

The Supremacy of Christ Over All Things

Be Content

Hebrews 13:5-6

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:

As I have said all along in this series through Hebrews, the author of Hebrews, in my opinion, is addressing one kind of audience – a suffering one. Suffering can come from one of two directions: pleasure or pain. The preacher of Hebrews (and I treat it more as a sermon and not a letter) is preaching to those who, on the one hand, are contemplating *caving-in beneath the pressures that threaten* as well as to those who are contemplating *selling-out to pleasures that beckon*. The message that both parties need is the same – it is the gospel of Christ’s supremacy over all things. To those suffering as Jews in a post-Jewish context, they needed to see the supremacy of Christ over the older covenantal system. He is the answer to all questions. He is the finish of all lines. He is the completion of all starts. He is the referent of all pointers. He is the substance behind all shadows. He is the antitype to all types. He is the end of the run, the final destination. There remains nothing left to come. He is it. He is supreme. He, then, is worth suffering and even dying for. “Don’t cave-in! Persevere in faithfulness!” And since this Jesus is supreme, there is nothing this world has to offer that is more valuable. “Don’t sell-out! Persevere in faithfulness!”

The preacher has another dynamic going on throughout the sermon: he is addressing a suffering congregation. That is, he is addressing them in their corporate identity. The author makes it clear throughout the sermon that each one’s perseverance is a corporate responsibility. He has such powerful sections as 3:12, “See to it, brothers (plural and corporate), lest there be in any of you (plural) an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” Or what about the famous section in 10:24-25? “And let us consider one another with a view to stirring up each one to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage each other...” (my translation). Perseverance is a corporate responsibility. The corporate gathering of God’s people is to be mutual and meaningful, as opposed to occasional and casual.

As He brings his sermon to a close he fires off these nine exhortations that I have divided into four categories. They are the categories of relationships, marriage and sexuality, money, and leadership.

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 to Christ means carrying out a faithfulness in the nitty-gritty of life. Beds and bank accounts cannot be separated from one’s commitment to Christ. The way we live behind the closed doors of bedrooms or boardrooms says as much as anything about the supremacy of Christ.

Therefore, I think there are two reasons these nine commands and four categories for living appear precisely here at the end of twelve chapters of Christ’s supremacy:

First, they stand-out as real expressions of heartfelt worship. We are meant to ask some hard and searching questions of our hearts:

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

Second, these categories stand-out as the areas in life where believers need to most help from the body. These are the areas we are most inclined to be blinded, deceived, hardened, and drifting. We are meant to ask some hard questions of each other:

- Do you ever feel pressures that threaten in areas of leadership, submission, marriage and other relationships?
- Do you ever feel pleasures that beckon in sex or money?

So to this end, I have been treating them topically. The command of Hebrews shouts forth: “Uphold the supremacy of Christ over all things!”

“How?”

We answer that question this morning by saying, “Be content!”

Read vv. 5-6 again:

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?”

Grammatical Context:

Before we go anywhere, I want you to notice how the verse sets up grammatically. First of all, notice that the main assertion of v.5 is set up with a negative statement followed by a positive one.

Negative: “Keep your life free from love of money.” Or, “Do not love money.”

Positive: “Be content with what you have.”

That is simple and straightforward.

Second, you notice that the connecting word in the last phrase of v.5 is the word for. The quote taken from Joshua 1:5 is the ground for our contentment. His argument is like this: “be content with what you have because God has said that he will never leave you nor forsake you.” What is it about that quote that provides a reason for contentment?

Third, v. 7 begins with a conclusive word, “so.” “In this way we can say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’”

He is the paraphrase: “Keep yourself from love of money, and be content with what you have, because God has promised to never leave you or forsake you. In this way, then, we can say, ‘The Lord is on my side; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’”

We’ll take up these three things.

Historical Context:

These words were written to a suffering church. Many of them were contemplating *caving-in to the pressures that threatened*. Persecution was looming large on the horizon. Many of their fellow church members were in prison. Several of the others had suffered hardship as they ministered to the daily needs of their friends in prison. Many others had their possessions looted or confiscated. If there was a love for money or material possessions, there was pressure to *sell-out to those pleasures that beckoned*. Perhaps Christianity is not worth it.

Go back to a parallel passage in chapter 10

Hebrews 10:32-35 (ESV)

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your **confidence**, which has a great reward.

I don’t see any evidence that the words of 13:5-6 are meant to be scathing indictments. Rather, I see evidence that they are meant to be a gentle but firm call to perseverance. These Christians were largely already doing what he was calling them to do. They were “joyfully accepting the plundering of their goods.” How do you watch joyfully as your possessions are stripped from you unless you are free from the love of money and material possessions?

There are so many connections between chapters 10 and 13.

Find the word “since” in 10:34. Do you see it? They were able to accept the plundering of their property with joy *since* they had a better and more abiding possession. What do you think that better and abiding possession was? I think the word “since” in 10:34 corresponds to the word “so” in 13:6. “Since the Lord is on my side I am free from fear. What can man do to me?”

Find the word “confidence” in 10:35. Do you see it? I think that word “confidence” corresponds with the words “confidently say” in 13:6. “We can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is on my side’...”

There is one more connection. The phrase, “you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property” corresponds to the phrase in 13:5, “He will never leave you or forsake you.” How is that a correspondence? **All things material are fleeting and susceptible to flight; but God is the only constant.**

That is the way the book of Hebrews sets up these verses. Now, let’s unpack them.

1. Keep yourself from the love of money.

Imagine with me an encounter with two separate individuals. The first encounter is a lady 72 years old. Her husband died 9 years ago and she has been a joyous delight to your family. Her husband was a hard worker but not at all wealthy or financially savvy. He left her with next to nothing. In fact, in your encounter she enters your pastoral office for an appointment she arranged. In your conversation with her she reveals that she is down to her last \$200. She says it so matter-of-fact like and blows it off under her breath as she says from her heart, “The Lord has been so generous to me.” Well, you finally get around to asking her what she wanted to see you about and are blown away as she hands you two crisp \$100 bills with the stern instructions to put it into the mission budget. All you can say in that instant is, “But...”

How would you finish that sentence?

Your second encounter comes later that day as you meet with one of the men in your church. He reveals to you in small-talk that he has landed a hefty promotion at work with a sizable increase in pay. His purpose in taking you out to lunch is so that he can tell you in person that he and his wife have put their house up for sale so that they might move to a more luxurious home in a more affluent city. “We are secure now,” he announces. “We have arrived. We have everything we need. We will be secure for the rest of life.”

How would you respond to this man? My main concern in our responses to these people is whether or not the words we say would match the words Jesus would say. What would Jesus tell the 72 year old widow who hands you her last \$200 for missions? What would Jesus say to the man who has reached financial security and declared the game to be over?

Let’s find out.

Mark 12:41-44 (ESV)

⁴¹ And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Luke 12:15-21 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Do these words of Jesus to the widow and the rich fool match your counsel?

The writer of Hebrews wrote these words: Keep you life free from love of money.

Jesus spoke these words in Luke 12:15: Be on guard against all covetousness.

Do you see the parallel? They are saying the exact same thing! Covetousness is having a love for money and material possessions. Are you on guard? Or are you flirting? Or are you an adulterer? Do your affections for things surpass your affection for Christ? I think that those of us who live in the extremely wealthy west have done our souls a disservice by whitewashing and glossing over what the Bible says about covetousness.

Mark 7:20-22 (ESV)

²⁰ And he said, “**What comes out of a person is what defiles him.** ²¹ **For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,** ²² **coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.**”

Do you see what’s on this list? Do we treat all the items on this list equally? Are you as on guard with covetousness and envy as you are with sensuality and sexual immorality?

In this church, we are becoming extremely forthright about the fight for sexual purity. The kinds of conversations that I am having with men and women in this church is phenomenal compared to my parent’s and grandparent’s generations. We talk often and bluntly about lust. Do you know why? Because a man who does not stand guard at the door of his heart with lust goes to hell! That’s what Jesus said (cf. Matt 5:27-30). If a man said to me he was thinking lust-filled thoughts, I would be all over him. But what if he told me he was thinking of getting another house, or car, or cabin, or toy, etc. What would I say?

Let me give another example. The other day we were all milling around our house doing different things while the TV was on in the background. Brice was sitting on the couch kind of half-interested in the show – watching like a mindless, un-engaged, drone not really seeing what he was seeing. Do you follow me? I was walking away from the living room toward the dining room while Tina was walking toward me and could see the TV over my left shoulder when all of a sudden, like a flash of lightning she took off sprinting across the house. She took flight behind the couch; grabbed the remote from off the cushion in mid-air; fired it at the TV changing the channel; then she landed on the other side of the couch in a summersault roll and stood back to her feet in a smooth finish blowing the smoke from the barrel of her remote. I was just getting my head turned to see what she was in such a panic about when she said, “I didn’t want Brice to see that Victoria’s Secret commercial.”

At that point, I made eye contact with the TV to see what it had landed on. Brice, still oblivious to all that had just taken place, not even knowing the channel had changed, said, “I want one of those.” What he saw when his mom changed the channel was a commercial for a navy blue Ford F-350 getting loaded with a ton of dirt from a huge front-end loader.

I tell you I laughed out loud and said to Tina, “Fine! We don’t want him to lust; but we’ll let him covet!”

Now I ask you which commercial is more deadly to my son’s soul?

In our little Christian subculture, which one is more acceptable?

Are you as on guard with covetousness and envy as you are with sensuality and sexual immorality?

Ephesians 5:3-6 (ESV)

³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or *covetousness* must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ... ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually

immoral or impure, or who is *covetous* (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

When the writer of Hebrews says, “Keep yourself free from love of money,” he means: be on guard against covetousness.

2. Be content

Once he says, “Keep yourself from the love of money” in a negative fashion, he adds in a positive fashion, “Be content with what you have.”

I think we could paraphrase the two phrases this way: “Keep yourself free from the love of money *by* being content with what you have.”

Let me show you this quickly. Instead of saying, “be on guard against covetousness,” Paul says, “put it to death.”

Colossians 3:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

It is on account of these things that the wrath of God is coming on the world. So there is a very real and practical way that you and I can put covetousness to death.

If you asked me, “Pastor, how can I keep myself from love of money? What can I do practically to stand guard against covetousness? How can I put it to death?”

I would say two things:

1. Give Thanks – cultivate a grateful heart from present status.
2. Give it Away – cultivate a generous heart in giving intently.

Let me make the connection and be done.

Paul said in Romans 1:21 that the reason the wrath of God was coming upon the world because they did not honor God or give him thanks. So because they did not acknowledge God in these two ways (honor and thanks) they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness. You can view the list of unrighteousness in vv.29-31 and covetousness is #2 on the list behind envy.

If we could cultivate grateful hearts by giving thanks, we would be content and thus free from love of money. But also, give it away with the intent of fighting that affection.

Covetousness

Contentment

Confidence

Christ