

Faith In Action

Hebrews 13:1-3

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Well, it is good to be back with you this morning. I appreciate Chris filling the pulpit for me faithfully last week. I enjoyed being at Countryside Bible Church, our sending church for their conference.

But this is home, and it is good to be back in this pulpit and to be with familiar faces in a familiar book. As we open up to Hebrews 13 today, turning into a new chapter of this wonderful letter. Today we'll be in verses 1 to 3.

You know, as we grow and mature in life, we quickly learn to interpret certain signals around us that help us to navigate in our daily routine. We even design gadgets and household products to give us signals to tell us when we ought to do this or when we ought to do that. For example, how do you know when your coffee pot is ready? Usually there's some kind of beeper, something that goes off to tell you it's finished its brewing cycle. How do you know that a tea kettle is hot enough that the water has come to a boil? Most tea kettles are designed to give off some kind of whistling sound that can be heard across the house so that you know it's time to turn it off and the water is ready to be used.

Even our Lord in creation has baked into creation examples of things in which we're able to tell what's coming. For example, how do you know when it's going to rain? Well, the clouds grow dark and the wind starts to blow and often you can even smell the rain on the air before it starts to fall. If you think about it, there's all kinds of signals around us like this on a daily basis that we use to live life.

But let me take that idea and ask a different question. How do you know if a Christian is full of steadfast faith? How do you know? After all, the author of Hebrews has spent 12 chapters instructing us, warning us, pleading with us, commanding us to persevere in the faith, to have steadfast faith in Christ. So how can we assess the current status of our faith in Christ? And are there signs and signals that point to a steadfast faith in the life of believers?

Well, this morning as we begin our wonderful journey and embark into chapter 13, we will see that yes, there are signals. There are signs. In fact, what we have in chapter 13 is a list of instructions and practical ways that we ought to live life, commands that we ought to follow. They are external practices that flow out of internal faith.

In the same way that hot water and a tea kettle can't help but give off that whistling sound, a Christian full of vibrant faith can't help but manifest that faith in his or her life. But as we begin, it's important to consider what comes first, the hot water or the whistle. In the same way, we have to realize that just as the hot water must come first to create that whistling sound, steadfast faith in the heart must come first and then overflow into a Christian life that honors the Lord.

We are not advocating for a works-based salvation. In other words, we're not saying, hey, just walk around whistling and you'll be saved. We're saying it begins with a heart full of

faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that heart then will begin to express itself in ways that Christ calls us to.

With that in mind, look at Hebrews 13:1-3. The verses read this way:

"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."

Remember, all of this is under the grand umbrella of **The Superiority of Christ**. And most recently, we finished chapter 12, and it culminated in this final warning, the last warning passage in Hebrews. Remember, that warning centered on the coming judgment of God that will ultimately entail the removal of this created universe.

It will be replaced by a New Heaven and a New Earth. And because of that warning, there's a way that we ought to live. We ought to live, first of all, with gratitude, he said, and that gratitude should overflow into a life of service of Christ.

Now, as we enter into chapter 13, that call to serve Christ and to live in an overflow of gratitude is boiled down into specific examples of what that will look like in the Christian life. And what we have this morning are three practices that flow out of a steadfast faith in Christ. There are others that we'll see really the whole chapter flows out of that idea.

But just this morning, we'll see the first three practices that should flow out of steadfast faith in Christ. And I want to read our text one more time, and you'll begin to see these practices.

"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."

The theme, then, that ties all of this together is simply this. **Love the brethren, showing warm hospitality and compassionate care for their needs.** Love the brethren, showing warm hospitality and compassionate care for their needs. And this, again, boils down into three practices.

Practice number one in verse one is Brotherly Love. **Practice brotherly love.** Verse one reads, *"let love of the brethren continue."* Now, each of these practices is presented as an imperative, as a command. Meaning, of course, it's not optional. These are things that we are to do as believers.

And also, they are all in the present tense, and in this case, in the active voice. We've talked about this before, but in the Greek language, the present tense is used to often describe an action that's ongoing. So, we might say it this way, we are to continually continue in this action. As a habit of life, this is how we are to live.

And when we see the object of what is to continue, this becomes really clear. Because the object is love. Love of the brethren. Actually, the word here in Greek is one single word that means brotherly love. You may be familiar with the city. Unfortunately, they won the Super Bowl this year, but that's besides the point. Philadelphia, that is based off of, it's a different

pronunciation, but it is the Greek word for brotherly love. That's why it's called the city of brotherly love.

And the idea is if you have steadfast faith in Christ, that faith ought to lead you then to a continual expression of brotherly love towards your brothers and sisters in the church. Now, obviously, this is not new. If you've been a Christian for any length of time, hopefully you understand that we are called to love.

But it is so foundational to the Christian life that it shows up all over the place. It's actually all over the Old Testament as well, but certainly in the New Testament. The Apostle John goes as far as to say that love of the brethren is one of the tests of eternal life.

That is, true believers will, because of the work of the Spirit within them, exhibit this quality. 1 John 2:9-10: "**9** *The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.*"

You might also remember the famous words of Jesus when he said that it was this quality of brotherly love, love for one another, that would cause the world to know we belong to him as his disciples. John 13:34-35: "**34** *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.* (verse 35) **35** *By this (by the exhibiting of this love) all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

Now what we need to understand is that now 2,000 years, roughly, removed from the ministry of Christ, we all have grown very accustomed to this idea of brotherly love, that we're called to love one another in the church. But we have to understand that was not so in the first century. This was not commonly known.

In fact, the Greek word for brotherly love is not a Christian word inherently, meaning it was used in secular society, but it came to be used in a specific way within the church. But unbelievers in Greek society used the term brotherly love, but it was limited for unbelievers to literal brothers. It described the kind of love you would have for a blood relative in your home.

That's how *philadelphia* would have been used. But what's unique here for Christians is that our Lord calls us to apply a familial love to people beyond the household to the household of God. That we're to express this kind of brotherly love in the church so that we actually really love each other as if we were brothers and sisters in the blood since, because we are united by the blood of Christ. Our union to Christ makes us one with Him. We're adopted as sons of God, and therefore we are to live as sons of God.

But this was a countercultural idea in the first century. When we understand it this way, we see that Jesus was calling Christians to live in a way that was countercultural, and it stood out. The world noticed. In fact, I came across a quote in my study by a satirist from the first century named Lucian. He's a satirist. He's not a believer. His job was to make fun of and ridicule and speak tongue-in-cheek about others. Specifically, he poked fun at religion.

We have a couple of quotes by him this morning because though he is poking fun, it actually shows us how the unbelieving world thought about and witnessed the love of Christians at this time. Here's a quote by Lucian on this point. He says, "Moreover, their original lawgiver, (that is Jesus who he's talking about), persuaded them that they should be like brothers to one another. Therefore, they despise all things equally and view them as common property."

What he means is they were selling their possessions and they were giving them, as we see in the New Testament, Acts 2, as we'll look at later, and they were caring for the needs of the saints. William Lane comments on this quote by Lucian and says, "Lucian's remarks indicate that an educated person in the 2nd century was quite unprepared for the Christian notion of *philadelphia*, expressed in the admonition, keep on loving each other as brothers. The expansion of the term to include men and women beyond the immediate family was considered ludicrous."

The unbelieving world, in other words, saw the way that Christians loved one another and it stood out. That puts a whole new light around the command that Jesus gave when He says, "**34** *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

He first demonstrated that kind of love himself to the disciples and then He called them to take the kind of love He had demonstrated and do it towards one another and so on and so on in the church and the world took notice.

As I studied this, it began to dawn on me that we as Christians in 2025 are in danger of becoming too familiar with this call to love one another in the church. We have to understand it's not just a suggestion.

It is to define every fellowship of true Christians. It is a way that the lost world ought to be able to say that one belongs to Jesus and I can tell by the way he loves other believers. When you start to connect the dots here, it's no wonder this pops up all over the New Testament. It's everywhere.

Romans 12:10: "*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;*"

1 Peter 4:8: "*Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.*"

In 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10, a church that was effectively loving each other. He says: "**9** *Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,*"

Do it more. You are loving each other. Love each other even more. And so now we begin to see this really is foundational for the Christian. And the Greeks were dumbfounded as they looked on and they watched and the Romans as they watched the Christians live this way.

But let me ask you, is your love for the believers in this local church so fervent and so continual that the unbelievers in your life find it kind of odd? Do you love the people in this church with your time, with your energy, with your willingness to sacrifice for their benefit, to such a degree that the unbelievers in your life wonder why do you dedicate so much energy and time and effort to those people? That's the kind of effect that this love should have on the lost world. In this way, they will know that we are his disciples.

And if you think about the context of all we've studied in chapter 12, this really flows perfectly. Because remember in chapter 12, he encouraged us that we're part of, we're citizens of this heavenly kingdom that is to come. And we already have our citizenship. We are already adopted into the family. Therefore, right now we ought to live like it. We ought to begin living like brothers and sisters today because we so fervently believe that is our eternal destiny.

We will be with God forever and we will be with His people forever. So, the question is, is that how you think about the people in this local church and Christians in general? You know, we can use that as a greeting, as a common way of speaking. That's my brother in Christ. That's my sister in Christ. But do you believe that to be true? And do you live towards that person as if that's true? That's the call.

Now, how does that brotherly love play itself out? Honestly, we could spend the rest of our time looking at examples from scripture of how we're called to practically express this love. We could study the one another's, for example, and see that. But what I want to do is stick with the context of Hebrews itself because the next two practices really are examples of how this love is to express itself.

So, practice number two in verse two is **Intentional Hospitality**. Intentional hospitality. Verse two reads: "*do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.*" Now, the command in this case is these three words, "do not neglect." Neglect is the command. It's also in the present tense. This is a continual action. As a habit of life, Christian, do not neglect to show hospitality.

The object, of course, hospitality in this case, is translated here in the NAS as hospitality to strangers. And the reason for that is because there's a word play here in the Greek text that's difficult to replicate into English when we translate it

And the issue is the word for brotherly love in the first verse and the word for hospitality are both compound words where two Greek words are smashed together to make a new word. And they both begin the same way and they end the same way. So there's this sense of a word play.

They almost kind of rhyme together. So you have *philadelphia*, brotherly love, and then we have *philoxenia*, which is the love of strangers. Now, when we take that together, the word

itself, the Greek word here, it literally means love of the stranger, but it began to be used among people to mean what we mean when we say hospitality.

It involves a host and a guest. If a host is hosting a guest, that is hospitality. But the literal, if we take the compound word and break it apart, it means love of the stranger.

But we're not to think that this is only to be applied to strangers as if it has no bearing on our lives in the church. That's not the point. The point is that this is to define the Christian life, actually.

Hospitality is to be a fundamental aspect of each of our lives if we are in Christ. And I want to show you that because we have passages that teach that hospitality is to be true of us generally, all Christians. We have passages that teach that the leadership of the church actually are required to be defined by being hospitable. And then we are even told that the widows of the church are to be known for hospitality.

So listen, first of all, to 1 Peter 4:9. This is a general call to hospitality. "**9** *Be hospitable to one another without complaint.*" That's just plain and simple. If you're a Christian, you ought to be hospitable to other Christians and to do it with a great attitude, as we say to our kids, with a happy heart, without complaint.

1 Timothy 3:2: "*An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,*" There it is.

And then finally, when it came to determining which widows were to be put on the list of those widows that the church would care for, typically in some kind of financial way, hospitality was one of the qualifications. So 1 Timothy 5:9-10:

"9 *A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work."*

Now, the point of that little survey is to help us understand hospitality is not just for those who may be particularly gifted at it. And it's okay to admit that there are those who are particularly gifted at it. They're just good at hosting people, and when you're there, you feel cared for and loved, and praise God for that. But it is not to be only those who have that particular giftedness who express hospitality. It is a call to every Christian.

We also know that hospitality is not a matter of financial ability, because why in the world would Paul say that widows, and not just widows, but these are the widows who are under consideration for being cared for by the church because they're in need, why would he say those women ought to be hospitable if this required a great amount of resources? It doesn't.

Hospitality is not about the size of your home or how lavish a meal you're able to afford to lay before your guests. It is a heart of Christ-like love. Hospitality actually, I wish we had

time to dive into this, but it actually is an expression of the heart of God, because God shows hospitality to us.

What did Jesus say that night before his death in the upper room when he told his disciples not to be troubled? He said do not be troubled because I go to do what? Prepare what? A place for you. And if I go do that, I'm going to bring you to be with me where I am. And He's going to serve food to us. He's going to host us in that sense. It's the hospitable, selfless, sacrificial heart of God that's on display in hospitality.

But very quickly, why this emphasis on strangers? Hospitality towards strangers? Well, if we consider the context of the first and second century early church, we begin to understand, particularly in this time in which Hebrews is being written, hotels and inns and sort of those kind of public places to pay and stay somewhere were not readily available. And not only that, but those that were available were often seen to be unsafe, not a place you'd want to stay with your family, and often immoral activity characterized those places.

So if you're a Christian and you're traveling through town, you don't want to stay at an inn or a hotel. And so you would be dependent on someone else, another believer, inviting you into their home to put you up for the night, to feed you. And often these believers would even send them on their way, adding to their resources to help fund the rest of their trip. This became a common practice in the early church.

Especially it became a practice when traveling missionaries and evangelists would come through town, the Christians would put them up so they had somewhere to stay. This grows out of the ministry of Christ, if you think about it. He was always staying in someone's house or upper room. You remember the Last Supper? That's in a borrowed upper room. Someone showed hospitality to him to do that. Paul frequently in his missionary journeys relied on people to show goodwill to him and hospitality to bring him into their home and allow him to stay. And so this became an early church practice of hosting a guest, and often that guest was unknown to you. They were a stranger in that sense. You just met them.

But the word also goes beyond that because hospitality became one of the crucial components for how the Great Commission was carried out. Because where did most local churches meet in the first century? In homes. Someone had to host that small, new, church in their home.

We see this mentioned in places like Colossians 4:15, where Paul says: "**15** Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house." So she's hosting the church gathering.

In addition to that, hospitality became one of the primary ways that the world would witness the brotherly love that existed among the church. We see this in the way the church fellowshipped from its inception in Acts chapter 2. I mentioned this passage earlier, but I want to read this. This is the classic text that describes the fellowship of the body of early believers, Acts 2:42-47:

"42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. **43** Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many

*wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. **44** And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; **45** and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. **46** Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

Now notice, from the earliest days of the church, the brotherly love that existed among them. And it resulted in several aspects that can all fall under the banner of Christian fellowship.

What does it look like to fellowship? Well, first of all, they gathered with regularity together. They were, at that time, gathering in the temple. That would change later, but at this point, early on, they're gathering in the temple.

They're gathered to hear the word preached. They gathered to take communion and they gathered to pray. In addition to that, notice there was this immediate impulse towards generosity.

People were selling some of their assets, liquidating certain assets so they could share those assets with those who had need in the body. It doesn't mean that they took a vow of poverty and everyone sold all that they had and put it in a common pool, but that as there were needs in the church, those who had assets to help would sell them to help meet that need.

Also, there was this immediate familial impulse to show generosity and care and to have people in their homes. They were, from house to house, taking their meals together. They were enjoying time together and sharing the resources they had to offer Christian fellowship and care to others.

What I'm getting at here is that hospitality in the scriptures is multifaceted. It could be anything from putting a stranger up or a person from the church up overnight in your home because they need a place to stay. It could be inviting someone into your home for the purpose of evangelism. It could be having a believer in your home to share a meal and to fellowship together.

It can include opening your home for some church activity to host a small group or a WOW group or a Bible study. But the bottom line is that an expression of brotherly love among believers that we see immediately in the church is this call to hospitality. It's really a spirit of generosity and it's generosity on all fronts. It is a willingness to share your time, talents, table, and treasure.

Now, it's important to notice this command is cross-cultural. We ought not to think, well, they were a particularly, you know, fellowshipping type culture and as Americans we kind of like our space, you know, and our stuff to be just so. And so maybe that was something that went on there but not here. But that's not so. This is a command that transcends culture.

Now, their culture was different than ours, yes, and we need to apply the command to our culture and our context which may mean it looks different in our culture in some ways. For one, we don't live within walking distance of each other's homes as most of them likely did before cars and before motorcycles and things that people could ride. In our case, we may live 45 minutes apart by car.

And so what it's going to mean is not that we set aside hospitality, it's going to mean that we are more intentional, that it's going to take more coordination to open our homes and to share our resources.

Also though, in our culture it may simply look different. Maybe we meet at times for coffee at a coffee shop or a restaurant. Maybe it looks like generosity and that, hey, I'm going to buy you this cup of coffee. I'm going to buy you a meal. Sometimes even in our culture it could be sending a door dash gift card because someone's sick at home and you don't want them to worry about having to cook food that night.

But these are modern day expressions of generosity and care, but the bottom line is do not neglect to show hospitality. So just think about it practically. When's the last time that you had a family from our church in your home? When's the last time? How many families in our church could describe your living room and your table because they've sat in it, they've eaten at it?

Now I do want to be clear. In a church this size it's impossible for every member to host every other member and that's not even the biblical command, but the command is that all of us would host some of the members in the church in our home. That all of us would be intentional to whatever sphere we're able to do that to be a blessing to others. I do want to say there are times practically, because of illness or some unforeseen situation in which temporarily it's impossible to open our home.

Maybe it would be unwise or even unsafe to do so, but for those of us who are healthy and unimpeded by some unfortunate unforeseen circumstance that would keep us from it, hospitality should be a regular aspect of our life as believers.

I do want to reiterate this again because I do think it's a common misconception that keeps us from hospitality in our culture. A lot of Christians, not just in the US but in our bubble where we live, this is a very affluent area, and many people can falsely think or act like unless Joanna Gaines has redone their house and decorated their house, they cannot have anyone step foot in it outside the immediate family and that absolutely is false.

Joanna wasn't even alive when this was written. The issue is not how much you have or how big your home is or if it's an apartment or two-story home or a very small, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter how much you're able to spend on the meal or even if you're only able to open the doors and invite people in but people all split up who brings what food, that's fine.

The issue is are you being generous? Are you creating opportunities to spend time with God's people because you love them and you want to fellowship with them and benefit them and be benefited by them? Don't neglect hospitality.

I was reminded as I was preparing for this of a time that my wife and I sat with one of my mentors, Rocky Wyatt. He's been here and preached in our pulpit. He runs XL Ministries. We were with Rocky and his first wife Sue before she passed and went to be with the Lord and I was a young seminarian. We didn't have any kids and we were excited and full of questions about ministry and life and ministry and I remember them explaining to us this concept of hospitality and how it played out in their early life of ministry when they had just started out.

They really couldn't rub two pennies together and they would invite people over and serve them peanut butter and jelly sandwiches because that's what they could afford and that's what they were going to eat for lunch and so if you want to come, you're welcome to come and you're going to eat what we're going to eat for lunch and it was fine. Those were some of their fondest memories are those peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, fellowshipping with God's people. So please don't think, well I can't host but twice a year because I've got to save up for filet mignon. That is not the biblical call.

Now if you do start opening your home, the author says you might get more than you bargained for. He includes this very interesting statement that is kind of out of the blue. He says, *"don't neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by this, some have entertained angels without knowing it."*

Now this actually happened a handful of times in the Old Testament that we're aware of that are pointed out in Scripture, but the most famous example of when hospitality turned out to be hosting supernatural beings, ultimately a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ and two angels is found in Genesis 18, when Abraham hosts the two angels and what turns out to be the text says is Yahweh in Genesis 18 1-5:

"Now the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. 2 When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth, 3 and said, "My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, please do not pass Your servant by. 4 Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; 5 and I will bring a piece of bread, that you may refresh yourselves; after that you may go on, since you have visited your servant." And they said, "So do, as you have said."

Now, the text goes on but we'll pause there but this is just a simple example of hospitality. Abraham notices these three guests, he immediately goes to them and in the custom of the day offers to wash their feet and to bring them water and something to eat to refresh themselves but in the end, he's going to find out these are not ordinary visitors and in verse 13, the text says, *"13 And the Lord (literally the Hebrew is and Yahweh said to Abraham, (one of these guests is called Yahweh speaks to him and says) "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?'"*

And you know the story, God ends up revealing what's going to happen to Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot is in Sodom so the angels go to Lot. Lot ends up hosting them and showing hospitality to them and the point here is that Abraham and Lot end up being recipients of

greater blessings than they were able to give by their hospitality because Abraham is given the blessing of the promise that Isaac is going to be born by that time the next year and Lot receives his own life and the lives of his daughters.

Now the point here is not that we should assume that everyone we invite over for a meal is an angel in disguise. Okay, don't do that. You're going to weird people out staring at them funny across your table and they're not going to want to come back. Okay, don't do that.

What is the point though of bringing this up? I think F.F. Bruce says it well. He says, "he is not necessarily encouraging his readers to expect that those whom they entertain will turn out to be supernatural beings traveling incognito. He's assuring them that some of their visitors will prove to be true messengers of God to them bringing a greater blessing than they receive."

I really think this is the idea, and I'm sure if you have shown hospitality to others you've experienced this. There have been many times where I have sought to be a blessing to others only to find myself blessed by the conversation and the wisdom and the love and the care that's been shown to me, and I think that's the idea. When we host, yes, we are expressing Christ-like love but also, we find ourselves often the recipients of such Christ-like love and there's a mutual blessing.

That brings us now to a third practice that's also an expression of this brotherly love. Practice number three in verse three is **Compassionate Care**. Compassionate care.

He goes on to write, "**3 Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.**"

The command here is the word "remember". It means to give careful consideration to something. It's also in the present tense just like the others. This is a continual remembrance and there are two categories of people that are spelled out here for us to make sure that we remember.

Category number one would be **The Prisoner**. The prisoner. Specifically remember the prisoners as though in prison with them. Now when we think about that command, we need to be very careful to read this through the lens of the context in which it was originally written.

Remember this is a church and this is a time period in which persecution for the faith was a real reality. In fact, in chapter 10 the author has already commended these believers for previously caring well for those who've been imprisoned and persecuted for their faith. Remember Hebrews 10 specifically verse 34. He says: "**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.**"

So really what we have here I believe in verse three is a call to excel still more. To keep on doing those things that they've already done which is to care well for those Christians who are incarcerated because of persecution for their faith.

The idea here is not in my opinion to think of this as a general call to a kind of prison ministry. Although that is a good ministry. People in prison need Christ and there's nothing wrong with having a ministry to go and share Christ with them.

But what's happening here is a call to remember those believers who are being persecuted for their faith and to support them and to encourage them when they're in prison.

Remember this was a time period when if you were incarcerated it was a difficult situation because often you were incarcerated at your own expense. Which meant you were dependent on other people who loved you hopefully to come and bring you food and water and clothing. The things that you needed because they weren't going to be provided for you. And so it puts you in a really difficult spot.

And Christians quickly became known and even ridiculed for how lavishly they cared for other believers who had been incarcerated.

Back to Lucian the satirist from the second century who is writing again tongue in cheek thinking he's making fun of Christians. He actually in this quote helps us understand just how well Christians loved one another in these situations. This is speaking of a preacher who had been incarcerated because of his faith.

"Well when he'd been imprisoned the Christians regarding the incident as a calamity, left nothing undone in the effort to rescue him. Then as this was impossible every other form of attention was shown to him. Not in any casual way but with assiduity (that is with fervor, they were really fervent in how they cared for him). And from the very break of day aged widows and orphaned children could be seen waiting near the prison while their officials (in this idea probably pastors and elders) even slept inside with him after bribing the guards.

Now I want you to think about this. These Christians--he goes on to talk about how they brought this man food and they cared for all of his needs--but these Christians went as far as to bribe the guards not to get this man out of prison but to let them go in so they could sleep with him in the prison so he wasn't by himself. This is the way they interpreted this command to remember the prisoners. To care for them.

Now thankfully in our day and age this is not part of our daily reality. We live by God's grace in a free country where we're able to meet like this without fear. And we're thankful for that. We should be thankful for that. But we also should not forget that this is not the reality for everyone in the world.

That there are believers in our world today who must do this in secret if at all, who are currently imprisoned, who fear execution for sharing their faith or for preaching a message like this one, or even gathering for communion. And we ought to do our part to care for them which from a distance at least means we ought to pray with fervency for these people. To not let them grow far from our thoughts. To remember and not to be so put to sleep by the comfort of our lives that we forget that many do not live the way we live. And they desperately need our care.

Pray for them as if you were in prison with them. Pray for them the way that you would want someone to pray for you if you were falsely imprisoned for your faith separated from

your family. And also, don't become too comfortable in this life that God has given us because it's not a promise. It's not a promise that our country will always be a free country. It's not a promise that we will always be able to meet publicly like this or share the gospel without fear. Persecution has been a reality throughout church history and it may very well be God's will that in our lifetime we experience real persecution. And if that comes then God will sustain us by His grace.

But will we be faithful to remember those who are imprisoned in the ways we can now and certainly in the ways that we may be called upon if the Lord brings that to our present-day reality. Pray fervently and genuinely for believers suffering around the world because of their faith.

But there's a second category here. It ties into the first but it is broader. Category number two of those people we must remember we'll call **The Mistreated**. The mistreated. Verse three: *"Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body."*

Now certainly we can put those who are in prison under this umbrella of being mistreated at least the way we're thinking of it here being falsely imprisoned for your faith. But really this includes any person who's been unjustly treated, and I think most specifically in regards to their faith, and this is something that we may legitimately encounter in various ways.

This is much more likely for us at this time than being put in prison. A person may lose their job or be overlooked for a job because of their faith. A person may have their reputation falsely slandered as an attack on their faith. A person may be drawn into an unjust lawsuit. I've seen that happen before, that really has no standing. They just want to waste that person's resources on the lawsuit to be spiteful.

That can happen and these are ways that people can be mistreated, maltreated, ill-treated. And in those circumstances, we need to be careful to come around those people and encourage those people both in word and in deed. But in addition to that I do believe the principle extends beyond that to just those who are suffering among us because of life in a fallen world. We all know what it is to be sinned against, to be falsely accused, to be undermined, to be overlooked.

Some sadly know what it is to experience real abuse of various kinds. And the call here is to care for those people, to have compassion for those who are mistreated, to love them and to stir up empathy for them by remembering, he says, that we too are in the body. What does he mean when he says that? That remembering that we too are in the body. Most commentators, almost universally, take this in the sense of, in a very practical sense, that we too have physical bodies.

We live in the body currently and we too are capable of suffering and may find ourselves suffering a similar thing that this brother or sister is suffering and so we ought to, in the same way that we ought to care for prisoners as if we were in prison with them, we ought to care for sufferers as if we are suffering what they are suffering. That's the idea, to care for them, to love your neighbor as yourself, so to speak.

So let me ask you, how compassionate are you towards other believers when they are beaten down by the difficulties and trials of life? How freely do you bend down and help carry the burdens of others? Are you generous with your resources, both your time, relationally, and your prayers, spiritually, and your resources, physically, to help people who are suffering in your sphere of influence in the body of Christ? Are you willing to be inconvenienced and shoulder the burden, the heavy burden and the weight of what they're carrying?

It can be hard to enter in with someone who's walking through a difficult time. It's heavy. It's burdensome. And we don't like heavy. We like comfortable and we like easy. And so it's a selfless act of love to say, no, I'm coming over. We're going to talk. We're going to pray. We're going to weep together and I will shoulder this with you. We will walk together.

This is what it means to bear one another's burdens. But the bottom line is we're to be intentional to remember those who are mistreated, those who are suffering. And when we do that, we exhibit the kind of brotherly love and compassion that Christ called us to exhibit.

Now as we draw this to a close, I really want to apply it in three crucial ways. And this is no surprise. We just need to consider each of these commands.

And so number one, I would ask you to **Consider your love**. Consider your love. Do you love Christ's church? More specifically, do you love the people sitting in this room? And do you love them with a familial kind of love as if they were a real brother or sister by blood? The Bible says you should.

It doesn't mean that you're going to have the same depth of relationship with every person in the church. That's not possible. But it does mean that your starting place, your fundamental disposition towards them, is one of love as a brother or sister in the way that you think of them, speak of them, and respond to them.

You know, there is unfortunately a common trend out there that you hear people say things like, you know, I love Christ, but I can't stand Christians. And biblically, that's not possible. It's an impossibility. The Bible says if you love Christ, it will overflow into a heart that loves His people. That doesn't mean His people won't sin against you. That doesn't mean it's not hard to be close to people in the church. It doesn't mean that relationships are perfect and not messy. It means that God will help you by His Spirit to love them as a brother or sister and to not give up on that relationship, but to pursue them because you are mutually bound together in Christ.

And if you're here this morning and you would say you just genuinely have no love, zero love in your heart for believers, you really can't stand them, you don't want to be near them, then I have to ask you, do you truly love the Lord Jesus Christ? I mean, really love Him? Have you come to the place in which you have humbled yourself and repented of your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation? Understanding your need because of your sin and that only by His death and resurrection and faith in Him can you be saved.

That is the starting place of Christian love. You cannot have love for God's people. This brotherly love is an impossibility. The world cannot do this. The only way you can have the

kind of brotherly love that's spoken of here is if you first love the Savior and then He will transform you so that your heart can love His people. So if you're here and you don't know the Lord, that is the place to begin is repentance and faith in the gospel.

But secondly, Christians, **Consider your hospitality.** Consider your hospitality. Aren't you thankful the Bible doesn't give us this legalistic command that says every Christian must host in their home twice a week? That's not what it says. It doesn't tell you how many dollars a year you have to spend even towards the church or towards God's people.

It calls instead for a heart of generosity, an open hand with your resources, and it gives an open-ended command like this, do not neglect hospitality. That's the command. So if you want to apply this command, I would encourage you to spend some time prayerfully. If you're married, I would say spend prayerful time with your spouse and sit down and talk through what is reasonable. What's generous for us with the means that God has given us? We ought to be generous proportionately to how God has blessed us.

So what's reasonable? What's a reasonable number of times a month or a year to have people in your home? What's a reasonable amount of money that you can set aside specifically to bless other people? But this is the way we ought to think as we seek to apply the command.

And then finally, **Consider your care.** Are you willing to suffer alongside other believers? Will you labor in prayer for believers, not only in this local body, but around the world, people you don't even know, but we know of, that they are suffering? Will you shoulder the burdens of others and not grow weary walking with them in their trials?

This is what it looks like to express brotherly love towards the body. When one member of the body hurts, the whole body hurts. When one member suffers, the whole body suffers. These are the practices of a church whose faith in Christ has been fanned into flame.

So Northlake Bible Church, may we be a church whose love and faith is so steadfast in Christ that it shows up in real tangible ways in the way we live our lives towards one another.

Let's pray. Lord God, we are grateful for Your word, for its clarity. We're thankful for the conviction that the Spirit brings as we read it and study it. And we freely confess that we fall short of the mark when it comes to these things. But we ask God that this morning You'd give us grace to grow in the expression of these commands and the obedience to these commands.

And God, we do remember those. We don't even know them, around the world who are suffering directly related to their faith in You. We pray God that You'd be their strength.

We pray the gospel would continue to go forth in the darkness in those places. We pray for those who are imprisoned, who are being tortured, who are ripped away from their families, who are in labor camps, who are fearing for their lives simply because they follow You. God, we pray that You would strengthen them, that You would be near to them, that they would know Your love and Your care, and that You'd be faithful to them and that

through their witness of a willingness to suffer for You in such obvious ways that others would be drawn to Christ.

God, help us to be faithful in these things we ask in Christ's name, amen.