

Hebrews 13:1-6
(Matthew 5:13-16)
“Proper Confidence”

Introduction

Hebrews was written to group of Jewish Christians facing persecution for their faith in Jesus as Messiah. They were in a situation where anyone would feel insecure and frightened of what might come. Our author writes to encourage them to stand fast in their faith, to warn them not to draw back out of fear, and to exhort them to a proper confidence based, not upon their circumstances, but upon their salvation (13:6).

In this final chapter, the author continues giving us pictures of enduring faith, and the first six verses call us to move from fear to faith, from anxiety to confidence, by focusing on others rather than obsessing over ourselves, by pursuing faithfulness in the central covenant relationships of our lives, and by being content in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Look with me at these three calls that contribute to facing life with a proper confidence.

Body

1. A call to love (v.1-3).

We should note that the kind of love in view here is not the usual New Testament word for love, *agape*, meaning “self-sacrificial love,” but rather the Greek word *philadelphia*, meaning “affectionate brotherly love.”

His first example of such love is surprising, since we think of brotherly or sisterly love toward those closest to us with whom we have a natural affinity. Instead, our author calls us to *hospitality*, to showing Christ’s love to those strangers who come to us seeking some kind of help (v.2). Hospitality was, and still is today, a cultural expression of good manners throughout the Middle East. Anyone who refuses shelter to a stranger is guilty of a serious breach of etiquette and common decency. We are even reminded that some have entertained divine messengers, angels, without even realizing it. I suspect that the author had in mind such Old Testament stories as the angelic messengers who entered Sodom, and were given hospitality by Lot. His point is that we should greet strangers who show up inconveniently just as if they were messengers from God.

He then turns from hospitality to *compassion*, to showing Christ’s love to those who cannot come to us, but whom we must make the effort to visit (v.3). He illustrates this by telling us to remember those in prison and those who are mistreated. He may have been thinking of Christians who were suffering in chains for their faith, but the principle of compassion calls us to

remember and care for all those who are in desperate straits, whether prisoners or victims of human trafficking, or people in the hospital or home-bound and alone. The call is to remember those languishing out of sight, and to nurture in our hearts, not only pity, but affection, brotherly love.

2. A call to faithfulness (v.4).

Love should lead to faithfulness. The Greek word here translated as “immorality” is *porneia*, from which we get the word “pornography,” and it includes all forms of sexual immorality: thought, word and deed. It is easy to think that our thoughts and lusts and passions are our own affair as long as we do not act upon them. But, of course, if we indulge our passions, eventually we act them out, and the consequences are devastating. Just as unbridled, unmortified anger leads to violence, so too unbridled, unmortified lust and passion lead to disordered immoral acts.

Specifically, he warns us against violating the covenant of marriage, which is a picture of the relationship of the Lord and his people. Adultery is considered, throughout the Scripture, a sort of idolatrous sacrament, because it expresses an unwillingness to be content with one’s covenant partner, just as we are so very prone to turn from the Lord to the false gods of pleasure, power and prestige. Christ has kept covenant for us and has given us his Spirit so that we might increasingly learn and cherish faithfulness, as well.

3. A call to contentment (v.5-6).

Faithfulness leads naturally to this third call. Contentment begins by learning to be grateful for what we have, rather than always wishing that we had more. When we fret over and lust after what we do not have, we measure our life’s value by something as fleeting as possessions, which in the end can only disappoint, either because we never get them and become embittered, or because we do get them, discover that they are not enough to fill the empty place in our soul that only God can fill, and so become disillusioned.

Contentment comes as we realize and rest in God’s loving care for us, and we learn to seek first his kingdom and righteousness, and trust him to supply all of our needs out of his riches in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

How very strange these three calls may sound to those obsessed with their own anxieties and fears, and yet how deeply satisfying and life giving they are to those who heed and pursue them. Instead of living in fear of what might come, we can say with proper confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (13:6). In Christ, we have the power to love faithfully, and to live gratefully.

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