



“Consumed by God. Living in Love.”

Hebrews 13:1-3

Currently I’m meeting with a group of guys and we’re going through Church History. I know, to some of you this sounds boring. To others, this is hugely exciting. I may be in-between. Sometimes I’m drawn right into a story. Other times I think to myself, “Who cares?!” But the stories that most often grab my attention are stories of the persecution of Christians.

Think of Polycarp – an elder in the city of Smyrna. He was a disciple of the apostle John. Around the age of 90, he was sentenced to death because he wouldn’t say “Caesar is Lord.” In that day, the Roman world believed Christians were atheists because they refused to believe in the many gods. So, Polycarp was told to say “Away with the atheists.” But instead of denying the fellow Christians, he reached his arm out to the crowd of people and said, “Away with the atheists.” That statement led him to his death.

Or, I think of a woman named Blandina. She was a physically challenged slave, and she was sentenced to die because she followed Jesus and wouldn’t recant. She was stripped and then tortured because she refused to offer incense to the emperor. Wild beasts were sent to devour her. And yet, miraculously, they didn’t. The tormentors did other things to kill her, but she wouldn’t. It wasn’t until a bull gored her and tossed her to the ground that she died. Yet, in her death, fellow-Christians who were watching her, said, “they saw in the form of their sister him who was crucified for them” (see Jones, Timothy Paul. *Christian History Made Easy*, p. 19).

Of course, we also have examples of the apostles Peter and Paul, too. In the summer of 64 AD, the city of Rome burned. Ten out of fourteen Roman districts were burned. In the rebuilding, many citizens blamed Nero. And, in an attempt to divert attention away from him, he blamed the fire on an increasingly unpopular group of people – the Christians.

Now, think of this in the context of the book of Hebrews. This book, written to a struggling church in or around Rome, and the these Christians can feel the grumblings of persecution coming. They’re weak, they’ve drifted from Jesus – and the author writes to them to essentially affirm to them that he sees persecution coming to them again. Their fears were right.

In the persecution under Nero, one Roman historian described the persecution by saying that “Some were dressed in furs and killed by dogs. Others were crucified, or burned alive, to light the night.” Peter was one who was crucified. Yet, according to tradition, Peter was crucified upside down because he did not believe he was worthy to die like Jesus. But Peter wasn’t the only apostle to die in Rome at this time. Paul also died. Being a Roman citizen, he most likely wasn’t crucified. That was too shameful. Instead,

it's most likely that he died by the sword. (see Jones, Timothy Paul. *Christian History Made Easy*, pp. 10-11).

When I read stories like these, my heart aches. I want to cry. But I also see a beautiful perseverance in these people – as well as a community of Christians who sought to help one another, grow in Christ and love him no matter what the cost – even if it was imprisonment or death. This is the outlook of the Hebrew Christians. Some might die. All will be persecuted in some way. And, according to history, it looks like many did die. What's interesting is how the author doesn't encourage the believers to hide in caves, but instead, he elevates the importance of their church community. He calls them to fellowship. He calls them to encourage one another. And ultimately, he points them to their need to look to God's glory in Jesus. So, in the midst of persecution, they maintained commitments to serve God and one another. The book of Hebrews was a means of encouragement to strengthen these believers to endure.

As you hear the reality of this book in the lives of real people in the city of Rome, what comes to your mind? You might think, "I hope I have that endurance if persecution comes to my life." Or, you could think, "Am I even strong enough to endure?" I think those are good things to think, but let me pose something to all of us. We all are experiencing a type of trial in our day. While some have had to endure the trial of persecution, the Bible also reveals people who have had to endure the trial of prosperity. One time I was listening to a pastor who said that far more people have failed the trial of prosperity than the trial of persecution. Think on that. A trial is simply something that tests the genuineness of your dependence on the Lord.

If prosperity can reveal our hearts, where's yours? When you hear the commands of Hebrews, don't think the applications *only* apply *if* you were persecuted. Instead, we ought to be thinking, **"If Christians under persecution can seek the Lord, listen to him, worship Him and grow in their understanding of the Lord while also gathering with one another and encouraging one another daily – what's my excuse in my prosperity?!"** When in the trial of persecution or prosperity, we all need to heed the lesson of this book!

We now come to an end of this book. One chapter left. And, what's intriguing about this last chapter is how seemingly odd it is in comparison to the rest of the book. Chapter 13 is full of bullet-point statements. It's written unlike the previous 12 chapters, and much of this chapter is application.

By the way, I find that very interesting. It's not that the author hasn't put in application in the previous 12 chapters, but his biggest concern is that we actually know more of the fullness of the glories of Jesus. He wants us to turn from our sin and to turn to Jesus' glory and have Jesus' glory shape us! He believes it takes 12 chapters to get the point across! And then, after showing us the majesty of Jesus and our need to trust in Jesus, he gives one short chapter on obedience to Jesus. This doesn't diminish obedience, but instead it highlights the fact that our obedience must be fueled by Jesus himself! If we're only moral, that's not godly! **We need an obedience that comes from a heart moved by God's glory and melted by Jesus' sacrifice.**

This is what you saw throughout the whole book. And then, as we came to the end of chapter 12, the author boils everything down. Because of all that God is for you in Jesus and all that he has given you in Jesus, no matter what happens in life, "Listen to God and Worship Him." The exhortation is so simple, isn't it? But it's based on *who* God is. The last verse of chapter 12 says that our God is a consuming fire. Obedience must flow from an awareness of who God is. He's the God of Mt. Sinai. And he's the God of Mt. Zion. Ponder his glory. With his word, creation came into being. With his word, creation will be

dissolved and, with his word, he will bring about a new creation! With his word, people are eternally judged. With his word, his children are given an eternal inheritance in an everlasting Kingdom. It's because of these things that the author of Hebrews refers to God as a consuming fire!

Since God, through Jesus, is so powerful and also so gracious, listen to him and worship him. And let this worship of God affect every facet of your daily living. It's with that exhortation that we enter into chapter 13. Chapter 13 is the very practical, down-to-earth, brass-tacks application of the entirety of the book. These commands show us more of what it means to worship of Consuming God. Or, if I can put it another way. If you've been consumed by God, in his grace, this is how we ought to live.

With that understanding, open your Bibles to Hebrews 13, and I'm going to read the first three verses for us after I pray:

13 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.¹

If you are consumed by God, we see in these first three verses, **we must live in love**. Now, before we study each command, I have to say something right off-the-bat. Some people take verse 1 as the umbrella command for verses 1-3. So, they believe that these commands are specifically geared towards our behavior with other Christians. Other people take verse 1 to be specifically to Christians, while verse 2 is probable to Christians and then verse 3 is towards all people. I'm sure there are others who take other approaches.

First, let me challenge you to pray and ask God for discernment on this. But, as I look at this text, it seems to me that the author is highlighting our responsibility towards one another as Christians. Now, in saying that, I don't negate our responsibility to love the world around us. The apostle Paul, in Galatians 6 says, "as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."² He says we have a responsibility to love *everyone*, but then he highlights a greater responsibility to love those who are in the same "house" so-to-speak! We are to exhibit a certain degree of love to our *family in Christ*. So, in making application this morning, I'm going to mostly make application with our responsibility with our church family. I think that fits the context of the book of Hebrews. But there will be times that I expand the application to our love for the world around us. So, understanding this, let's dive into the first command.

1. Love your Church (v. 1).

Verse 1 says, "Let brotherly love continue." Each word is packed with meaning. Remember that the author of Hebrews often states a command by saying "Let." So, this is a command. This isn't him simply saying, "Let something happen to you." That's how we might often wish God's commands were like. We hear a sermon that says we're to be sacrificial in our service to others and we think God is saying, "Let sacrificial service happen." Then we go about our weeks thinking, "Well God, I'm letting it happen, but

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 13:1–3.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Ga 6:10.

no one seems to be sacrificially serving!” That’s a misunderstanding of God’s commands. God’s commands are telling us that we are each responsible to obey.

This is the case here. We are commanded to brotherly love. What is “brotherly love?” This actually is simply one of the Greek words for love. There’s “agape,” “eros” and then “philadelphia.” “Philadelphia” is the word used here. And, it’s a familial type of love. In the context, it’s clear that the author is saying “Because God is a consuming fire and because there’s a future Kingdom we’re looking forward to, then worship God through loving those who are entering the Kingdom with you!”

Think of how the author has already encouraged this type of love previously in this book. In Hebrews 6:10, he’s said, “¹⁰For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.”³ In 10:24-25, “let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not 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.”⁴

We are to love by serving one another. And we are to love by gathering together, encouraging one another and stirring each other up to love. It’s not enough to have a loving personality. We have to take love and actually love others and help others to love others. But why would we do this? It’s because we’re family. This truth goes all the way back to chapter 2, where the author says that Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and now we know that all of us who have been rescued by God and saved by Jesus are God’s children (cf. vv. 10ff).

Listen, if you have seen your sinfulness against God, and God has opened your eyes and given you faith in Jesus; you are God’s child and you have an eternal family. Everyone else in this room who trusts in Jesus is your brother or sister.

Think on the ramifications of that statement. Some here could say, “That sounds like a lot of work. I’m just going to focus on my physical family!” But please ponder the preponderance of Bible passages on this topic. Let me give you a few verses. First John 3:14 says, “¹⁴We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”⁵ Jesus himself says in John 13:34-35: ³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”⁶ The world will see Jesus if the world sees Jesus’ disciples love each other.

Is it important to love fellow Christians? Yes. Oh, and it’s not enough to simply say, “I love you.” Love must lead to action. First John 3:18 says, “¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”⁷

So, the author of Hebrews says that if you know Jesus is superior and you know you’re entering into a future Kingdom that is unshakable with other Christians – then worship God today with those other believers! Ventura, the application is for us, too. We’re not being persecuted. So, we have even greater

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 6:10.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 10:24–25.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 1 Jn 3:14.

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Jn 13:34–35.

⁷ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), 1 Jn 3:18.

opportunity to love on one another. And why do we do this? Because Jesus came from heaven's splendor in order to forgive us of our sins and give us eternal restoration with God – to even make us his own family.

Now we have the privilege of extending that same type of love to each other. I think that the most consistent application of this verse is within the context of the local church. Earlier in Hebrews, the author highlights the love towards the fellow believers with whom you gather! So, when you're thinking of letting brotherly love continue, think of *how* you are going to live this out within the local church. This doesn't negate other believers, but I'll get to that in verse 2. For now, think local church.

At this point, some of you could say, "But Pastor Timothy, some people in the church are just awkward. Or, I don't get along with them. Do I have to actually love them?" Others of you could say, "I used to love so-and-so in the church, but ever since they did [fill in the blank], we don't get along any more."

Do you think God is ok with not loving the awkward? Do you think God's ok with you not loving the fellow Christian who hurt you in the past? Well, look at verse 1 again. And, if you write in your Bible, underline the word "continue." Let brotherly love *continue*. Why does he have to say that? It's because we can let our love for others cool down. "This person isn't as nice as they used to be." "That person over there said something rude to me." "I'm really busy right now so I don't have time for the church in my life." "I'm doing fine spiritually on my own."

We need to let the ramifications of the truth of being part of the family of God fill our minds until our hearts sing! We must ponder the truth that Jesus himself, God the Son, did not have to, but chose to, come to the earth to make you and me brothers and sisters. Praise God that Jesus didn't say, "I'm doing fine on my own!" Praise him that he didn't use our sin as his excuse for not reaching out to us. Instead, it was because of our sin and our refusal to worship God that Jesus came!

Oh Ventura, now we have been set free to worship God and then to help one another grow in worshipping God. So, daily, let us encourage one another and let us think how we can love practically. I came across a quote from the actor Will Rogers this past week who said, "Live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip" (<https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/willrogers106129.html>). Let's apply this in the church. Live in such a way that if you sold your parrot to the pastor or to another church member, your family would not only *not hear* negative, but if the parrot spoke, it'd speak positively toward one another.

Ventura, if one way God reaches the world is through the love of the local church towards one another, then we can be assured that Satan and our flesh will attack our love for one another. We must be guarded – always filling our minds with Jesus' sacrificial love for us and the unity we have because of him! And, we must always be acting in such ways to guard and grow that love. So, speak of our family in loving ways and then also act in such ways that show love.

I'm not going to detail what this looks like in your life. Instead, if you take notes, keep a space open on your note page and then pray, asking God to show you specific ways you can show love towards the believers around you.

If we are listening to and worshipping our Consuming-Fire God, then we will let brotherly love continue. Then verse 2 says that

2. We are to love the strangers in our family (v. 2).

Look at verse 2 again: ²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.⁸

I believe that the most direct application of this verse is towards fellow Christians who are strangers. Now, I know that some of you could say, “Does it say ‘strangers who are Christians’ here?” Well, not necessarily. But, maybe so. In the Greek, the author seems to connect verse 1 and verse 2. In the Greek language, the word for hospitality is “philozenia.” I’m giving you the word because it relates to verse one and “Philadelphia.” Verse one has a love for brothers. Verse two states a brotherly love for strangers.

Now, could the author be using the Greek word for hospitality to talk about how we should be hospitable to everyone, whether a Christian or not. Yes. It’s certainly biblical to be hospitable to all people. But, I think that the author is seeking to be more specific in his application. The application like this elsewhere in Hebrews applies to the Christian community. So, I think it fits here as well. Either way, the Bible does command hospitality to all, but I am going to emphasize with body of Christ.

The phrase “do not neglect” indicates that we can tend to simply *not* do this. To neglect means you’re not doing this. You could be neglecting out of willful disobedience or neglecting because you are doing other things you think are more valuable. Let me ask you something, “Do you practice hospitality?” If you say “no,” then you are neglecting this command.

But we need to probe that word for hospitality a little further. In the Greek, this word hospitality referred to opening your house to strangers for lodging and general care. In the first century, inns were notorious. Plato recounts instances of innkeepers keeping guests hostage. One ancient named Theophrastus put innkeeping on the same plane as running a brothel (see R.K. Hughes, pp. 436-37). You can understand why people wouldn’t want to stay in the inns.

Think of the Hebrew Christians, too. If the application is towards Christians coming from different areas – which, it would make sense that Rome would get a lot of travel – then the Christians should be concerned for other Christian’s well-being and they should be willing to open their homes to fellow Christians coming into Rome.

But hospitality isn’t supposed to only refer to showing kindness because someone could be put in a difficult circumstance. The author goes on to defend hospitality by saying that through hospitality some have entertained angels unawares. Probably the most well-known illustration of this is with Abraham when three people come to him – one is the Lord. God does not spend the night at Abraham’s house. But Abraham did offer food. In other Old Testament examples, we see a welcoming spirit with lodging and food.

What I think is most important to note is that hospitality is truly a love for those we do not know. If we’re willing to love, sacrifice for and care for one another in the local church, then this command shouldn’t be shocking. Within local churches, new people come in that we don’t know and yet we learn to love and grow with one another. Scripture indicates we are to welcome people within our own local church into our homes. After all, Acts 2 says the local church members went into each other’s homes.

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 13:2.

This should be happening within the local church. So, don't neglect hospitality with the local church family.

But here, now God calls us to extend that love because our family isn't only our local church. If there are needs of believers somewhere else or if there are Christians who could use aid in our own town, we should welcome those into our homes – give them lodging and food. In some ways this could seem foolish. We don't know the people. How can we trust them? And, yes, we have to be wise. But, we it is not wisdom to sacrifice generous concern for believers simply because we don't want to be bothered.

Remember Jesus' own words in Matthew 25:34-36. In talking about the Judgment Day, Jesus says that he will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." ⁹ Jesus then says that people will respond by saying, "When did we do these things?" And Jesus' response is, ". . . I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."¹⁰ Food, drink, welcoming a stranger. This is important to Jesus. Why? Because he says that these are his brothers. These are people he has saved. Does Jesus love all whom he has saved? Yes, absolutely, yes! Therefore, we should love those whom Jesus loves!

But the author of Hebrews adds another motivation to hospitality. He says that some people have entertained angels without knowing it. And, that phrase almost makes it sound like the writer of Hebrews is saying, "If you show hospitality to strangers, you could potentially entertain angels without knowing it." Well, maybe that's what he's saying, but I'm not convinced because in the other scenarios, the people ended up finding out that they were entertaining special guests.

I think there's a different point the author is making. The word "angel" means "messenger." And, in each Old Testament encounter, the people received some type of special message from God after they showed generous hospitality. I think the author is saying that through hospitality we can grow in following after the Lord. Not only do we provide food or lodging for Christian brothers and sisters; but we learn from God as we offer hospitality to fellow believers. This is true in the local church context as well as the broader church.

Ventura, has Jesus set us free to worship God? Do you want to learn more from God? Then, open your heart towards other believers, including those who are strangers to you. If that means letting missionaries stay in your home or helping refugee Christians or housing a fellow believer for a time because of greater need, we must consider this.

And, if this sounds too sacrificial, then you probably have a right picture of hospitality! After all, this command is resting in the previous 12 chapters of Hebrews where the author shows us how great our God is and what Jesus has given to us! Jesus came to enemies and turned them into not only friends, but family. And now we get to live with God *forever* and be at rest with him! Therefore, let us, by his grace, show this type of kindness and hospitality towards fellow believers. IN doing so, we help other Christians get glimpses of our Father's love. And then, the author also says that we too will receive encouragement from God through those other believers. So, if we worship our Consuming-Fire God, let us love our brothers. Let us not forget hospitality. And finally,

⁹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Mt 25:34–36.

¹⁰ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Mt 25:40.

3. Remember the mistreated Christians (v. 3).

Verse 3 says, “³Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”¹¹

Continue to love. Do not neglect. Now, verse 3 says, “Remember.” In other words, call to your attention. Call to attention what? Answer: those who are in prison. This takes us back to Hebrews 10:32-34 where the author says that in previous days the Hebrew church “endured a hard struggle. . .sometimes being publicly exposed. . .and sometimes being partners with those so treated” (v. 32). The point of the passage is the love they had towards fellow Christians who were imprisoned.

This verse could be talking about caring generally for all who are imprisoned. And, again, I believe God calls us to that. But I don’t think the context of the book of Hebrews leads us to that conclusion. The author gives two examples as to how we should care for Christians who are in prison. Both examples emphasize empathy.

First, we are to think of those in prison as though in prison with them. If you were in prison, what would you want other Christians to know? What would you want them to pray? Would you want them to have a passing thought of you or would you want them to spend concerted energy on your behalf? The second example says “since you also are in the body.” I’m not exactly sure what I believe of this phrase. Some think this means “since you are part of the same body of Christ.” Others think this simply means, “because you have a physical body.” I think it’s because we have a physical body. If we truly empathize with the suffering Christians around the world, we’ll think about the pain.

I think this is a confrontation to western world Christianity. I remember years ago when I went to Haiti on a missions trip. While there, for one day, we traveled to a very nice beach. It was owned by the Royal Caribbean, and it was beautiful. You had to pay to go on the beach, and all around the beach was a twenty foot steel wall. I discovered that the sand was imported and everything was perfect. Whenever the ship would dock, only people they paid were allowed on the beach. And no one from the cruise ship could go beyond the walls. I wondered if people even knew they were in Haiti. I doubt anyone knew that there were people literally starving on the other side of the wall. To know that might ruin their vacation, right?

I wonder that about Americanized Christianity. We don’t want to read stories of martyrdom and imprisonment because it is depressing. But hold one a second. If your physical brother or sister were mistreated in prison, would you pray for them? Would you know details? Would you care? Yes! How much more for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are being mistreated for the name of Jesus. These brothers and sisters are following in the steps of our elder brother, Jesus – and therefore, we should pray they endure! Again, referencing the Matthew 25 passage, Jesus says that we minister to him when we minister to brothers and sisters imprisoned. He loves them and we are set free to love them with the love of Jesus.

So, the author tells us that if we are worshipping our consuming-fire God, then by the grace of Jesus, we will worship him as we love our church family, show hospitality to our brotherhood and remember the mistreated in prison.

¹¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Heb 13:3.

In each of these, the author uses terms to emphasize our need for genuine concern. There's a novel by Herman Melville called *White Jacket*. In that story, there's a sailor who becomes very sick with abdominal pain. The doctor is excited about the surgery. He investigates and is overjoyed with the appendicitis. He gets other sailors to help and then he makes his incisions. They're precise as he removes the appendix. He's very into what he's doing – everything is very correct. But the sailors are not impressed by any of this because their friend died on the table and the doctor never noticed.

Without knowing Jesus and knowing God's great glory and goodness towards us – we may do all the right things – but they won't be done in worship. But, if we do know Jesus and we do know God as the Consuming Fire, may we pray that we are never like that doctor.

Jesus loves us and made us family. The Father welcomes us into his home. Jesus was mistreated and cares for those who follow in his steps. So, by the grace of God given to us, let us run with endurance the race set before us. Let us listen to and worship God. Being consumed by God, let us our brothers continually, exercise hospitality and remember the mistreated.

And, as we close this service, let's sing together of the joy we have in the unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ! Let this be our prayer and praise to God that he's given us a family that aids us in growing in the Lord and that we get to help to grow in Christ.

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