

Hebrews: The Supremacy of Christ Above All Things
Counter-cultural Christianity
Hebrews 13:1-9

Text:

Hebrews 13:1-9 (ESV)

¹ Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. ⁵ 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.”

⁶ So we can confidently say,

“The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me?”

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. ⁹ Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them.

Introduction:

For 12 chapters now the writer of Hebrews has been establishing an air-tight argument as to why it is paramount for the Hebrew Christians to persevere in their faith so as to not turn back to Judaism away from Christ. His argument in a sentence is very simply: the supremacy of Christ above all things. Jesus, he has argued is superior to angels, superior to Moses, superior to Levi and the entire Levitical priesthood, superior to the entire old covenant as the new covenant he ushers in is far surpassing in its promises and accomplishments.

What this means is that for a group of Christians who are near to caving in beneath the pressures that threaten them and to a group of Christians who are near to selling out to the pleasures that beckon them, there is a kind of life that is to be lived. In order for Christianity to be Christian, it must be counter-cultural. Though the culture threatens to punish, persecute or murder you; and though the culture seeks to minimize or marginalize your beliefs; and though the culture may taunt you or tantalize you, there is a way to live. This way to live is called in 12:28 a grateful heart of service and worship.

Christianity, when it is truly Christ-like, has always been, will always and must always be counter-cultural. That is, it will be against the culture with its philosophies, views, and morality. This does not mean that Christianity is at war with the culture in a political sense; but in a redemptive sense. The way we recover a culture is not by seeking to make the culture Christian but by trying to transfer members of the culture, one at a time, from a kingdom of darkness into a kingdom of light. The way to redeem a culture is to proclaim the gospel to one friend, one relative, one associate, and one neighbor at a time.

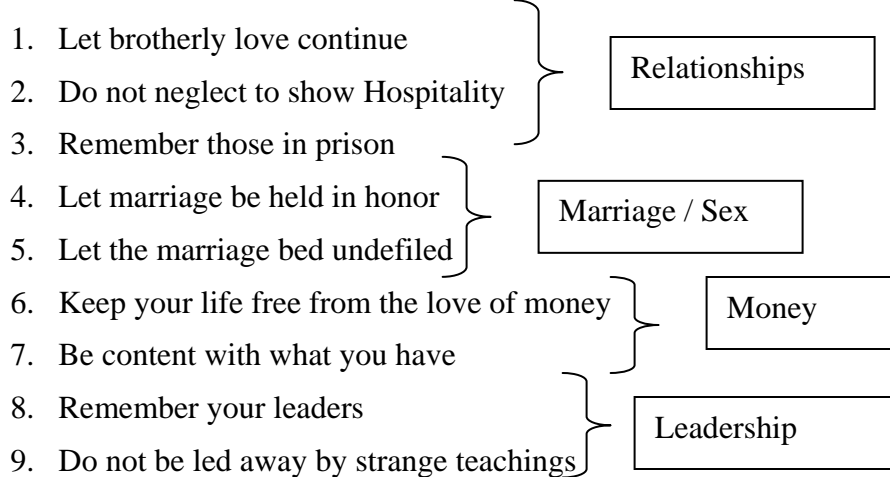
There may be a misguided approach to culture wars going on in our day among evangelicals. It seems that many are seeking to ghettoize the Christian sub-culture by hanging the “Christian” label on all that it does. We now have everything from Christian music and movies to Christian gyms and law firms. I do not think this is redeeming a culture. It is more or less the Christians withdrawing into their holy huddle. That may be a topic for another time.

There are, however, certain areas of life that will continually find the Christian and his culture at total odds. There are certain areas where Christianity is completely opposed to culture. Let me give you four areas where Christianity and culture clash in all ages and times: (1) the view of money; (2) the view of marriage and sexuality; (3) the view of relationships; and (4) the view of leadership.

Our culture views money as a god. They are completely in the grasp of its service. Most people do not control their money; it controls them – like a god. Need we say anything about the clash between our culture and the Christ when it comes to marriage and sexuality? To marry or not to marry is not a question today; neither is sex outside of marriage. That is simply a non-issue. Relationships are viewed today as a means to an end. Enter a relationship only if it has promise for you. And there is certainly no such thing as submission to leadership. Everything is questioned in leadership. Conspiracy and scandal are the norm for leaders. We have the mindset in our culture that leaders are not to be trusted. How much of these views and philosophies have crept into the church?

When it comes to the beliefs, philosophies and mores in these areas, Christianity, when it is truly Christ-like, will always be at odds with its culture.

Now, notice that these four topics are addressed by the author of Hebrews in our text (13:1-9). In fact, in these nine verses we have nine exhortations.



The Supremacy of Christ Over All Things

These verses call us to a real-life commitment and devotion to the supremacy of Christ over all things.

Let’s take these topics one at a time.

1. The Supremacy of Christ in our Relationships

How will we exalt the supremacy of Christ over all things when it comes to our relationships with one another? How will we keep one another moving forward in our perseverance? Our author commands and exhorts for brotherly love to continue.

Did you know that one way you exalt the supremacy of Christ over all things is demonstrated in your Christian friendships? The most important relationships on earth are not tied to blood

lines and family trees but to Christian community. (Of course, you can have your cake and eat it too when your natural family is also a part of your spiritual family.)

Why do we have to love at all? I believe it is quite simple: we cannot help but love the brethren because of the common bond we share in Christ. The love of Christ within initiates love for others. Paul explained to the Thessalonians, “Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” Yet he urged them “to excel still more” in this love (I Thes 4:9-10). “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you,” Jesus declared, “abide in My love” (John 15:5). The word for “continue” in our text and “abide” in John 15 is the same root term. We are *abiding* in a love that is already present in the new birth. We need not search to find it, for Christ’s love is part of the Spirit’s fruit assured in every believer (Gal 5:22). But we must give attention to make sure that we constantly live in Christian love.

There are two very practical examples of what the author thinks this love will look like:

a. Brotherly love is hospitable

13:2: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Travel during the first century was precarious at best, and from reports by ancient historians, the few inns available to travelers were even worse. Often dirty and cesspools for immorality, most avoided the expense and abuse found in ancient inns. Christian preachers and missionaries traveled from church to church in order to help with the ongoing spread of the gospel, planting of new churches, and equipping of the saints. Without the hospitality of the saints on the way, their mission would be encumbered. Thus we find Peter staying in the home of Simon the tanner and Paul lodging with the household of Lydia in Philippi, indicating early examples of hospitality.

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers [literally, “love for strangers”], for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.” *Love for strangers* demonstrated the love of Christ working through the brethren. As Philip Hughes has rightly commented, “True hospitality springs from the limitless fountain of the divine love manifested to us while we were still estranged sinners (Rom. 5:8), and it must likewise be spontaneous, unforced, and free from reluctance” [*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 563]. Surprises may lie in store for the hospitable as it did for Abraham, Lot, and Samson’s parents as they “entertained angels without knowing it” (Gen 18-19; Judg 13). It is not that hospitality is to be enjoined in hopes of seeing an angel! Rather, it shows that our Lord values the practice of hospitality among his people, often rewarding it greatly.

Hospitality is commanded by Paul in Romans 12:13, and Peter adds, “Be hospitable to one another without complaint” (1 Pet 4:9). It is also to be a qualification for eldership (1 Tim. 3:3).

Opening up your home demonstrates that you grasp the power and importance of vital and meaningful interaction on spiritual levels.

b. Brotherly love is empathetic

13:3: “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”

It is under this same theme of brotherly love that the writer of Hebrews reminds his readers to remember those in prison and those being mistreated. It is the qualifying statements that

make this exhortation remarkable – do it as though you were in prison with them; and do it because you are in the body also. This is nothing more than a call to empathy.

The word the writer uses for “remember” means to “keep present in one’s mind.” Keep their plight in your mind as though you were in there with them. You will begin to feel what they feel.

There is an interpretational option for us here. The writer offers this phrase, “since you also are in the body,” as the reason for empathizing with those who suffer. What does he mean by being in the body? John Calvin thinks that this Pauline language referring to the church. “Empathize with those who are ill-treated because you are in the church with them.” The other option is that you should empathize with them because you should have no problem identifying with their suffering because you too are not far from suffering in the body. I am inclined to the second, but really am unsure. Either way, the call is to empathize with those in prison and ill-treated.

There is no more powerful expression of brotherly love than walking beside those who hurt and suffer in Christ.

2. The Supremacy of Christ in our Marriage and/or Sexuality

The institution of marriage was assaulted in that culture in two ways. First, there was a popular notion among the so-called spiritual that celibacy enhanced holiness. Thus, celibacy was to be preferred to marriage. Marriage came to be viewed with contempt. The second way marriage was assaulted was by a libertarian freedom which developed into full-blown immorality – sex with whomever and whenever you wished. This is much in line with our culture today – a culture that has developed a term like “recreational sex.” There is sex in marriage and there is sex outside of marriage and recreational sex, by definition is more to be desired than married sex.

Marriage is to be held in honor by all – even the singles.

The marriage bed – euphemistic for sexual intimacy is the biblical mandate. Adultery – is a married person violating their fidelity while immorality is sex outside of marriage. God judges both.

We’ll say more about this next time.

3. The Supremacy of Christ in our Money Management

We will visit later

4. The Supremacy of Christ in our Leadership and Submission

We will visit later

I want to conclude today by answering the question, “Why are these lists of ethical topics included here at the end of Hebrews?” I think the answer is two-fold:

Examples of Worship and Service

As I have already alluded, these nine exhortations are being brought forward as very practical ways that new covenant promises affect real-life believers. This is where Christianity is lived – true commitment of Christ means carrying out a commitment in the nitty-gritty of life. Beds and bank accounts cannot be separated from one’s commitment to Christ. I think we are supposed to ask ourselves questions like:

- How can I serve Christ with my relationships?

- How am to I worship Christ in marriage and sex?
- How do I demonstrate the supremacy of Christ over money?
- What will my commitment to Christ look like in my treatment of leadership?

Ask yourself, “Do I reveal the supremacy of Christ above all things in the way I view relationships, marriage, sexuality, money and leadership?” The way we view these things, or the way we live our lives in these areas, says more than anything what we think of Christ. They speak volumes about our worship of Christ.

Areas for Corporate Perseverance

But not only are these topics set forward by our author as examples of worship and service; they are probably set forward as areas where we need the greatest help in perseverance. Do you ever feel pressures that threaten in marriage and other relationships? Do you ever feel pleasures that beckon in sex or money? We need perseverance and we need help in perseverance.

The context of chapter 13 flows over from the warning passage that began in chapter 12, verse 12. For those among us who have drooping hands and weak knees, we are to help and strengthen. And the exhortation in 12:12 was flowing from the discussion in 12:1-11 about discipline. Do you need help in gaining discipline in money management, or sexual purity, etc.? Everything about the book of Hebrews has been about corporate perseverance.

Your drifting heart is to be our concern.

Hebrews 2:1 (ESV)

¹ Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

Your deceived and hardening heart is to be our concern.

Hebrews 3:12-13 (ESV)

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. [Do you hear the corporate call for perseverance in this verse?] ¹³

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Your sluggish heart that has become dull of hearing is to be our concern.

Hebrews 5:11 (ESV)

¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

Your deliberate pattern of sin is to be our concern.

Hebrews 10:24-26 (ESV)

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. [This is a loud-and-clear call to corporate perseverance.] ²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

- Are there individuals in our congregation who have started to drift away from Christ because they begun to sell-out to other pleasures – money or sex?

- Are there any person in our church whose hearts are growing deceived as they buy the lies of our culture for more pleasure or pressure-free lifestyles?
- Are there adults or teenagers in our congregation who profess faith in Christ yet deliberately sin in their sexuality? Love of money? Refusal to submit to leaders?
- Are there couples, families or individuals in our church who are refusing to hear Christ speak because they do not want the kind of relationships that make them vulnerable?

The answer to all of these questions is a resounding, “Yes!” We need help if we are to persevere in the areas of relationships, marriage, sexuality, money and leadership.

Christianity cannot be counter-cultural if Christians are not counter-cultural. And Christianity is by very definition sacrifice, sharing, selfless, stewardship, and submission. Thus, by its very nature, it is counter-cultural, for our culture does not call for nor exhibit the sacrificial, sharing, selfless, stewardship and submission that embodies the person of Chris