

EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

Message #40

Hebrews 13:15-19

Let us remind ourselves of the context. The Hebrews were in danger of being lured back to a physical, liturgical worship that featured altars, sacrifices, grandiose liturgy, and priestly clothing. They were being accused of being atheists because they did not have a visible altar and they did not have visible sacrifices. The writer of Hebrews says our worship and our altar and our sacrifices are not like the Judaistic system of ceremony; we have direct access to God through Jesus Christ.

I want you to take a good look at how verse 15 begins, because it tells us that no worship is possible apart from Jesus Christ. Every form of worship that will be acceptable to God must go “through Him” (δι αὐτου).

Now acceptable offerings to God in the Grace Age are not like the offerings of Jerusalem. In fact, when it comes to offering acceptable sacrifices to God in this Church Age it specifically requires things that most do not understand:

- 1) We must offer the acceptable sacrifice of our person. Romans 12:1-2
- 2) We must offer the acceptable sacrifice of our praise. **Hebrews 13:15**
- 3) We must offer the acceptable sacrifice of our possessions. **Hebrews 13:16**
- 4) We must offer the acceptable sacrifice of obedience to our pastors. **Hebrews 13:17**
- 5) We must offer the acceptable sacrifice of our prayers. **Hebrews 13:18-19**

WE ARE TO OFFER OUR SACRIFICES TO GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, AND THE SACRIFICE WE OFFER INVOLVES OUR PRAISE, OUR POSSESSIONS, OUR PASTORS, AND OUR PRAYERS.

We get a true glimpse of the type of lifestyle that lives in a way that pleases God. I would like to analyze this by way of three sacrificial lifestyle actions that truly honor and worship God.

**SACRIFICIAL LIFESTYLE ACTION #1 – We are to offer a sacrificial lifestyle of praise.
13:15**

I want you to notice this is called a “sacrifice of praise.” If we are going to worship God and praise God it will be a sacrifice. Sacrifice of time and effort. The word “sacrifice” (θυσια) refers to something that we sacrifice as an offering to God (Smith, pp. 210-211). The word “praise” (ανεσθεως) refers to praise we offer God in a way that specifically acknowledges the worth and adores the object praised (William Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, p. 529). When we sacrifice to come to worship God, it is an offering of praise to Him.

We have seen in our journey through Hebrews that through Jesus Christ we have direct access to God that is unlimited. One of the responsibilities that we have with this access is the responsibility to praise and worship God.

We must not forsake ourselves from assembling together to worship God (Hebrews 10:25), and we are to worship God with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28).

You cannot read the O.T. or the N.T. without seeing that God demands our praise and worship. The Psalms of the O.T. are filled with admonitions to praise God. A couple of weeks ago I finished reading the Psalms and the final Psalms (Psalm 145-150) are all praise Psalms.

When you analyze those Psalms there are many reasons for which we can praise God:

1) Because of God's awe-inspiring greatness and works (145:3); 2) Because of God's majestic sovereignty (145:5, 14); 3) Because of God's salvation (145:19).

Notice specifically what **Hebrews 13:15** says, we are to be people who worship God and praise God continually. We are to continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise. Now we may notice that the praise that we are to offer to God is to be continually offered.

Not praise on Sunday, not praise in the morning or evening, but continual praise. When you and I think about all of the things God has done for us every day and all of the blessings He has given to us, we literally could be praising God twenty-four hours a day, every day of our life.

SACRIFICIAL LIFESTYLE ACTION #2 – We are to offer a sacrificial lifestyle of doing good. **13:16**

The Greek word “doing good” (εὐποιᾶ) is very rare and only used here. It is a word that presents the idea of doing good to someone with the idea of benefiting them (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 188). Ben Whitherington said we have the responsibility to sacrificially do “random acts of kindness” in regard to others (*Hebrews*, p. 364). When we sacrificially do something good for the benefit of others, God views it as a form of worship.

This idea of doing good can take on various forms of ministry. We can do good by showing hospitality, giving some food to someone, helping with transportation, sharing some money, or just helping in some way. We can do good by visiting someone who is sick or helping a neighbor who needs some help. All of these things are forms of worship.

True worship always connects itself in giving ourselves to others for the service of God. We are to be philanthropic people. We are to use what we have to do well to others and to share with others. This is the kind of sacrifice that pleases the Lord. We are to be characterized by people who do good things for other people. This pleases God when we do these kinds of things.

I read an interesting article called “When We Get to Heaven” and here are some of the thoughts:

- 1) God won't ask us what kind of car you drove; He'll ask how many people you drove who didn't have transportation.
- 2) God won't ask the square footage of your house; He'll ask how many people you welcomed into your home.
- 3) God won't ask about the clothes you had in your closet; He'll ask how many you helped to clothe.

- 4) God won't ask what your highest salary was; He'll ask if you compromised your character to obtain it and how you used your resources for Him.
- 5) God won't ask what your job title was; He'll ask if you performed your job to the best of your ability and used your position to be His ambassador.
- 6) God won't ask how many friends you had; He'll ask how many people to whom you were a friend.
- 7) God won't ask in what neighborhood you lived; He'll ask how you treated your neighbors.
- 8) God won't ask about the color of your skin; He'll ask about the content of your character.

The truth is, we all have some work to do and the sacrifices we make for God is a form of worship.

SACRIFICIAL LIFESTYLE ACTION #3 – We are to support our spiritual leaders .
13:17-19

It is interesting that when you analyze **Hebrews 13:17**, the writer never exhorts the leaders but only the congregation. But I want to tell you, there is no verse I have come across in the New Testament that will challenge a leader more than this one right here. This verse is serious business.

Now we need to consider these verses in the context. We have already seen in **verse 7** that the writer wanted these believers to remember those former leaders who taught them the Scriptures and lived the Scriptures and presented to them the grace of God. The problem with most of those leaders is that they were now gone. But other leaders had been raised up by God who taught the grace of God and the people were at a critical spiritual crossroad in their lives. Do they obey and submit themselves to these new Grace Age leaders or do they defect and go back under the law?

Some of the most hurting, degraded, criticized, and verbally abused men are leaders of a church. I can tell you firsthand that no matter what you do or how hard you try, you cannot please everyone and some people spend their lives in criticism and disrespect.

We who are in church leadership are up against a Christian media that features a handful of carefully edited, professionally packaged, and artistically produced programs. We who lead God's church are up against churches with a big business world mentality that have marketing strategies that are designed to draw the masses.

Furthermore, we are living in a time when most people are suspect of leadership, and individuality is the norm. People have their own opinions and they do not like authority. When some people come to church on Sunday and hear someone stand in a pulpit and expound God's Word, and then they compare what is happening in their way of thinking or with what they see on TV, it doesn't seem to measure up. As Kent Hughes said "pastoral authority evaporates."

This is why some leaders are hurting today. Leadership in a local church is tough, lonely business. People are always comparing you to someone else or something else, and as soon as Sunday night is over, the leader has to start thinking about doing it all over again for next week. There is no break in the action.

I cannot tell you the number of times I have heard this one - Pastor, that was a really great message, and I just listened to so-and-so speak on the same subject and he brought out some great points, and if you like I'll let you listen to the tape or watch the video. That makes you feel real good. But in spite of the pressures or negatives, God demands that there be leaders in His church and God wants leaders in a church supported. It is part of godly worship, and in this text there are two ways the writer of Hebrews spells out in which we support our leaders:

Support Way #1 - We support our leaders by our obedience and our submission . **13:17**

The charge here to the congregation is to obey the leaders, not criticize them. Submit to their authority, don't usurp their authority. We should obey them and submit to them to the extent that it is a joy for them to watch over us. Now in order to figure out what this exactly means, we need to analyze the words God uses.

The Greek verbs "obey" (πειθο) and "submit" (υπεικω) are both present imperatives which means they are commands for a continual, habitual pattern of life. The word "obey" actually carries with it the idea of being persuaded to the point that you believe something and have confidence in something (Smith, pp. 350-351). Ray Stedman understands the sense of this when he says the idea here is to permit oneself to be persuaded and then yield to the persuasion. "It definitely does not mean to blindly follow orders." The word "submit" means a willingness to withdraw or retire from self and yield or submit to the leaders (Smith, p. 457).

What I understand this to mean is that God's people have the responsibility to allow the leader to persuade them with the Scriptures and then they need to be willing to back off from self-opinion and yield or submit themselves to God's Word and God's leadership.

Warren Wiersbe said, "When a servant of God is in the will of God, teaching the Word of God, the people of God should submit and obey" (*Be Confident*, p. 151).

Now when we talk about this type of obedience and submission, we are not talking about some slavish, blind, mindless submission. That kind of thing is what made it possible for an evil, demonic, religious leader like Jim Jones to get people to willingly drink cyanide mixed into Kool-Aid and commit suicide.

This is not a challenge to blindly follow some religious dictator. In fact, notice the challenge in this verse; it is to obey "leaders" not "lords." In fact, the Apostle Peter specifically said that leaders were not to lord it over the people (I Peter 5:3).

This is also not some mandate designed to get one to stay in some authoritarian church context without questioning anything. Kent Hughes said he knew of an authoritarian church that demanded that all of the members stop wearing to church any clothing that had a blend of fabrics such as prescribed in Leviticus 19:19. Of course this mandate is a violation of this very context which says get out of any O.T. legalism and run into grace.

What is called for here is respectful obedience and submission to the leaders, if the leaders are governing in a true Biblical way that is not contradicting Scripture. If they are leading us to conform to the true Scriptures, then we need to be obedient and submissive people. We need to continually allow ourselves to be persuaded by the Word of God.

One reason for this is because these leaders do have the responsibility to watch over your soul, which literally means they have the responsibility to stay awake and alert to see to it that you are being led in the true, right, pure ways of God. In Greek, the phrase “they watch over your souls” is emphatic. In other words, the leaders themselves have an emphatic responsibility to watch over your soul.

I agree with those who have concluded that when it comes to ministry it is much easier to win souls than to watch over souls. The larger the church grows the more difficult the task is. One of the tendencies for a leader is to run when danger hits. To resign rather than watch over the flock.

The words “watch over” here means these leaders have the responsibility to never go to sleep when it comes to watching out for the souls of the people in the church. They must have a sleepless watching and guarding of the flock. The specific verb (αγρυπνεω) refers not only to a mental alertness but a moral alertness (Smith, p. 7). In other words, a true leader must be willing to lose some sleep over their flocks by making certain that they are being led in mental and moral ways that are right and true before God. Thomas Aquinas cited the shepherds in the birth story of Jesus Christ who were “keeping watch over their flocks at night” (Luke 2:8).

Now specifically what these leaders watch for are those who are moving away from the doctrine of the grace of God, and those who are becoming spiritually lazy, and neglecting fellowship with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). The motivation for this type of watch is future judgment that will come from God.

Another reason why there should be submission to leadership is not only because they watch over us, but also because those leaders will have to give an account to God of the way the sheep followed their lead.

Frankly this is a very sober text and it is one that makes me shudder. **First of all leaders will give an account to God of how they led, and second they will give an account to God of who they led.**

I am here to tell us all this, especially myself - James warns that not many should presume to be teachers, knowing you will receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1). Listen very carefully because what I am about to say here scares me a lot.

If we claim that we have true knowledge of God’s Word and God’s grace for God’s people and we claim that we are a true teacher, then we are responsible to clearly and accurately deliver that knowledge to God’s people, and we are responsible to obey it ourselves. We will all stand before the Bema Seat Judgment and we will all give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:12; II Corinthians 5:10).

As I understand this, the leaders will stand at the judgment seat of God to give an account of how we submitted to their leadership. So the charge to the flock is obey the leaders and submit to them so they can joyfully testify of our willingness to obey God’s Word.

Now suppose you are one who says, I am not going to do that. I am not going to obey or submit. Two things you need to know: 1) Your life will lack joy and growth in this life; 2) At the Bema Seat Judgment the effects of disobedience and lack of submission will be monumental and eternal.

Support Way #2 - We support our leaders by our prayers . **13:18-19**

I can tell you this firsthand; leaders need your prayers. One of the ways the congregation can be obedient and submissive to the leadership is to pray for them.

Now the specific charge here is given to the people to “pray for the leaders.” I understand the “for” (γὰρ) to give the reason for the prayers; so that leaders may be persuaded that they have a good conscience.

No leader in God’s work is perfect; but godly leaders do strive to have a good, clean conscience when it comes to God and God’s truth, and God’s people and the leaders need the prayers of God’s people in this regard.

It is clear that one way we support our leaders is by praying for them. One way a leader may test himself is by his conscience. A God-honoring leader will do his best to have a good, clean, and clear conscience in everything he is doing.

He will have a good, clear, clean conscience in his passion for God’s truth. He will have a good, clear, clean conscience in his passion to apply God’s truth. He will have a good, clear, clean conscience in his relationships with his flock. To have this conscience, leaders need the people’s prayers.

The Apostle Paul said that his conscience testifies that he had conducted himself in the world and in connection to brothers and sisters in Christ in a way that was holy and sincere (II Corinthians 1:12). When you have a clean, clear conscience, people’s prayers for you are powerful.

It is said that D. L. Moody would often encourage people from all over the world to pray for him. After Mr. Moody died, a story is told of R. A. Torrey who went on a tour to preach in many countries and he got the backing of a huge prayer chain. In Australia, 2100 home prayer groups met for two weeks before he arrived, and the result is that huge numbers of people were changed by his preaching.

If the people of the church regularly pray for the pastor and its leadership, some very powerful things can and will happen.

These are our sacrifices and these are the ways we worship God, not through legalism but through a lifestyle.