

Common Traits Among God's Children

Hebrews 13:1-6

What are Canadians like?

The answer might depend on who you ask.

I'm sure most of you have heard the typical stereotype answers like, "Canadians are nice, they like to watch and play hockey, they like maple syrup, they say "eh" a lot, and I'm sure there are a few others.

Some stereotypes may be truer than others, but what I am interested in thinking about this morning is where do they come from?

They come from culture.

Culture according to the dictionary is the "customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group."

These are the things that happen in a particular people group that causes that group to take on certain character traits.

I don't think the stereotypes about Canadians are as true as they perhaps were years ago and that is because our culture has changed and people are changing along with it.

I think it is probably safe to say that most Canadians don't really have a clear idea of what it means to be Canadian.

Where that will lead is anyone's guess, but what is clear is that the culture of an institution, organization, community, or even country produces traits in people.

That is as true in the church as it is anywhere else.

The Bible tells us a great deal about the culture that is to be present in the church.

Now that does not mean that every church in every part of the world will look exactly the same.

When we are talking about church culture we should not be thinking primarily in terms of language, skin colour, fashion, or food.

Those things can and do vary from place to place and some churches are blessed with a great mixture of all of those things.

There are other things, however, that should not vary from church to church.

Sound doctrine, for example, should be the bedrock of church culture across all time and all geography.

It is the solid foundation of good theology that enables a church to distinguish the things in particular societies that are good and the things that are bad.

Things that we can continue to enjoy and participate in and things we must avoid.

Good church culture has good doctrine.

[The Bible never waivers on the importance of believing what is right and true, but it is equally clear that knowing, believing, and enjoying what is true changes what we do. Church culture can never be less than what we believe, but it is always more than that. We say we are Christians, what is that supposed to look like? What kind of traits should we expect from church people? What does being a part of the family of God look like practically speaking? That is what our text **Hebrews 13:1-6** speaks to us about. The Lord tells us here about what we are to be like as sons and daughters of God. While these things need to be true in our lives individually, the emphasis here is on the gathering of the local church. In others words these things are some of the defining characteristics of a body of believers as a whole. This text gives us three common traits that people belonging to the family of God should have. First...]

Point #1 – In the family of God love must be tangible. (Verses 1-3)

In our day it is absolutely critical that we have a right understanding of what love is, but we also need to know that proper Christian affection leads to action.

The very first word in the Greek sentence here is the word “Philadelphia”.

It is two Greek words put together “Philos” meaning love and “Adelphia” meaning brothers.

It is very important to consider what makes us brothers and sisters.

The New International Commentary points out that verses like this were very unusual in the ancient world.

It was extremely rare to refer to someone as brother or sister who was not your literal brother or sister, but the bible does this all the time.

Why?

Because according to our faith in the death and resurrection of Christ we have been made children of God.

Literally the command of verse one is “Let brotherly love remain, abide, or continue.”

It is something that needs to be actively kept up. We fight against indifference, we fight against the coldness of our hearts, we fight against anger, and we seek to cultivate affection for one another.

It is one of the most basic and common commands to believers, to love other believers.

In order to define the kind of love that is being talked about here we must look to the example of Jesus, who is called our brother in Hebrews 2:11.

What we see in Christ is a tender hearted affection for the highest good of those upon whom He has set His affection.

That is how we must understand love.

When we see love in this way, it quickly becomes clear that this kind of love will result in tangible actions.

(Verses 1-3).

Without a doubt Christians are to be loving towards all people, but having said that it is particularly the affections we have for other believers that is to pervade the culture of the church.

Certainly brotherly love is to be shown to believers we know, but it is also to be displayed in caring for strangers, that is believers from out of town.

It says, “In doing so some have entertained angels.”

That may be angels from heaven. There are several examples in the bible of that. Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Manoah, and others.

“Angels” here may also refer to pastors, evangelists, and missionaries.

You see the word angel simply means ‘messenger’.

The point of the command is to be willing to show hospitality to people who come in the name of the Lord.

It is a tangible display of love.

Next it says, “Remember those in prison.”

The word remember here likely means much more than bringing up a memory in our brains.

You see, in the ancient world prison was not like it is today. The daily needs of those in jail had to be met by friends and family outside the jail.

So the command to remember here means to bring stuff to believers in jail to sustain them.

That would take some courage because if they are in jail for being a Christian then a fellow believer taking provisions to the jail may very well be running the risk of going to jail themselves.

“Remember...those who are mistreated.” Those not in jail but perhaps those who have lost property or employment on account of their faith.

Take care of those people too.

Why? What is the motivation to risk and sacrifice even for believers who are otherwise strangers?

Love!

[Most of us get that love is tangible don't we? Think about someone you really love. They call you and say, “The car broke down, can you come and pick me up?” What do you do? You drop what you are doing and go pick them up! If you say, “Yah so, walk home” and then add “love you” do you? Of course not!]

It's the exact same in the church.

Anyone who has sat through church on any kind of regular basis is going to have the knowledge in their head that Christians are to love one another like brothers and sisters.

But if we simply know it in our brains and it stops there, then we do not have the culture in the church that the Scriptures call us to.

Love needs to be tangible!

I have to confess, these verses are a powerful confrontation to the coldness of my heart.

My affection for you is far too small and I desperately need the LORD to increase it.

Maybe that is you too, if it is we need to change.

Or maybe you are someone whose heart is full of love for you fellow believer, for you the exhortation here is to keep it up.

[If love is not a significant factor in the culture of a local church, then it is not a church. Take that in for a minute. This is one of the things we should be known for. Believers must care about each other and you should be able to see it! Here is another trait that should be common among God's children...]

Point #2 – In the family of God marriage must be deeply valued and protected. (Verse 4)

Every believer whether married or single must have an unwavering commitment to see husbands and wives live out the picture of their covenant relationship to the glory of God.

This is plainly stated in the beginning of verse 4.

The word 'honored' here is something that is considered to be very valuable, precious, of great worth, and something that is to be highly respected.

“Marriage”, it says, “to be honored by all.”

That is every Christian whether young, old, married, single, elder, deacon, or church member.

The culture of the church is to be one where marriage is held in really high regard.

Doing that begins with asking the question, “What is marriage?”

The only way to answer that is to know “Who defines it?”

Listen, laws made by human authorities are completely irrelevant on this issue.

God alone defines marriage and He did so in the very beginning when He created Adam and Eve and brought them together in marriage.

Marriage is a covenant entered into by one man with one woman uniting the two together in such a way that they enjoy a form of unity unlike any other human relationship.

That is important for two major reasons according to the scriptures.

One marriage allows for a magnified expression of bearing God's image.

Without a doubt every individual bears the image of God, but marriage adds another layer to our image bearing.

The Bible teaches that God exists as three equal and distinct persons in one being.

Nothing can adequately capture that incomprehensible reality in the nature of God, but marriage is supposed to point us towards that.

A man and a woman are distinct persons (they are different), but God brings them together to make “One flesh” the bible says.

Its unity and distinction.

Secondly, the Bible uses marriage as a picture of Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5 tells us that the husband is to be a picture of Christ to his wife.

He is to love her at the cost of his own life. He is to serve and protect her in complete humility just as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples.

The wife is to be a picture of the Church to her husband.

She is to honour and respect him, she is to follow his leading and submit to him as the church does with Christ.

Immediately, in our culture many are repulsed by that.

Why? I suggest it is because husbands fail to be like Jesus and wives fail to be like the church.

The bible is not calling men to be tyrants and women to be door mats.

The bible is calling us to imitate a relationship of infinite, eternal, and perfect love.

Let the magnitude of that sink in for a moment!

It is a high calling to say the least and it is one that must be honoured by every Christian.

[It is similar to going to a museum and seeing something of great value through a glass case. It is in the case to be protected because if people mistreated or even mishandled the item it would be ruined and could not be replaced. But the case is made of glass so everyone can see it.]

That is how the church should be with marriage. We need to honour and protect it with passion and resolve so that it might be on display for the world to see the glory of Christ in us.

We are briefly told something of what that looks like in the rest of verse 4.

From what has already been said regarding marriage it is safe to say that these commands represent God’s minimum standard for honouring marriage.

A husband must cultivate his desires to be for his wife alone and a wife must cultivate her desires to be for her husband alone.

To do otherwise in anyway is a most severe offense against marriage and therefore against the LORD.

To engage in immorality, that is acts of intimacy intended for marriage outside God's design and therefore outside the covenant of marriage, is also an offense against marriage and therefore an offense against God.

Now people today would have us believe that anything goes and we should just follow whatever desires we may have.

Our government has even made it illegal to say otherwise, but no matter what we must honour marriage.

I'm not saying that it is easy to fight against sinful desires.

Quite the contrary, I believe it is incredibly hard and even costly.

What I am saying is that knowing Jesus is worth giving up everything for, even the things you think are impossible to live without.

[Sadly I think the church in North America has fallen disastrously short on being known for valuing marriage. I believe that is true in many ways and it is something we should lament over and repent from. It is possible to turn from evil towards the living God brothers and sisters and I pray that would happen and in the years to come we would be known for having fantastic God honouring marriages. That is what the family of God is supposed to look like. Here is a third trait that should be common among God's children...]

Point #3 – In the family of God satisfaction must be found in God. (Verses 5-6)

The Bible says that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1Timothy 6:6). This is true not only for individual believers but for the whole body of believers as well.

Verse 5 has two commands that are strongly related to one another. Look with me at the first at the beginning of the verse. (Verse 5a)

That is a hard command. It's hard because money is a necessary part of life.

We need money for food, clothes, transportation, shelter, education, recreation, and the list goes on.

Because money buys stuff it is very easy to fall for the lie that it can provide security.

People think, “If I just have enough money in the bank then I won't have to worry.”

It's not true, people who love money never truly feel secure, and they never have enough.

Money lies in other ways as well. It promises happiness, but the kind of happiness that it provides is fleeting.

Remember the parable of the prodigal son? He lived it up with his money for a while but ended up miserable.

The same is true for everyone who loves money. True they may never end up physically destitute like the prodigal, but they will end up spiritually destitute.

The love of money is a terrible trap that God wants us to avoid.

How do we avoid it? That is what the second command of verse 5 tells us.

Another way to think about contentment is to be happy with what we have.

Now I'm sure someone might be thinking, "Does this mean I should never buy anything new?"

To think of it in those terms is to miss the point. The point is less about stuff and more about our depending on stuff to make us happy.

[Think of it like this. Let's say whatever amount of money you make at work is enough to live on. Your boss comes to you and says, "I really appreciate all your hard work and I've decided to give you a raise." Is that o.k? Absolutely, in fact I'd say that is a blessing and would encourage you to be a good steward of that extra money. Now take another scenario. You make more than enough to live on, in fact your life is quite comfortable. When you are at work one day your co-worker comes to you and tells you they got a raise and they are now making more than you and it makes you angry and dissatisfied with your paycheque. Is that o.k? Not at all, you have a problem with contentment.]

As the apostle Paul says, it is possible to be content with very little and it is possible to be content in abundance because contentment has nothing to do with things it has everything to do with your heart.

Now, look at the end of **verse 5** and into **verse 6** to see the reason why we need to be content with what we have.

How can you be content/satisfied when you have little to nothing in this world?

Remember that in Christ the LORD is with you, He will be your 'helper' in every circumstance of life.

What is the worst that could happen? People take away your stuff?

That is only a temporary setback, God will see you through into a glorious inheritance worth far more than anything we might own in this life.

What else could happen? You lose your life? In the blink of an eye you will be with Jesus which is better by far.

It is possible for the Christian to lose money, possessions, health, and prosperity.

It is possible to end up dirt poor and barely make it by from day to day and still be content.

Those things are possible when we are satisfied most fully in God Himself.

Is that what we are like? Do we have the character trait of contentment?

We are supposed to as God's children.

We are not to be grumblers or complainers.

We are not to be ungrateful and envious.

We are not to be full of worry and frustration.

We are to be satisfied in God.

This is what it looks like to be a blood bought son or daughter of the LORD.

This what is looks like to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

It looks like loving one another in tangible ways.

It looks like holding marriage in the highest regard.

And it looks like being content in life because God is our greatest treasure.

These are the things we ought to be known for. These are some of the things that should make up the culture of the church.

May God be merciful and grow these things in us individually and even more so as a church so that all people could look at our lives and see that the LORD is good.