

New Covenant Sacrifices (Hebrews 13:15–17)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (4/8/2018)

Introduction

1. The section of exhortation (13:1–19) is introduced by the challenge to respond in grace (meaning grateful or grace-filled) with respect to the kingdom we have been given (12:28).
 - a. The primary response is that we “*let brotherly love continue*” (13:1).
 - b. The verses that follow suggest various way to demonstrate brotherly love: hospitality to needy brothers (v. 2), identification with persecuted brothers (v. 3), honoring Christian marriage (v. 4), freedom from covetousness (vv. 5, 6), and keeping in mind and imitating the lifestyle and faith of Christian leaders (vv. 7–12).
2. The conclusion and expectation we are to observe in following these challenges is twofold:
 - a. We are to follow Christ “*outside the camp* [the present Christ-rejecting culture, whether it be secular or religious] *and bear* [take up] *the reproach He endured*” (v. 13).
 - b. Since “*we have no lasting city* [culture]” here, we are to serve Christ in our present experience (v. 14).
3. The remaining verses of this section (vv. 15–19) inform us how we are to serve Christ until we are brought into the city to come, the new Jerusalem (12:22–24; Revelation 21:9–22:5). In the passage before us, we see three obligations to God: (1) a *spiritual* obligation of praise, (2) a *social* obligation of good, and (3) an *ecclesiastical* obligation of respect and trust.

I. Sacrifice of Praise (v. 15)

1. In bidding the Hebrew Christians to go to Christ outside the gate, Paul was asking them to abandon Judaism with its temple. This raised an objection, for it was depriving these believers of what they understood as constituting the worship of God.
 - a. Therefore, Paul reveals another kind of worship that is acceptable and pleasing to God.
 - b. The NC way of worshiping God is to offer real sacrifices on the true altar—the continual *adoration* of their hearts and the *devotion* of their lives.
2. David describes the most important aspect of sacrifices under the old covenant, “*a broken and contrite heart*” (Psalm 51:17).
 - a. Sadly, most OC participants who offered the bodies of sacrificial animals missed the most important aspect of the ritual, their own inward sense of brokenness over sin.
 - b. The NC believer has no need for sacrificial animals since Christ was slain for him, but he must also experience this *brokenness* in repentance and faith.
 - c. The NC believer also *identifies* with Christ’s sacrifice made in His behalf by acknowledging his own death to sin and self (Romans 6:6–8).
 - d. The response of faith, knowing that our sacrifice is accepted of God, is “*the sacrifice of praise in acknowledging His name*” (what He has accomplished for us). Praise is a *response* to His gracious work that glorifies God and fills the believer with joy and thanksgiving (Philippians 1:9–11; Ephesians 5:4; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 2:6, 7).

II. Sacrifice of Service (vv. 16–19)

1. Our serving and sharing with others in their need is an acceptable sacrifice of *love* (v. 16; Acts 10:38).
 - a. One wonders how many “worship” services are populated with those who withhold time and talents that would make a great difference in benefiting others (Matthew 5:16).
 - b. Neglect of mercy in benevolent service is sinful (Proverbs 17:5). It is to despise the wisdom of God in the way He allows for trials and conditions that occur in this world.
 - c. Sacrifices from the lips are wonderful; so is the praise of thanksgiving that springs from those who have benefited from the sacrifice of time and resources of serving saints (2 Corinthians 9:6–15; Proverbs 19:17). Another sacrifice of love is found in verse 17.
2. Christ is the sole head of the Church; yet He has wisely gifted the church with godly leaders (Ephesians 4:11–13). Serving the body of Christ under the guidance of God-called Christian leaders is a loving sacrifice acceptable to God.
 - a. There are three dangers in the body with respect to the authority of church leadership.
 - 1) False teachers
There are false church leaders who have “*crept in unnoticed*,” whose purpose is to oppose Christ and harm the body with deception, heresies, and false doctrine (Jude 4; 2 Peter 1:1–3).
 - 2) False Christian independence
We live at a time when many Christians think that the church is not relevant to one’s successful spiritual walk. With abundant resources outside the church (radio, interdenominational ministries, conferences, books, etc.) many falsely believe that a close personal relationship with Christ is possible without the church.
 - 3) Natural resistance to authority
Because of our sinful fallen nature, we have a natural aversion to authority and, therefore, a tendency to resist any human-issued rules or commands.
 - b. A compassionate plea for submission
 - 1) The plea: “*Obey your leaders and submit to them.*” The command for obedience is based on a verb that means to yield to authority because you are persuaded to do so. It could be translated: “Agree to trust your leaders and submit to them.” The term translated *submit* means to *yield* or *give way*, not the typical authoritarian terms. They appeal to the reader to trust the leaders and yield to their spiritual authority as men called and commissioned by Christ to lead His people.
 - 2) The reason for the appeal: “*they are keeping watch over your souls.*” The work of these leaders suggests a sacrificial and loving concern for believers entering and maintaining an authentic relationship with Christ.
 - 3) The fact of accountability: “*They watch . . . as those who will have to give an account.*”
 - 4) Your part in submitting to them: “*Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*”