

Hebrews

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March 6, 2024

Hebrews 13:1-6



Vs. 1

- As he now turns to close his sermon, the preacher gives some very practical advice for a people about to be attacked, mainly, don't give the pagan authorities a legitimate reason to attack and to always remember that a three-strand cord is not easily broken, so lock arms in unity with one another and with God!
- First and foremost, let love for one another continue. That sounds easy and simple enough, but with those creatures called PEOPLE, nothing is ever easy or simple. First, we need to remember how racially and culturally and economically diverse the early church was. There were Jews and Gentiles. There were people from North Africa and from Southern Europe. There were slaves and the very wealthy. All of this made for tension. In Acts 6, when the church was still confined to Jerusalem, the Greek church members were unhappy that their widows were not receiving their fair share of the food, precipitating the need for deacons. In Acts 13, it seems that North Africans played a large part in founding the church in Antioch, which today is in Syria, near the border with Turkey. And in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is writing to address the many divisions in the church, not the least of which were the shameful ways the rich were abusing the poor. Another issue that Paul deal with in 1 Corinthians is the problem of theological conflicts and spiritual abuse. So in times of trouble, and at all times, LOVE ONE ANOTHER. Make Christ's love supreme over any and every conflict: race, money, theology, everything.

Vs. 2

- Hospitality was one the highest aspects of morality in the ancient world, thus the preacher and all Christian leaders exhorted the church to demonstrate hospitality that is above and beyond the norm. The Jews held that there were six essential qualities of the moral life and the first was hospitality. The Greeks added hospitality to the titles of Zeus, calling him the god of strangers.
- Inns were filthy and expensive most everywhere in the ancient world. They served as part hotel, part gambling club, and part brothel. In one Greek play Dionysus asks Heracles where to find the lodging that had the least fleas.
- So for traveling Christians, the only place indoors to stay was the home of another Christian. A Christian home should always have an open door to those in need.
- Finally here, the preacher reaches back to two passages in the Old Testament, where he reminds the congregation that as they practice hospitality, they never really know who they may be hosting, perhaps even angels, just as Abraham and Sarah did in Genesis 18 and the day when the angel came to Manoah to tell him that he would have a son in Judges 13.

Verse 3

- “Remember the prisoner and those who are ill-treated”. In Adolf Harnack's book, “Expansion of Christianity”, he tells of how Christians would find themselves imprisoned for their faith, or it might be for debt, for many Christians were poor, or it might be that they were captured by pirates or highwaymen. If they were kidnapped there would be a ransom to be paid and the church would often do whatever it could to raise the money. There is an account of the church in Carthage raising a huge amount to free several of their member who had been kidnapped. Other accounts tell of Christians even selling themselves as indentured slaves to raise money to pay the ransom of a Christian brother or sister.
- Some prisoners were not merely held in prisons but would literally be sent to the salt mines. There was an early book of church order known as “The Apostolic Constitutions” and it lay it down: "If any Christian is condemned for Christ's sake to the mines by the ungodly, do not overlook him but from the proceeds of your toil and sweat send him something to support himself and to reward the soldier of Christ." There was actually a little Christian Church in the mines at Phaeno, in modern day Jordan.
- We think that prison ministry started with Chuck Colson. No, the early church was so good at bribing their way in and caring for their own in prison that at the beginning of the fourth century the Emperor Licinius passed new legislation that "no one was to show kindness to sufferers in prison by supplying them with food and that no one was to show mercy to those starving in prison," and added that those who were discovered so doing would be compelled to suffer the same fate as those they tried to help.

Vs. 4

- Christian morality when it came to marriage was virtually unique in the ancient world. The church should always demonstrate a life that the world cannot know apart from Christ. Here, as the pagans looked at Christian marriage, they were amazed, finding a morality that their philosophers held as an ideal to work toward, but was unreachable. Yet the Christians did reach it. The emperor Trajan asked Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, to investigate the Christians in his province, looking for some charge to bring against them. In Pliny's report he had to admit the Christians were exceedingly moral in every way, especially in their marriages.

Vs. 5

- Be content. Says William Barclay, “The Christian must be free from the love of money. He must be content with what he has, and why should he not be for he possesses the continual presence of God? Hebrews quotes two great Old Testament passages-- Joshua 1:5 and Psalms 118:6 --to show that the man of God needs nothing more because he has with him always the presence and the help of God. Nothing that man can give him can improve on that.”