

Service to God through brotherly love (Hebrews 13:1–3)

The exhortations in the first verses of this chapter address and correct major influences from our current culture. It is hard not to be influenced by our own cultures, and the self-centered, narcissistic thinking of modern western culture is no exception. The believer needs a renewed mind to be transformed (Romans 12:2). The first challenge by the author of Hebrews is let brotherly love continue.

I. *Let brotherly love continue, broadly viewed (13:1)*

1. *“Brotherly love” is an attitude and action, not simply an emotion.*

It is an attitude because it is based upon the relationship which believers have to one another in Christ, as has been taught already in this letter (cf. 2:10–13; 12:5–10). Especially in the Old Testament, family was responsible for caring for family, without regard for personal feelings. Care was given because of the family relationship.

Brotherly love is an action, because love is an action. Brotherly love presupposes that it is a labor of love (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 4:9). It is not only words, but deeds (1 John 3:18).

2. *“Brotherly love” is a participation in that which remains (eternally).*

Chapter 13 flows out of chapter 12 where in vv. 25–29 the author points to things (like the kingdom believers receive) which will endure. Later in 13:14 he speaks of an enduring city. By using the same word in 13:1, “let brotherly love endure,” there is an implication that brotherly love belongs to that which endures eternally. The apostle Paul confirms that while other things may pass away, love is among that which endures (1 Corinthians 13:8, 13)

3. *“Brotherly love” is as an act of worship.*

In 12:28 readers are called to an acceptable worship (or service) to God. The unbroken flow into chapter 13 and the return to earlier themes later in the chapter indicate that the author is exhorting the reader to actions which are acts of service or worship to God: brotherly love, moral purity, and material contentment. Romans 12 demonstrates the same truth where total commitment to God is the believer’s reasonable service or worship, and is then developed as mutual service within the Body of Christ.

Brotherly love is the proper response by those who have been brought into the family of God. It is not the manner by which one gets into the family. God has first loved us, providing in Jesus Christ a sacrifice to pay the penalty of our sin. After becoming children of God by belief in Jesus, then we are capable of and obliged to let brotherly love continue.

II. *Let brotherly love continue, specifically applied (13:2–3)*

1. *Show “brotherly love” toward traveling brothers and sisters in Christ (13:2).*

Hospitality was generally regarded as a virtue, but particularly important for traveling Christians. It seems that there was a tendency to neglect this, perhaps because of the risk or the cost. But the author points to it more as an investment, which might bring unexpected spiritual blessing (like those who hosted angels without being aware).

2. *Show “brotherly love” toward persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ (13:3).*

Those imprisoned or ill-treated for Christ’s sake especially needed brotherly love. (Prisoners were often dependent upon help from friends for even essential things.) If you wonder if or how to help, put yourself in their place. It might put you at risk, but treat them as you would want to be treated.

The call to brotherly love is based upon God’s love for us and His love being put in the heart of all His children. Showing brotherly love affirms your new status with God, and His love informs us how we are to love, that is, as Christ has loved, even to giving His life for us.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- How would you evaluate your own sense of compassion to help other believers? How should compassion and a sense of obligation complement each other?
- How can we cultivate a better sense of worship (service to God) in our service to other believers?
- To whom can you show hospitality without expecting something in return from them?
- In what ways might believers in our context suffer for Christ’s sake and how can we then demonstrate brotherly love?