

A Life Anchored in Christ

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Imagine a weary band of travelers, their sandals worn thin, trudging through a world of crumbling empires and fleeting promises. These Hebrew Christians, recipients of this ancient letter, stood at a crossroads. Behind them lay the familiar rituals of the old covenant—sacrifices, altars, a city they could touch. Ahead stretched the uncharted path of faith in Christ, a road marked by rejection and hope. The author of Hebrews, in this final chapter, pens not a dry list of rules but a vibrant tapestry of exhortations, woven with the scarlet thread of the gospel. Hebrews 13:1-17 calls us to live as exiles in a fading world, our hearts fixed on the city to come, transformed by the unchanging Christ who died and rose for us.

The sermon begins with a heartbeat: *“Let brotherly love continue”* (Heb. 13:1). The Greek word *philadelphia* pulses here, not a fleeting sentiment but a familial bond, forging strangers into siblings under God’s fatherhood. This love spills into action: *“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares”* (v. 2). Picture Abraham under the oaks of Mamre in Genesis 18. Three travelers approached his tent in the desert heat. With no thought of reward, he ran to meet them, offering water, rest, and a feast of freshly baked bread and a tender calf. Little did he know, these were divine messengers bearing God’s promise of a son. In AD 252, during the plague that ravaged Carthage, Bishop Cyprian urged his flock to stay amid the chaos. While others fled, Christians fed and nursed their pagan neighbors, risking death to embody *philadelphia*. Their love, shown in bread and bandages, drew countless souls to Christ, proving hospitality’s power to reflect God’s heart in a broken world.

This love reaches deeper: *“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the*

body” (v. 3). Empathy here is raw, a shared ache. In the early fourth century, Pachomius, an Egyptian soldier, found himself chained during Constantine’s campaigns. Christians slipped through the bars, bringing food, water, and words of hope. Their care pierced his heart; upon release, Pachomius embraced Christ and later founded monastic communities that echoed this prisoner-remembrance for centuries. Their actions remind us that *philadelphia* binds us to the suffering, urging us to act as if their chains were ours.

The exhortations turn intimate: *“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous”* (v. 4). Marriage mirrors God’s covenant love, a sacred trust. In 1525, amidst the Reformation’s upheaval, Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora embodied this truth. Katharina, a former nun, married Luther, a former monk, defying clerical celibacy laws. Their Wittenberg home became a beacon of hospitality, hosting students, refugees, and theological debates. Their marriage, marked by mutual respect and shared ministry, stood as a living sermon, honoring God’s design in a world of shifting values.

Contentment follows, a shield against greed: *“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’”* (vv. 5-6). Quoting Deuteronomy 31:6 and Psalm 118:6, the author roots us in God’s unshakable promise. George Mueller, a 19th-century pastor in Bristol, England, lived this vividly. Caring for thousands of orphans, he never solicited funds, trusting God alone. One morning, with 300 children hungry and no food in the pantry, a baker arrived with fresh bread, followed by a milkman whose cart broke down outside, donating his load. Mueller’s unwavering trust—over 50,000 answered prayers—shows contentment’s power, proving the Lord’s provision outshines worldly wealth.

Next, we’re called to honor our guides: *“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith”* (v. 7). Athanasius of Alexandria, in the fourth century,

stands as a towering example. Exiled five times for defending Christ's divinity against Arian heresy, he stood *contra mundum*—"against the world"—when emperors and bishops wavered. His steadfastness shaped the Nicene Creed, a bulwark of truth still confessed today. His life invites us to imitate leaders whose faith endures, anchoring us in the gospel's unchanging foundation.

At the core of this passage shines a truth like a fixed star: *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"* (v. 8). In a world of shifting doctrines, this anchors us. The author warns, *"Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace [charis], not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them"* (v. 9). Charis, God's unmerited favor, fortifies us where rituals fail. The old covenant's dietary laws and sacrifices were shadows; Christ is the substance. *"We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat"* (v. 10). Jesus, our true altar, *"suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood"* (v. 12). Like the scapegoat in Leviticus 16, driven beyond the camp to bear Israel's sins, Jesus bore our curse outside the city. *"Let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come"* (vv. 13-14). This is no call to comfort but to courage, to embrace the cross's shame for the sake of the eternal city.

Worship flows from this: *"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God"* (vv. 15-16). Our lives become living sacrifices—praise, generosity, service. In the 16th century, Queen Elizabeth I's advisor William Cecil supported persecuted Protestants, funding schools and churches from his own wealth. His quiet sacrifices, rooted in faith, strengthened a fledgling Reformation, showing how good deeds glorify God.

Finally, obedience seals the call: *"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you"* (v. 17). The Battle of Agincourt in 1415 illustrates this.

King Henry V's outnumbered English army faced a French force five times their size. Yet, their disciplined obedience to Henry's strategy—archers holding formation, men-at-arms standing firm—turned chaos into victory. Obedience to godly leaders, like soldiers to a trusted commander, fosters joy and strength in the church's mission.

These exhortations—brotherly love, hospitality, empathy, honoring marriage, contentment, imitating faithful leaders, clinging to grace, bearing reproach, offering praise, doing good, and obeying leaders—are not a checklist for salvation. On our own, we stand condemned, our merits like ashes before a holy God. But Jesus, the unchanging one, was crucified outside the gate, paying for our sins with his blood. He rose, conquering death, to grant us eternal life in his name. Through *philadelphia*, he binds us as family; through *charis*, he strengthens us with grace. Jesus works in us, transforming exiles into citizens of the eternal city, where he reigns forever. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

Pastor Ron Breight

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