Christian Love

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[0:00] We're going to return this evening to the Hebrew church, having made it to the final chapter of the book.

! If you can believe that. But as we studied the first 11 chapters, there were very specific commands given to the believers.
There were only a few of those commands because the focus was really on the uncommitted in that church. The author spent a lot of time speaking to the uncommitted.
He knew there were some genuine believers there. He was exhorting the unsaved in this church to come to full redemption, without which, of course, no one can ever see God.
These chapters were directed at Jews who were being counseled to make a break with the Old Covenant and embrace the New Covenant. In chapter 12, which we finished up last time, we saw an exhortation for Christians to run the race of faith well and to completion.
[1:32] We're to run patiently and to pursue holiness and peace. And now we come to chapter 13. Here the writer will give exhortation as to how we can live in light of the revelation in the first 12 chapters of this book.

So we actually come tonight, beginning with the great summation of the book. And we can paraphrase it this way.
True faith demands true living. And that's going to be kind of the theme until we get to the end of the book. Pliny the Younger, not a name we're very familiar with, lived under the rule of the Roman Empire, the Roman Emperor Trajan, in the first century.
He received a commission by the emperor to study these strange people known as Christians. And Rome was actually looking for a way to condemn them and eradicate them from their society.
This is what Pliny the Younger wrote. And bear in mind, he's writing this to the Roman Caesar.
Speaking of believers, They bind themselves by an oath not to commit any criminal act, to avoid theft, to avoid robbery, to avoid adultery, and to never break their word or repudiate a deposit when called upon to refund it.
[3:22] Rather than charge Christians with crimes against Rome, Pliny was forced to tell the leadership that these were people who paid their debts and they didn't commit crimes.

And that's how it should be. If our lives are examined under the microscope, will it be obvious that we live up to a high moral standard?
Well, if we examine Wes or Mike, yeah, but if you're going to be looking at me, probably not. I remember Dr. McBride being asked one time, when we get to heaven, will all of us see our life played out on a videotape?
And he said, it wouldn't be heaven if we did. The Apostle Peter made this statement. Concerning believers in every age.
1 Peter 2, verse 15, For such is the will of God, that by doing right, you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.
[4:40] And that fits in perfectly with some words from Paul that he wrote to Titus. In all things, show yourself to be an example of good deeds with purity and doctrine, dignified, sound in speech, which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.

The atheist philosopher Bertram Russell rejected Christianity, but not because of the teachings of Christ.
In fact, Russell was drawn to those teachings, but he based his rejection of Christianity upon what he saw in the lives of people who claimed a relationship with Christ.

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And that brings to bear the fact that we are to live in such a way that our lives bring glory to God and we live it in such a manner that it draws men and women to the cross.
Most people base their assumptions on Christianity not from reading the Bible, but from reading us. And that is why, as we read in Matthew 5.16, let our light shine before men in such a way that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.
[6:33] We've heard over the years this topic of situational ethics. I actually had to study that in college.

That's a house of cards. When ethics are based upon the situation, they're not ethics at all. Instead, they're merely a pattern of behavior that fits that moment.
And when the moment changes, the behavior changes. Many churches claim that doctrine is useless and divisive.
They say the best way to live is just to love each other. Just to love one another. That sounds good, but on what basis do they love? Without the compass and foundation of Christ, love becomes whatever someone says it is.
I mean, and let's face it, we have all kinds of definitions. We have Jimmy Swaggart's definition. Need I go on? There's others. True ethics, our standard for living, demands right doctrine coupled with a biblical relationship with Christ.
[7:54] Without God's Word as our foundation, it would be like building a house without a foundation. People, apart from Christ, possess neither the sustained desire nor the ability to live up to New Testament morality.

Please mark this next thought down in your head. Every moral command in the New Testament presupposes faith in Christ.
No one can live up to God's standard without God's life in their life. And He's only in the lives of those that have Jesus inside them.
So today we come to Hebrews 13 and are immediately faced with two realities. First, Christian doctrines were taught in chapters 1 through 12 in Hebrews, and second, those apply to genuine believers.
verse. The second point will be taught in this final chapter. And the first thing I want to mention here is sustaining love.
[9:19] Hebrews 13.1 Let love of the brethren continue and continue and continue and continue. That's sustaining love.

Here we see the primary moral standard of Christianity. Christianity. We are to have a love for one another. Love the brethren is one word in the Greek language.
That word is Philadelphia. We talk about the church at Philadelphia. We're told we should be like the church at Philadelphia and we should. We have a city, several, but a big one in Pennsylvania called Philadelphia the City of Brotherly Love.
Now I've been there. It's not. But still, I've been there. This is often translated brotherly love.
The two root words of phileo meaning tender affection and delphos meaning brother or kinsman. A literal translation of that latter word is from the same womb.
[10:31] But in addition to have a sustaining love, we're to have a love, a special love for the brothers, for the brethren. We're to love the brethren.

We're to love fellow Christians. In the context of Hebrews, we know that we're dealing with a Jewish church, Jews from the same womb, meaning that they descended from Abraham.
And on the one hand, Jews converting to Christianity were to reject the old covenant and embrace the new covenant, but they were to maintain a deep love even for unbelieving Jews.
They were still of that same womb. Paul referred to them as his kinsmen. And the great call for these new Jewish converts were to continue to love their Christian brothers.
Love already existed, but now it was to be extended even to Gentile believers. And you can imagine some of those guys sitting and saying, Gentiles?
[11:43] Yeah. Even Gentiles. Love for each other is essential to spiritual life. 1 Peter 1 verses 22 and 23.

Since you have in obedience to the truth, purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.
For you have been born again, not of seed, which is perishable, but imperishable. That is, through the living and enduring word of God.

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love increases when we are living lives in obedience to the revealed truth of God. What the Lord is commanding here for all genuine believers of every age is to exercise their God-given love for one another.
forever. We were given brotherly love at conversion. Now we are commanded to exercise that which we've already been given.
[13:04] It's already in us. But we're called upon to exercise it. So just what is brotherly love? It's real easy.

It's caring more for others than we actually care for ourselves. That was Paul's meaning when he said this. Romans 12, 10.
Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Give preference to one another in honor.
So why is brotherly love important? Let's consider these three reasons. First of all, brotherly love, the love that we have among Christian brothers, reveals to the world that we belong to Christ.
The world can look at that and they can make a judgment say, these guys say they're Christians. I think they are. It reveals to us who we really are.
[14:21] And it delights God. By the love we demonstrate to the world, the world knows that we belong to Christ.

Now let's be honest. What does the world usually hear about the church? Well, that's those people down there that fight. Their members fight each other.
They're always arguing with each other. They fight over the color of carpet. Sometimes we fight over foundational doctrine.
The trouble is, all too often it's over color of carpet. often it's over things like, what kind of pews and chairs are we going to buy for the sanctuary?
Well, I'm not going to put my money into that. Trivial matters have split the church. I've told you about the church in southern Oklahoma that split over the size of a piece of ham.
[15:29] because the chairman of the board got a smaller piece of ham than the pastor's son. And the pastor confronted him for yelling at his son and they got in a fist fight.

And they split. I wonder if any other church has split over the size of a piece of ham. Now, the world for its part loves to see the church not expressing love for each other.
They just love it. Then the world indicts the church arguing that they don't really belong to Jesus. After all, if they belong to Jesus, they'd love the people that belong to Jesus.
But it's not a loving church. But there's even a more devastating argument. And Jesus told us this. He said, if they see you not loving one another, they can say, not only we don't believe those people are Christians, we don't believe Jesus was legitimate.
Because he said, my people have love one for another. God the world would argue Jesus is a fraud, can't possibly be who he claimed to be, because he said, my children will have love one for another.
[17:00] And we don't see them doing that. Instead, we see them fighting and fussing and arguing. Probably if we track the history of denominations, that's how most of them were born.

They came out of an adverse situation. brotherly love is vitally important. But let me say there's something else that's vitally important.
Love for strangers. Love for strangers. We're to have a love for strangers. Hebrews 13, 2.
Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Now, that word stranger there is interesting.
It can refer both to believers and unbelievers. Our first responsibility is to our brothers in Christ, but our responsibilities do not end there.
[18:05] We are also to love unbelievers so they will see the love of Christ and be drawn to the cross of salvation. How else would they be drawn?

But how do we define this word stranger? It is simply someone we do not know personally. If someone comes to us with a need that we can fulfill, we should do it.
But suppose we get taken in. what if we get taken to the cleaners by somebody? Suppose we give someone claiming to be hungry ten dollars and they use it for alcohol.
That is their shame, but in no way lessens God's honoring of our faith to help. Now, my wife and I have a great example of this.
when our youngest son Rob, who is now 45, when he was little, he was going to Wesleyan Christian School, came home with a whole bunch of boxes of candy and whatever and they were

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going to sell those to raise money for the school.
[19:28] Well, I hated that idea. I said, let me just buy them all and we'll give the people in our church. No, I can do this. I want to do this. So there he went in our neighborhood and he knocked on one door and this man came to the door and Rob explained what he was doing.

The man said, son, I'd sure like to help, but I don't have any money. I don't have pennies. So Rob thanked him and the guy closed the door and Rob came running home.
Diane heard him come in. She thought he was home a little early and she heard the door to his room close and so she crept upstairs. She's good at that. Wanted to check on him.
He had a little piggy bank up there and it had ten dollars in it and he had taken that ten dollars out and put it in a giving envelope from church that I probably stole.
Sorry. And he wrote on it, Jesus loves you. And he had some tape that he was going to use to stick the envelope to the man's door.
[20:55] So after explaining all this to mom, she let him go. And when I got home, Rob was in his room and Diane was worried sick.

She was pacing the floors. What if this guy took advantage of him? I told her, that's not Rob's problem. That will be his problem.
I said, Rob had done what he sensed the Lord wanted him to do. And in the process brought the name of Jesus to that man's home.
So that was between that man and the Lord. And I'm confident he wasn't lying. I don't think he was lying. And that concept of hospitality is interesting in the ancient world and even in the Middle East. And may I say, in the Middle East today in many places. Since there were few ends for people to stay in, they often had to ask complete strangers if they would put them up for the night.
[22:02] As Christians, we're to have open homes for others. I know in my travels in the Middle East, they are very hospitable.

And actually, even under the Koran of Islam, if you're under their roof, they're to protect you with their life. Now, whether they would or not, I don't know. But it was funny.
I was with this woman lawyer. I was with Phillips, and we were in the Middle East, several of us. I knew enough of the culture because my dad pioneered the Middle East for Phillips and spoke Arabic, and I knew some of that.
So I complimented her on this beautiful carpet she had, and she said, you know, I'm supposed to give you that carpet under the Koran. I said, well, I couldn't get it on the airplane, don't worry about it.
So the next day we went to see her and said, that sure is a pretty little lamp you've got over there. She said, I'm on to you now. She was wise to me by then. But they really are hospitable, very much so.
[23:09] I'm getting off track, I shouldn't do this, but I remember that in Yemen, and I've been there, they're huge on kidnapping people and holding them for ransom, the tribes.

And they kidnapped this German guy and the Yemeni authorities were looking for him and the German embassy and he was a businessman and finally he comes walking into town one day. They saw him on the road and they picked him up and they said, are you okay? He said, I thought I was going to die. He said, did they threaten you? No. He said, they give me three meals a day, like eight courses.
He said, I gained 40 pounds. He said, my gosh, they just lavished hospitality on me. But then they found this Frenchman and he'd been kidnapped and they let him go and then he walked away and he got kidnapped again and they let him go.
He said, that's because no one likes the French. You know, and finally he walked into town. It is interesting that the Holy Spirit speaks here of entertaining angels unawares.
[24:27] Or as one little boy was quoted in Sunday school, angels in their underwear. But the basis for our hospitality is not that the stranger might be an angel.

people. We're to be hospitable purely out of Christian love. We're to minister based upon need. Remember that Abraham went out of his way to help three men that were passing by his tent.
He didn't wait for them to ask for help. He jumped right in. He saw them coming. He jumped up. He offered them a cool place to rest. And trust me, you need a cool place in that part of the country. I've been there. He offered them a fine meal. In one sense it was duty, but more than that he had an opportunity to show hospitality.

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And without Abraham even knowing it until later, two of those strangers were angels and the third one was the Lord Jesus Christ in a theophany or a Christophany, what we call a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.
[25:40] But if it had been mere human travelers, it still would have been proper for Abraham to react the way he did.

It would have been proper. To turn our backs on those in need is to turn our backs on Jesus. us. That is why we're commanded to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, and to visit prisoners. Which brings us to Hebrews 13 3.
A very important verse of scripture for me personally. And we're going to deal with the topic of sympathy. verse 3.
Remember the prisoners as though in prison with them. Those who are ill treated, since you yourselves are also in the body.
[26:45] That is a guiding verse for Voice of the Martyrs, where I serve on their board. one translation actually says, remember those in chains just as if you are chained with them or chained to them.

If you've ever really truly been hungry, and I'm not talking about missing a meal. I missed one of those one time. But if you've ever been hungry, it's a lot easier to feed the hungry.
If you've ever been naked, it's easy to clothe someone. And if you've ever been in prison for our faith, it's a lot easier to help those that are in chains.
Richard Wormbrown, the founder of VOM, did it all the time. He did it all the time. I'm sure I told you the story, but they were in Norway one time. I think it was Norway.
And there were several VOM workers with Richard. And he spotted a guy across this asphalt plaza, and he said, you all stay here.
[27:54] And he went over there. And they spoke, they shook hands, and they embraced. They spoke some more, and then they embraced, and then they parted. When Richard got back, they said, Richard, was that someone you served in prison with?

He said, no, no. He said, when I was in prison for 14 years in Romania, that was the guard that beat me every day. And he said, I finally was able to lead him to the Lord.
And I haven't seen him since I was out of prison. And he's still a believer. He's still firm in his faith. He too served a prison sentence for converting to Christ. It was a moment to remember.
It was a moment to remember. No, he wasn't a fellow prisoner. He was my beater. Richard never could wear shoes because they used to beat him in the soles of his feet. He wore socks or house shoes.
Now, our church spends a lot of time in prison ministry dealing with convicted felons. And when I was in Lawnfort, we worked together. I sent them there and these guys witnessed to them.
[29:05] It was a nice deal. That's appropriate. I think what you're doing, guys, is very biblical, very scriptural. But I do also believe the thrust of this verse deals also with persecuted followers of Christ.

They're imprisoned. And let's face it, in the Roman Empire there were a lot of those. There were a lot of those. Here's some great statements relative to the persecuted.
Tertullian was an early church father. If there happened to be any in the mines, house or banished to the islands or shut up in prisons, the Christians become carriers of their confession.
They can't get their confession out so believers that might visit them or bring them some food, they carry on what's going on with them.
Diane's great, great, great grandfather was imprisoned in Scotland, an open air prison where it snows and cold. And we've been there. It's part of the Greyfriars Kirk, which is a huge church and they've got like 40,000 gravestones.
[30:28] And then they had these cells outside, no roof. And her great, great, great, great grandfather, father. He only survived because they had family members would come and bring him food.

If you didn't have a family member willing to feed you, you died. We've been there several times. Aristides, he was a pagan orator.
He said this, talking about Christians, if they hear that any one of their number is in prison or in distress for the sake of their Christ's name, they all render aid in his necessity.

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And if they can, they redeem him to set him free. If any Christian is condemned for Christ's sake to the minds 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 this soldier of Christ?
All money accruing from honest labor, do you appoint and apportion to the redeeming of the saints, ransoming thereby slaves and captives and prisoners, people who are sore abused and condemned by tyrants?
[32:00] That's in the apostolic confession of faith. And let me say this without emotion. Mike taught me that.

There are cases on record where early Christians sold themselves into slavery to get enough money to free a fellow believer out of slavery.
Can you imagine? Can you imagine that there was a Vietnamese boy, I say boy, he was a man, 25. He was sentenced to a year in prison in Vietnam because they caught him with a Bible. And he was a model prisoner. And six months after he'd been arrested, the authorities came and said, we're going to let you go early.
He said, you can't. I said, why not? He said, I've only witnessed a half this prison. I've still got half to go. So they kept him in. And he finished witnessing to the guys that were in prison with him.
[33:14] so how do we show sympathy? Three things. By being there in time of need.

And if you don't know anybody that's got a need, stick around, it'll happen. It'll happen. By giving direct help and by praying for those in need.
And there's plenty of those out there. And when we bear one another's burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ.
Jesus has a law? Yeah. It's called the law of love. And when we bear someone else's burdens, we're fulfilling the love of Christ in that person's life.
Thank you.

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