God is a Consuming Fire, Love One Another!

I. Context

A. Hebrews 1-12: Jesus: who He is and what He’s done

“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” [Hebrews 12:28–29]

“Chapter 12 builds to an intensely theological crescendo with the statement that ‘God is a consuming fire,’ which is then met by the intensely practical command that opens chapter 13—namely, to ‘keep on loving each other as brothers.’ So now we move from the fire to function- from vertical to horizontal- from love for God to love for the church.” (Hughes, 205)

II. Moving from Imperative → Indicative

We are to stand at the foot of the two mountains and gaze reverently at God’s consuming fire and consuming love…We must will to obey the imperatives- God’s commands. We must will to practice brotherly love…We must will to practice love of hospitality…We must will to be empathetic. (Hughes, 212)

“Understanding that God is both the consuming fire of Mount Sinai and the consuming love of Mount Zion, how ought we to live- especially in the church? What ought our ecclesial ethics to be?” (Hughes, 206)

III. The answer to that is Hebrews 13:1–6: Love

“Let brotherly love continue.” [v. 1]

“Through the centuries men have displayed many different symbols to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, even had special haircuts…But there is a much better sign…It is a universal mark that is to last through all ages of the church until Jesus comes back. That mark is love among Christians,’ and Schaeffer proves it with Jesus’ teaching of John 13:35: ‘By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’” (Phillips, with quote of Schaeffer, 587)

A. Love which honors God

“The Christian really has a double task. He has to practice both God’s holiness and God’s love…Not His love without His holiness- that is only compromise. Anything that an individual Christian or Christian group does that fails to show the simultaneous balance of the holiness of God and the love of God presents to a watching world not a demonstration of the God who exists, but a caricature of the God who exists.” (Phillips, quoting Schaeffer, 590)
B. Love of the brothers

Greek *philadelphia*

C. Love, as commanded by Jesus

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” [John 13:34]

D. Love, as commanded by the apostles

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” [Col 3:12-14]

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” [1 John 4:7-8]

IV. Love that asks something of you. Love gives, love costs

“By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” [1 John 3:16]

A. Love is…Hospitality

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” [v. 2]

*brotherly love (philadelphia) and love of strangers (philzenia)*

1. Why hospitality?

   a) Because Inns were icky
   “Inns throughout the Roman Empire were places of doubtful repute…and would provide very uncongenial company for Christians.” (Bruce, 390)

   b) Because Jesus did it for you
   “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” [John 14:2]

   c) Because it’s for Jesus
   “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came...
to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” [Matt 25:35-40]

d) You might entertain an angel

“[Abraham] lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, ‘O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant…And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.” [Gen 18:2–3, 33]

Abraham entertained angels and the pre-incarnate Jesus. [Gen 18]

e) You WILL entertain an immortal

“It is possible that when you sit in church, the person next to you will really be an angel, but he or she is likely something even more wonderful. There beside you in the pews is probably a saint of God in light.” (Phillips, 589)

“It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest, most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - These are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.” (Lewis, The Weight of Glory)

B. Love is…Remembering prisoners

“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.” [v. 3]

1. Remember because you were a prisoner to sin
It might be time-consuming, inconvenient, painful and expensive, but Jesus did it for you.

2. Remember because you are members of the same body.

“The thought here is ‘be concerned for those who are suffering as if every blow they receive puts a stripe across your own back.” (Guthrie, 436)

3. Remember because this is not a first century problem

There are 100 million persecuted Christians, 163,000 die every year (Voice of the Martyrs)

4. And remember even those prisoners not imprisoned for their faith.

C. Love is...honoring marriage

“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” [v. 4]

1. Why should we honor marriage?

a) It was designed and ordained by God

“God Himself has placed a special honor upon [marriage]. All other ordinances or institutions (except the Sabbath) were appointed of God by the medium of men or angels, but marriage was ordained immediately by the Lord Himself- no man or angel brought the first wife to her husband.” (Pink 749)

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” [Gen 2:24]

“So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” [Matthew 19:6]

b) Jesus honored it

“Now there were six stone water jars [at the wedding] for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from…” [John 2:6-9a]

c) “This mystery [marriage] is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” [Eph. 5:32]
Before the fall, God preached the gospel of Jesus by creating marriage: a faithful, life-long, promise-based relationship with gives safety, security, transparency, intimacy freedom from shame, trust, oneness, ecstasy. (Hamilton)

d) It is a witness to the culture positively
“One of the greatest witnesses in our age will be Christian couples who faithfully meet the struggles of marriage with the grace and power of God. Along with that is the astonishing witness, as our world now judges it, of Christian singles who keep the marriage bed pure through self-control and godly restraint.” (Phillips, 591)

e) It is a witness to the culture negatively
Any sexual intimacy outside marriage distorts a living image of the gospel, how God loves you through Jesus. Mess with that, and God and Jesus become more distant and less intelligible to the world that God is pursuing. (Hamilton)

2. How should we honor marriage?

Honoring marriage means to shun both asceticism, which denies marital intimacy and has culminated in monasticism, and libertinism, which sees marriage as irrelevant and pursues unbridled sexual fulfillment. (Hughes, 216)

a) Shun asceticism: God has given you intimacy.

b) Shun libertinism: God has given you an object for your intimacy.

D. Love is…not coveting money

“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.” [Mathew 6:24]

“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.” [Ecc 5:10]

E. Love is…not coveting at all

“So terrible is this sin and so great is its power that, one who is governed by it will trample upon the claims of justice, as Ahab did in seizing the vineyard of Naboth; he will disregard the call of charity, as David did in taking the wide of Uriah; he will stoop to the most fearful lies, as did Ananias and Sapphira; he will defy the express commandment of God, as Achan did; he will sell Christ, as Judas did.” (Pink, 758)
Covetousness is “an over-eager desire for the things of this world. It is a lusting after what God has forbidden or withheld from us, for we may crave, wrongly, after things which are not evil or injurious in themselves.” (Pink, 755)

F. Love is…being content

“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have” [v. 5a]

“He who has God and everything has no more than he who has God alone.” (Hamilton, quoting Augustine)

“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” [Matt 6:31-33]

“No that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” [Phil 4:11-13]

V. The encouragement

“[God] raises up the poor from the dust; He lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, and on them He has set the world.” [I Sam 2:7-8]

“[He] has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”’ [v. 5b–6]

What can man do to me? The unspoken answer: NOTHING!
FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What things can you identify in your own life which lead you away from Zion and back to Sinai, things that cause you to turn back to a legalistic view of your salvation?

2. Raymond Brown says that “contentment is the child of faith which does not come suddenly; it is a habit of mind and can best be acquired by constantly reminding ourselves of God’s fatherly provision and His generous promises.” In what area of your life are you discontent? What provision of God can help you to be more content?

REFERENCES


