

## **An Exhortation To Be Steadfast.**

Text: Heb 13:1-9

1) In Christian Duty

Suggested Hymns:

2) In Christian Faith

326, 355, 330, 294, 375

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Hebrews 13:1-9, <sup>1</sup> *Let brotherly love continue.* <sup>2</sup> *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.* <sup>3</sup> *Remember the prisoners as if chained with them — those who are mistreated — since you yourselves are in the body also.*

<sup>4</sup> *Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.* <sup>5</sup> *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* <sup>6</sup> *So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”*

<sup>7</sup> *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.* <sup>8</sup> *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

<sup>9</sup> *Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There is today a spirit of restlessness which shows itself in almost every relationship. The whole world seems to be affected by a feeling of instability. People are looking for something new, something different, hailing it for the moment as the very ultimate, only too soon to discard it again, however, for something else.

This sentiment has made itself felt also in the Church and in the attitude of people towards religion. Much of the preaching of our day seems to lack the note of certainty. Some even say that those of any faith will go to heaven.

The very men who are to guide the people hesitate to state just what is truth and what is error, what is to be believed and what is to be rejected. If, indeed, doctrine is still preached, it is often done, not as a positive truth from the eternal Word of God, but as the opinion of people, which may be superseded by other opinions tomorrow.

Now, contrast these with the note of certainty with which the holy writer addresses us in our text today on Christian faith and duty. There is no admission of any doubt or possibility of any change in these matters. They are always positive statements with *no variation or shadow of turning*.<sup>1</sup>

In our study of this lesson today we shall observe the order of the text. It is an exhortation to be steadfast in Christian duty and then an exhortation to be steadfast in Christian faith. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. An Exhortation To Be Steadfast In Christian Duty**

The Christian duties placed upon us in the lesson are nothing new. They are so old that many people today regard at least some of them as old-fashioned and hardly in keeping with the spirit of the new day. God's people, however, will adhere strictly to His will for their lives.

Our text begins, <sup>1</sup> *Let brotherly love continue*. Brotherly love is a distinguishing mark of the disciples of Jesus, who says in John 13:35, <sup>35</sup> *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

What is love? Scripture tells us in 1 John 4:16 that *God is love*. And in Galatians 5:22, <sup>22</sup> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love*. Rather than simply defining love it may be more helpful to give a working description of it.

St. Paul, in 1 Cor. 13, shows us love in action. Let us substitute the name of “Jesus” for the word “love,” because Jesus is Love personified.

It would therefore read, <sup>4</sup> *[Jesus] suffers long and is kind; [Jesus] does not envy; [Jesus] does not parade [Himself], is not puffed up; <sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely, does not seek [His] own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all*

*things, hopes all things, endures all things.* <sup>8</sup> *[Jesus] never fails.* Can you substitute your name for Jesus?

In the text before us the apostle emphasises brotherly love. If we are to love people in general, then surely we must love our brothers and sisters in the faith. They have the first claim upon our love, as we read in Galatians 6:10, <sup>10</sup> *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.* How is it with us in this respect?

Our text continues, <sup>2</sup> *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.* <sup>3</sup> *Remember the prisoners as if chained with them — those who are mistreated — since you yourselves are in the body also.*

In the days of the holy writer people travelled a lot from place to place. Facilities and means were limited for the most part, and Christians were often fleeing. The brethren therefore had many opportunities to translate into practise the brotherly love of which the apostle had spoken, to be hospitable, and to gladly provide food and shelter.

In order to encourage them in this, he alludes to the experience of Abraham and Lot,<sup>2</sup> recorded in Genesis chapter 18 and 19, who *unwittingly entertained angels.*

These were times of hatred and enmity for the Christians. For the sake of the Gospel some endured hardships and imprisonment. The apostle admonishes the believers to have such sympathy with those who were suffering as though they themselves were enduring bonds and adversities; praying for them as though they were praying for themselves; and doing for them whatever they would have others do for them in a similar situation.

We may not often be called upon to open our homes or to remember those who are in prison for the sake of the Gospel; but the present world conditions are making heavy demands upon our Christian love and charity in other respects, so much so that our flesh is inclined to rebel at times and to insist that the very limit has been reached. But love never fails.

And let us not forget what Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, *‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it*

*to Me.*' Abraham and Lot entertained angels. Ours is the greater privilege of ministering to Jesus whenever we minister to the wants of the poor and the needy. Let us be steadfast in every good work.

In verse 4 we read, <sup>4</sup> ***Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.*** This apostolic admonition concerning the sanctity of the marriage relationship is greatly needed in our generation. Little else has been the object of such a concerted attack on the part of unbelievers of every shade and hue as holy wedlock. Theatre, higher schools of learning, popular leaders and authors, different cults, and even the popular opinion of many people today, have combined forces to assail and ridicule the God-appointed relationship of one man and one woman in marriage.

The lesson before us emphasises: “***Marriage is honorable among all.***” This view of marriage prevails throughout the Word of God. The divine verdict “***It was very good***” applied also to the relationship which the Creator had established between one man and one woman.

Jesus, too, in the days of His flesh, honoured this estate. At Cana, in Galilee, we find Him attending at a wedding celebration, and He does not hesitate to use His divine power to contribute to the enjoyment of the feast.

To the apostle the love that unites man and wife in marriage is so holy that he uses it to illustrate the love of Christ to His Church. This is a Scriptural illustration: Christ is the Bridegroom, the Church is His Bride. Indeed, marriage must be honourable.

The agitation of free-love advocates, and the like, usually comes from people who are dissatisfied, not only with the marriage order fixed by God, but with about everything else determined in His Word. All such, together with the ***fornicators and adulterers*** mentioned in the text, the Lord will judge. It will be a terrible judgement if they do not repent.

Over against all this agitation for a loosening of the marriage bonds Christian people will remain steadfast both in refraining from any personal transgression of the Sixth Commandment and, by their testimony, in upholding the order fixed by God and proved by the experience of centuries.

Verse 5 reads, <sup>5</sup> *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

The apostle warns against very common sins: covetousness, discontent, and cares. The prevalent attitude of people is fertile ground for these thorns to grow. How covetous people are of the possessions of others, how dissatisfied they are with their own station in society, and how burdened they are with the cares of this life! Greed and the love of money are the root cause of many of the ills that are besetting the world today.

The Christian, with the help of God, will strive to conduct his life that more and more it will be free from these ugly manifestations of a restless social order.

And as an inducement to avoid these sins, the apostle reminds us of the gracious promise of God that He will never leave nor forsake His people.

With this unfailing promise of God the Christian can join the apostle in a bold, triumphant challenge to all adverse experiences, *"The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"*

## **2. An Exhortation To Be Steadfast In Christian Faith.**

Coming now to the second part of our study, it need not surprise us that the practise of Christian virtues and observance of God-given duties are at a low ebb in the world today.

This is a direct result of a lack of steadfastness in Christian faith and doctrine. You cannot ignore Christian faith and doctrine as revealed in God's holy Word and then expect your life to be conformed to it. Christian living is a fruit of Christian believing. It is therefore imperative that we remain steadfast also in Christian faith and doctrine, to which the apostle admonishes us in the closing verses of the lesson.

We read in verse 7, <sup>7</sup> *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.*

We are exhorted gratefully to remember those who have taught us the Word of God. Faithful parents, teachers and pastors are precious gifts of God to His

Church. We praise God for the Apostle Paul, who gave us a complete exposition of Christian faith and doctrine in his epistles.

We praise God for Luther, who dispelled the darkness of a long spiritual night with the light of the Gospel, and also for others who have proclaimed God's Word faithfully. Let us thank God for every spiritual leader who has declared to us God's plan for life here and hereafter, whether his name is recorded in church history or not.

We can best remember our spiritual leaders by remaining true to the faith which they preached and lived. Some of them are no longer with us; they have gone to their reward, where they shall shine as the stars forever and ever; but their teaching and influence abide with us, to bless us, if we will remain steadfast in the faith which they proclaimed.

In verse 8 we are reassured that <sup>8</sup> ***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*** The essence of the teaching and preaching of these God-given spiritual leaders is Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Teachers come and go, but the great subject of their teaching, Jesus Christ and salvation in Him, always remains the same. It must never be any different, for there is salvation in none other, as we read in Acts 4:12, <sup>12</sup> ***Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.***"

Today and in the future, it is the same as it was nearly 2,000 years ago, when Jesus first made the assertion, as written in John 14:6, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.***

Our text continues, <sup>9</sup> ***Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.*** Finally the apostle warns against false doctrine.

***"Various and strange doctrines"*** may be alluring at times. False teachers have a way of appealing to the vanity of people to accept only what they can reason out and understand. They speak of progress in Christian doctrine and change their beliefs based on the latest human opinions.

But how can there be comfort and solace for troubled souls who can never be certain that what they accept today, may or may not be discarded tomorrow? Being carried about with false doctrine cannot bring peace to the heart.

Over against that, the Christian, who is steadfast in his faith in the teachings of God's holy Word, finds his heart established as our text says, ***For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.***

Remember that "established" means strengthened, confirmed, grounded, sure, fixed, steadfast and secured. As Christians we are certain of God's good will toward us. We are confident of our eternal salvation. Unbelief is never certain of anything. But as steadfast believers we are so certain that we rejoice with St. Paul, ***"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."***<sup>3</sup>

A freight train was crossing a mountain range, moving rapidly down the steep grade. Suddenly the whistle screamed, and the brakes were applied. The engineer had seen two boys walking on the track at a point where there was little chance of escaping the rushing train, with the deep abyss on the one side and the massive walls of rock on the other.

Just as it appeared that the boys would be crushed, they caught sight of a niche in the rock, made by the blasting, into which they jumped, as one cried out, ***"Cling close to the rock! Cling close to the rock!"*** The train passed by, and they were unharmed.

This is a striking illustration of the sinner's relationship to the Rock of Ages. In Jesus Christ we find the safe retreat and all that we need. Oh, that all people might gain Christ and in faith be found in Him!

Then there will be happy lives. Lives steadfast in Christian duty, lives adorned with Christian virtues; and when this life here below is done, there will follow an even more beautiful life, a perfect life, in God's eternal presence. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> James 1:17

<sup>2</sup> Abraham - Gen 18:1-5, Lot - Gen 19:1-3

<sup>3</sup> See also Rom. 8:33-34