

Heb 13:1-6 The Ethics of Acceptable Worship

I want to begin today by reading from Rom. 12:1-2. **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”** Here we have an appeal to WORSHIP. I read this verse because Scripture always interprets Scripture. And what Paul is saying in Rom. 12:1-2 is very similar to what the author (Paul?) is saying in Heb. 12:28. **“Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken”** And then he says, **“Therefore, let us offer to God acceptable worship.”** Let me make a couple comments before getting to the specifics: 1) Doctrine comes before acceptable worship. The writer to the Hebrews just spent 12 chapters establishing the gospel of Christ fulfilled in the new covenant. And throughout there are many practical warnings to obedience. But, there are no specifics as to how we treat one another. Therefore, we must get doctrine before we can understand the ethics of worship. (Same example in Romans).

2) Brothers and sisters, we are worshipers (all of us at heart). But, God commands us to worship rightly. And often, we think of worship merely as coming to church on Sunday. And we separate the rest of our life from those times we meet with God’s people. Even in OT times, I imagine many of the Jews did the same thing, as they considered the Sabbath or the feasts or the new moons or the festival times as worship, and in some way, separate the more formal times of “worship” from the rest of life. I am sure there are folks out there in churches who act differently when their pastor comes by. I have heard of stories of those who say things like, *“We won’t watch that movie since the pastor’s wife is coming over.”* Or, parents to their kids, *“be on your best behavior since the pastor is coming over this evening.”* As, if we can compartmentalize our worship, or our godliness.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot separate “worship” from life. By the Spirit of the living God, we are worshippers 24/7. And the Bible is clear, we worship ALL THE TIME by the way we live our lives. And the reason, in both Romans and Hebrews, is because God is holy. And in the Gospel of Christ, He has given us great power to be godly. He is sanctifying us by the Spirit. Therefore, we worship 24/7. To follow Christ is not to follow him on Sundays. As we will see, we follow Him always, every day, even “outside the camp” (13:13), even to the cross. And God has not left us with clear examples and commands as to what this worship is to look like. Worship 24/7 is practical godliness and vice versa. And God has not left us alone, but gives us great grace, in fact He gives us Himself to accomplish this task. This is what we see with 13:16. So, as we examine ourselves before taking the Lord’s Supper, I have two parts to the sermon: 1) Practical applications of Worship; and 2) The source of our help in worship. So let’s begin.

1. Practical Applications of Worship. The Bible is full of examples and commands. What we have in Heb. 13 are only a few examples, designed for their particular context. But as I look at them, nothing has changed in our context. So, let’s briefly walk through 5 ethical considerations for worship. In other words, this is what “worship” looks like!

i. Brotherly love. V. 1: “**Let brotherly love continue.**” We immediately apply this verse within the body of Christ. But, in their context, I think he was saying, “*Since you (as Jews) have trusted Christ, and received the kingdom of God revealed in the new covenant, remember your “Jewish” brothers and sisters.*” Love them. Consider them. Pray for their salvation. In the same kind of way, when we become Christians, we must not think ourselves above our family members in any way that might be prideful. We are what we are by the grace of God!

But, this application moves to the body of Christ. Jesus says, “**A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.**” How, “**As Christ has loved us**” (John 13:34). This is one of the themes of the Apostle John, even one of the tests of true faith: Love for the people of God. And this love isn’t an abstract kind of love; it is “brotherly” love. This is the love of family. I may nag at my sister and give her a hard time, but she is my sister. Don’t mess with her! Why? Because I love her and want what is best for her. As love shows itself most deeply and most practically in families, so is love in the Church of God. We love one another because we are united by the Spirit of the living God, unlike the world.

ii. Hospitality. V. 2 “**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.**” Hospitality is really an outworking of brotherly love, both for the body of Christ and for the world. The command to be hospitable comes right from the Law of Moses (and before). In Lev. 19:33-34 we read: “**When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.**” I think of Gen. 18: Abraham entertaining the three men (angels - one of them the ANGEL of the Lord – preincarnate Christ) as they revealed God’s promise that Sarah would have a son. I often wonder about those we pass over and neglect hospitality.

We must remember! Everything we have has been given by God; nothing “belongs” to us. Therefore, we must be willing to use our means to bless others. And one of the ways we do this is by opening our houses, our things, the blessings God has given to us. This applies to both outsiders and particularly to our brothers and sisters in the body Christ. One of the things that strikes me with the NT church is that they “**had all things in common**” (Acts 2:44).

The context of this hospitality is the persecution found in the early church, particularly the persecution coming from their Jewish brethren. There were often disciples travelling from place to place preaching the gospel. And these brothers and sisters must be welcomed and cared for in their travels. Jesus emphasizes the blessing of hospitality as he instructed the disciples to “**wipe the dust from their feet**” concerning those houses and villages that were not hospitable (Matt. 10:14). This was very common in our times overseas as we travelled throughout parts of the world. What a picture of brotherly love has been shown to our family through the years. What a beautiful act of worship to open your house and your things with hospitality. I think this begins with the people of God, before we move to orphans or to the homeless, etc. How are we doing in the opening of our homes?

iii. Remember and associate with those who are persecuted. V. 3: “**Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you are also are**

in the body.” Apparently, there were those in their context who had been thrown into prison because of their faith in the Gospel. There were also many who were mistreated; also because of the gospel of Christ. Interesting! This is an example of acceptable worship! This “worship” simply flows from the fact that we love our brothers and sisters in the gospel. The problem associated with identifying with those who are persecuted is the possibility, NO, the probability that the same thing might happen to us. Jesus says to us: “***If they persecuted me, they will persecute you***” (John 15:20). What happened to the 12 apostles? Eleven were killed, one went into exile. Look over at Heb. 11:36-38: Notice the providential destiny of some Christians. “**Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy— wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.**”

As Christians, to give acceptable worship, to love our brothers and sisters, is to stand with them, knowing that we also may suffer the same. Just this week on Al Mohler’s *The Briefing*, he shared of a report in Oxford England that was just published. A group of students studied all the churches in Oxford and rated them on a scale of 1 to 5 on their acceptance of the LGBTQ+ rights and principles. A rating of 1 meant to stand by the orthodox teaching of Christianity, who are very “accepting” of anyone coming to church, but membership requiring repentance, of any sin, but particularly gender issues and sexual immorality. A rating of 5 meant your church is fully “accepting,” and openly lobbying for this shift in morality with the movement. Mohler mentioned a couple of the Anglican Churches that are standing on the side of Orthodox Christianity and how they are being persecuted. Just by mentioning this issue, Mohler is standing with them. He also asked his listeners to pray for such churches and to stand strong as this and other issues are coming our way. In some ways, this is new territory for us. And in the coming days, we will see the dividing line of “worship” become more acute. But if we are to give acceptable worship, we must stand with what is true and what the Bible teaches us.

iv. Marriage and the marriage bed. V. 4 “**Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.**” Two main truths here. First is the God-given, God-established, God-endorsed, God-pleasing, institution of marriage. In the beginning God gave Adam the most beautiful bride in marriage (First Man to the First Woman). Second, the marriage bed is to be maintained as holy. God said, “***Be fruitful and multiply.***” We know what this means. Our two exhortations here are: 1) Uphold the sanctity of marriage! And 2) Abstain from sexual sins. Can you think of two sins, (outside of abortion) that are more detrimental on society than the breakdown of marriage in our day (particularly in the West)?

Concerning marriage, there is a difference between living with your spouse and living with your “partner.” Everywhere now we hear of men and women living together and referring to one another as “partners.” I have friends and family, men and women who choose not to get married, but to live together with no plans for formalizing and committing to marriage. This “lifestyle” does not honor God and the institution of marriage. And concerning homosexuality and all the issues that stem from “gender” sins, men are “marrying” men. Women are “marrying” women. And then you have men who try to “become” women and women who try to “become” men. And then, they also live together and call it “marriage.” This is wrong! God says this is wrong!

As Christians, no matter what happens out there, we must uphold the institution and sanctity of marriage; no matter what kind of persecution comes our way.

Concerning sexual sins, has there ever been a time in our history of such depths of sins in this area? I think not! The word in our text is “ pornos,” which is where we get the word pornography. And the meaning includes ALL sexual sins. And the text says, **“Let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”** So how do we do this? From a very simple point of view it’s easy! Husbands, only be with your wife. Wives, only be with your husbands. If you aren’t married, stay pure until you are. Eph. 5:3 says: **“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”** Brothers and sisters, everyone listening to me, we cannot give in here, as difficult as it may be! Also, it is very interesting that these two exhortations are put together! In these two acts of worship (marriage and the marriage bed) we find that marriage between a man and a woman GUARDS holiness in sexuality. This is so important! We must uphold marriage and the marriage bed. If not, the judgment of God is coming. **THESE ARE NOT MY WORDS!**

v. Contentment. V. 5 **“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have . . .”** Here we have the example of loving money (material things of this world) as a lack of contentment, which is clearly declared in the 10th commandment from the Law of Moses. Think of the context. Look back at 10:32-34: **“But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property . . .”** Here we see that some of them (I have read), when they stood with their brothers and sisters in prison, they themselves became targets to be robbed. The author says **“recall the former days”** as they stood with their brothers and sisters in prison and became targets for persecution and robbery. In all probability, more persecution was coming and he was reminding them not to fall into the temptation of covetousness. And the motivation is this: **“You have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken”** (12:28).

Jesus often speaks of the love of money as example of covetousness and a lack of contentment. In Matt. 6:24 He says: **“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”** In Matt. 19:24 He says: **“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”** He is not saying a rich person cannot go to heaven. He is saying a rich person who loves their money more than God CANNOT reach heaven. Why? Because he/she loves his money more than he/she loves God. This is idolatry. And, at the end of the day, it is covetousness as he/she does not find God to be the prize of his life. Brothers and sisters, be content with what you have. And this doesn’t merely include money. It may be your job that you really can’t change right now. It may be your family situation as everything seems to be chaotic and falling apart. It may be a physical ailment you cannot change . . . Now, I didn’t say, you have to love your situation! But, be content! I think contentment comes to few. I believe contentment is a great sign of maturity! And if we

think about it, ALL of us fight the temptations associated with money and having something someone else has. (Much I could say here).

This concludes the first part of acceptable worship 24/7. So, how do you worship? Brotherly love, hospitality, remember and associate with the lowly, uphold marriage, abstain from sexual sins, be content with what you have. These are 5 practical ways we worship 24/7, as you “present our bodies as a living sacrifice.” With these 5 exhortations in mind, as well as all the other pleas for godliness in the Bible, we must know that God does not leave us on our own.

2. The Source of our Help. Look at v. 6: **“The Lord is my helper: I will not fear, what can man do to me?”** Again our author turns to the OT as he quotes, really, a number of verses put together that remind us that apart from the Lord, we can do nothing. I will say very little here. But, the point is clear! We cannot worship in godliness and do this from the heart unless the Lord Jesus helps us! This is the power of the gospel of Christ. Jesus says, **“This is my body, do this in remembrance of me. And this cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this in remembrance of me.”** Today, as we worship 24/7, as we live in godliness, we remember what Christ has done for us. I think of Tit. 2:11-14. **“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”** And Eph. 2:8-10: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”**
(Eph. 2:8–10 [ESV](#))

And the application is this: ***“I will not fear. What can man do to me.”***