

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

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

The Christian's Sacrifices – Part 2

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.

Last week we began this look at Hebrews 13:15-19 – seeking to see from these verses the believer's responsibilities, his duties and ultimately his delight being made a priest unto the service and glory of God. Remember that from Hebrews 13:12, we saw how the blood of Jesus not only sanctifies the people from sin, making them holy and righteous, but also then in that holiness and righteousness, they are set apart as priests to offer up sacrifices, sacrifices much different from those described in Leviticus 1 – 6.

From Hebrews 13:15-19 we find five sacrifices that are to be a part of the regular repertoire, that is - the everyday experience of each believer who has been set apart by the blood of Jesus. Let me quickly review with you the two sacrifices we considered last week.

I. The Sacrifice of Self (13:15)

"Though Him then..."

The first of these sacrifices that are to be offered up is our very self. This is a reminder 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. Beloved, the truth is that without coming to Christ with a sense of your need of Him as Savior, without coming to Him in humility and willingness to serve Him who saved you – without sacrificing yourself, your hopes and dreams as shaped and formed by this world's thinking and in accordance with the desires of the flesh in exchange for the thinking of Jesus and in accordance with His commands – we will never serve and worship God aright. All self-will must be turned delightfully over to Christ's will. The sacrifice of self seeks to view all activity through the thinking – does this truly exalt Christ and advance His purposes?

As our text indicates, we can only worship God aright **"through Him"** – through Christ alone. He is our source, He is our strength, He is the captain of our Salvation and the High Priest whose example we follow.

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.

Second, we noted that we must engage in a sacrifice of service, reading in verse 15, **"let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."**

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We noted that this is a clear call to our service and worship to God as priest as we are called to **“offer up”** – as a priest this **“sacrifice of praise to God”** this “fruit of the lips that give thanks to His name.” This is to be a continual act, not intermittent; it is to be an act consisting in praise; not animal sacrifice; and it is to be a confession. Remember that the phrase in our text **“give thanks”** literally means “confessing” - “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.

This is what we have already considered. Let us press on and see the third sacrifice that is our duty and delight having been sanctified by the blood of Jesus.

III. The Sacrifice of Sharing (13:16)

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

Here in verse 16 we have 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 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 in the church. **“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, like 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.

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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 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.

IV. The Sacrifice of Submission (13:17)

“Obey your leaders and submit to them...”

This brings us to our fourth sacrifice, what I have called the sacrifice of...submission. Verse 17 begins with the command, “**Obey your leaders and submit to them...**” There they are, those nasty words – obedience and submission. It’s hard enough to practice these things at times with the Lord, or in the home, but now we have it here in the church. It is too bad that these words have been often taken so negatively, particularly as we remember that our Lord

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Jesus Christ was both obedient and submissive to the Father and He delighted to be so. (John 4:34; 5:30)

The word **“obey”** as used here is a command to allow yourself to be persuaded or convinced by those whom God has put over you. The verb **“obey”** is the same verb used by Paul in Romans 8:38-39, **“For I am convinced, persuaded, agreeable to act in accordance that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers....shall be able to separate us from the love God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** We are to be persuaded by our leaders concerning the truth of God.

The word **“submit”** in our text is found only in this form in the New Testament and means “to surrender” – that is “to consider one’s self dependent.” You talk about a sacrifice of self and a sacrifice of submission. To allow ourselves to be persuaded by others and to be seen as dependent upon someone else runs counter to our culture. But this is the command, every bit as much as binding as Matthew 22:37, to **“love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind”** is this command to constantly and continually place yourself in those circumstances that allow you to obey, be persuaded and dependent upon spiritual leaders. Such is a sacrifice because it makes us vulnerable to someone else, someone outside our circle. What if they are wrong? What if they are abusive, What if they are intrusive? Honestly, if your spiritual leaders are these things, then you need to prayerfully consider other spiritual leaders. To be under leadership in this matter of obedience and submission is a killer to pride and requires massive humility. But before you think I am calling you to some kind of blind obedience and senseless submission, let us note from our text both the clear and implied parameters of this command.

First, let us glean some responsibilities of a leader. What are the tasks of a leader according to this verse and its context in Hebrews 13 and the rest of Scripture? These help us discern the parameters of this submission to leaders.

First, according to our text, a spiritual leader must **“keep watch over your souls.”** Literally, they keep awake continually over your souls. There is the idea that a good spiritual leader may lose sleep over his congregation; those times when he wakes up in the middle of the night and feels the need to intercede on your behalf; those times when he gives of himself even when it costs him something, knowing that it is to your benefit.

Second, the spiritual leader is called to “give an account” before God concerning you. How is that for a sobering task, both for the leader and yourself. As we will see in a moment, the spiritual leader’s accounting is really focused on two things; 1) has he effectively communicated the precepts of God’s word and will for your life, and 2) has the “soul” effectively put those precepts into practice.

Third, and we see this by going back to Hebrews 13:7, **“Remember those who led you...”** This is related to giving an account, the spiritual leader is to lead and guide believers in matters spiritual (what God’s word says about a matter) and therefore practical as to living out those principles.

Fourth, the spiritual leader, according to Hebrews 13:7 is to speak the Word of God to you. The preacher has no business standing in the pulpit if it is not his intention to communicate anything but the truth of God’s Word and its implications in your life.

Fifth, the spiritual leader is to live as an example of faithfulness to Christ, living out before the people the precepts and practices of God’s will.

These then are the tasks of the spiritual leader from Hebrews 13:7 and 17. This is how they are to be constantly keeping watch over your souls. And moving on in verse 17 we find

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the responsibility of each individual believer; that in addition to obeying and submitting to these things, there is also a particular manner – a how we are to obey and submit. We read, **“Let them do this with joy and not with grief”** – or, “Let them, because of your involvement, because of your participation with them, be filled with joy and delight, not with grief, or painful, heart-wrenching moaning.” And just how can we insure that we are obeying and submitting in a right manner that brings our spiritual leaders joy rather than sorrow. Let me suggest a few.

First, consider your **communication**. In other words, be open and communicative about spiritual struggles and concerns remember that a good spiritual leader is keeping watch over your soul. Beloved, coming to a spiritual leader, which in context here would be a pastor, elder or some other church mentor; and not soliciting from them information or input on matters spiritual is like going to the doctor but not telling them what ails you. If you do not trust your spiritual leaders enough to seek such input, then they cannot keep adequate watch over your soul and ultimately implies that you are either being disobedient to this command or you are in the wrong church, if indeed you cannot open up to your spiritual leaders because they don't want to know or don't care. Let me assure, the spiritual leaders here do care. Such communication, while certainly hard at times for both the disciple and the mentor should result in joy as they labor together with God through the Word and in prayer.

A second way to bring joy to your spiritual leaders is through **implementation** – that is to purposely seek to meditate on and make personal application of the Word of God as it has been spoken to you by your spiritual leaders, be it from the pulpit or in private. As you speak about and live out those truths which have been communicated to you, I promise you, joy comes to those who led you and spoke to you concerning such things. (Philippians 4:1 – “my joy” – “stand firm”).

[Philippians 4:1 - Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.]

The final way I would suggest to you to bring joy rather than grief to your spiritual leaders is by means of **imitation** – by taking the godly disciplines you see in your spiritual leaders' lives and do them yourselves. You know it is said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. And such is true when what is imitated is good. It is not so good when what is imitated is bad. [Illustration of Luke's exclamation, “Holy Cow!”] – [Illustration of laboring with the kids to say “thank you” to others – once they did this on their own, what a joy].

Finally then, let us note the meaning and application of the final phrase of Hebrews 13:17, **“for this would be unprofitable for you.”** The failure to offer up this sacrifice of submission to spiritual leaders is said to be “unprofitable” – or to say it another way, “not to one's advantage but rather hurtful or pernicious.” In other words, not to actively seek this obedience and submission, this allow yourself to be persuaded by their communicating the Word of God to you and this making yourself dependent upon their examples and exhortations to follow after God is as absolutely dangerous to your soul as it would be to your body if you were to ignore the “beware of dogs” sign only to be bit or mauled. To make this even more heavy, not only does an unwillingness to hear and to heed your spiritual leaders result in your own spiritual digression, but it will negatively impact the rest of the congregation as well. While it is true that the Lord does not want “cookie-cutter Christians” – spiritual clones who have no varying personalities, original thoughts or spiritual gifts; we need to remember that the Lord

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also doesn't want "maverick Christians" – those who think themselves independent and better enough to exist in a manner outside and different from that which the church has sought to encourage and edify its members. There is no profit for such in the church and certainly the church does not profit when such attitudes exist (Proverbs 9:7-9; 15:12).

[Proverbs 9:7-10 - 7 He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. 8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you. 9 Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning. 10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.]

[Proverbs 15:12 - A scoffer does not love one who reproves him, He will not go to the wise.]

So then, are you serving God as a priest, offering up the sacrifice of submission, seeking to humbly learn and practice godliness by means of those whom, according to 1 Corinthians 12:18 and Ephesians 4:11, has appointed over you? Again, there are only two reasons why you wouldn't be doing this. First, ask yourself if it is a matter of disobedience – are you simply not heeding this command? If not, repent and ask the Lord to help you pursue this sacrifice of submission. The second reason is that the leadership itself is neglecting, forsaking or outright not providing such direction, in which case you must seriously consider leaving such a church (I hope and pray that none would ever find that the case here).

V. The Sacrifice of Supplication (13:18-19)

"Pray for us..."

The final sacrifice I see in our text that is to be part of our regular service as priests to God is that of supplication – of praying, certainly for the needs and concerns of all, but noticeably here is a prayer for one's spiritual leaders. And what the author communicates here gives us some insight as to what we ought to pray for our leaders. After the command, **"pray for us..."** we read, **"for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things."** It appears that the author was concerned that some may have doubted his sincerity for the welfare of their souls. Additionally, some may have doubted the fullness of the revelation concerning the superiority of Jesus as communicated in this letter. So the author pleads, pray for us; pray that purity of our conduct and the truthfulness of our message is understood (Colossians 4:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 3:1, 7).

[Colossians 4:3-4 - 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.]

[2 Thessalonians 3:1, 7 – 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you..]

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Beloved, a part of our responsibility as priest unto God is to offer up this sacrifice of supplication, praying that those who teach us would teach effectively, that those who lead us would lead us in godliness, and if by chance there is any animosity, any tension, any perceived difficulty between the leadership and any member, we would all fall to our knees and pray for unity, and as verse 19 implies, pray for restoration.

These then are the specific sacrifices of those who have been sanctified, set apart as priest, by the blood of Jesus Christ. We are to offer up the sacrifice of self, of service, of sharing, of submission and supplication. How are you doing in your priestly service? In any area you find yourself lacking, plead with the Lord to grant you opportunity to grow and glorify Him. Perhaps you are here and are not even certain about having been called as a priest to serve Christ – that is – you have not experienced the power of the new birth and you are in need to come to Jesus, confessing you need of Him as Savior, as the one who paid your debt to God by His death on the cross. You need to realize as well that He did not die for you simply to be saved from death, but also then to serve the living God. Call upon Him in prayer this morning, asking Him to forgive you your own sins and plead with Him to fill you with His Spirit that you might begin to live for Him and serve Him as a priest.

Soli Deo Gloria

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