

Hebrews 13:1-3 "Keep On Loving Each Other As Brothers"

We are starting a new chapter this morning, but we're not starting an entirely new thought. When this letter was first written there were no chapter divisions, those weren't added until hundreds of years later.

This thirteenth chapter starts with an exhortation to love the brethren and yet the previous couple of verses set this section up.

HEB 12:28-29 "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

How do we show our thankfulness and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe? Well, if God is love then to show our thankfulness we must walk as people who have this love which is given from God as we receive Christ by faith.

This love is indicative of the fact that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives and producing the kind of fruit that bears witness of the life God has given us. This is what Paul brings out in GAL 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love,"

This is a supernatural working of God as His fruit in our lives is made manifest. And the love of God is the chief fruit among God's people to be used to show our thankfulness to God as we love Him above all as well as being used to minister to God's people and the world.

When speaking of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14, Paul sums up their proper use when he says in 1CO 13:13 "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

It's interesting that Jesus says in MAT 7:16,20 "By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."

That fruit stems from the love of Christ being shed abroad in our hearts as in thankfulness we love Him and serve Him. If you want to recognize a true Christian check out the fruit of the Spirit in his or her life. Granted, some fruit will be greener than others, but

there will be evidences of the Spirit of God working in that person's life.

But the greatest of these is love. If our love for God is growing it will show itself in gratitude and thanksgiving as we walk by faith.

GAL 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

When we love the brethren we are expressing our faith in Christ. When we love the world with the truth of God's word we are expressing our faith in Christ. When we are tempted to seek self above others and yet we reach out to others in His love we are expressing our faith in Christ.

The reason is that God first loved us and in gratitude we are being imitators of Him as we rely on His grace and strength to consider one another as more important than ourselves. (Phi.2:3)

It is our faith in Christ that enables us to love as Christ loves us. Not that our faith in itself is the source of this love, but the One in whom we place our faith. Remember God is love as John puts it in 1JO 4:8.

John also goes on to define love in what Jesus Christ did on our behalf when he says in 1JO 4:10-11 "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

And this is where our writer in Hebrews is going in our text this morning as we see in HEB 13:1 "Keep on loving each other as brothers."

It's not as though these Christians were without love, but they must continue to build upon that love as they extend it to one another and walk in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And we too must continue to grow in the grace of God as we love Him and demonstrate that love to others. Jesus said in JOH 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This kind of love sacrifices for others as seen in Christ's sacrifice for our us. This kind of love is patient, and is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not

self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It
always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
(1CO 13:4-7)

This is the kind of love that our Lord expects us to put into practice
and the kind of love we can in fact have because His Spirit
indwells us and is perfecting His fruit in our lives as we submit to
Him, because we love Him who first loved us.

Not to love as Christ loved us is to show that our love is not being
demonstrated as a true agape love. John brings this out in 1JO
3:16-18 "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid
down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our
brothers. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his
brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be
in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but
with actions and in truth."

Often times in our world today it seems that Christians have lost
sight of what it is that distinguishes us from the world. Many have
lost sight of the love which we have in Christ that is to be seen and
tasted by the world as they see Christ in us.

Instead it seems that everything else has been substituted for this
agape love as the badge which Christians wear. It's as though you
must know them by their gifts, or you will know them by their
particular doctrines, or you will know them by their traditions, or
you will know them by their Christian rallies, or their bumper
stickers or T-shirts.

No, God tells us, you will know them by their fruit, with love
being the greatest outworking of the Spirit. Love sees a need and
meets it in the name of Christ. How is that done in a practical
way? Jesus spoke of that when He explained how we can serve
Him as we serve others.

MAT 25:34-40 "Then the King will say to those on his right,
'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance,
the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 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, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick
and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'
37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see
you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to

drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

Our love and gratitude for the Lord will prove itself as we love the brethren. And as we love each other we will be loving those who have the greatest need ever and that is those who don't know Christ. We will be seeking the lost and showing them their need for the Savior.

But in loving each other we will be able to work in a spiritual environment where we trust each other, where we are there for one another, where there will be the kind of unity of Spirit in which God's work goes forward in His power and according to His will.

David knew the importance of the brethren loving each other when he wrote in PSA 133:1-3 "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! 2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. 3 It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."

We as a body of believers here at Calvary Chapel Port Charlotte have the greatest privilege of being brought together by Jesus Christ Himself for the express purpose of loving Him above all and loving each other as we encourage each other to love and good works as our writer says in Heb.10:24.

He has placed us together to do His work and we each play a role in seeing that accomplished as we are there for one another, encouraging each other and building each other up in the Lord. That's why the fellowship of the saints is so important. To neglect that is to neglect the means of not only growing in Christ, but also being available for each other.

This is why our writer says in HEB 10:25 "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

I praise God for the love demonstrated here, but there's always room for growth and an increasing love as we love our Lord more and more.

Having said all of this I know that it can be hard to love for a variety of reasons. Our sin nature wants to only consider number #1. And those who we call brother and sister also have a sin nature which wants to look out for number #1. And sometimes it's difficult to love as Christ loved who died for us even when we were His enemy.

That's why we must rely on the grace of God as we consider one another and in some instances forbearing with one another. This is what Paul said in EPH 4:1-2 "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

If we're not willing to bear with one another we certainly won't be patient with one another.

Remember, one of the fruits of the Spirit is patience. And there may be times when we must be patient with one another as we bear with one another in love. But to bear with one another doesn't mean we overlook God's truth.

This is why the ecumenical movement is so misguided and dangerous. It's a movement made up of "evangelicals" and many other religious groups and cults which want to come together in unity, but at the expense of God's truth.

That's not what the word of God has in mind. In fact, what many tout as love for each other is a false love, because God's love is never separated from God's truth. Jesus tells us, "I am the Way, and *the Truth* and the Life, no man comes to the Father but by Me."

And yet in the ecumenical community all roads lead to God. It may be Buddha, or Mohammed, or New Age teachings, oh and maybe even Jesus Christ. Of course the Jesus they speak of is not usually the Jesus of the Bible.

Love must be found in the One who is love and there is no room for any false god or religion to try and take God's proper place. If people rely on a love found in falsehood, it will only produce more falsehood and a false hope.

Praise God for our Lord Jesus Christ who has given us all good things in Himself, through whom we have eternal life. Paul said it well in 2TH 3:5 "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."

Our writer then goes on to explain how this love may manifest itself in real life.

HEB 13:2 "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

It would seem that God will sometimes test our love for the brethren as well as for the world by placing us in circumstances where we must make a choice to either love or not. In our text we're told not to forget to entertain strangers.

The words "entertain strangers" could be better translated show hospitality. In the days of the apostles it was not uncommon for disciples to travel and share the gospel and teach the word of God. In many cases these Christians had very little in the way of material possessions.

And so it was not uncommon for churches to take these people in and show them hospitality and meet their needs as they would then continue on taking the gospel to another city.

It was also not uncommon for Christians being displaced from one region, and like refugees under persecution, being forced to flee their homes as they sought the hospitality of other Christians in different cities.

And so our writer is saying that your love should be willing to reach out to these people. But he adds a bit of an incentive when he says, "for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

Now there's a couple of things we can glean from this. First, it would seem angels have the ability to appear as human beings, so much so that you and I could not tell the difference between an angel, appearing as a human, and a real human being if they stood side by side.

But there's a second thing here. Angels are given a great deal of power by God and this is one area in which they are used by God to walk among men, in some cases, for not only helping but also testing our faith and love as they appear as human beings.

Now, one reference to which our writer may have in mind could be found in the book of Genesis.

GEN 18:2-5 "Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. 3 He said, "If I have

found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. 5 Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way - now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

Abraham noticed that these three men were strangers and yet they were men he bowed to as though he realized they were special in some way. And yet they behaved as men, at least in the way they had fellowship, not the least of which was their eating of food.

GEN 18:7-8 "Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 8 He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree."

So, here we have a case of angels taking on the appearance of men and actually eating food. As I mentioned in an earlier study in this book of Hebrews, regarding angels at the end of chapter 1, these created beings are servants of our Most High God who may be more physical in nature than we realize.

I'm not going to re-teach that section but you can reference it on the web site under the Heading Hebrews 1:14, "Angels Watching Over Me."

http://www.growupinchrist.com/images/docs/Hebrews/Hebrews_1_14_Angels_Watching_Over_Me.pdf

This is also similar to the case with Lot, Abraham's nephew, whom God was going to save from destruction as these same angels who appeared to Abraham went to Sodom to destroy that city because of its unrighteousness.

GEN 19:15-16 "With the coming of dawn, *the angels* urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." 16 When he hesitated, *the men* grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them."

These angels did not become human beings, they were still angelic beings, but their appearance was that of men. And in these two cases these angels were shown hospitality by both Abraham and Lot and in the process Abraham and Lot entertained angels.

God was the one who sent these angels, they didn't act on their own behalf. And when God sends angels they are sent for a purpose. And if God were to send us angels, who appear as men, they appear for a purpose.

By the way, it's interesting to note that in the Bible angels never appear as women, they always appear as men. Just a little side-note that you would see in the aforementioned study I did on angels.

But the point of our text is not to now start showing hospitality to everyone in the hopes of possibly entertaining angels. The point is to show hospitality in love because God was merciful to us and if God so chooses to use an angel to grace our presence that's entirely up to Him.

All of us here in Christ have been the recipients of angelic help. You may have had actual contact with an angel and didn't even know it. I can remember years ago when I was a new believer in Christ reading this passage and thinking how neat it would be to meet an angel.

I used to go to school in Gainesville, Fl. and I would have to hitchhike home to Ft. Lauderdale if someone from school wasn't going that way. I can remember on one occasion hitchhiking, where this guy picked me up and said he was going all the way to Lauderdale. I was sitting there thinking that God had sent an angel to take me all the way home.

And this guy was real pleasant and seemed to be a very moral type guy which I thought was par for the course if he were going to be an angel. Well, it wasn't too far down the road that we got to talking and the next thing I know, he's letting go with all sorts of four letter words. I thought, bummer, angels can't possibly use that kind of language, at least not the type of angels who are holy. And so I used the opportunity to share Christ with him.

And that's really the emphasis of this passage. If our motivation in reaching out to people is to meet angels then we're going to be sadly disappointed if they turn out to be just ordinary people, which in most cases they will be.

Our motivation should be to reach out to people, both Christians and non-Christians, because that's what our God wants us to do. This is one way we show our "gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe.."

Paul was a man who practiced hospitality and was also on the receiving end of hospitality all throughout his ministry.

ROM 12:12-13 "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

It's also one of the qualifications of leadership in the Church.

1TI 3:2 "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, *hospitable*, able to teach,..."

TIT 1:7-8 "Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless - not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8 Rather he must be *hospitable*, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined."

In fact, for a widow to be put on the widows list to receive aid, hospitality was something she must have been practicing in the past as well as the present.

1TI 5:9-10 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, *showing hospitality*, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds."

And of course hospitality as with any service for the Lord should not be done under compulsion but because of our gratitude for the salvation we freely received.

1PE 4:8-9 "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*"

Together with showing hospitality to those who may approach us, we are also called to show hospitality to those who cannot come to us.

HEB 13:3 "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

There probably isn't greater compassion for someone then when you've put yourself in their shoes and had true empathy for them. In the case of our text our writer refers to prisoners and those who

have been mistreated. There were many Christians in those days who suffered both because of their faith in Christ.

And what our writer says is to consider those people as though you were in the cell with them, as though you had been mistreated with them. This is not one of those shallow statements of "feeling their pain". This is genuine concern to the extent that you do something about it because of the love of Christ in you which desires to meet the need.

All of this has to do with understanding the love and grace we've each received from the hand of God and being grateful. We are called servants of Christ because we've been called to serve, not just to observe. But as we meditate on Christ's love for us and are willing to be used by Him our gratitude will grow as well.

COL 2:6-7 "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and *overflowing with thankfulness.*"

COL 3:15-17 "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. *And be thankful.*"
16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with *gratitude* in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, *giving thanks to God* the Father through him."