

## Imperative for Christian Living

12<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 08/28/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.  
Text: Hebrews 13:1-17, 20-21 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 1 **“Let brotherly love continue.”**

v. 20 **“Now may the God of peace...by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good...through Jesus Christ...Amen.”**

### Introduction

- ✘ I think most of us have a general idea what the word “imperative” means. But it’s possible that we’re not so clear on the two subtle differences in how the word “imperative” is used.
  - ➔ Grammatically, an imperative is “a command”; something “you” have to do. Someone who loves us says, “Get an annual checkup!” and their meaning is clear – do it! “Don’t play in the street!” “Pay your taxes.” That’s an imperative, a command. Even something gentle or polite, can be an imperative: “Pass the butter, please”. Or God says, “Love your neighbor”. It’s still clear that we really have only one possible response – we must do it.
- ✘ But “imperative” can also simply mean “very important, necessary”. It’s imperative that we have clear weather if we want to go sailing. It’s imperative that children get a good night’s sleep for school the next day. It’s imperative that the Denver Broncos remain healthy and get a few breaks if they’re going to have a chance at making it into the playoffs this year. “Imperative” in that sense isn’t a command; it may not be something you are supposed to do at all. It’s just something that’s necessary for a certain result to come about. It may even be something we need someone else to do for us.
- ✘ Our Epistle Reading today is loaded with imperatives. Some of them are grammatical commands from God. Others are just very important, necessary, nothing we do at all, but in fact, necessary that God do for us. All of them are necessary in Christian living. So, what sorts of things are addressed by the preacher who wrote this Christian letter in Scripture?

### I. Imperatives for us to do as Christians

- ✘ The text begins with a list of imperatives for you and me and all Christians to do. These are commands from our LORD, now that He has saved us and graciously adopted us into His family of believers – that is His universal Church and this local congregation. There are seven of them in this text. Let’s step through them one by one.
- ✘ Verse one begins with one that is short and sweet, but also all-encompassing. The Greek literally says, “Remain in brotherly love”. Remember this is a sermon being proclaimed to a congregation, a group of believers in Christ. The pagans outside the church and looking in noticed something different about the way these Christians interacted toward one another. They actually “love each other”. In John 13:34-35 Jesus gave His disciples “A new commandment...that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” And then He said, “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”.
  - ➔ Not only was Christ’s love to be seen in Christian to Christian interactions, but Jesus said in Luke 6:27-28, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you”. And in Luke 23:34 Jesus models that for us when He says from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”.
  - ➔ When people look at you; when they look at us here in Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church and out there every day in the world, do they see Christ’s love as the first characteristic that defines us? It is His imperative.

- ✘ Verse two has the second imperative, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers...”. The word for “hospitality” in the Greek is an interesting word. It’s made up of two seemingly opposite words - *philos* which means “friend” and *xenos* which means “stranger”. So whenever a person treats and welcomes a stranger as if he/she is a friend, that person is showing “*philoxenia*” (φιλοξενία) – hospitality.

  - ➔ We Christians have already received the promise of the greatest hospitality where we as strangers to God in our sin, have seen Him come to earth in His Son Jesus, and even though He was rejected and beaten and murdered on a cross by us, He still opened up His heavenly home to us – becoming “the way” to eternal life by grace through faith in Him (Jn. 14:2-6).
  - ➔ And we have two examples in Scripture of believers who showed hospitality and ended up “entertaining angels unawares”: Abraham entertained two men who ended up being angels and a third who was the LORD Himself though he first thought they were common strangers (Gen. 18:1-21); and also Lot when he welcomed two angels that he first thought were strangers into his home before the city of Sodom was destroyed (Gen. 19:1-3).
  - ➔ So, that stranger who may even seem to be a bit “strange” to you – whether he/she is an angel or not, God’s imperative is that you greet him/her with hospitality either way.
- ✘ The third imperative is in verse three, “Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body”. This one has a back story at the time of the text that we need to understand. You see, Christians at that time were regularly placed in prison, and at a minimum, mistreated just because of their faith. And those prisoners received no food or provisions except what their family or friends would bring to them.

  - ➔ Because these people are part of the “body” of Christ, then 1 Corinthians 12:24-26 applies that and says, “...God has so composed the body...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together”.
  - ➔ If you are mistreated because of your confession of faith in Christ, then I am mistreated as well. It’s what we do; we support and care for and provide assistance in any way that we can to each other, whether we’re on the “Board of Human Care” or not. This is imperative to our Christian life.
- ✘ The fourth imperative – verse four, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous”. Just as it was in the first century, so it is today – the whole idea and view of marriage in the culture of the day was/is almost completely perverted and depraved. To the pagans, the wife was only there to provide an heir. Sexual desires were met through concubines or homosexuality.

  - ➔ But God’s design and intention for marriage; for the husband and wife relationship must be the place where we Christians intentionally and boldly stand out as different from the world. Ephesians 5 and other parts of Scripture show that the Christian relationship between a husband and a wife is God’s earthly expression of the relationship between Christ and His Church (His bride). It is imperative that this be believed and seen and treated as a bedrock for the family; for the entire community; that marriage is faithful, monogamous and lifelong. It is one of God’s greatest gifts to His people; one of His greatest expressions of love. Ephesians 5:33, “Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband”.
- ✘ Verses 5-6 have the fifth imperative which says that we must not covet, pursue or depend upon earthly things or money so that we neglect and forget who it is that is our true “helper”. Even if you or I end up penniless, with barely the clothes on our back as all that we own, as Christians we still have the only true security in this totally insecure society. God promises, “I will never

leave you nor forsake you” (v. 5). And as verse 6 says, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

- ✘ The sixth imperative flows from the fifth. We find it in verses 8 and 14, that we must focus our entire life’s thoughts and activities and priorities not on the things that we find only here in this time-bound earthly life but instead upon the eternal. Ever since our baptism, as Philippians 3:20 leads us all to proclaim, “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”. Though Paul said that some 2000 years ago, the reason for our out-of-time, eternal view on all of life is always, always, always “the same”. Verse 8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”.
- ✘ And the final, seventh imperative, for us Christians is in verse 9. Since Jesus and His truth never changes and is always current and applicable, then, “Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings...”. Our world likes to call them “new” and “enlightened”, but Scripture rightly labels them as “diverse” and “strange” precisely because they have deviated from the truth of Christ that remains always “the same”. When we’re talking about the teachings of Christ, just because they are eternal never means that they are “old” and “out of date” like our culture tries to make us think when they pressure us and our children into thinking that it’s no longer needed or beneficial or cool to be active in Christ and His Church. The problem is not the unchanging Bible, but the “diverse” and different beliefs of this temporary world.

## II. It’s Imperative we know, God’s Work for Us

- ✘ Well, how are you doing with all of these imperatives? I don’t really need to ask, because I know how I’m doing with them myself. I struggle with them. I fall short. As Paul says in Romans 7:19, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing”.
  - ➔ And yet all of these things; these imperatives are the good that God not only wants of us, He commands it!
- ✘ And the only way that we have any hope of survival; any chance of doing these things and residing in what verse 14 calls “the city that is to come” is that we understand and believe whole heartedly – not our work – but God’s work for us. It is imperative that we know what verses 10-13 teach us about the work of the unchanging Jesus Christ.
  - ➔ Yes, the one and only way to find pardon and forgiveness for the sinful ways that we rebel against and neglect and fall short of “doing” the imperatives God has given us to do, is by God’s undeserved grace. It goes all the way back to our baptism, not whether or not we are able to keep a list of rules. In baptism you were connected to Jesus, the one who verse 12 tells us “suffered outside the gate” of Jerusalem on Golgotha “in order to sanctify the people through His own blood.”
  - ➔ Jesus was sacrificed outside the city, as an outcast of the Jews who taught one could only be holy in God’s eyes by following perfectly His commands. But Jesus knew and taught differently. He endured the ridicule, torture and shame of the Jews and all the people, and died with the sins of all the world upon Him, for the forgiveness of all the world. He died for you!
  - ➔ So, verse 13 says, “let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach endured”. You see, to believe in and stick with Jesus today, means going against the flow and the philosophies of this world. It means you will be pressured to stay away from this place – often by your own desires and decisions. We shouldn’t be so surprised that church attendance and involvement; that following Christ is declining across the country at alarming rates. We see it right here in our midst. And yet, Jesus and His teaching and His love and sacrifice for our salvation have not changed and never will.

- ⊗ So it is imperative that we see Him and as verse 6 says, “we confidently say” for all to hear and know, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”
- ⊗ It is imperative, as verse 17 says, that we see and appreciate God’s gift given to us in the leaders He has given us in the past – how they did not waver under pressure in teaching and passing on the truth of Jesus. Why? Because they were “keeping watch over your souls” even before you were born, so that now the leaders you have today still have the unchanging Gospel truth and the unchanged sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper to use in God’s service to feed you and strengthen you and sustain you in the faith until Christ returns.

## Conclusion

- ⊗ While both kinds of God’s imperatives are necessary and important for Christian living, it is imperative that we all understand which kind comes first and makes the other kind possible.
  - ➔ God commands us to practice brotherly love, extend hospitality, keep our marriages pure, avoid the love of money, and focus on the eternal. But we couldn’t do any of that if God didn’t give us life in Christ Jesus’ cross and resurrection; if He didn’t work forgiveness and faith in our hearts and adopt us undeservedly, yet unconditionally into His body of believers here in His Church first.
- ⊗ That’s where the preacher takes us in verses 20-21, the benediction, which means “the blessing”. But understand, the benediction is not just a prayer wish, it is a giving of God’s work and power and promise. As I say before the benediction every week, “Receive the blessing of our almighty and gracious God...”.
  - ➔ You see, God’s blessing to you does what it says, it gives what it proclaims. It connects you directly and intimately as verses 20 says, to “the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant...”.
  - ➔ And what does it do? Verse 21, it “equip(s) you with everything good that you may do His will” because He is the one who is “working in us that which is pleasing in His sight”. He does it not us. No, it is only and always made possible in your life “through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever”.
  - ➔ You and I, we are His project, His handiwork of grace. And so we, the congregation, join in humbly and joyfully and expectantly, adding our “Amen”. This is what is imperative, dear friends, for Christian living. Amen.