

Brotherly Love (Hebrews 13:1)

Well, we are returning today to the book of Hebrews to chapter 13. It's been two months since we were in Hebrews. We left off just after the beginning of the month of November because we finished chapter 12, you will remember, and then I did two weeks on subjects that are included here in Hebrews 13: love and thanksgiving. And then we had a Christmas series through the month of December. So it is now almost eight weeks since we've been in Hebrews. And though we've finished chapter 12 and I'm starting chapter 13, we shouldn't think in our minds that there has been some major change of subject matter or intention in the mind and the theme of the author here. Really, if you just eliminate the chapter division in your mind, you can see how chapter 12 very naturally flows into chapter 13.

Chapter 13 begins with a section of the Epistle that is very heavy with exhortation, commandments and encouragements and applications of all the truth that we have looked at in the first twelve chapters. So the first twelve chapters were very doctrinally heavy. Chapter 12 ends with a warning passage, and of course we are warned about not laying hold of the sacrifice that is described to us in the first twelve chapters of this book. And in the first twelve chapters, the author has been talking about the Person and the work of Christ, heavy emphasis on His work. The book begins by describing the Person of Christ, His deity, what Scripture says about Him, what to expect about Him in the Old Testament. And then this book describes the self-giving sacrifice of the Son whereby He came into the world and offered a sacrifice that would pay for the sins of His people. And having done that, He has cleansed our conscience, He has taken away our guilt, He has removed our sin and our shame, He has made us His own, and He has brought us into the new covenant with all of the blessings that attend the new covenant that have been promised in the Old Testament. And Christ has done all of that, and that is His work that He has accomplished.

And now you get to the end of chapter 12, and we get these closing exhortations, closing encouragements. So if you want to know what does the author want us to leave with as we finish up the book, what does he want the readers to have ringing in their ears, fresh on their mind, on the surface of their heart, that's where we get this in chapter 13. These are the applications, the implications of all the truth that he has expounded in the first twelve chapters. We have these five warning passages that warn us of the judgment that is to come if we do not lay hold of that sacrifice that he has described earlier in this book. If you will not repent and lay hold of Christ, there is no

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more sacrifice for sin. There is no atonement. There is no salvation outside of Him. So lay hold of Him or perish; that is the message of the book. And if you will not lay hold of Him, then you will certainly perish. And in the words of chapter 10, verse 27, you can expect nothing but the judgment that is to come and “the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.” That's chapter 10, verse 27.

Such a great sacrifice of Christ is not without its aim and its purpose. Why has Christ offered up Himself for His people? Not just to save us but to present to the Father His people, sanctified, holy, and pure. He has saved us for Himself, a people zealous for good works. As Paul says in Titus 2:11,

11 The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,

12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:11–14 NASB)

Ephesians 2:10: You and I “are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” That sacrifice that He made is not without its goal and its purpose. And if you want something to inform your approach to this coming year, let it be that, Titus 2:12 and 13, “to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.” That is a 2024 motto for you: “Looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of Christ.”

So since this is the case, since Christ has suffered, since He has atoned for the sins of His people, and since He has purchased a people for His own possession who are zealous for good deeds, a people whose good deeds have been foreordained and prepared for us beforehand that we should walk in them, since that is the case, then we ought to produce the peaceful fruits of righteousness, or pursue the fruitful peace—peaceful fruits of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). I will make it my New Year's resolution to speak—no, I won't. Hebrews 12:14—since that is the case, we should pursue holiness, without

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which no one will see the Lord. That should be our goal. If we are those who have been brought to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, if we have been brought to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the myriads of the angels, to the general assembly and the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in Heaven, and if we have been brought to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and if you and I have been brought to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood which speaks better than the blood of Abel, then how shall we live? That's the question. What should our conduct look like? What should mark us as different? How should we be set apart from the world? If something that amazing has happened to you, if you have been secured out of the world and called out and purchased by the blood of Christ, and you have been brought into a covenant relationship with Him in the new covenant, and all of the blessings of that kingdom have been made yours, then how shall I live? What should my conduct be like?

It will leave a mark on you. You cannot be saved by Jesus Christ and not be radically changed at the most fundamental level of your life. You cannot be. Salvation is life transformation. It is heart transformation. It is the removing of a heart of stone and having a heart of flesh put in its place. It is being taken out of the kingdom of darkness and being transferred into the kingdom of God's dear Son. It is to be given new affections, new desires. The sealing of the Holy Spirit now dwells within His people. And God begins the process of conforming us to the image of His Son so that Christ and Christlikeness become the goal of the conduct and the life and everything that God does in the hearts of His people. And then He disciplines us in that process, bringing into our life affliction and trials and difficulties and appointing and ordaining all of those things for our good so that He might train us in righteousness.

And so then you get to the end of all of that at the end of chapter 12. And of course this question then remains: then what does such a person look like? You will be changed at the most fundamental level. If you have received an unshakable kingdom, then how do you live? Because kingdom citizens live different than worldlings. That's just a fact. Kingdom citizens live different than worldlings. The gratitude, the service, the reverence, and the appropriate awe that accompanies all of that is the outgrowth and the fruits of being given an unshakable kingdom. This glory is yours, this future is yours, purchased for you, secured for you, and held for you until it is given to you and you are given to it. If all of that is true, how then ought you to live?

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And the author begins to answer this at the end of chapter 12: “Show gratitude, . . . offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28–29). And then he continues into chapter 13—ignore the chapter division—“Let love of the brethren continue” (v. 1). This is the next step; this is the next application. If you have received an unshakable kingdom, you'll show gratitude, you'll serve with reverence and awe, our God is a consuming fire, and you will let brotherly love continue.

And that is our text this morning, Hebrews 13:1. This is a rather straightforward command, and I want us to consider together not just what this means but how this command is to be worked out in the life of a church and in the life of an individual believer. Verses 2–7 are all expressions or applications of this command in chapter 13, verse 1. We are to let love of the brethren continue, and then he gives us examples of a right love in verses 2 and 3, wrong love in verses 4 and 5, and again another expression of right love in verses 6 and 7. So love is the overarching theme here of verses 1–7.

And today we're just going to consider what brotherly love is and how it is natural to the believer. Sometimes I have two points for you to consider if you're taking notes, sometimes three, sometimes four, sometimes five, and then it becomes five sermons, you know the story there. I have one point for you this morning and that's it. So this is your outline, that love of the brethren is natural for the believer. That's the only thing I want you to remember. Well, not the only thing, but that's the primary thing I want you to remember. Love of the brethren is natural for the believer. That's what we're going to consider this morning.

Verse 1 is only three words in the Greek. In the original, two of them are main words, one of them is just an article. One of the words—I'm just going to define these words for you so you have sort of an idea of what the author is describing here. One of those two main words is the word *philadelphia*, and I didn't get the accent on the wrong syllable with that like we would pronounce *Philadelphia*. They actually accent that wrong. It's *philadelphia*. And it is the word from which we get our city's name, Philadelphia, and it is a combination of two different Greek words. One of them is *phileo*, which describes a love or a kind of affection. It is related to the word *philos*, which is a friend, describes a friend. So the *phileo* is the love that would exist between friends. All right, now keep in mind that we're talking about holy love, virtuous love, pure love. We're not talking about lust at all. That's a different kind of love. *Phileo* is a kind affection. It means to cherish or to regard or to treat one another with affection. It can refer to a friendly love,

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a love between friends or brothers. And so that word, *phileo*, is combined with *adelphos*, which is the word for brother or kin. So *phileo adelphos*, *philadelphia*, is the idea there. It is the type of love, a brotherly love, the kind of love that exists between brothers. And the word *adelphos* is a word that can describe one's countryman or neighbor. In other words, somebody who is kin, a fellow countryman, or somebody of the same tribe or ethnicity, one that would come from the same womb or the same lineage. But it is used in a spiritual sense in Scripture to describe those who are our spiritual kin—that is, our spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ.

The word *remain* or *continue*—let love of the brethren, or brotherly love, *philadelphia*, continue—the word *continue* there is a Greek word that is used frequently in the New Testament. It is from the word *meno*, which means to remain or to stay or to abide. So it's just two words. The brotherly love abiding or continuing, that's the idea. The love between brothers is to abide or continue.

That word *abide* or what is translated there *continue* is used in the New Testament. It's a frequent word. It's used all over the place. It's used 118 times in your New Testament, 118 times. I found this significant, and I don't know if this is significant or not, but more than half of the times that it is used, it is used by John in one of his writings. For instance, in the Gospel of John, that word is used forty times. In 1 John, it is used twenty-four times, and in 2 John, it's used three times. So that means that 67 out of its 118 times, John uses that verb *to remain* or *to continue*, *to endure*. A good synonym might be “persevere” or “continue in something.” And so just as you and I are to persevere or endure or continue in the faith in the face of hostility, so it is that we are to remain or abide or continue in this virtue of *philadelphia*, brotherly love, the love between brothers.

That word is used to describe negative things continuing to persist. Like for instance, in John 3:36 where it says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God [remains, continues] abides on him.” That's the idea. That is, the one who is outside of Christ who will not repent and embrace salvation in Jesus Christ, the wrath of God continues to remain on that person. Not that it will come upon that person, but that it remains on that person. It's a state of continuing wrath. And then of course it is used in a positive sense. John 15:4: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.” Again from John—all three of these examples are from John's writings—1 John 2:6: “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself

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to walk in the same manner as He walked.” See, John uses this language of abiding to describe a reality. The reality being that we who are in Christ remain or continue in Christ, and thus Christ continues or remains in those who are His.

And of course, there is a consequence then. If we remain in Christ and Christ remains in us, then there are certain things that will also remain in the believer. The one who is in Christ and remains in Him, certain things will abide in him, in that one. Certain things will remain true of him, continue in him. Just as you endure in faith through that adversity, so we are to endure in our brotherly love and continue in it and persevere in it. Because that is the natural condition of a believer is to love the brethren.

Now I need to define something about love that is particularly culturally relevant. And there's something that we need to make sure that we frame in our minds, and it is this. And you obviously know exactly where this is going. Our culture does not determine what love is. There's that old eighties song, “I Want to Know What Love Is.” I'll tell you what love is. Love is what Scripture says that love is. The culture, the world, does not know what love is. They get approximations of love because they feel kind affections toward one another. And there are certain things that they say that they love. And they use the term *love* all of the time. In fact, they throw the idea of love around toward those of us who have revelation that tells us what love actually is, and they try and trip us up by saying, “Well, that's not very loving.” See, Jesus was all about love. That was the big thing. You ask most pagans, your average garden-variety pagan on the street, “What is the central idea of Jesus's teaching?” and they would say, “Well, just love one another. You just need to experience love and know love. Jesus was loving. He was all about love. God is love, and love is God.” That's their idea of what love is. In fact, the world cannot think any more deeply about love than to come up with that tautological statement, “Love is love.” As if “love is love” just defines what love is. You can't define something if you just simply say it is what it is. Love is love. You ask the world, “What is love?” Well, love is love. What they mean by that is love is whatever I say it is. It's whatever I feel it is. It's whatever makes me comfortable. It's whatever doesn't offend somebody else. Love just is whatever you say that it is. And that is obviously patently false. It must be patently false.

What if my idea of love is to take your wife from you to have her as my own? What if that's my idea of love? Do I get to define then what love is? Is that love? What if my idea of love is small children? You see where the world goes with this? There is no limiting parameter upon such nonsense that love is love. Obviously love is a certain thing. It is a

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specific thing, and it is defined and described in Scripture. It is in fact limited by the confines of Scripture. And let me give you one of those limiting confines, and it is that truth and love can never be divorced from one another. It is never loving to condone sin or to condone falsehood. It is never loving to withhold truth. It is never loving to endorse or accept what God forbids. Those things are never loving. It is never loving to contradict Scripture or to ignore it or to endorse what Scripture condemns. So, brotherly love has a biblical definition. It is the kind, sacrificial affection that exists between people who are friends with one another. This is the love that is to continue.

You'll notice that the author in verse 1 does not say let the love of the brethren start, let the love of the brethren begin, let the love of the brethren be taught in a Sunday school class so people would know how to do it. In fact, it was already going on. In Hebrews 6:10, the author says, "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints." They already had ministry to one another going on in the church. And in Hebrews 6:10, which I just read to you there, that is on the heels of the warning passage there in chapter 5 and through chapter 6. And as he gets out of that warning passage, he is reaffirming to the Hebrew Christians the evidences of their genuine salvation. And one of the evidences of their genuine salvation was the love that they had for one another and their expression in ministering and in still ministering to the saints.

Then in chapter 10, verses 32–34, he says,

32 Remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

33 partly by being made a public spectacle through approaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. (Heb. 10:32–24 NASB)

These are people who had already been involved so much in loving the brethren that they were remembering the prisoners and they were giving to one another and they were sacrificing their own possessions for the sake of others, ministering to one another. The love was there, and it existed, and the author is simply saying let it continue. When he says, "Let love of the brethren continue," he is not suggesting that it had ceased. He's recognizing that it was ongoing, and he is encouraging them to let that

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love flourish and abound and to pursue it even more. So just as it was going on, it was to not just continue, but he is telling them to press in on that. And then he gives them some very practical ways to do that in the next couple of verses.

It is just like what Paul had said in 1 Thessalonians 4:9–10. He says to the Thessalonians now, “As to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you.” I love that verse. He's saying to the Thessalonians, “When it comes to loving the brethren, you guys have this down.” In other words, it was natural for them. Remember, at Thessalonica, Paul only spent three weeks with them before he was run out of town. He writes to them shortly after that, and he hadn't spent the three weeks teaching them how to love one another, but he writes to them shortly after he was run out of town and says, “You guys—love of the brethren, it just exists. And you have no need for me to even mention it.” Then he says, “You . . . are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.” It's already going on. And so he just comes alongside. So no need for me to correct you or to even instruct you in it. Just pursue it, pursue it even more. Let it continue. It is natural. It doesn't need to be manufactured.

And you know why it doesn't need to be manufactured? Because it's the fruit of the Spirit. That's why. So when the Spirit comes into us and dwells within us, He begins to produce in us what? Love. That's the fruit of the indwelling of the Spirit of God. It is the natural result of regeneration. You don't have to take somebody who has genuinely been born again and then bring them aside and say, “OK, look, here's Christianity 101. We're gonna teach you what love is. We're going to instruct you on how to love the brethren.” It is the most natural thing in the world for a new born-again believer to say, “All of a sudden, I love those people who are also in the same family of God as I am.” And their perspective—this happened to you if you are born again—your perspective toward the world changed, and your perspective toward believers changed. Because suddenly you have a love for the brethren. And I would say that it is inexplicable. It is inexplicable. It is natural. And it is not something that you need to create within you. It is something that the Spirit of God creates in you in response and in conjunction with the truth. It's natural.

Siblings love one another. Now, if you come from a dysfunctional family, that's going to sound—it's going to be shocking to you. Siblings love one another. That's natural. You see a family where all the brothers and sisters love each other, they all get along, do you say to yourself, “That's completely unnatural”? Or do you think, yeah, that's what I

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should expect. Listen, it's what you should expect. When siblings hate each other, something has gone on. You talk to somebody and say, "So tell me about your brothers and sisters." "Well, I haven't talked to my brothers and sisters for years, decades. I never talk to them. I hate them. We all hate each other. We don't talk to one another. We haven't seen each other. There's no communication at all. As far as I'm concerned, all of them could die and it'd make the world a better place, and they think the same thing of me." Now, if you talk to somebody and they said that, what do you assume? You assume that fundamentally, somewhere, something happened. It was egregious and sinful. That something is not natural, because what is natural—when sin is dealt with and when things go as it should in the natural realm, siblings love one another, and so it is in the family of God. When Christians are at war and they hate one another, they won't talk to one another, something is wrong. Something is wrong. The most natural thing is for the child of God to have affection for other children of God.

It is connected to our salvation. First Peter 1:22–23 says, "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." Peter says, "You love one another from the heart; do so fervently because you've been born again." In other words, love is the natural expression of a regenerated heart. It is so natural in fact that John includes love of the brethren as a distinguishing mark of believers. How is it that I know that I am saved? The answer to that question: you will have a love for the brethren. Conversely, the same thing is true. If you have no love for the brethren, mark it, friend. You have every reason to question whether or not you are genuinely saved. In fact, that is the evidence of your salvation, a love for the brethren. First John 3:16:

16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth [notice the connection between love and truth].

19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him. (1 John 3:16–19 NASB)

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We will know by this that we are of the truth. How will we know that we are of the truth? If we have love for the brethren. That's the evidence of it.

First John 4:7:

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:7–14 NASB)

That's a wonderful passage that describes the love of the brethren and the love that God has in sending His Son to model for us what that sacrificial love should look like. And John commends to us that we love the brethren, and then he gives God as the initiator of this. In this is love, not that we loved Him, but that who first loved us? God first loved us. He is the initiator of it. And there's not a person in this room who would ever love God or his fellow man if God had not first loved us and came and saved us. God is the initiator in that. Salvation must take place before there is any kind of biblical love for the brethren. God is the initiator of it, and He creates this within the hearts of His children, and He creates it through the new birth by giving us new affections, new hearts, new desires, a new nature. God does not save a person from their sin and then save them from the penalty and the power of that sin without changing that person into a God-lover, and the one whom God has changed into a God-lover will be a brother-lover as well. And if one is not a brother-lover, then know this for certain, you are not a

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God-lover and you have not been changed. In fact, if you have no love for the brethren, I want to say this bluntly, as if that's new for me, you have every reason to believe that you are at this very moment an unregenerate, rebellious, self-deceived pretender to the faith. That is as blunt and simple as it can be. This is so fundamental to what it means to be born again that when we even talk about the new birth and new affections and a new heart, it is love of the brethren—it is love that is at the center of that. And if that does not exist, neither does the salvation that you make pretense toward. You say that's harsh? Well, don't take it from me. Take it from John. 1 John 4:

19 We love, because He first loved us.

20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. (1 John 4:19–5:1 NASB)

That's a natural family relationship. The one who says he loves God and hates his brother is a liar. That's John's way of saying you're pretending something that is not true. You're pretending to be a believer, but if you don't have love for the brethren, rest assured, you are not a believer. However often you attend church, however frequently you listen to podcasts, whatever outward pretense you do for show, rest assured, you are not a believer if you do not have love for the brethren. It is natural.

Now, there are a number of dangers to brotherly love. We are not commanded to manufacture this love because it is produced by the Spirit of God. That's why there's no instructions in Scripture telling us how to create love for the brethren. If you just do this and do this ten times and then you do this and then you go here and then you hear this, then you read that, then you'll love the brethren. There's no formula for that. There's no instructions for that. Why? Because it is the base assumption of all New Testament writing that the one who has been born of God will love God and love his fellow man and love his brother and that that love exists and that that love is the evidence that we are indeed born of God and have been brought into His family. It is assumed that this love will exist.

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It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who has sealed us, but it is possible for us to grieve the Spirit and to quench the Spirit and to disobey the Spirit and to neglect those disciplines of grace which produce love in us and keep that love warm and hot for one another. And thus it is possible for us to pour cold water on the love that we have for our brethren. Now I'll give you some ways that this is done. If we neglect the gathering of fellowship, the assembling of ourselves together, as Hebrews 10:25 describes, that will cool your affections for one another. If you neglect that gathering together, if you neglect the preaching of the Word, and if you neglect repentance and forgiveness and confession of sin and fellowship with one another, and if you neglect communion, and if you neglect the ordinance of church baptism, if you are not present for those things, if you will not serve one another, if you will not give kindly to one another, if you don't sacrifice for other people, if you don't spend time for one another—what am I describing? All I'm describing is the body life of the church. In other words, if you neglect that, your affections will grow cold. That is inevitable. And you will find yourself over the course of time saying, “Ah, church, I can take it or leave it. Ah, church, I'm not sure. I go there. It's a big gobbling up of my time. I go there and these people are cold to me, and I walked in and so-and-so didn't recognize me. I'm going to hold a grudge.” And then you go out and you go home and you stew over that all week and you let bitterness come up in your heart. And rather than dealing with all of that sin, you nurture it and you stew in it and you soak in it and you sour in it. That will affect your heart and your affections toward other believers. It inevitably will do that. In other words, if you neglect the means of God's grace in your life, the evidences and the fruit of your salvation will wax and wane and grow cold and eventually become nigh unto nonexistent.

It is possible for us to pour water on that affection which is natural, which I think is some of the motivation behind Paul's admonition in Romans 12. I told you at the beginning, we took a break for a period of time before Thanksgiving and we looked at two subjects, love and Thanksgiving, those two weeks prior to that. We looked at Romans 12, and Romans 12 has a lot of parallels to Hebrews 13 and the admonitions here. I'm going to read to you five verses, Romans 12:9–13, and I want you just to listen to these. And I'll read the verse and give you a couple of comments. Listen to how Paul encourages this aggressive pursuit of these virtues.

Romans 12:9: “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.” In other words, if you will endorse and approve what is evil and reject what is good, then your love will be hypocritical because it will not be a biblical love. You must abhor what is evil and cling to what is good.

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Verse 10: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.” The selfishness, not being devoted to one another, preferring yourself above others, that will cool your affections for others.

Verse 11: “Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” If you are not fervent in your pursuit of these virtues and these affections, and fervent in your expression of these things, it will cool your affections.

Verse 12: “Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.” Prayerlessness has a way of cooling your affection for others, but you will find when you pray for somebody that you are warmly affectionate toward that individual. You have an issue with somebody in your life, you begin to pray for that person. Pray for their good, pray for their blessing, pray for your own heart toward that individual. If you are cold to them and you are callous to them and you don't care about them and they bug you, you begin to pray for them. Make them the object of your prayer, fervent, arduous, passionate prayer for a long period of time. Then you'll find that when you show up on a Sunday morning, it's hard to hate the person that you've been praying for, and it's hard to do that when you have to bring that person into the presence of God and begin to pray for that person in the presence of your Father, who is love, and you're praying lovingly for them and your own heart. And then to show up and to see that person face-to-face, you will find yourself warmly and affectionately drawn to that person. Your heart will become knit to them. So in the context of brotherly love, Paul says, be fervent in prayer.

Verse 13: “Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.” And of course, these are the very things that are mentioned in verse 2 and verse 3 of Hebrews 13.

So Paul is describing there a passionate pursuit of this virtue. Be devoted to brotherly love. Make that your pursuit. Make it your passion. If you're cold in that area, then make it your devotion to warm yourself up in that area. You cannot do that if you neglect the means of grace. You cannot. You're cutting yourself off from the very fuel that feeds that flame and that love and makes it grow and makes it mature and makes it express itself.

Before I give you two closing applications of this, let me just say that this affection, this discipline, begins at home. It's no surprise that the very next verse would address the issue of hospitality, which really is the opening up of your heart and your home to other people. This affection must begin at home. It should go without saying that men should

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have a brotherly love for their wives, that wives should have a brotherly love for their husbands, that there should be this kind of friendly affection between one another, and that that should be expressed to the kids, and that the kids should be encouraged and taught how to work that into their lives and to practice that themselves, and that this is part of what it means to grow up a house in the fear and admonition of the Lord, that that brotherly love should be part of that. That affection should be central there. It will do you no good at all to open up your home to strangers and welcome them in and show them kindness and grace and compassion and open-heartedness while you are not showing that to your spouse or to your children. That is the most egregious of hypocritical loves. The very first person who deserves that is the person you share a home with. So get that right and then move on to verse 2. Then let's open it up and begin to show that affection to other people as well. But let's not think that the commands that we have here and our responsibilities that we have here pertain to the other people who are strangers around us, the people in the pews behind us or the pews in front of us. That is an application of this principle, but there are people who are much closer to home where we can begin to do this, to show brotherly love and let it continue.

So has your love grown cold or nonexistent? If it has, then let me encourage you to examine yourself to see if you're even in the faith. Was there a time when your heart was inflamed with love for the brethren? Brotherly love? And you wanted to be with people? You wanted to be with God's people? And you wanted to sit and fellowship and discuss spiritual things and discuss your common kinship in Christ, and that warmed your heart, that made you passionate? You were fervent in that? Is there a time when that existed? Or would you say, "No, I don't ever remember that happening. I mean, I've been coming to the church for years. I've been in church my whole life, but I never remember a time when I liked Christians. This is the worst hour of my week, Sunday morning right here, surrounded by all of these complete . . . people. And I would just prefer to have nothing to do with them honestly." If that is the case, you should examine yourself to see if you're even in the faith. The very central and first mark of genuine salvation is brotherly love.

And if you are a believer and your love is cold, then what has happened? There's been sin somewhere along the line. Something has happened that has fundamentally taken you off track. Something has happened that has fundamentally changed your heart toward others. Like a thermostat, love for the brethren is something by which you can measure the temperature of your own relationship with the Lord. You can't say, "I love

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the Lord passionately, but I have no need or regard at all for my brother.” You can't say that. You're a liar. You don't love God. You can pretend to love God and hate your brother, but you can't genuinely love God and hate your brother. If that love is cold, what has happened? Make it your focus in the coming year to remedy that, because this love of the brethren is the mark of a believer.

It's also the mark of a healthy church, by the way. It is one of those things that distinguishes the church as its unique social unit. You've been called out of the world. You are different. I mean, so when verse 2 says, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,” there's nobody stranger than that person sitting in the pew next to you and behind you. This is a collection of strangers. So this collection of strangers is its own unique social unit in the eyes of God. There is the world, there is the government, there is the family, there is the church. And we have obligations here to one another that we do not have to the world, that we do not have to people who are outside of this fellowship. We have moral obligations and ethical obligations among us, and love for the brethren, that thing that marks a healthy church, sets the church apart from the world, and it sets the church apart as its own special unit.

And as culture gets crazier and times get crazier and things get more dangerous, this is going to become even more and more important. Because I will tell you, when you are facing a hostile world, there is no place that you would rather be than in a room full of people who love you and whom you love. So as everything goes nuttier and nuttier outside of these walls, it is going to become incumbent upon us to become more passionate and zealous about the love and affection and the relationships that are inside of these walls. This is why it is significant. The Hebrews audience was already undergoing persecution. We read that back at the end of chapter 10. The reproaches, the tribulations, the suffering, the imprisonment, the seizure of their property. You know what's important for people who are going through that? Letting brotherly love continue. Because then you come to a place like this and you get solace from the craziness of the world around us. So he is encouraging them to press on in brotherly love, even at the risk to themselves, even at great cost, which is what hospitality and showing love to strangers and love to prisoners is. Remembering prisoners and showing hospitality to strangers, that's costly. That can be expensive. It can be risky. You can get trampled underfoot doing that. It can hurt you. You can be hurt by it. But he encourages them to press into this brotherly affection and to not allow the hostile world to cool those affections for one another.

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So I would say to you, as Paul did to the Thessalonians, excel at this still more and more. I have opportunity to travel around, not as much as other pastors do, but every once in a while I get to be in another church for a Sunday here or a Sunday there, and I have noticed something that is unique about this congregation. And I can't speak to every church that every one of you have come from, but I do know that this congregation is one of the most loving, brotherly, affectionate places that I have ever been in my life. Every Sunday, I see it. I see the evidence of it throughout the week. I could say, as Paul would say, that when it comes to brotherly love, you, this collection, Kootenai Community Church, has no need that I even say anything about this, because you do it. And so I would just say with Paul, excel at it still more and more for your own sake and for the sake of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

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