

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The Christian's Sacrifices – Part 1

Hebrews 13:15-19

15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. 17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. 18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. 19 And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Life is filled with “significant events” – those moments in life that serve as a transition, that cross us over from thinking and living one way to understanding and acting in another. While such “significant events” may be quite different from one person to the next, there are a few common ones that I will use to illustrate my point. Generally speaking, sometime between the ages of 16-18, a young person will get a driver’s license; and often to the trepidation of the parents, that person’s life will never be the same as such an event moves them from being mom and dad’s little boy or girl to the responsibilities of adulthood. Similarly, the transition from being in High School and then pursuing college or career changes a person’s outlook and behavior. For those who marry, such can attest that this “significant event” changed their perspective on many things. And perhaps the most dramatic “significant event” for me was the moment I held that little 6 lbs baby boy in my hands some sixteen years ago as I realized I was no longer a child myself but had a child to care for. Truly, these and other significant events move us from thinking and acting one way to something else.

And for those who have experienced the significant event of being born again, of being transformed by the regenerative power of God’s Holy Spirit to see Jesus Christ for who He really is, the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world and specifically my own sins, that He has become my Redeemer, purchasing me from the dominion of darkness, of death, of sin and of Satan that I might become a loyal and faithful subject of the kingdom of the Son of God – the dominion of righteousness and life – truly a transition in my way of thinking has taken place.

In our text this morning and then continuing next week, we will look at five sacrifices that are to be a part of the regular repertoire, the everyday experience of each believer. These are to be the thoughts and actions that are now to be the norm for everyone who has come to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Let me outline these sacrifices for you before we look at them one by one.

- I. **The Sacrifice of Self (13:15)**
“Through Him...”
- II. **The Sacrifice of Service (13:15)**
“let us continually offer up...”
- III. **The Sacrifice of Sharing (13:16)**
“And do not neglect doing good and sharing...”
- IV. **The Sacrifice of Submission (13:17)**
“Obey your leaders and submit to them...”
- V. **The Sacrifice of Supplication (13:18)**
“Pray for us...”

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This morning it is my desire to flesh out the first three of these Christian sacrifices. But before we look at these sacrifices specifically, let me remind you how these verses ought to be seen contextually. The original readers of this letter had been brought up to worship God through the religion of Judaism and the specifics of the Levitical sacrificial system. In other words, prior to the significant event of Jesus abolishing the need for the Levitical priesthood and all its sacrifices, the only known and correct way to worship God was in accordance to the OT sacrificial system – you went to the priests and only they could approach God on your behalf after the right sacrifices had been made. According to the Law, no layman could enter the holy place to offer sacrifices to God. But in Jesus all this was changed. No longer were animal sacrifices needed and no longer were the Levitical priests the only ones who could come to God. According to Hebrews 13, all who believe in Jesus have been made priests who were to offer sacrifices of a different kind. This was a radical teaching for these Jewish readers.

But, how can I say that Hebrews 13 teaches the priesthood of all believers? First, I would have you look back at verse 12. There we read, **“Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”** We must remember that when Jesus offered Himself on the cross for the sins of His people, the need for the Levitical priesthood ended. The better and greater priest – Jesus - offered a better and greater sacrifice - Himself. But this sacrifice was not only for sin, but also for separation unto God. And just as Moses in Exodus 29 sanctified, anointed and set apart Aaron and his sons as priests with the blood of the sacrifice, Jesus has sanctified, anointed and set apart - notice here in verse 12 – not the Levites – but, to the shock of many of these Jewish readers, **“the people”** – all who come to Him in faith. The sanctification that Jesus offered was not only a setting apart from sin, but also a setting apart of all **“the people”** to priestly service. The blood of Jesus consecrated, it installed new priests, which includes everyone who is redeemed by the blood of Jesus. We see this teaching verified in other passages. Look with me at 1 Peter 2:4-5 and 9 Peter declared...

1 Peter 2:4-5

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up [service] spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

In addition, notice how John addresses his readers in Revelation 1:4-6 saying,

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the

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kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood [set apart from sin] — and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In other words, coming to Christ is a significant event that results in some radical changes in the way believers, particularly these Jewish believers, were to worship and serve God. And while these radical changes might be a bit different for us this morning than it was for these Jewish readers, since we have not come out of a system of worship that sacrifices animals, the principles are none-the-less the same. According to Hebrews 13:15-19, all believers are now priests unto God, called to offer sacrifices to the pleasure of God. Part of our study is to discern what these sacrifices are and how to offer them rightly to God. Let us turn then our attention to this morning's text and see this more specifically.

I. The Sacrifice of Self (13:15)

Through Him then...

Our text begins with what I will call the first of the believer's sacrifice, the sacrifice of self. Our text read, "***Through Him then...***" "Through Jesus, therefore..." Beloved, this is a concluding statement. It is a reminder of the whole argument of the book of Hebrews that Jesus alone is able to bring us near to God because of "His work" as our high priest, having offered Himself as the once for all atoning sacrifice for our sins. In a moment we will see how we are specifically called to do priestly work, but before we can rightly serve God, we must have a right view of the priestly work of Christ for us. "Through Him..." reminds us that Jesus paid it all, that Jesus did it all, that the work of Christ alone makes us right with God.

If we are to worship God aright, it cannot be the as a result of thinking, "I have offered the right animal sacrifice..." or "I have regularly attended Church; or taught a particular class; or speak respectfully to my parents; or haven't stolen company time at work." If we are to rightly worship and offering praises to God, it must begin, every time, with the recognition that Jesus died on the cross so that you might be enabled to worship God. Jesus didn't simply save you from your sins, as glorious as that was, but Jesus, by His sacrifice, enables you to please God with your life. As the chorus says,

It's all about You, Jesus; and all this is for You and glory of Your name.

It's not about me as if you should do things my way.

You alone are God and I surrender to Your name.

The first sacrifice of the believer then is the sacrifice of self. We are not accepted because of what we have done or who we are. We are accepted in the Beloved. Our worship and service to God is not pleasing to God because how talented, how committed or how laborious our efforts. It is pleasing to God when self is diminished and the Savior is exalted. If our sacrifice to God is to be acceptable it must begin with a remembrance, a concentration, a consciousness of the sacrifice of Christ offered on our behalf. Jesus, through His own blood, that is through His own efforts, not ours, sanctified, set us apart for His service.

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II. The Sacrifice of Service (13:15)

...let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

So, the first of our sacrifices as those sanctified by the blood of Christ is that of self – of looking to the Savior and His merits rather than our own. The second sacrifice of the believer is that of service. As we continue on in verse 15, we find that our service to God is specifically likened unto that of a priest. We read, **“let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”**

Let us note first then how this is a priestly service. First, notice the verb, “offer up.” This verb is used two other times in Hebrews, both with reference to the duties of the high priest. Let us see the first one in Hebrews 7:26-27,

26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Clearly, the duty of the high priest was to offer up the appropriate sacrifice to God. We see this again with reference to Jesus as our high priest in Hebrews 9:28 reading,

so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.

So, the high priests according to the Levitical priesthood, as well as the High Priest according to the priesthood according to Melchizedek were to offer the appropriate sacrifice. In like manner, those who have been made priests by the blood of Jesus are to offer the right sacrifices to God. When a priest regularly does his duty, such duty is called service. In Numbers 8:19 we have the consecration of the Levites as priests. Notice what is said by the LORD...

I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the sons of Israel, to perform the service of the sons of Israel at the tent of meeting and to make atonement on behalf of the sons of Israel, so that there will be no plague among the sons of Israel by their coming near to the sanctuary.

Beloved, there are a lot of things in this life that vie for our attention, that seek your service. Some of these things may be good and some bad. Some may be neutral, at least until they consume your time and render your service to God as secondary. Remember that the Levites were totally devoted to the service of the tabernacle and its worship. For them there was nothing else. To be sure, we all have responsibilities that God desires us to honor; but all responsibilities are secondary to our responsibility to serve God as priests in offering the right and pleasing sacrifices, the first of which was self and the second of which is service, that is, making sure that you are regularly and rightly offering worship to God.

In addition to seeing our priestly service, let us also notice the elements of this service. I see three such elements in verse 15. First, this priestly service is to be done **“continually.”**

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If there is any doubt as to the priority of our duty of worship and service to God, then this word continually removes it.

Let us remember that according to the Law, the priests were to offer sacrifices at prescribed times. While the OT sacrifices were regular, they were not continual in the sense of seeing every moment into an opportunity of worship. The point is that each and every believer can personally approach the throne of grace, the holy place of God with confidence, with boldness at any time (Hebrews 4:16). How glib we can become, failing to see that because of the sacrifice of Christ, we can turn every moment at work, every trip to the grocery store, every conversation on the phone, every date, every activity as a moment to worship, to bring it before the throne of God. Beloved, for the OT saint, the opportunity to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, praise and gratitude was limited by the calendar, by time and even by the limitations of resources. But as NT saints, our sacrifice of worship is limited by nothing as we have the ability to turn even the most mundane of circumstances into a moment of worship. Even as 1 Corinthians 10:31 reminds us,

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Not only is our sacrifice of service to be continual, but it is also to consist in praise. It is called, ***“the sacrifice of praise”*** or more literally, ***“the sacrifice consisting in praise.”*** Let us remember that the offering of sacrifices in the tabernacle was a very visible, very demonstrable act of worship toward God. When a person walked through the camp with a lamb in tow heading toward the tabernacle, everyone knew what he was up to. Beloved, the offering of the sacrifice of praise ought to be no less demonstrative. Only the sacrifice we are offering is not an animal, but of praise – a vocal proclamation of the goodness of God. I love what Spurgeon had to say about this sacrifice of praise:

So then, we are to utter the praises of God, and it is not sufficient to feel adoring emotions. The priesthood of believers requires them to praise God with their lips. Should we not sing a great deal more than we do? Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs should abound in our homes. It is our duty to sing as much as possible; we should praise as much as we pray...Hear how the ungodly world pours out its mirth! Ofttimes their song is so silly as to be utterly devoid of meaning. Are they not ashamed? Then let us not be ashamed. Children of God, sing the songs of Zion, and let your hearts be joyful before your King [MTP, vol. 34, 569].

So our service is to be continual, consisting in praise and finally, it must be a confession. We read in our text, ***“that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”*** The “sacrifice of praise” certainly carries the idea of thanksgiving, but it also is more than this. The literally reading of this last phrase in verse 15 is, ***“the fruit of lips confessing to His name.”*** The word for “give thanks” or “confessing” means “to say the same thing as.” So, a part of our priestly service and sacrifice to God is to say the same thing as God concerning Himself and His work – that is, we must be confessing the person and work of Jesus Christ who sanctified us with His own blood. It has been said that the OT saints depended upon their animal sacrifices to be the expression of their worship; but the NT saints, rather than offering animals, offer up confessions of truth concerning Jesus and His gospel. Beloved, this implied

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then that the NT priest, that each believer is immersing him or her self in the Word. For the more one immerses himself in the Word by faith, the more he will worship God. Our lips are to confess the greatness of “His name”. Remember that to the Jews, “the Name” of God represented the fullness of God’s person. To say the name of God, “Yahweh” was to speak of the totality of His being. In contrast, if I were to say to you this morning, “Thank you, Bill!” - you might first ask, “Which Bill are you referring to?” And then you might ask, “For what are you thanking Bill for?” But with God, to offer praise in His name is not to question which God is being spoken of, for when we praise God for salvation, those who know Him know that salvation is only from Yahweh and that He is salvation. In other words, to praise God for what He does is to also praise Him for who He is – and to praise Him for who He is also, simultaneously to praise Him for what He does as these two things are inseparable.

Let us therefore continually offer up the sacrifice consisting in vocal, demonstrable praise to the person and works of God. Or as Spurgeon once exhorted:

Admire the Father-think much of His love; acquaint yourself with His perfections. Admire the Son of God, the altogether lovely One; and as you mark His gentleness, self-denial, love, and grace, suffer your heart to be wholly enamored of Him. Admire the patience and condescension of the Holy Ghost, that He should visit you, and dwell in you, and bear with you. It cannot be difficult to the sanctified and instructed heart to be filled with a great admiration of the Lord God. This is the raw material of praise [572].

III. The Sacrifice of Sharing (13:16)

And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Let us consider one more of these five sacrifices, the sacrifice of sharing. We read again in verse 16, **“And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”** I want to say something that I desire each of us to consider very carefully. In verse 15 we have the exhortation to praise God – to be vocally demonstrative in declaring the person and work of God. Right on the heels of this exhortation is another command, the call not to neglect or forsake “doing good and sharing” with others. This is reminder for us that true praise of God will result in a true sharing of blessings with others. If your worship of God stops short of serving and sharing with others, then you have not rightly worshipped God, you have not rightly considered how benevolent, how giving, how gracious He has been to you because when this is done, it results in a benevolent, giving, gracious heart toward others.

To say this another way, the priesthood of NT believers means an end of animal sacrifices, but not the end of sacrifices. Truly, sacrifices offered for the purpose of merit or expiation of sin had ended, but sacrifices, the offering up of the blessings we have received from God to the benefit of others as expressions of love and gratitude toward God are now the intended result of right worship toward God. To this end, two expressions of love and gratitude are given.

First, we are not to neglect, forget or forsake **“doing good.”** This “doing good” simply refers to acts of kindness. Even as we praise God for His kindness toward us, it is to result in visible, tangible expressions of kindness toward others. In a nutshell, doing good is the sacrificing one’s own pleasures and desires to help, encourage and meet the needs of others. Believers are to actively seek out opportunities to do good to others. Of course the big

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question is, “what does it mean to do good?” This expression is rather vague, which I believe reveals the limitless possibilities of doing good. If the list was three, ten or twenty items long, we might be tempted to do only those things. What are some good things we might do? This ought to be the subject of our conversation throughout the day, but let me give you just a few. You might personally take on a ministry in the church that helps or relieves others, particularly those who may be involved in multiple areas. **“Doing good”** may be as simple as preparing a meal for someone; of emailing someone a note of encouragement. **“Doing good”** may take more planning, let offering to watch the children of a young couple so that they can go out, or of inviting some of our singles over for an evening of fellowship. Whatever it is – we are called to sacrifice ourselves by doing good to others.

In addition to **“doing good”** there is **“sharing.”** The Greek word for **“sharing”** here is one some of you have heard before, *koinonias* or “fellowship.” The idea behind sharing is literally giving, whether that giving be to God or to one another. It implies togetherness so that you might give as well as sacrifice as you take that which has been given to you in order to give it to another for their benefit or well-being. I read one definition of “sharing” as “generosity of all sorts.”

This sharing and being together stands in contrast to an attitude already addressed in Hebrews, that of neglecting or forsaking the opportunities to do good and share with one another. Remember Hebrews 10:23-25?

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

It is part of our priestly service, our responsibility as those sanctified by the blood of Christ, to the doing of good, of stimulating one another to love and good deeds, coming together in *koinonias* – in “fellowship” or sharing that we might encourage one another.

And why would we want to do this? Because, according to the end of Hebrews 13:16 – these are sacrifices that what? **“...for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”** Beloved, a congregation that seeks to do good and share with one another pleases God. This principle is seen in Titus 3:8 and 14,

8 This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men.

14 Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.

So, let me ask you – with whom are you regularly sharing your blessings (both spiritual and material)? I have a friend in this church that is constantly doing both, calling me to share with me something he has learned in the Word and then showing up with material things to also bless me. And you know what, such sacrifices are never done with a sense of dread or ritualistic duty, but rather with delight. And this is the point. The believer has been called to

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serve God and one another as priests, those who offer up right and demonstrable praises to God as well as those who love to do good and share their God-given blessings with others.

So then, let us learn the delightful duty of Christian sacrifice, putting off the old self, giving time and energy to the service of praising God and of joyfully ministering to the needs of others by sharing your blessings. It is a sacrifice – but it is a “living sacrifice” – one that is acceptable to God, that imparts life rather than death and exalts Jesus as the one who has sanctified you and called you to such manner of living. Will you sacrifice? Will you experience the joy of the Christian sacrifices? May we do so to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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