

Introduction

In preparation, I stumbled down a rabbit hole of engineering called useless machines. The idea behind useless machines is precisely what it sounds like. In this form of engineering, its purpose is to do the opposite of what it was created for. The most famous example was a box with a switch to turn it on. When turned on, a hand would extend to the button and turn it off. Essentially it was an "on" switch to turn itself "off".

After reading about these "useless machines," I started thinking about my versions or ones that I might create. I imagined hydrostatic steering that, when pushed forward, it would spin. When pulled back, it would turn the other direction. I imagined a bike that the gears would force the front wheel to spin backwards while the back went forward, rendering progression inert. Try it for yourself. Think about any simple machine and see if you can create a useless version of it. A spoon that won't scoop. A hammer that won't hammer. Use the extra space on the bulletin to get creative and see if you can generate a few ideas. While you guys generate a couple of useless machine ideas, I will read our passage this morning.

Hebrews 13:1-6

13 1 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. 3 Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. 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. 5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." 6 So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

The last chapter in Hebrews is a group of appeals for the Christians life. In total, there are five exhortations. They teach us how to act in person to person relationships, as well as person to material possessions. In these scenarios we can respond with selfishness or selflessness. We can put our self first or consider others before ourselves.

Through this message, I hope to show you that Christian life is outward focused. If we call ourselves Christians, we reflect the person of our namesake. Christ lived a completely selfless life, always putting the benefit of others above his own life. This series of exhortations asks us as Christians to do the same with our life.

God created us to be relational. We are to be in communion with Him and, by extension, His creation.

We were designed and created with a purpose. A Christian will love his brother and sister, will be hospitable, remember those in need, honour marriage, and love people instead of money.

Self < Others

Do not forget to put others first—practice hospitality. Mimic Jesus.

This passage starts with three verses that deal with how we relate to our neighbours or those around us.

1 Let brotherly love continue.

The word love in the Bible has multiple meanings because the English term encompasses different types of love. Love can refer to romantic love, parental or familial love, God love etc. In the first of several encouragements of this passage, the meaning of love is family love. The word brotherly love here comes from the Greek "Philadelphia." You will recognize this word, or I should say the name as we know it. The city of Philadelphia is known as the city of what? Can someone tell me?

It comes from the combination of two Greek words:

Phileo: to love.

Adelphos: brother.

When the two words are combined, we get Philadelphia which means brotherly love.

One of the keywords to focus on here is the word "continue". This word would infer that brotherly love was already present, indicating that this reference is toward a group of people we know already have this kind of relationship. This verse is talking about how we relate Christian to Christian.

Jesus in John 13:1-17 displays for us how we are to act towards our Christian siblings. Jesus and the disciples were partaking in the Passover Festival. After supper, Jesus takes a towel around his waist and begins to wash His disciple's feet, taking the position of a servant. Jesus, throughout this passage, demonstrates servant leadership. Servant leadership requires us to put others first and serve them. It is an act of humility and love.

The author simply asks that this kind of love continue, and we should continue to do the same. Take note of Jesus' motivations. They are not selfish in any way. He has nothing to gain to take on the role of a servant beyond building up his disciples.

We must continually keep an eye on our motivations. I often look at myself in the mirror of my mind and ask, "What are you going to do? Is this for you or them?" Practicing selflessness is hard. It does not come naturally.

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2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

The second verse is similar to the first, but it now shifts to the quality of hospitality. It is interesting when examining the word hospitality in the original text as it uses a similar construction as Philadelphia in the previous verse. The word in Greek here is "philoxenia", which comes from two Greek words:

Phileo: to love.

Xenos: stranger/foreigner.

The word here is translated to "love the stranger/foreigner." It is the same type of love as brotherly love used in the previous verse. We are called to show love, not for the Christian brother but instead a stranger.

Jesus talks about this in **Matthew 25: 34-40**.

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed

you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ 40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

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In verse 3 of Hebrews 13, we see the same progression from the stranger/foreigner to care for those in prison in verse 40 in Matthew 25.

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

"Prisoners" here is probably referencing those imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel. But this reference can also extend to all that are in prison. These are particularly vulnerable people— Those in prison and those who are ill-treated. We are called here to remember them as if they were a part of our body.

We have all been vulnerable in our lives at some point. Take a moment to reflect on the prayer requests mentioned each week during our services. I receive emails from the prayer chain almost daily, sometimes multiple times a day. People get ill, mistreated, and experience loss or misfortune. As humans, we are vulnerable, not invincible. This vulnerability extends to people who make mistakes or are treated poorly.

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Self < Marriage

Do not give in to your desires—put your marriage first. Mimic Jesus.

4 Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

While not everyone is married or going to be married, we are all commanded to honour marriage. Honouring marriage means that if we are married, we are to keep our vows and consider that of

our neighbours. To hold marriage in honour means treating our spouse with respect and honouring our commitment to them. It means to remain dedicated to our spouse.

This command begs the question of "how do we do all these things?" At the core, the answer means putting someone else before ourselves. Any person that has been married for any length of time will tell you that marriage takes putting the other person first. If you are not ready to yield your wants, you are not prepared for marriage.

In the previous three verses, we learned about putting others first in our friendships, acquaintances and strangers. Moving forward through these verses to verse 4, there is a progression in the subject matter. Verses 1 - 3 shift the subject matter from people we are close with to strangers. In verse 4, the author keys in on a human's most intimate relationship with another human. A spouse. The Bible says that when two people get married, they become one flesh.

This series of verses beginning in verse 1 is ramping up to a climax through the middle of verse 4. Now the author attaches consequences for non-adherence.

4 Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

If you are single and here listening to this morning, this does not mean that you can tune out of this portion of the message. There is one word to key in on here. That word is "all." This verse is a command to "all" to hold marriage in honour.

To honour marriage means to respect its boundaries. It means to not participate in anything that threatens its sanctity or purity. Considering marriage and its sanctity would include how we act, the way we dress, the way we talk and the way we think. Making these considerations is difficult to do in our sex-crazed culture. The exhortations here in Chapter 13 are contradictory to almost every message in our culture. In schools, in movies, on television, on Youtube, on TikTok and everywhere else on Social Media and the internet—we are told that the most important person to consider in regards to marriage and sex is ourselves. The lie screams, "The only thing that matters is what you want. Nothing else." If you are not satisfied, look for more elsewhere.

Remember that the audience of Hebrews is former Jews. The Jews went to great lengths to avoid ritual defilement. Avoiding defilement included not touching or consuming anything unclean. The type of defilement here is behavioural. They were well aware of the idea of defilement, but we don't make these considerations in the same ways. If defilement was to bring unclean things into

our lives, we must evaluate all the things we bring into our marriages, whether in the future or now. We must also consider the things we may be putting into someone else's marriage.

When we put ourselves first and fall into the trap of devaluing other people, this devaluing can transition into seeing others as material things for us to consume or disregard. Many men and women have fallen into this trap, so heed the warning at the end of the verse.

This verse is a firm stance. It is a line in the sand for the Christian because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. This rebuke is not a threat but a warning. There are consequences for cavalier behaviour. 1 Corinthians 6:18 states:

18 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Do not give in to your desires—put marriage first. Mimic Jesus.

Jesus never married another human because his marriage was different. Jesus' spouse was the church. Ephesians 5:25-27:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

It is a vivid image throughout the Bible. Jesus was selfless in all his actions for the church. He gave his life to put us (the church) first. If we are to reflect on Jesus and how he acted, we need to work hard to put our selfishness to death and live a life of selflessness.

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Self < Contentment

Do not be ruled by wanting more things—put God first. Mimic Jesus.

5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

We see in verse 4 a warning to avoid sexual immorality because when we partake in it, we devalue people—we turn them into things we consume. Sexual immorality is a violation of how God created us to act, and there is a stiff warning that goes with it. In verses 5 and 6, the author continues on this thought, addressing consumerism. While our society is obsessed with consumption, there is a call here for Christians to act in contradiction to this.

Take note, though, the verse does not say, "Keep your life free of money," but rather "free of the LOVE of money." The word refers to the exact definition of love in Greek, as discussed earlier in these passages. The word is "Aphilargyros" and breaks down into three parts like this:

A (alpha): denotes a reversal of meaning for the following.

Philos: To Love.

Argyros: Money.

With the alpha reversal, the word is defined as to (not) love money. This inversion of definition is an interesting choice of words from the author. It follows the author's emphasis on the devaluing of relationships with other people and God. **Luke 16:13** Jesus states:

13 No servant 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."

When we love money with the love that is supposed to be attributed to our brothers and sisters, we value the wrong things in life. We should never appreciate material things more than we value God or other people.

Here is a lie we need to be mindful of that has pervaded history: "more will make me happy." If we believe this statement and live by it, what happens when we get more and aren't happy? The answer is we want more because we think it will make us happy. It is a circular logic that yields discontentment. Sometimes the dissatisfaction can get so great that we begin to value "the pursuit of more things" over people and, ultimately, God destroying our relationship with both.

How do you avoid this fate? The author reminds us to practice contentment. What is contentment? Contentment is a state of satisfaction. It is the opposite of the Mic Jagers anthem. The real question becomes, how do I achieve it? Joshua 1:5 is possibly the verse the author is quoting, and it says:

5 No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

The author claims Joshua's promise to continue the journey with God in Moses' absence. Realize that the same God with Moses, Joshua, David, Rahab, and various other biblical characters is the same God that will take care of us. Remember all the arguments, promises, and comparisons the Hebrews author made in all the previous chapters? Let's list them out briefly as we are finishing off Hebrews in the next couple of weeks:

- Christ is superior to the Prophets (Chapter 1)
- Christ is superior to the Angels (Chapter 2)
- Christ is superior to Moses (Chapter 3)
- Christ is superior to the High Priest and Levitical System (Chapter 4-10)
- Christ is the Superior Perfecter of Faith (Chapter 11-13)

Christ's promise and covenant to us are tremendous compared to anything we can attain through money or its pursuits.

It may be that we need the proper perspective to have contentment. When we realize how rich we are with all that is wrapped up in salvation through Jesus, we will not want anything else in this world.

Now I am not saying that I don't wrestle with contentment. I do, but it is always when I take my eyes off Jesus and stop meditating on his word. When life gets too busy, I don't pray, and it is in these moments, I forget all that I have.

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Conclusion

Not a Useless Machine

Science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke wrote after encountering the famous "on switch box" useless machine, "There is something unspeakably sinister about a machine that does nothing—absolutely nothing—except switch itself off." I would tend to agree with Mr. Clarke. When created things work in contradiction to their purpose, it leaves me with an unsettled feeling.

Online I found an interesting simple useless machine. It was a light that turned on in a luminant presence and turned off in the absence of one. It made me laugh. It made me pause and think about the purpose of a light source. It only serves a purpose in the dark.

In some ways, anything can become a useless machine when its purpose is inverted. (Take iPhone to turn the light on and put it in the pocket facing it towards my chest.) I have this iPhone, and it has lots of different things it can do. One of the most useful ones is the flashlight. All I got to do is pull down this menu and push the light button. (Put the light in your pocket) While the iPhone is an incredible machine, it can be useless if I use its features in an unintended way. The flashlight serves no purpose when it is facing inward towards my chest. (Pull iPhone out of your pocket) However, as soon as I pull it out of my pocket, the flashlight transforms by fulfilling its purpose.

God created us to be relational. We are wired to invest in other people. We are made to worship God, to connect to our Creator and love His creation. When we turn our lives inward and put ourselves first, we invert our created purpose.

God calls us to mimic Christ with our actions. He was and is the ultimate version of what humanity can be at full potential. If you are new to Christianity, I would suggest you take a look at Christ's life. Start in the book of Matthew and read through his life and death. When you do this, please pay close attention to his actions. Ask yourself what his motivations are with His actions because they showcase what he valued above all else.

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If we were designed with a purpose, what was it? Was it to live for only for ourselves? The worship of self in our society is a dangerous lie, and the church needs to bow out. We need to be a church of selfless Christ-followers, putting those around us first. Jesus demonstrated servant leadership to his disciples. Taking his example, will you join me in being different? A useless machine's work is to defeat its purpose. Let's refuse to be something created by God who defeats its purpose and focuses inward. Instead, we will work against our human nature and put others before ourselves.