of their faith in Christ Jesus. St. Paul, Aristarchus (cf. Colosians 4:10), and Epaphras (cf. Philemon 23) were mentioned. Such treatment has, as yet, not taken place in our nation; but it certainly does take place in other nations – especially those controlled by the godless Muslims. Pray, fellow believers, pray, that those Christians suffering in those situations may hold firmly to their faith in Jesus in spite of persecution and slaughter.

As you and I review the exhortations that the writer to the Hebrews pens, we are brought to our knees to confess that we are guilty – if not in action, then in thoughts, words, and attitudes. Moreover, James reminds us, "Whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10) – guilty because God demands perfection (cf. Leviticus 11:44&45; 19:2; 20:7; Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:15&16). You and I are not perfect and, therefore, face God's damning judgment.

There is only one escape for us and that escape is provided in our text. That escape is given to us in God's promise.

DEAR CHRISTIAN, PUT LOVE INTO ACTION II. TOWARD GOD

How does one describe love toward God? To love God means to hold God as dear above all others. To love God means to hold God as more dear than any other person or thing – money would be an example. How can believers in Jesus have that kind of love toward God. John tells us in his First Epistle, "We love because [God] first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God's love toward believers in Christ Jesus creates believers' love toward God and motivates believers' love toward others. With that love in the hearts of believers by faith in Jesus, God's promise is freely given.

The writer to the Hebrews states, "God himself has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (13:5b; cf. Deuteronomy 31:1). This was the promise God gave to his Old Testament believers. It is a promise that Jesus repeated to his disciples before his ascension into heaven, when Jesus said, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). King David spoke of this promise in Psalm 46 when he wrote, "The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (Psalm 46:7). The LORD spoke of this promise when he said through the Prophet Isaiah, "Do not fear,

for I Am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God” (Isaiah 41:10). And again, God spoke through Isaiah,

**43:1 But now, thus says the LORD:
The One who created you, O Jacob,
The One who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine.
2 When you pass through the waters,
I am with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
3 For I Am the LORD, your God,
the Holy One of Israel, the One who saves you; ...
(Isaiah 43:1-3a).**

And the writer to the Hebrews states for us our response.

What is the response of believers to the promise of the LORD God that he is with us always? “So we say with confidence, ‘The LORD is my Helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (13:6; cf. Psalm 118:6,7). Thus, St. Paul and Barnabas reminded the believers in Asia Minor (today’s Turkey), “We must go through many tribulations to enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22b). Previously we heard the writer to the Hebrews describe some of the terrible tribulations that believers endured. Given these truths, all believers join the writer to the Hebrews in proclaiming, “So we say with confidence, ‘The LORD is my Helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (13:6; cf. Psalm 118:6,7).

APPLICATION

You and I join the believers in both the Old Testament and New Testament in saying, “with confidence, ‘The LORD is my Helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (13:6; cf. Psalm 118:6,7). There will be opposition to our faith in Jesus as St. Paul and Barnabas said before, “We must go through many tribulations to enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22b). Perhaps that opposition will not include for us imprisonment or physical torment or torture or death. Yet there will be opposition. There will be tribulations.

Those who oppose the Christian faith will ridicule us and ostracize us as not being worthy of their companionship. Those who oppose the Christian faith may prevent us from advancement in job, profession, or career. But you and I are called upon to remember God’s promise to be with us always and never to leave us or forsake us. With that promise, we join the writer to the Hebrews in saying “with confidence, ‘The LORD is my Helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (13:6; cf. Psalm 118:6,7).

CONCLUSION

The writer to the Hebrews has much to say to us. He speaks to us about Jesus, God's Son, who became man, who suffered, who is our Savior, our Brother and our Helper. Jesus promises to be with us always. With that promise, dear Christian, put love into action.

Put love into action toward God as we hold to the Means of Grace, the Gospel of Jesus in Word and Sacraments. Put love into action toward others – a love that grows out of love and faith in Jesus our Savior. Amen.