

Love for Sufferers (Hebrews 13:3)

Hebrews chapter 13. And actually as we begin reading, we're going to begin at chapter 12, verse 28, and read through chapter 13, verse 3. Twelve, verse 28:

28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

29 for our God is a consuming fire.

13:1 Let love of the brethren continue.

2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body. (Heb. 12:28–13:3 NASB)

There are so many ways for us to express our love for the brethren. Loving those who are inside the family of God is for the believer the natural thing to do, since we share a common Savior, we share a common interest, we share a kingdom, we share an inheritance, we share the same Lord, we are in the same family, bought by the same blood, purchased by the same atonement, secured by the same resurrection, wooed by the same Holy Spirit, elected by the same Father. We share all of those blessings of salvation. And so to show love for those who are inside the family of God is a very natural thing for a Christian.

And if, as I argued a couple weeks ago, if that love for the brethren is not there, it indicates that something is fundamentally wrong. Just as in an earthly and natural family, when siblings hate one another, it is because of sin or alienation, something has gone wrong fundamentally somewhere along the line. And by the way, if you are in war with a sibling, a natural sibling, I would encourage you to get that sorted out, and maybe it has nothing at all to do with you and everything to do with somebody else, but that only goes to make my case that something has gone wrong somewhere that may need to be resolved and addressed.

The various “one anothers” in the New Testament are examples of how Christians are to love one another and show the brotherly love that is commanded in chapter 13, verse 1.

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For instance—and there are more than this, but here's just a sampling—we are commanded to be devoted to one another (Rom. 12:10), to honor one another (Rom. 12:10), to build up one another (Rom. 14:19), to accept one another (Rom. 15:7), to care for one another, (1 Cor. 12:25), to serve one another (Gal. 5:13), to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), to be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph. 4:32), to submit to one another (Eph. 5:21), to bear with one another (Col. 3:13), to comfort one another (1 Thess. 4:18), to exhort one another (Heb. 3:13), to show hospitality to one another (1 Pet. 4:9), and to pray for one another (James 5:16). And it just occurred to me as I was reading that list that whoever was running the live stream, if they were trying to put the verses up on the screen, you had quite the challenge. Apologize for that.

Life together affords us all kinds of opportunities to love one another. And really that boils down to simply considering the interest of other people ahead of our own, to put other people first, which means that we would then honor them and build them up and accept them and care for them and serve them and bear their burdens and be kind to them and submit to them and love them and cherish them. And that type of activity of putting other people ahead of us and considering the interests of others before our own—that's Philippians chapter 2—which is exactly what Jesus Christ did, that is something that can be done and lived out everywhere by every Christian. It is something that can be done when you are single, when you are married, when you are married before you have children, when you are married with children, when you are married after the children leave, when you are retired in the home, in the marketplace, at the jobsite, in the neighborhood. In literally every area of life, this type of sacrificial and others-centered love can be lived out. And of course it is most frequently and most easily lived out in the church body inside of the congregation.

And all of these are expressions of love. And love is what tops the list of our author's concerns in Hebrews 13 as he begins the chapter by imploring us to “let love of the brethren continue” (v. 1), something that was already going on, and he says, “Let this continue amongst you.” And then he gives us some practical ways of showing that love, to remember the strangers (in v. 2) and to remember the prisoners (in v. 3). So there's the general command in verse 1, we are to remember the brethren, then we are to remember the strangers, and then we are to remember the sufferers. And we have looked at the first two of those commands, verses 1 and 2, and yet here is another example in verse 3 of ways that Christians can demonstrate their love for one another. Verse 3 says, “Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who

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are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.” And that is our text for this morning.

This reference here reminds us that being in prison for the faith was an ever-present reality for New Testament Christians. If you lived in the first century in and around Judea and the land of Israel or places where the gospel had spread to because of Paul's missionary journeys, if you lived in any of those areas, then you likely knew someone who had been imprisoned at least for a time or was imprisoned for the sake of righteousness or for the sake of the faith. It was not uncommon in the first century. It is uncommon in our century, in our location. But it was not uncommon in the first century, and it certainly was not uncommon in every place where the gospel had manifested and been preached.

The New Testament is a collection of books that was forged in the midst of suffering and imprisonment. The New Testament is a collection of books that was forged in the midst of suffering. Suffering for the faith, suffering for the gospel is all the way through the New Testament. The predictions that this would happen are in the New Testament. The examples of people to whom it happened are in the New Testament. The warnings about suffering and the trials and temptations that we are prone to in the midst of suffering, that is described in the New Testament.

Five of Paul's Epistles were written from prison cells. Four of them were written during his first imprisonment, which is recorded at the end of the book of Acts. That's Colossians and Philippians and Philemon and Ephesians. And then Paul was released for a brief period of time where he visited the city of Ephesus and he sent Titus to the island of Crete to set in order some things that remained there. He wrote a couple other Epistles, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and eventually Paul was arrested a second time and put into prison, and this time not the rented quarters that you see at the end of the book of Acts where his friends were allowed to come freely in and out and he was allowed to teach them and proclaim the kingdom of God. But that second imprisonment was the type of imprisonment that is basically you're thrown in a hole and you're left to rot or die until you're executed. And that was when he wrote the book of 2 Timothy. So our New Testament is forged in the midst of suffering and affliction and imprisonment.

It is our situation in America in the, we should say, the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, and even now into the twenty-first century, that is a historic anomaly to what the church has experienced around the world in every other age for the last two millennia. We have enjoyed an anomaly. And the anomaly is that we

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have lived in a situation, in a circumstance, where the Christian faith has been allowed to flourish and to prosper, and we have lived off the benefit and the blessing of that. But I don't know if you have noticed it or not, but that window, that environment, is very rapidly changing around us. We have enjoyed an anomaly that Christians for two thousand years have not because for most of church history, in most of the locations where the gospel has permeated, the church has existed inside of a hostile culture, and imprisonment for the cause of Christ and for the sake of righteousness was the reality, and those who lived freely are the anomaly. We have enjoyed it. And right now we are—I'm not trying to terrify anybody, but this is the reality—we are coasting on the fumes of what we have enjoyed for the last two centuries. Our society is right now. We're coasting on the fumes of that. And that may or may not change. I don't know. You don't have to be a prophet to see that if the current trajectory is not stopped by something, a revival, a reformation, something, that we are headed in the very same path and the very same course as the rest of human history—that is, the ash heap of empires—and the reality that we will be facing something that our Christian brothers and sisters have faced for two thousand years.

It was certainly the situation for the Hebrew Christians that they knew people who were imprisoned. Thus the command in verse 3, “Remember the prisoners.” And I want you to know that the audience themselves, some of them had been imprisoned for their faith and that is alluded to or mentioned back in chapter 10. Turn back there if you will, just to chapter 10, verse 32. I want to show you three examples from this Epistle of how the early Hebrew Christians to whom this letter was written were very familiar with the kind of sufferings that we're talking about. Hebrews 10:32:

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

33 partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches 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. 10:32–34 NASB)

Notice that the author there says that they had become sharers with people who were so treated. They had joined in that affliction. They had done what Paul later said to Timothy that we read at the beginning, where he was not ashamed of the gospel and

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joined him in suffering for the sake of the gospel. There were a number in the Hebrew congregation who had done that very thing. You'll notice the reference in verse 34, "You showed sympathy to the prisoners." There were some among them who had not only had their property seized and suffered the reproach and the tribulations, the conflict of suffering, but had for the sake of the gospel been landed in prison. And the Hebrews had shown sympathy to them and accepted joyfully the seizure of their own property.

Now I want you to fast forward a little bit to Hebrews 13:23. I want you to notice there was another example of somebody that they knew well who had been in prison. Hebrews 13:23: "Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you." Timothy himself had been released from prison. I find it interesting that in the chapter that we read earlier in the service, 2 Timothy 1, Paul tells Timothy, "Don't be ashamed of my chains or me, the prisoner of the Lord, but join with me in suffering for the sake of the gospel." It's very possible that it was Timothy's act of going to Paul as Paul requests of Timothy at the end of 2 Timothy 4 when he says, "When you come, bring my cloak, bring my books. Come to me before winter." Why? Because Paul was sitting in a hole, and in that environment, if you didn't have family or friends show up to provide clothing for you and sustenance for you, you sat there with nobody to visit with you. In that situation—it's different than in our current context—in that situation, the only thing that the government provided for you was the hole to put you in, and after that it was up to somebody else to meet your needs. So at the end of 2 Timothy chapter 4, Paul says, "Bring my cloak, which I left at Troas. Bring my books, the parchments; I need those. Bring my coat and come to me before winter because everybody has departed, everybody has left me all alone. Only Luke is with me." He was in dire straits. It's very possible that Timothy's arrival there in Rome to visit Paul and to fulfill the mission that Paul had given him landed Timothy in prison. And now Timothy was released (Heb. 13:23).

Notice the reference in verses 18 and 19; it's possible that the author himself was imprisoned or at least is writing this from less than ideal circumstances. Verse 18: "Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner" (Heb. 13:18–19). Very possible that the author himself for some reason was imprisoned, in some way was imprisoned. It's odd language to say "I will be restored to you." It seems to suggest that he had been forcibly and against his own will taken away from them for some reason. Maybe persecution, maybe he himself was imprisoned when he wrote this.

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There's the reminder here to continue to remember those who are the prisoners. "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body" (v. 3). Like brotherly love and like hospitality, this was already happening in the Hebrew congregation. We saw that back in chapter 10. You had participated in their sufferings, you had remembered and shown sympathy to the prisoners and those who had had their property seized. There had already been the expression of love on behalf of these Hebrew Christians toward those who had been imprisoned and ill-treated. And the author is not saying, look, you should start doing this. The author is saying to continue to do this, just like Hebrews 13:1: "Let love of the brethren continue."

And in so doing, don't neglect these two groups of brethren who are very often neglected. The stranger whom you don't necessarily want to know and you may suspect that they're a plant or a government agent or somebody who will turn on you. Don't neglect them. And don't neglect those who have already been imprisoned and ill-treated for the faith. Those, by the way, are the two easiest groups of people to neglect because they are out of sight and therefore they are out of mind. And remembering either one of them could be costly, it could be dangerous. So the author wants them to continue doing what they may be tempted to stop doing and that is to embrace those people who would cost them and be a danger to them. He wants them to continue doing this.

He says "Remember them," which is similar—it's sort of a positive side of the command we get in verse 2 when he says, "Do not neglect." Remember that word *neglect* means to allow it to pass out of your mind, to forget, to lose sight of, to lose out of your mind. He says don't do that; instead you should remember. So verse 2 is negative—don't neglect this. And verse 3 is positive—remember this. It's really the same idea stated two different ways. We could say, "Don't neglect to show hospitality and don't neglect the prisoners," or we could say, "Remember to be hospitable and remember the prisoners." It's the same idea.

Paul spoke of himself in this way, by the way, when he asked others to remember him in his imprisonment. Colossians 4:18: "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. [Listen to this] Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you." That is such a short, simple, but loaded phrase. Remember my imprisonment. Now Paul doesn't say, "Here are ten things that I want you to do as you remember my imprisonment." He just simply says to the Colossians, "Don't forget me. I'm in prison, and don't forget that." It's almost

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as if the apostle could just simply remind them of his circumstances and the people in Colossae would know what to do with that, they would know exactly how to handle the apostle Paul.

So what does this look like to remember the prisoners? What does it look like? Does it simply mean that I put up on my mirror on my vanity in my bathroom, *Prisoners*? So every morning I wake up and think, oh yeah, that's right, prisoners. Just remember that. Remember prisoners. Have I fulfilled my responsibility? What does it look like to remember the prisoners? Well, the New Testament gives us some examples. We could look at what was happening then and what others did for the apostle Paul and get some idea of what this would look like when the brethren expressed love for one another in remembering the prisoners. So here's a couple of things that we see from Paul's own life that others did for him. In the book of Philippians, the first is there was care and concern from the brethren, care and concern. A care *and* concern, not Karen concern. Care and concern, three words. Paul writes in Philippians 4:10, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity." And later on in the same chapter Paul writes this:

14 Nevertheless, you have done well [listen to this] to share with me in my affliction.

15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone;

16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

17 Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:14–19 NASB)

They had expressed their compassion, their solidarity with the apostle Paul. They had joined with him in his affliction. They had revived their care for him, their concern for

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him. And that manifested on their behalf in giving a gift to the apostle Paul to meet his needs. That's a very tangible, real expression of how they showed their brotherly love.

Second is prayer. We see this in Ephesians 6. And by the way, I'm quoting here from Paul's prison Epistles because it is writing to people from prison that we get some idea of what other people were doing for Paul when he was in prison. Ephesians 6:18:

18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph. 6:18–20 NASB)

Now maybe in some situations prayer is all we *can* do. But it's certainly something that we can do, to pray for those who are in prison.

I find it interesting that from prison Paul didn't say, "Pray for my release." In fact, when he asked them to pray for something specifically, Paul simply says, "Pray that I will be bold and that I will speak as I ought to speak so that the gospel may be proclaimed." And then we find out in Philippians that the gospel had circulated amongst the entire praetorian guard because they had a soldier chained to Paul 24-7. And so they would come in and switch out the soldiers, and every time they brought a new soldier in, guess what Paul saw it as. For lack of a better term, a mark. "Here's somebody I can share the gospel with." And then those soldiers would leave Paul and go back into the praetorian guard, and news about him and about the gospel had spread throughout the entire praetorian guard. Paul's concern was not that he would be out of the chains so much. Paul's concern was not that he would have his needs met. Paul's concern was just simply this: "Make me bold so that even in chains I will speak as I ought to speak." That's something that we can pray for the prisoners.

Third, visiting the prisoners. Matthew 25—these are the words of Jesus in verses 34–40:

34 Then the king will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

35 For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;

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36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’

37 Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink?’

38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?’

39 When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

40 The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’” (NASB)

See, that expression of brotherly love to those who are suffering is a service to Christ Himself. And He will reward that abundantly and graciously on the final day. And this is why, by the way, Christians in the early church visited each other in prison, because of this very command, this kind of command, knowing that they were serving Christ in doing that.

We see examples of that, people visiting those in prison. Paul's companions visited him. He says at the end of 2 Timothy, which I already mentioned, that Luke was with him. He encouraged Timothy to come to him and to bring the parchments and his coat. He spent two years in Caesarea where he had visitors, and he spent two years in Rome where people came to visit him. So visiting prisoners in their imprisonment is certainly a very tangible way of showing brotherly love for them.

We have an example of that in Onesiphorus. 2 Timothy 1:16–18:

16 The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains;

17 but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me—

18 the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus. (NASB)

Onesiphorus was not ashamed of Paul's chains.

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And then in that same chapter, the apostle tells Timothy—2 Timothy 1:8: “Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.” At that time, Paul was public enemy number one. He had been accused, if you follow the narrative through the Book of Acts, he had been accused at the end of the Book of Acts of sedition (stirring up cities), sectarianism, and illicit religion and sacrilege, defiling the Jewish temple. Those are the three charges that the Jewish leadership brought against Paul before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, and we can presume that they brought those same charges to Nero when Paul finally landed in Rome and stood before him. Sedition, sectarianism, and sacrilege, that was what he was accused of.

And after he was released and he was finally put back in prison, this time it was not to have sort of a courteous presentation before Nero and to present his case there as he did during his first imprisonment. But that second time, instead, Paul was public enemy number one, and Christianity was on the cusp of becoming an illicit religion. And they were only, when 2 Timothy was written, they're only a couple of years away from a government-sponsored, government-funded, government-orchestrated persecution of the Christian church. They were only a couple of years away from that. The slanders had already started regarding what Christians were doing and what they were guilty of, and it looked as if the dark storm clouds were gathering on the horizon and even over top of their heads. And Paul says, “Don't be ashamed of me, but join with me in suffering.”

It would be dangerous to identify with the Christian community. It would certainly be dangerous and even at the risk of their own lives for anybody to identify with the apostle Paul. He was their most notable, notorious, and well-known ringleader. And to hook your wagon to him in any way would make you a target. And Onesiphorus got to Rome, and he eagerly searched out Paul so that he could visit Paul. And Paul says the Lord will remember him and the Lord will reward him on that day.

It's not just the prisoners that we are to remember but also those who are ill-treated. Look at the second half of the verse—“Those who are ill-treated” (v. 3). Suffering in prison is not the only way that people suffer for the sake of the gospel, for the truth. And so compassion should not be restrained just to the prisoner. There are other ways that people suffer for the gospel. We've seen them back in Hebrews chapter 10. Reproaches and contempt, having your children taken away, suffering financial woes, losing your job, the seizure of your property, your physical destitution, occupational or reputational ruin, being banished from family and friends and from those who should

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care for you, being ostracized from society, being falsely accused, those are all ways that people are ill-treated and all ways that first-century Christians were ill-treated.

In fact, they are to view themselves as being lumped in with the heroes of faith because that other reference to “ill-treated” is actually back in Hebrews chapter 11. Do you remember when he is reciting through the virtues of the heroes of the faith, Paul—the author of Hebrews says . . . I've been talking about Paul; I'm not suggesting Paul wrote Hebrews. The author of Hebrews says in verse 35,

35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release [talking about prisoners], so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated [there's our phrase: ill-treated]

38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. (Heb. 11:35–38 NASB)

They were ill-treated. And the reference here to ill-treated in chapter 13 should remind the readers of this Epistle that when they are ill-treated for the sake of the truth, they are in good company. They are with those like at the end of chapter 11 who were ill-treated. And the author says, “Those were men and women of whom this world is not worthy.” So if you have received ill treatment for the sake of the truth, count yourself in that number, among the men and women of whom this world is not worthy. And we are to remember them as well.

Now here's a question that I should answer before we talk about the manner in which we do this and the motive with which we do it. This question here—who or what does the author have in mind? Is he talking about every prisoner in every prison who is imprisoned for every reason? Is he talking about them? In other words, do I have an obligation to be down—do you and I have an obligation to be down at the county jail visiting prisoners in the jail? Is that our obligation? Is that what this passage is talking about? I don't think it is what this passage is talking about. This passage is specifically talking about how we treat brothers. “Let love of the brethren continue” (Heb. 13:1).

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Remember the strangers, remember the prisoners. What kind of prisoners? Brethren. What kind of strangers? Brethren.

Now, if you want to go to the jail and visit people, you have a captive audience there that you can share the gospel with. You can do that. That's totally fine. Not opposed to any of that. But this passage is not a mandate that we visit people who are imprisoned for rape and murder and drug trafficking or any of the other things that people are imprisoned for. It is a mandate that we remember those who are in prison for the faith and those who are ill-treated for the faith.

There are two phrases that qualify or describe how it is that we are to do this, the first half of the verse and the second half of the verse, “as though in prison with them” and “since you yourselves also are in the body.” Those two phrases describe the manner in which we are to do this and the heart with which we are to do it. It describes something of the mindset that is behind remembering the prisoners and those who are ill-treated.

The first phrase, “as though in prison with them,” that describes the sympathy of heart that we have with our brothers. We are to, as it were, put our hearts in with them. We are to remember the prisoners in a manner that suggests that we are in prison with them, that we have some kind of solidarity with them, some kind of unity with them, some kind of shared interest with them, so that if they are in prison, there is a sense—there should be a sense—in which we feel the weight of that imprisonment, and we ought to remember them in such a way as if we are imprisoned with them. Show them the kind of compassion and care that you would want if you were in prison. That's the idea. How would you think if you were in prison? What would you want people to pray for? How would you want people to support you? What would you want people to do for you and your family members? If you have a brother who is in prison and it is within your ability to do something to serve them in some way, remember them. Whatever the danger, whatever the cost, you remember them as if you were imprisoned with them. What would you want in that circumstance? As though you were suffering the same thing.

And he is alluding here to our union with those who suffer for the faith. If one member suffers, all members suffer with it. If one rejoices, all the members rejoice with it. There is a oneness in the body of Christ. And so if our brother or sister is in prison for the sake of righteousness or for the sake of the truth, we ought to remember them as if we were in prison with them because they are part of the same body and therefore we have a connection to them and thus a responsibility. We share a common life, common

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interests, a common destiny. We have a union in Christ that does and should knit our hearts together with them. And so when they are in prison, then our hearts go out to them and we begin to remember them in a way that we would want to be remembered if we were in their circumstances.

The second phrase, “since you yourselves also are in the body,” is not a reference to being in the body of Christ. That's how Calvin treats it in his commentary. I disagree with that. I only know of one person who treats it that way. The reference is not to being in the body of Christ together. That's already alluded to there with our union, the first half of the verse, but it seems to suggest the idea that we also have physical bodies and therefore we would know what that weakness, what that imprisonment would feel like. It is not difficult for us to imagine what being imprisoned for the faith or ill-treated for the faith would do to us if we received the same kind of treatment. And so since we are in the body as well, since we are in these vessels of flesh and blood, of weakness and limitation, what would that mean for us if we were in that circumstance? We could remember them in that way and show favor and kindness to those who are ill-treated, knowing that we share the same kinds of limitations. You're in the body as well. And so as long as you are in your body, you are subject to this very same kind of treatment. Even though right now you may not be enduring this kind of treatment, the fact that you are in your body means that you are not immune from similar affliction. That kind of affliction, ill-treatment for the sake of the truth and persecution for the sake of the gospel and even imprisonment, can befall you just as easily as it has befallen anybody else who is so treated.

There is the temptation for us to think that in America we can always be immune from this because after all the Republican party will come to our rescue. Yeah, I hear you chuckling. That's a good response. Because you ought to remember that half of the Republican party would throw you in prison tomorrow, all of you, if it would profit them. But the other half would tweet vicious things and say really harsh things on Twitter. You say, Jim, you sound like a Democrat. I'm not, because 100 percent of them would imprison you tomorrow if they could profit from it. Fifty percent of the Republicans would do it. There's nobody coming to anybody's rescue in that regard.

The Constitution is our Bill of Rights. The Constitution grants us these freedoms. These can never be infringed. That's how we used to think twenty years ago. Growing up in the 1980s—best decade ever—that's how we thought. We're America. This is going to never happen here. We're America. We have the Moral Majority on our side. The Constitution

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protects us from these things. Just keep in mind that nearly every elected official in this country, not all of them but nearly all of them, three years ago were willing to ruin your life and take everything that you cherish away because they were afraid of catching the flu. They will do it again in a heartbeat because one or two government bureaucrats told them that that was the best thing to do. Republicans, Democrats, leaders have not cared about the Constitution since . . . Well, what's today? Since 1777, give or take. They haven't cared about it since then. It means nothing to them.

That's the point here. You have no guarantee that this will not happen to you. One year from now, we could know people in this congregation who are sitting in a prison for the sake of the truth. Six months from now, that could be the case. That's the author's point. You know the weaknesses that come with suffering. And as long as you are in the body, you are as prone and vulnerable and open to that happening to you as anybody else who has ever suffered. As long as we are in this life, on this side of the veil, as long as we are alive here, this could happen to us. Therefore, remember the prisoner and those who are ill-treated just as if you were imprisoned with them.

Now, by the way, just as a reminder, let me back up and say this. There is a thin veil that separates the freedom and the enjoyment and the comfort that we currently enjoy—there's a very thin veil between that and going to prison for the faith, a very thin veil. And that veil was pierced a couple of times with James Coates and Tim Stephens, and they threatened to do it to John MacArthur and the elders of Grace Community Church and anybody else in California who did that. We saw people bumping up against that and testing the waters, as it were. That's why I say to you, as long as you're in the body, this can happen to you. It can happen to us.

Now currently, in our environment, as I alluded to a few moments ago, things are a little bit different than they were back then. I don't know anybody in prison for the gospel right now, for the sake of the truth. Now it might be that my circles are very small. It's very possible. I know *of* people in prison for the gospel, but I don't *know* any. Certainly there's nobody in our congregation who right now is sitting in the county jail suffering for the sake of the truth. If there were, there are a couple of sheriff's deputies over here that I would be talking to, but that is not the case right now. I don't know anybody who is in prison for the gospel. It's very possible that none of you know personally, that most of you don't know personally anybody who is in prison for the gospel. There's nobody in our congregation. I don't know of anybody in the county who is suffering in that way. But that could change. I am convinced that in the event that it did change, that the

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response of this body of believers would be very much akin to what we see in Hebrews 13. I think we would remember the prisoners.

Though it may be impossible or difficult for us to find people from our own circles who are in prison for the sake of the gospel, it is not difficult to find people who are ill-treated for the sake of the gospel. Now, I know plenty of these. I know plenty of pastors, because I have gotten their emails and I know some of them personally, who have been run out of their church for speaking the truth about sound doctrine, about Scripture, for expository teaching, who have been fired for not affirming the LGBTQ blah blah blah narrative and agenda, for standing on God's standards regarding sexuality, human sexuality. We do know, and probably so many of you do know, Christians whose lives have been wrecked and ruined because the government thought that they could raise their kids better than they could, because they were teaching their kids biblical teaching regarding sexual ethics and homosexuality and marriage, etc. I do know of people, and I am not too far removed from them, who have had their children taken from them because they refused to transition their young child, and their spouse was against it or their grandparents were against their position. So we already know people who have been ill-treated for the sake of the truth.

I have some pastoral friends who have been fired, and in fact I heard on Friday from a friend of mine who shared with me that their pastor is currently—it's not even in this state, so don't worry about it—their pastor is currently being run out of his pastorate simply because he stands up and he just preaches through the Scriptures like I do each and every week. The church environment in America has become hostile to good men. That's a fact. And to find an environment that is not hostile to good men and to sound doctrine is a very difficult task.

And even with all of that, we enjoy tremendous blessing, tremendous freedom, tremendous grace and joy. We don't know a fraction of the suffering that has been endured elsewhere. And this in verse 3 is merely one way that we can love the brethren. We can begin to pray for those who are in prison, and we should certainly pray for those who are ill-treated. For pastors and faithful men that we know elsewhere who have been exiled from their jobs or kicked out of their families or lost their reputation for standing on the truth, we can pray for them and do what we can to support them. And we don't overlook them because of the danger or the cost that might come to those who suffer for the faith. And instead, we press in and sympathize with them and do what we can to pray for them, to encourage them, to strengthen them, to visit them, to

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provide for them and their families if necessary. These are all the things that we can do, remembering that we are likewise weak and vulnerable creatures and the tables could be turned at any moment.

A year from now, you could be visiting me in prison. Now, if anybody here is going to go to prison, I'm fine with it being me and not anybody else, mainly because my kids and my grandkids are fine, and that's fine, and my kids are raised. You guys will take care of my wife. But it might be that somebody else is in prison for speaking the truth. And maybe it's not a year. Maybe it's five years. Maybe it's ten years. Maybe that's the reality. You don't know what it is. But we do know that if one of us suffers, all the members suffer with it. And therefore, the expression of brotherly love is to remember those who are ill-treated as if we were with them, knowing that we are not far from them.

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