

ECCLESIOLOGY 101
How the Local Church Lives and Breathes
Part 6: Philadelphia and Philoxenia

Hebrews 13:1–2 (NLT) Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. ² Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

This is our 6th installment of a series titled ECCLESIOLOGY 101.

AGAIN — The point of this series is not so much a to lay out a formal and systematic look at the nature of the church — but rather to get a street level, organic look at what the Bible has to say about the way the local church lives and breathes.

Hebrews 13:1 (ESV) Let brotherly love continue.

Philadelphia. That's the Greek word.

Practice — work hard at — brotherly love.

In one sense — the idea of *brotherly love* carries very little weight in our culture — after all, the city of Philadelphia (the city of brotherly love) is known for having a jail under their NFL football stadium! In another sense, it is totally cliché in our culture. In culture at large — everyone uses the term “*Bro*”. “*Listen, Bro!*” In church culture we can refer to one another as “*Brother*” or “*Sister*” in the Lord without any sense that what we just said is incredibly glorious — carries infinite weight! Think about this: In Hebrews 2:11 we read —

Hebrews 2:11 (NLT) So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters.

I believe a lot of the reason why community doesn't resemble Biblical community is because the average Christian has no idea of the weight and glory and COST for us to be the brothers and sisters of Jesus — and as a result of THAT related to one another as spiritual siblings!

The fact that we are the brothers and sisters of JESUS — and brothers and sisters together IN Jesus is so UNDERAPPRECIATED — so **not** radical — that the word *Bro* has become a verb! Have you ever been “*Bro’ed*”? *Bro! can I borrow...can you.*

But when the Hebrew Christians read the words “*brotherly love*” it was truly RADICAL within culture! Lucian of Samosata was a 1st century satirist who ridiculed religion. He fully understood how radical it was for Christians to call each other *brother* or *sister*. In a story (The Passing of Peregrinus) he satirized Christians by saying

“These deluded creatures... It was impressed on them too by their lawgiver that... they are all brothers.”

HERE’S THE DEAL — the radical way the 1st century community of believers lived and breathed. The radical nature of community was never given a “sell-by” date — it was never intended to have a shelf-life.

Like I said in the first of our studies in this series — Community is not some philosophical/esoteric thing for Christians to talk about, think about, or dream about. Biblical Community **is a very real way of living.**

Community is radically intense. It is rooted in the nature of the New Birth! In the biological world, you don’t choose your brother or sister. Your biological siblings can never not be related. It’s a genetic bond! In the spiritual domain we don’t choose our brothers and sisters in Christ. They’re born again into the family of God. Those born again by the Spirit of God are forever united by the new nature they have received in Jesus — no matter what, in spite of fallings out and failures Christians are related by blood!

Brotherly love presumes intimacy and transparency of relationship. If you grew up with brothers or sisters a few years younger than you, you have an idea of the kind of intimacy and transparency wrapped up in brotherly love. If you were four or five years older you wiped noses and wiped bottoms, or else at least you saw those things being wiped.

That kind of intimacy and transparency has consequences! There’s can’t put on airs anymore. You know who they are and they know who you are. If you’re a girl,

your siblings have seen you without make-up! They know what you are. They know who you are.

Brotherly love means that's the way we live and breathe in community with each other. We're with one another in grace. We're to be growing up with one another. As we live out our relationships with Jesus together, we're going to be more fully known — which demands *brotherly love*. REMEMBER — our big brother Jesus knows us fully and loves us fully!

Think about the material/financial ramifications of brother love. This was a big deal to those reading the letter to the Hebrews.

Hebrews 10:32-34 NLT Think back on those early days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you remained faithful even though it meant terrible suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were exposed to public ridicule and were beaten, and sometimes you helped others who were suffering the same things. ³⁴ You suffered along with those who were thrown into jail, and when all you owned was taken from you, you accepted it with joy. You knew there were better things waiting for you that will last forever.

Brotherly love extended into the realm of the material/financial.

Acts 2:45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.

This was such an **observable reality within** the communities of believers — **and to** the culture they lived in — that Lucian of Samosata satirized it!

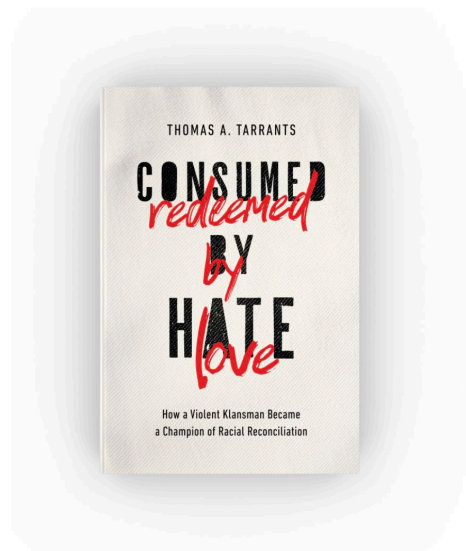
Lucian of Samosata (The Passing of Peregrinus) — *They take his instructions completely on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods and hold them in common ownership. So any adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who knows the world, has only to get among these simple souls and his fortune is quickly made; he plays with them."*

In an emotionally healthy family siblings share the same space. They have a claim on your resources.

Biblical community is racially and culturally radical! In the New Testament we see people of different cultures and different ethnicity living in community and living on mission together.

Acts 20:3–4 he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴ Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.

Real community lives and breathes in a way that slays racial and cultural bigotry! I can't wait to dig into this book!



Tom Tarrant In 1969, while attempting to bomb the home of a Jewish leader in Meridian, Mississippi, Tom was ambushed by law enforcement and shot multiple times during a high-speed chase. Nearly dead from his wounds, he was arrested and sentenced to thirty years in the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman Farm. Unrepentant, Tom and two other inmates made a daring escape from Parchman yet were tracked down by an FBI SWAT team and apprehended in hail of bullets that killed one of the convicts. Tom spent the next three years alone in a six-foot-by-nine-foot cell. There he began a search for truth that led him to the Bible and a reading of the gospels, resulting in his conversion to Jesus Christ and liberation from the grip of racial hatred and violence. Astounded by the change in Tom, many of the very people who worked to put him behind bars began advocating for his release. After serving eight years of a 35-

year sentence, Tom left prison. He attended college, moved to Washington, DC, and became copastor of a racially mixed church. He went on to earn a doctorate and became the president of the C. S. Lewis Institute, where he devoted himself to helping others become wholehearted followers of Jesus.

Community lives and breathes as a family

A lot of people LOVE the idea of community, but in reality, they have a “professional” relationship with church. They come to a service every week, maybe even two or three times a week, but they never **devote themselves to** developing fellowship that lives and breathes brotherly love.

The Bible is the very Word of God to man. It is alive and powerful! It is God’s desire for you to be **devoted to gathering** with other believers to be **taught** the Word of God. It is His desire for His Word to find a rich dwelling place in your heart — a rich dwelling place where we make choices, where words and actions are birthed. He wants it to find a rich dwelling place there so our lives will be shaped by it. But Paul doesn’t merely pray that the Word of God would dwell richly in our hearts — period.

Colossians 3:16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, **teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

The Holy Spirit wants to take the things you’ve learned — the truths that He has used to shape your life — and He wants us **use us** in bringing the transforming truth of God’s Word to the lives of those around us. Valerie and I have been shaped by the word of God lived, modeled and shared by those we’ve done life with! We have been shaped by intimate, transparent relationships; people we shared meals with, people we talked with, even argued with! The framework of our thinking and our faith that our lives and our ministries are built on today were forged in community! Valerie and I haven’t been molded by information.

If you sit down with Valerie you’re getting a lifetime devoted to being taught the Word **AND** fellowship — wisdom that’s has it’s origin on the Word of God — but has been hand delivered in real life by experiences shared with other believers. I don’t want to put words in Valerie’s mouth (or in pastor Chris’ mouth — but I

think this is pretty close to how they would articulate their vision for Women's Ministry and Men's Ministry — and it's for sure the vision that I have for Monday Night @ Metro. There's a reason we're seated around tables. There's a reason we break bread together. I want you to connect with people — meet with people — build those connections over time so there is the possibility for the Lord to continue to build those relationships outside of these walls. I want you to not only take the word of God in together — but also take the opportunity to talk about the previous Monday(s) — share how the Word is shaping your life. Even more so when the Women and Me gather weekly. I know that Valerie's vision for the Women's Study is NOT for women to merely sit at a table with other ladies to take in information — it's to connect spiritual siblings around a table — connecting lives around that Biblical truth — connecting lives in prayer for one another around the table — so when they leave the building they can build on that connection. It's around those tables that they can **fellowship** — share in the richness of the Word of God with each other — share how God's Word has and is shaping them. Whether it's every Monday Night around these tables — or around tables on Thursdays in the Women's Study or Men's Study — THAT is where brotherly love is nurtured! For some it is the **first shared space** with their spiritual siblings. For a lot of people those tables are where people begin to treat one another as spiritual siblings. It's where they begin to let people in to their lives — where they begin to let people know who they are. And that shared space begins to expand in to more of your life outside of these walls.

THIS COMMUNITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE IS NOT A CLOSED SYSTEM

Verse 1 — “Keep on loving each other as brothers.”

Verse 2 — “Do not forget to entertain strangers ...”

Verse 1 says — “Work at *philadelphia*,” which means brotherly love. Work like crazy at loving the insiders, loving the people you know who trust Jesus like you, love Jesus like you, serve Jesus like you!

Verse 2 says — “Work at *philoxenia*.” The word *philoxenia* means love of strangers. Make sure you work incredibly hard at loving outsiders.

It's interesting that after the city of Philadelphia was founded no one went down the road and founded the city of Philoxenia!

The Greek word *xenia* means a stranger. As a verb it means to take in a guest.

So *philoxenia* is such a gospel word. The Gospel is God opening His heart, His heaven, His Kingdom to strangers!

Real community not lives and breathes *philadelphia* — *spiritual siblings* opening their living space, their resources to spiritual siblings. It also lives and breathes *philoxenia*!

AGAIN — this is why the 1st century community of believers was SO RADICAL in the 1st century Greco-Roman world. And when it is real — it's just as radical in our 21st century world.

In the Greco-Roman world you only loved those you knew would be able to repay you. THAT is not how things worked in a 1st century community of believers. They were TRULY countercultural! They opened their lives — and their homes — to the unbeliever — to the person who couldn't repay. And when they did that they made the Gospel accessible. When an outsider stepped into the home of a Christian it was like stepping into a glass bottom boat in Tahiti! The grace of God was suddenly opened up to them — like a coral reef seen through a glass bottom boat.

The Local church should live and breathe *philadelphia* **and** *philoxenia*. By the way — this Metro's home. We should entertain strangers here! We should be inviting people who are yet outside of the Gospel into our home. When they walk in, they should see our brotherly love — see and hear the beauty of God's grace.

REAL COMMUNITY IS NOT CLICHÉ!

THAT is the way the local church should live and breathe!

For you and me to live and breathe like that DEMANDS relationship with Jesus who said

***John 15:5** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*