

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 31 July 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Faith Put to Action

Hebrews 13:1-4

We are now beginning our study of **Hebrews 13**—the final portion of Paul’s letter to the Hebrews. In order to keep things in context, I’ll quickly review what we’ve learned in the last 12 chapters.

First, throughout this letter, Paul has shown his readers that Jesus Christ is “better than” all the **prophets** of the Old Testament; that He is better than all the **angels**; that He is better than **Moses, Aaron**, and all the **high priests**; and that He is better than the **Temple**. He has shown that the **New Covenant** is superior to the Old Covenant, because it actually *takes away our sin* (whereas the Law can only *condemn* sinners). We’ve seen that Christ’s **sacrifice** on the cross was made *only once*: and that because of Jesus’ one-time sacrifice of Himself, He is able to save, and keep *eternally*, all who believe on Him. Several times, Paul has warned **unsaved professors** not to turn away from Christ, but to repent and *truly* believe on Christ, while they still had the chance. Paul has also urged the **true Christians** not to faint under the heavy hand of persecution, but to keep living by faith, and to keep their eyes on Jesus.

Now, as Paul is finishing this letter, he is about to give us some practical exhortations for Christian living. You might call it “faith put to action.” As James put it, “***Faith without works is dead.***” This does *not* mean that *salvation* is obtained through “faith *plus* works”! (Paul reminds us repeatedly that salvation is *not* by our works, but by faith alone.) Rather, it means that *true* faith in God will *produce* godly works in a Christian’s life. Let us now read our Scripture, and find out what godly works we are exhorted to do. The title of this message is ***Faith Put to Action.***

Read Hebrews 13:1-4.

From this Scripture, we see two ways in which a Christian’s faith should be put to action.

I. Christians should love their brethren (vv. 1-3).

In **Romans 8:3-4**, Paul says that Christ died for us in order that “***the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.***” In other words, Christ died not only so that He might forgive our sins and take us to Heaven, but also so that He might *break the power of sin* in our lives. Christ wants to produce *true* righteousness in our lives—the kind of righteousness that the Law requires. And what *does* the Law require? Paul answers that question in **Romans 13**.

Read Romans 13:8-10.

Love is what God’s Law requires of us. The Law requires that we love God, and that we love our fellow man. The Law is *all about* love! Of course, this isn’t how the world sees it. Most people think that God’s laws are cruel and unloving, because they restrain their “freedom.” Yet, just the opposite is true. The Law is God’s love manual! First, the Law instructs us to love God (by not taking His name in vain, by worshipping no other god, and so on).

Secondly, the Law instructs us to love our neighbour (by not stealing his possessions, by not committing adultery with his wife, by obeying and honouring our parents, and so on). Christ Himself summed up the Law in two simple statements: ***“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind”***; and, ***“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”*** That is exactly what Paul is telling us here in **Romans 13**. He is reminding us that *love is the fulfilling of the Law!*

Now, the next question is: *Whom* should we love? Well, Jesus said that we should love *everyone*, including even our *enemies*. However, in this particular passage, Paul focuses on our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. He says, ***“Let brotherly love continue.”***

Now, you’ll notice that Paul exhorted his readers to let brotherly love ***“continue.”*** This implies that there *was* already brotherly love among these Christians. Paul acknowledged their love, and commended them for it. However, there was danger afoot. There were circumstances in their lives that were soon going to put their love to a severe test. What circumstances were those? **Persecution!** As Paul has pointed out several times already, *persecution* for their faith had already begun in earnest, and was going to get much worse.

How can persecution affect our brotherly love? Quite easily! The ugly truth is that it’s easy enough to come to church in times of relative freedom and safety, and to show love to the brethren in a safe environment; but it is quite another situation when it is *dangerous* to associate with other believers, or to render help to brothers and sisters who are being persecuted. Persecution quickly weeds out fickle love. Persecution causes falsely professing believers to betray one another, and to hate one another. When the choice is “Betray your brother in Christ, and we won’t kill you,” false believers rise to the surface like dross, and show who they really are; and even true believers are sorely tested. (Even the Apostle Peter denied that he knew the Lord in a moment of fear!) Yet, true love—the kind that Christ sheds abroad in our hearts—empowers God’s people to face danger with courage.

Now, Paul mentions two areas in which we must exercise brotherly love. First, he says, ***“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers.”*** In other words, “Show hospitality! Have people over to your home!” Don’t just invite your friends whom you know well, and love; invite those whom you *don’t* know. Make your home a haven of love and friendship.

A Christian’s home should always be open to strangers who are in need. This has been a command for God’s people ever since the beginning. We *are* our “brother’s keeper.” This command *especially* applies to our relationship with fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord. Those who are of the household of faith should receive our special love. **Galatians 6:10** says, ***“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”***

This command is extremely important! Love for fellow brothers in Christ is so important, that it is one of the most powerful evidences that a person is saved. Now, please do not misunderstand: being hospitable to strangers does *not save* anyone. Being hospitable is not something that you must do to *earn* your salvation. The Bible says that it is ***“not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us”*** (Titus 3:5). However, hospitality to strangers (especially to brethren in Christ) is a *product* of true faith in Christ. Love for other Christians *will* be present in the life of someone who is truly saved.

Read Matthew 25:31-46.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to live in the time of Christ, and to have Christ in your own home as a guest? How would you have treated Him? You'd have given Him your very best! Like Martha, you'd have made your very best meal; and like Mary, you'd have sat at Jesus' feet, and have drunk in every word that He said. You'd have paid Him your utmost attention and devotion. Well, guess what? According to **Matthew 25**, true Christians will treat their brethren—even brethren whom they've never met before—just as they would treat Christ Himself, if He were here in the flesh! Showing kindness to a brother or sister in Christ is like doing that kindness for Christ Himself.

Now, this passage does *not* teach that salvation is by doing good works. Jesus is simply saying that His true followers *will* be known by their love one for another. Loving other Christians isn't a "good work" that earns you salvation; rather, it is simply an outward evidence that you've truly been born again, and that Christ is in your life. By the way, what Jesus is saying here is not some kind of parable. Jesus is describing a *real* future event. This passage is a prophecy of the Judgment of the Nations, which will take place just after Jesus returns to earth to set up His kingdom. As Christ is descending to earth with all the armies of Heaven, God's angels will go out into all the world, and will gather all those who survived through the terrible Tribulation period, and will bring them to a valley just outside the land of Israel. In that valley, Christ will judge the nations, and will separate *His* followers from those who followed the Antichrist during the Tribulation. Interestingly enough, the "litmus test" of who was Christ's follower, and who was Antichrist's follower, will *not* be whether or not that person had the Antichrist's mark of 666 in his right hand or forehead. *That* litmus test would be simple enough; yet, that is not how Christ will choose to determine who were His followers. Christ's test will be, "Did you give aid and quarter to my brethren (Christians)?" Not a *single one* of Antichrist's followers will be able to pass that test! Not a single follower of Antichrist will have been found secretly giving aid or quarter to a believer in Jesus! Only *believers* will be found to have helped other believers.

Now, let's get back to our Scripture, and read it again. (**Read Hebrews 13:2.**) In the last half of this verse, Paul reminds us that there have been some people who "*have entertained angels unawares*" (v. 2). We know of at least a few people in Scripture who entertained angels without knowing it at first. **Abraham and Sarah, Lot, Gideon**, and many other believers in Bible times showed hospitality to angels that appeared to them in the form of men. By the way, **Lot**, as you may recall, was a very carnal, backslidden believer—but saved, nonetheless. His walk with God was not nearly as strong as his Uncle Abraham's walk was. Yet, Abraham and Lot had one strong spiritual virtue in common: **hospitality to strangers**. In **Genesis 18** and **19**, we read about how Abraham and Lot both entertained angelic guests, and did everything in their power to protect them, and to make them comfortable.

Do angels visit believers today? They certainly do! I have personally heard the testimonies of Christians who, at some point in their lives, had a brief encounter with a stranger who rendered them help at a critical moment; yet, later on, they found out that that mysterious "stranger" was not seen by anyone else! The only conclusion that they could come to was that they had been visited by an angel! God's angels are constantly protecting God's people. The Bible calls them "*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.*" Keep that in mind the next time it is in your power to help a stranger!

Now, the subject of “danger” brings us to the second way in which Christians should show “brotherly love.” Paul urges us to **“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.”** This is where “brotherly love” is really put to the test. Brethren, if we won’t go out of our way to show love and concern for our brothers in Christ *now*, in relatively good times, is it likely that we will show brotherly love when persecution comes, and when association with other Christians is *dangerous*? If you won’t take time *now* to fellowship with your brother, and to find out his needs, and to pray with him when he’s hurting, and to render help to him, will you suddenly be filled with concern for his welfare when dire times arise, and when everyone else around you is following the “law of the jungle,” and throwing each other “under the bus”?

Sad to say, the Apostle Paul often experienced abandonment from brethren who, out of fear for their own safety, were not willing to help him when he was in prison.

Read 2 Timothy 4:16-17.

Does Paul’s situation apply to us today? Yes, it does. As I’ve said many times before, I believe persecution *is* coming to Christians in the West in the not-distant future, unless the Rapture takes place very soon! If and when that time comes, just remember what Paul said in **Hebrews 13:3**. Paul urges us to remember those who are in bonds for Christ’s sake, since we ourselves are **“also in the body.”** In other words, “You have a body like everyone else; and that body has physical needs. *You* know what it’s like to be in need; therefore, help *your imprisoned brethren*, as much as you have the power to do so!”

Brethren, there may be a time when you will be called upon to render help and comfort to a believer who is in prison, in whatever way you can. When that time comes, don’t be ashamed of your brother’s bonds! Be like the Christians in the Baptist church of Culpeper County of Virginia. “Who were they?” you say? They were the converts of a pastor named James Ireland. James Ireland was one of 45 Baptist pastors who were arrested and imprisoned in the Commonwealth of Virginia between the years 1768 and 1770, for the “crime” of preaching the Gospel without a license from the “state church” of Virginia. One day, while Ireland was praying at the end of an outdoor preaching service, two officers seized him by the collar, and gave him the order not to preach anymore, or else be thrown in jail. He chose to suffer arrest rather than disobey the Lord; and a few days later, he was imprisoned. Yet, he continued to preach to his congregation (and to anyone else who would listen) *through the jail bars!* The authorities would send horsemen to gallop through the crowd, and break it up; yet, the people kept assembling, anyway. (When those Christians said, “Wild horses won’t keep me from going to church,” they meant it literally!) Ireland’s church members couldn’t do much for their pastor, except come to hear him preach through the jail bars; but that’s exactly what they did!

Christian, would *you* go to church in the open air, and listen to your pastor, or to another Christian, preaching through the jail bars? Those Christians in Culpeper County did! They could have simply met in secret, away from danger; but they chose to identify with one of their own, who was in bonds. The authorities, and other people in the community, did everything from urinating in Ireland’s face, to burning brimstone and Indian pepper under the floor of his cell, to poisoning him and his family, to dunking him under the water until he was nearly drowned, to whipping him publicly, to encouraging the drunks in his cell to beat him

up, in order to get him to shut up; but he wouldn't shut up. In fact, he led many of his cellmates to Christ! He continued to write letters of encouragement to many churches; and he called his jail cell "My palace in Culpeper"! Would *you* be willing to be identified with such a man? Would you show your love and support to him, no matter what the cost?

Paul said, "***Let brotherly love continue.***" Fall in love with the Lord, Christian, and your love for the brethren will be in the right place. Christ will fill your heart with His love! **Romans 5:5** says, "***And hope maketh not ashamed; for the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.***"

Now, the next way in which our faith should be put to practice is that...

II. Christians should love their spouses (v. 4).

(**Read verse 4 again.**) Regardless of how filthy and impure our culture may be—no matter how casually they may view immorality—God still hates sexual sin! There is no getting around it. Notice that Paul puts "whoremongers" in the same boat as "adulterers." The Greek word for "whoremonger" is *pornous*, from which we get our word "pornography." This word refers to *fornicators* (unmarried people who engage in sex with other unmarried people).

Tragically, we are getting to a point in our culture at which *adultery* is not even regarded by most people as being all that terrible. "That's just life. It happens! It's as natural as can be," is the nonchalant attitude of most. As for fornication, most people do not consider it to be an issue at all. Those who dare to call living together in physical union outside of marriage a "sin" are shouted down, and regarded as mean, evil people. However, God has not changed His mind. Judgment day is coming; and the judgment upon fornicators and adulterers will be severe! Genuine Christians who fall into these sins cannot lose their salvation; but they *will* suffer severe chastisement in this life, and great shame and loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God will not be mocked, even by His own children. "***Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.***"

In spite of the acceptance of immorality in our world today, there is still, deep inside every person, a voice that whispers that sexual sins are worthy of judgment. That "voice" is our conscience, which is given to us by God. **God has written His laws in the hearts of every man.** Even those in pagan lands who have never been exposed to the Scripture know the universal laws of God. They just know. That is why man is without excuse! No fornicator or adulterer will be able to stand before God some day and say, "I didn't know!"

Read Romans 2:12-16.

Paul says that "***marriage is honourable in all.***" In fact, he says that the bed is "***undefiled.***" We have often heard it said that "You should stay pure *until* you're married"; but this statement almost implies that purity stops *after* one has engaged in the act marriage. Folks, the "act of marriage" is no less pure than abstinence *before* marriage is! God created it, and meant it to be a *holy* thing—within the bounds of marriage. (In fact, God wrote an entire book, *The Song of Solomon*, to let us know that there is nothing shameful about it.) The notion that it is to be done only for the purpose of having children is a false, pagan, gnostic

doctrine that was introduced to the Catholic world by “Saint” Augustine in the 400’s. It is *not* a Bible doctrine. Physical intimacy is holy and blessed of God, when done within marriage.

If you are married, you are bound to your partner for life. You are to love and cherish your spouse for as long as you live. Nothing that man says can put you asunder. You are *one flesh*.

Read Ephesians 5:24-33.

This comparison between human marriage, and God’s relationship with His people, is powerful! It reveals at least a couple powerful truths about how God views marriage.

First, this Scripture shows that **God ordained the family to be the basic unit of society**. God ordained the family to be the place where children are taught about their Creator, and where they are brought up to love, serve, and fear Him. Fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and other sexual sins, destroy that sacred environment, and cause the children of these broken relationships to harden their hearts against God. On the other hand, Christian parents who *obey* God’s law, and who keep their love only for their spouse, are able to instruct their children in God’s ways; and their faithfulness to each other serves as a living illustration of God’s faithfulness to *us*!

Read Genesis 18:17-19.

Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

The second truth that **Ephesians 5** teaches us about marriage is that **God has ordained marriage to be a picture of God’s union with His people!** In the Old Testament, Israel was called the “wife” of Jehovah. In the New Testament, the church is called the “bride” of Christ. In light of this truth, what happens when the vows of marriage are broken (either by adultery, or by an uncommitted sexual relationship before marriage)? **The precious picture of God’s committed union with His people is smashed!** This is why adultery is a picture of *spiritual apostasy*—turning away from God! Apostasy and adultery have much similarity. Just as an apostate hardens his heart against God, and serves false gods, so adulterers harden their hearts against their spouses, and love others. It never ceases to amaze me how hard and cold people become not only toward their own family, but toward God, when they enter into an adulterous relationship. It’s as though satanic scales come down over their eyes! For unsaved people, sexual sin can even quickly open the door to demonic oppression, or possession! (Anyone who was saved out of the occult world knows this to be true!)

Even true Christians who are living in unconfessed sin, and who are “chumming around” with the world, are likened to a spouse who has broken his (or her) vows. In **James 4:4**, James writes to Christians, **“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God?”** This demonstrates how seriously God takes the *spiritual* picture that is behind the union of marriage. To break one’s vows of marriage is to break that picture of God’s union with His people: and God is *not* happy about that!

Perhaps this is scaring some of you. Maybe you have been involved in immorality in the past—either physically, or mentally. (By the way, Jesus said in **Matthew 5:28** that to look at a woman in lust is to commit adultery in one’s heart.) If immoral living, or an immoral

thought life, has gotten control of you, or has controlled you in the past, what can be done? Well, here is what Paul had to say to the Christians in the church of Corinth.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-12.

The Corinthian Christians had committed the worst kinds of immorality before they were saved; yet, God no longer viewed them as guilty of these sins. Though they were undeserving sinners, their position before God was that they were **“washed,” “sanctified”** (set apart unto God), and **“justified.”** The Greek verb tense for these words is *aorist*, which indicates a one-time, point-in-time action in the past. In other words, the “washing,” “sanctification,” and “justification” were *done*. This was their settled *position* in Christ. They had been washed, sanctified, and justified before God forever; and *judicially*, God saw their sin no more.

What, then, can be done if these kinds of sins are in your past? Well, if you have truly repented of your sin and placed your faith in Christ alone for salvation, please realise that you have this same immovable position in Christ Jesus that the Corinthian believers had. Satan will throw your sin back in your face, and try to get you to doubt that you could be saved, on account of what you’ve done; but you can claim God’s promises in His Word. However, you may also be sure that God will deal with you as with a son. When you are living in wickedness, He will chastise you, until you get right with Him. If you have not yet confessed and forsaken a sexual sin, the Lord will chastise you until you repent with your whole heart, and come back into right fellowship with Him. The scars will still be there, and the earthly consequences of your sin will not just “go away”; but a true child of God may be sure of God’s forgiveness when he confesses his sin. God dealt with King David as with a son. He was severely chastised; but his soul was still saved, because he had placed his faith in God.

Read Psalm 51:1-10.

Christian, are you putting your faith to action in regard to marriage? Faith really *is* the bottom line. If you are trusting God in your daily life, then He will give you the kind of unselfish love that you should have toward your spouse. He will help you to **“cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 9:5).** He will help you to throw down those intruding, lustful thoughts; to turn away your eyes from beholding evil; to avoid the path of those who would tempt you to do evil; and to avoid anything else that could destroy your marriage.

If you are unmarried, then faith in God is what you need in order to keep your heart and your thoughts pure, and to save yourself for the person that God has for you until your marriage day! Marriage *is* honourable in all. Put your faith into action!

Conclusion: There is not a soul in this room who doesn’t need these exhortations from God’s Word. If you know Christ as your Saviour, you need to allow Christ to give you the kind of pure love for the brethren that you should have. Jesus said, **“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”** Perhaps your love for the brethren isn’t where it should be. Or, perhaps, you are allowing Satan to establish some dangerous beachheads in your heart or mind, which could threaten your purity. Don’t let Satan get the victory! Love your spouse, just as Christ loved the church! Keep the marriage bed sacred. Make a covenant with your eyes, as Job did, so that you will not look in lust upon

someone who is not your spouse! If you have sinned in this regard in the past, confess and forsake it with all your heart, and trust God to give you victory.

Perhaps you aren't sure that you are really saved. If so, please realise that trying to love others, or trying to be morally pure, is not good enough to get you into Heaven. You need Christ alone to save you. He has already paid for your sins in full! Repent of your sin, and trust in Christ to wash your sins away!