



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

A Sacrifice of Praise

Hebrews 13:15-19

October 31, 2010

¹⁵ Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. ¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. ¹⁸ Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. ¹⁹ I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

- As each of you know, today in our church we celebrate Reformation Day – a day that commemorates the lives and contributions of the Protestant Reformers, specifically the German Reformer Martin Luther. Of course, the reason that we celebrate Reformation Day on October 31 is because on this day in 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Chapel, protesting the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church.
- When most theologians speak of the outcomes of the Protestant Reformation, they often speak primarily of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. That is, the doctrine which declares that God reckons His people righteous based solely on the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ alone. This is most certainly one of the tremendous results of the Reformation; however, there are certainly many others.
- One of them was powerfully evident in the life of Martin Luther before, and then after his own conversion.

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- This story begins on July 2, 1505, when a 21 year old Martin Luther found himself in the middle of a violent thunderstorm in Stotternheim, Germany (near Erfurt). According to tradition, the terrified Luther cried out [in accordance with his Roman Catholic faith at the time], “Help me, St. Anne, and I will become a monk.”

- On July 16 – just two weeks later – Luther fulfilled his end of the “deal” and entered the Augustinian “Black Monastery” in Comthurgasse, known for the strict ascetic lifestyles of its monks. The next summer, Luther would formally take his monastic vows.
- These vows would mark the beginning of a chapter in Luther’s life that would eventually lead to his own conversion and embracing of the true Gospel message. From the time Luther took his vows, he became obsessed with perfectly fulfilling all of the demands of an Augustinian monk.
- In his classic work, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, author Roland Bainton writes:

“Whatever good works a man might do to save himself, these Luther was resolved to perform. He fasted, sometimes three days on end without a crumb...He laid upon himself vigils and prayers in excess of those stipulated by the rule. He cast off the blankets permitted him and well-nigh froze himself to death. At times he was proud of his sanctity and would say, ‘I have done nothing wrong today.’ Then misgivings would arise. ‘Have you fasted enough? Are you poor enough?’ He would then strip himself of all save that which decency required. He believed in later life that his austerities had done permanent damage to his digestion.”

- Luther himself later wrote:

“I myself was a monk for twenty years. I tortured myself with praying, fasting, keeping vigils, and freezing – the cold alone was enough to kill me – and I inflicted upon myself such pain as I would never inflict again, even if I could...I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.”

- The problem was that Luther was keenly aware of his sin as well as his ability to satisfy the impossible, righteous standards of a holy God. In fact, Martin Luther, commenting on Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (later in his life) said, “These words are too high and too hard that anyone should fulfill them.”
- During his life as an Augustinian monk, and prior to his conversion, it can be properly said that Luther lived a tormented and pitiful life. One time, during confession, the priest urged Luther to simply love God. Luther famously declared, “I do not love God! I hate him!”
- In fact, Luther’s plight reminds one of the first King of Corinth in ancient Greek mythology: Sisyphus. Sisyphus was a cunning and clever man and even prided himself of being craftier than Zeus. Because of several attempts to outsmart the gods, Zeus and other gods punished Sisyphus in a most unique and torturous way. They sentenced him to the task of rolling a boulder up a mountain; however, every time Sisyphus was near the top, the boulder would roll back down. This was to occur for all eternity. In other words, this was a task that Sisyphus was ordered to complete, but would never be able to do so. Martin Luther realized that this was his plight in and of himself with respect to the Law of God.

- Then, in 1515, while lecturing at the University of Wittenberg on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, the grace of God came upon Luther.
- He would later recall that his conversion occurred as he read the great statement on justification in Romans 1:17: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”
- It was at this point the Luther truly understood the Gospel. Humbled by the law and His own sin, the grace of God regenerated his soul, and he knew the freedom that only Christ could provide. Recalling this miraculous event, Luther later recalled, “Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that ‘the just shall live by his faith.’ Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith [in Christ alone]. Thereupon I felt myself straightway born afresh and to have entered through open the open gates into paradise itself.”
- Luther now knew that his salvation was not dependent upon him or his works. Rather, his salvation was based solely on the finished work and righteousness of Jesus Christ.
- Luther also realized that the Christian believer is then **free** to worship and praise Christ. Free from the terrifying burden of fulfilling the impossible demands of Law. Free to praise Christ with his lips.
- Sacrifice, then, took on a completely different meaning. The Church, then, going back to the teachings of Christ and His apostles reaffirmed the truth that God does not demand man’s sacrifices and sufferings for His sake. Rather, He is fully satisfied with the finished work of Christ on our behalf. The Reformers knew, as did the Apostles, that there is **nothing** that we can that is righteous in the eyes of God or that earns our way into the Kingdom of Heaven.
- And this is the truth the author of Hebrews declares in **Hebrews 13:15-19**.

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| I. | Honor God through a Sacrifice of Praise |
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¹⁵ *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.*

- Last week we read of several powerful truths that have profound implications in the life of the believer. First, we read, in Verse 10, that “**We have an altar** from which those

who serve the tent have no right to eat.” Secondly, we learned that “**Jesus suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.**”

- Given these two truths, the author this week now answers the follow-up question, “How, then, should we live?”
- In other words, given these biblical truths/doctrines, what are the practical implications in the life of the believer?
- Recall Hebrews 9:

Hebrews 9:26: “for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”

- **Since Christ was the once-for-all sacrifice for sin “outside the gate,” how should the believer in Christ walk?**
- The author, here, writes:

“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God...”
- The Hebrews author, then, clearly uses Old Testament language, speaking of “a sacrifice.”
 - Yet, notice, this is **NOT a SIN OFFERING or BLOOD SACRIFICE. [NOTE: Since Christ has come and offered Himself as the once-for-all sacrifice, it is not simply that any other “blood” sacrifice is not necessary, it is contemptible in the sight of God. For, if any blood sacrifice were acceptable to God, it would mean that Christ’s sacrifice was in some way insufficient.]**
 - In the Old Testament, there were multiple required sacrifices. Yet, there was a specific sacrifice of thanksgiving that was always accompanied by a blood sacrifice/offering.
 - In fact, the Greek words used in Verse 15 for “sacrifice of praise” are the identical words used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) in Leviticus 7:12-13.
 - We read of this in **Leviticus 7:12-13**:

“¹²If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the thanksgiving sacrifice unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of fine flour well mixed with oil. ¹³ With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving he shall bring his offering with loaves of leavened bread.”

- So, the author’s point was that **even though a sin offering is no longer permitted because of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, there was a commanded “sacrifice” – that of PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING.**
- Notice, however, the NATURE of this sacrifice:

1. It was “through Him” (i.e., through Christ).

- The purpose of the author of Hebrews throughout this epistle has been to present to his readers the absolute SUPERIORITY of Jesus Christ. Christ is superior to EVERYTHING the Old Testament could offer, and sacrifices were no different.
- Consequently, now that Christ “suffered outside the gate” as a once-for-all sin offering to sanctify His people, everything else we do is **through Him**.
 - In fact, God is not pleased with anything that is not done “through Christ.” If it is not done “through Christ” it is an abomination to the Lord.
 - The first century Jews [as well as many of the Old Testament Jews] wrongly believed that God was pleased by the blood of goats and bulls. They truly thought that these blood sacrifices contributed something toward their righteousness and sanctification.
 - However, by doing everything “through Him” they were acknowledging the sufficiency of Christ’s work, and the truth that they could offer nothing as an acceptable sin sacrifice.
 - As Paul writes in **Romans 14:23b**: “**For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.**”

2. It was a SACRIFICE of praise to God.

- Again, using language reminiscent of the Old Testament, our author refers to the calling of the believer as a “sacrifice” of praise. This was, no doubt, an echoing of the “thanks/peace offering” of the Old Testament.
- But, it is also true that blood/animal sacrifices were never intended to take away sin or make man right in the eyes of God. God has always been supremely pleased by **simple obedience**. This was always the **greatest form of praise and sacrifice**.

1 Samuel 15:22:

“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.

- It is quite interesting that the Hebrew word *bara* means “to create.” Whereas, the Hebrew word *barak* means “to praise.” Consequently, it is as though the chief purpose for the creation is to “praise” Him.

Psalm 92:1: “It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
To sing praises to your name, O Most High;”

3. It was the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.

- Throughout the Bible God speaks of the wickedness of the tongue.

Romans 3:13-14: “‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’”

Isaiah 6:5: “And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’”

James 3:6-8: “And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind.”

- Furthermore, God makes it clear that “out of the mouth the heart speaks.”

Matthew 12:34: “You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

- Therefore, through the once-for-all sin sacrifice and atonement of Jesus Christ, He sanctified and cleansed our lips. Now, the lips of man – which were once corrupted and “open graves” – have been sanctified and can send forth praises to God. No longer are they instruments of death; but, rather, they are instruments of praise and life.

- **In this manner, then, the praises of our lips are the fruits of our redemption in Christ.**

- The phrase the author uses here that our praise is “the fruit of lips which acknowledge His name” is a quote from Hosea 14:2:

Hosea 14:2: “Take with you words
And return to the LORD;
Say to him,
‘Take away all iniquity;
accept what is good,
and we will pay with bulls
the vows of our lips.’”

- The idea here in Hosea is that **our lips are the altars of our sacrifices of praise**. This is a tremendous was of looking at it from a biblical perspective. We offer sacrifices of praise on the altars of our lips
- Yet, this idea of offering a sacrifice of praise to God on the “altar of our lips” is nothing new:

Psalm 51:15: “O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth will declare your praise.”

Psalm 50:1, 12-15: “The Mighty One, God the LORD,
Speaks and summons the earth
From the rising of the sun to its setting...

‘If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine.
Do I eat the flesh of bulls
Or drink the blood of goats?

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
And perform your vows to the Most High,
And call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Psalm 141:2: “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,
And the lifting of my hands as the evening sacrifice!”

4. It was to be continual.

- Finally, in this passage, we see that “sacrifice of praise” to God was to be **continual**.
- First of all, this means that it was to be **never-ceasing**...all the time.

Psalm 104:33: “I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.”

- In other words, we are to praise God all the time, in all that we do. This is to be the “mark” of our lives. It is to be the manner in which we “walk.”
- Going back to verses 10-12, Christian do have a sacrifice that we offer up to God, namely the spiritual offering of our whole lives, a sacrifice not for forgiveness of sin but of gratitude and praise.
- In other words, **the entire course of our lives was to be a sacrifice to the Lord because of Christ**.
- This truth echoes the words of Paul in Romans 12:

Romans 12:1-2: “¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Richard Philips writes, “For many, the highest aspiration [of the Christian] is simply to ‘get saved.’ If they can just make it into heaven, that will be good enough for them. But this is not at all what Christianity is about. Justification, a doctrine we rightly emphasize, is not the end of our salvation, but rather the means to a life of pleasing service unto God. Justification is often called the hinge on which the door of the gospel turns, and that is certainly true, but it is a door that is meant to be opened, to give us entrance into the presence of God, that we may live with joy and awe as royal children in this world, and offer our lives as sacrifices of praise for his service and pleasure...It is for this that we are saved, to live sacrificially unto him, to offer a lifestyle of worship, for the blessing of others and for the glory of his name.”

- Yet, by continual, our author also means that we are to praise God in the good times and in the bad – we are to praise Him in all *types* of times.

Psalm 34:1: “I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”

- **There is nothing more exceedingly beneficial and healing to the regenerate soul than the praise of God being continually on his lips.**
- “To cultivate the habit of praising God will preserve the believer from many evils. The trials of life are more cheerfully borne if the spirit of thankfulness to God be kept lively in the heart. A man cannot be miserable while he is joyful, and nothing promotes joy so much as a heart constantly exercised in praising God.” A.W. Pink

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- The bottom line here is that **we are called to worship God as He calls us to do so, not how we would want people to worship us if we were Him.** From a human perspective, we would demand that people “do something” to earn the right to be in the presence of God.
 - It is no surprise, therefore, that in every false religion in the world (i.e., any religion outside of historic Christianity) man is **required to do something to either appease God or earn his way to the divine.**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It has often been said that every world religion presents a view of salvation whereby man reaches up to God based on his (man’s) own merits; whereas, historic Christianity presents God [the Father] as reaching down to His people through the merit and finished work of Jesus Christ. |
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- It seems that what God calls us to do is so simple – profoundly so. He doesn't demand that we live an ascetic lifestyle, free from any sort of pleasures of fun; rather, He demands our continual praise. May we, then, obey Him and offer up what He demands – a sacrifice of praise.

II. Honor God with the Sharing of Possessions

- Next, since God has given us His infinite grace – which is, indeed, priceless, may we share with others a small portion of what He has given to us.

¹⁶Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

- Throughout the Scriptures, God makes it clear that whatever God gives us, He expects us to give it away.
- Not only are we to offer up to God the sacrifice of praise, but the sacrifice of sharing – not because this causes our salvation, but because it is the fruit of it.
- We see this truth echoed throughout the Scriptures:

Galatians 6:10: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

1 Peter 2:5: “you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

- By sharing our goods with others, we become the hands and feet of Christ – His provision for those in need.
- Yet, not only do we extend the love of Christ through the sharing of our goods, but the goods of this world lose their death-grip on us as well.

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- This idea, though, of sacrificial living is the essence of “true religion” – that is, we are assisting those who cannot assist themselves.

James 1:27: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

- And this was, certainly, the very reason we were created – for the praise of God and good works to others in the name of Christ.

Ephesians 2:10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

- Although the analogy is an old one – often trite – it is pertinent to this verse. In Israel, there are two main “seas”: the Sea of Galilee in the northern Galilean region, and the Dead Sea in Judea. The Sea of Galilee has an inlet and an outlet, and is therefore, teeming with fish and other forms of life. The Dead Sea; however, is...dead. It is filled with salt and has no useful animal life in it. Why? Because the Dead Sea has an inlet (the Jordan River) but no outlet. So it is with us – when we receive from the LORD but do not share with others, we become useless in this world.

Micah 6:6-8: “With what shall I come before the LORD,
 And bow myself before God on high?
 Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
 With calves a year old?
 Will the LORD be pleased with
 Thousands of rams,
 With ten thousands of rivers of oil?
 Shall I give my firstborn for my transgressions,
 The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
 He has told you, O man, what is good;
 And what does the LORD require of you
 But to do justice, and to love kindness,
 And to walk humbly with your God?”

III. Honor God through Obedient Support of your Leaders

¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. ¹⁸Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. ¹⁹I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

- Finally, the Hebrews author commands his readers to “obey” and “submit” to their “leaders.”
 - In the original Greek, the word translated “leaders” is *haygoumenoi*, ηγουμενοι, literally means “guides” (and it is sometimes translated as such).
 - Biblical leaders are to be “guides” in that their primary function is to proclaim the truth of the Scriptures, not teach new and diverse doctrines. Consequently, biblical leaders are to “guide” their flocks into the truth, pointing them to Christ.
 - As God has biblically appointed such leaders, the believers in the churches are to “obey” them and “submit” to them. This is most certainly in the context of their function as “guides.”
 - That is, their office and position is to be respected, and their words, as long as they are in accordance with the Scriptures, are to be obeyed and submitted to.

- Submission to authority is something God repeatedly calls Christians to throughout the Scriptures. Furthermore, our submission to our God-ordained authorities is in itself a sacrifice of praise. It is an act of obedience to God – the originator of all authority.
- Unfortunately, in our anti-establishment and anti-authority culture today, such submission is frowned upon.
- Yet, as one commentator states, “Especially in a self-reliant culture like our own, submission to God-ordained authority is a true spiritual exercise and an element of our worship of the Lord.” Richard Philips

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- The author then gives the reasons why we are to submit to our “guides”:

1. “They are keeping watch over your souls.”

- The phrase translated “keep watch over your souls” in the original Greek carries with it sense of “chasing away sleep” or simply losing sleep (just as the shepherds would “keep watch over their flocks by night,” thus losing sleep).
- The idea here is that “guides” are like undershepherds and worry about the spiritual well-being of their flock, just as a shepherd would a flock of sheep.

2. They will give an account.

- This is a truth of Scripture that is true, but rather daunting for leaders. Yet, “guides” will give an account for what they have done to properly care for and lead their sheep.
- Consequently, congregants should be mindful of this and seek to support them by obeying the Word that is preached.
- This is why the author states, “Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”
- One of the greatest blessings for a pastor is when congregants believe the words that are preached. This leads to the fruits of the gospel which is the **joy of the preacher**. Again, congregants should be mindful of this truth.

F.F. Bruce writes, “[In the first century] there would always be a tendency throughout the churches for visitors who came purveying new and esoteric doctrines to be regarded as much more attractive and interesting personalities than the rather humdrum local leaders, who never taught anything new, but were content with the conservative line of apostolic tradition. Nevertheless it was those local leaders... who had a real concern for the welfare of the church...”

- Finally, the author asks for the prayers of the Hebrews readers.
- This truth underscores the single most important thing that a congregation can do for its “guides”: pray for them that they will have a “clear conscience, and “desire to act honorably in all things.”
- And so, may our lives be committed to offering up sacrifices of praise to the Lord through Christ, because of what He has done for us. May we honor others with our possessions and obey the guides that God has put in our paths.

Psalm 51:3-17:

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.

⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.