



## Sacrifices Pleasing to God

Series: *Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul*

Hebrews 13:1-16 (15-16)

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In reading this closing chapter, these concluding exhortations in the letter to the Hebrews, as I said last week, you get a real sense of the earnest longing in the heart of the pastor, the deep love of this man who has been preaching and teaching Christ, who has been imprisoned for his faithfulness, his unflagging desire that these to whom he has preached the glory and the treasures of Christ and His gospel would be remain faithful and finish the race. He doesn't want them to fall away. So he is giving to this church a series of encouragements, a series of instructions, appeals to their hearts that are intended to keep them in the faith, walking faithfully with Jesus Christ, safeguarding them from falling away and ensuring that they experience to the full the richness, the satisfaction, the joy and the hope of being God's people.

But here's the thing. We read these exhortations -- ***“Let brotherly love continue... Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers... Remember those who are in prison... Let marriage be held in honor among all... let the marriage bed be undefiled... Keep your life free from love of money... be content with what you ... Remember your leaders and imitate their faith... do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings... go to Jesus outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.”*** (cf. **Hebrews 13:1–13, ESV**) – and it would be easy for us to hear this as a to-do list, as a list of religious exercises that we must observe in order to remain in God's good graces, in order to earn merit with Him, in order to be accepted by Him. We could easily turn this all into a legalistic set of rules to follow, right? That is the natural tendency of fallen man. But that is not what this is. We cannot earn merit with God or make Him our debtor. Neither is it that Jesus has given us a clean slate or given us a “do-over” and now it is up to us to earn heaven with His help, to do better than Adam and Eve. Further, these exhortations are not given to be a standard by which we can pridefully prove ourselves and judge others and establish our spiritual merit. But it is possible that you could read it that way and that is specifically why, throughout the entirety of this letter, that the writer of

Hebrews keeps bringing everything back to Christ, keeps coming back to the grace that is in Jesus Christ.

Everything in this letter has been written to point us away from the false religion of religious rituals as the way of forgiveness with God, to the true religion of relationship, of covenant salvation and union with Jesus Christ, to grace and forgiveness, through faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. The whole focus has been on Jesus as the pioneer and forerunner of our salvation, how He has gone before us, blazing a trail for us into the presence of God, how He has removed every obstacle – our sin and God’s holiness – and satisfied every requirement, winning our forgiveness by His blood, winning access for us to God, giving us new hearts and writing God’s law on them, His power to save us not because of anything in us but because of His grace and mercy to us who are so very undeserving.

What this book keeps pointing us to – over and over – is the power of faith in Christ, the power of the grace of God in Christ, to change our hearts, to change our desires, to make us new creatures, who want, who long, who desire to live faithfully and to enjoy the fullness of life in Christ. Because of what Jesus has done for us and in us, this is how we should desire to live. This assumes, rightly so, that there should be a desire in you to live in a way that honors God’s grace to you, a desire to live how God wants me to live and so these exhortations and commands are given to give shape, focus, and expression to the new life that we have in Christ. They are not given as a way to earn salvation, as a way to earn merit with God, but as a proper expression of the salvation and forgiveness, the righteousness and the merit, the standing and acceptance that we have through faith in Jesus Christ – faith in His perfect life lived for us and His redeeming passion and resurrection from the dead to bring us to God.

And so what we are reading here in chapter 13 is what this life looks like, the practical expressions of this new life in Christ that will strengthen and sustain us to the end. So, the message is not “do these things and live” but rather, “do these things because you have been made alive and so that you may persevere, by the empowering grace of God, to the end.” These things are for your good and when you are in a proper frame – when you are thinking rightly – and when you are living in the grace of the gospel, you will naturally want to do them and find them to be food for your soul. He gives us two more exhortations today, and the pastor begins by calling us to offer up:

**The Sacrifice of Praise (15)** Read verse 15 with me again: **“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” (Hebrews 13:15, ESV)** Now, put yourself in the place of the Hebrew Christians who were hearing this. They had grown up in the Jewish faith and were familiar with all of the sacrifices that the Law required, sacrifices that when they were rightly understood pointed to Jesus Christ ultimate sacrifice, and who, by His sacrifice, had made all of those OT sacrifices now obsolete. The old way of worshipping God was now obsolete. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross had made a radical change to the worship of God by His people. No longer was there a need for animal sacrifices, incense offerings, or grain offerings. But we are called to bring to God the sacrifice of praise.

Let’s make sure we understand this. When we speak of the sacrifice of praise that we are to bring to God, we aren’t talking about bringing something to God to earn merit with Him or to pay for and cleanse our sins. This is not a sacrifice of atonement. Jesus has already done that. We are not offering praise to God so He will accept us, or forgive us, or show us His favor. This is not some kind of transaction with God. No, we offer the sacrifice of praise because God has already accepted us in Christ, forgiven us in Christ. We have already received His righteousness by faith so that we are declared right with God. We have already been given favor by the grace of Christ. Our praise is a response. It is not a command given in a vacuum, it is not a “because I said so” kind of command. This is a response. We have to make sure that we understand that and keep that in the forefront of our minds.

That is the very reason that the writer of Hebrews says it the way that he does. **Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.** Though Jesus or because of Jesus and what He has done, let us praise God. If you have not come to God through the sacrifice of Christ, through faith in Jesus as the substitute for your sins, you cannot offer to God anything that He wants. You are still under His just condemnation for your sins. But if Christ has saved you, this sacrifice of praise should be the natural response to such grace. This shouldn’t be a hard command to keep.

Think about this, beloved. Should not the sacrifice of praise to God be the most natural thing in the world for someone who knows that before the foundation of the world God chose you and placed His eternal love on you, who has experienced the full forgiveness of every one of his/her sins, who has had all of his/her sins borne away by Christ, who has been remade in the image of God, who has been made a child of God, who has been given an

inheritance in heaven, who has been delivered from the bondage of sin, who has been raised from the dead and received the Spirit of God, who has been given the right to approach with boldness the throne of mercy and find grace and strength, who has been given the promise by God that He will never leave you nor forsake you? Praise to God ought to be the most natural thing of all to someone who has received, by mercy and grace, the very opposite of what he/she deserves.

Praise to God ought to be one of chief defining attributes of our lives. God's greatness, His mercy, His grace, His love ought to so fill our hearts that like a cup filled to the brim we should be overflowing in our praise to God. The pastor uses the word "continually" to describe this sacrifice of praise, pointing to praise as a *lifestyle*. Not just in this place or that place, not at this time or that time, not in this circumstance or that circumstance, not only in the secret place but in the open, not only in the assembly of the saints but in the world, among the lost, speaking well of God and making His great grace in Christ known. It's not just attendance and singing in a worship service but the defining characteristic of a redeemed soul. A soul saturated with God's love, gripped by God's truth, believing and resting in God's power, steadied by the sovereign grace of God, and hoping in the glory of God will overflow in praise. Praise is the product of a heart in love with Christ.

And, here is the thing about praise – you can't fake it, not really. Hollow praise is just that and we all know the difference. We have seen it: maybe you have done it or experienced it. That faint, hollow, feeble, empty sort of thing that is absent any real emotion and depth. Politicians do this sort of thing when they lose elections, athletes when they lose a game, co-workers when they are overlooked for a promotion. They may praise someone but it is absent the heart. Remember what Jesus said about the unbelieving Jews, **““This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;” (Matthew 15:8, ESV)**

Real praise isn't like that. There is a realness, a rawness, an intrinsic authenticity to it and you know the difference. It encompasses your whole life. You can see it in the Psalms. **“I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.” (Psalm 9:2, ESV) “Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds!” (Psalm 9:11, ESV) “I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.” (Psalm 69:30, ESV) “Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.” (Psalm 95:2–3, ESV) “I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God**

*while I have being.” (Psalm 104:33, ESV) “Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!” (Psalm 105:2, ESV) “With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD; I will praise him in the midst of the throng.” (Psalm 109:30, ESV) “Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly! Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!” (Psalm 149:1–3, ESV) “Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.” (Psalm 33:1, ESV) “And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.” (Psalm 27:6, ESV) “My lips will shout for joy, when I sing praises to you; my soul also, which you have redeemed.” (Psalm 71:23, ESV)*

There are some themes in all of these verses that jump out – and honestly these are just a tiny sampling – telling for the works of God, gratitude, praise for God as righteous king, dancing, shouting, singing, praise as a whole-life and lifelong pursuit and not only in the Sabbath, making yourself glad in God. Oh beloved, this is what we have been made to do. This is the thing for which we have been redeemed. Charles Spurgeon says, **“Adoration is the grandest form of earthly service. We ascribe unto Jehovah, the one living and true God, all honor and glory. When we see His works, when we hear His Word, when we taste His grace, when we mark His providence, when we think upon His name; our spirit bows in the humblest reverence before Him, and magnifies Him as the all-glorious Lord. Let us abide continually in the spirit of adoration, for this is praise in its purest form.”** It is the natural result, the fruit of lips, and the harvest of a heart that acknowledges His Name.

**“That acknowledge his name”** – that’s a meaningful phrase. That’s the focus. He is our focus, the center not only of our corporate worship but of our lives. Filled with awe, wonder and passionate love for Him, our lives are to be lived for His praise. But for that to happen, you must really know Him. It is the natural fruit of someone who knows Christ in truth. That is the symbolism of fruit. It isn’t something that can be manufactured. It grows. It is the natural produce of a saved and spiritually healthy soul. And so the question – does this praise describe you? It should, right? But what if it doesn’t? That is a good and legitimate question. What if praise is missing from your life? What if this kind of praise to God is weak or failing?

That is a terrible place to be. There really are only two options. First, if your praise to God is lacking or sputtering, something is impeding the natural flow of praise to God. There are a

number of things that can stifle praise — unconfessed sin, doubt of God’s love, His character or His truth, doubting His providential care, mistrust of His ways, not seeking His care and comfort in trials, failing to rest in the gospel truth of full forgiveness, not truly abiding in Him personally, becoming desensitized the wonder of the gospel. There are a number of things that can steal our joy and praise. I would encourage you to deal with whatever it is before God.

But then, second, if praise to God escapes you, it may be because you do not truly know the saving grace of God in Christ. The transforming work of the gospel has not taken place in your life, and you are not trusting in Christ alone as Savior and Lord. Oh, I’m begging you, believe the gospel. A soul saturated with God’s love, gripped by God’s truth, believing and resting in God’s power, steadied by the sovereign grace of God, and hoping in the glory of God will overflow in praise to God. **“Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright.” (Psalm 33:1, ESV)** And praise vertically should lead to practice horizontally.

**Praise Leading to Practice (16)** The writer of Hebrews tells us, **“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” (Hebrews 13:16, ESV)** Do you see the flow of thought here? A life that brings praise to God is a life that overflows in grace to other people. It is the natural progression. Oh, this is so important.

You know the challenge of living in a world that is self-focused. We can become so inwardly-turned that all of our attention becomes focused on ourselves and it can happen among the people of God. We can become so busy giving attention to our own spiritual lives that we neglect to seek the good of our brothers and sisters or those who don’t know Christ. We end up viewing the church and being part of the family of God as a transactional sort of thing – are we getting what we want, is this benefitting me? But that is the wrong focus. God wants the sacrifice of our lips, our hearts — real praise, the investment of our joy in Him but along with it, He desires the investment of our lives in one another.

What is God after when He calls us to do good and to share what we have? It’s not complicated at all. He is calling us to look for opportunities to do good to other people as an expression of praise, as an expression of worship to Him. There are countless ways to do this – visiting the sick or the homebound, making a meal for someone, being hospitable, freely

extending forgiveness, helping a friend in need, notes of encouragement, engaging someone you don't know in conversation, putting yourself out there to make a friend, praying with someone, reaching out to a visitor, actively ministering to someone in need as you would like to be ministered to, speaking the truth in love to all, serving in the children and youth ministry, organizing a men's get together, not simply identifying needs that someone ought to meet but meeting them... again, the list is endless.

Do good... and share. Sharing what you have is sharing your life, that's the idea. It is the root word for fellowship. It encompasses the whole of our lives – money, material possessions, time, energies, the gifts that God has given you for the edification of this body and for the growth of His kingdom, the life and truth, the graces, the spiritual blessings that God has poured into you. Look for opportunities to serve rather than expecting to be served. Look for ways to pour out what has been poured into you. There are numerous opportunities in this church and in our community to do good and to share and we need to if we would be like Jesus who said, **“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** (Mark 10:45, ESV)

That is the natural overflow of a life lived to the praise of God and let me tell you what this does. When you give yourself to a life like this, it will make you self-forgetful, and slow to criticize, complain, proudly find fault with others, grumble or blame-shift. Instead, it will amplify your joy because you are doing the very thing for which you have been made and it will please God -- **for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.**

We want to please God, don't we? We want God to be pleased with us. In an eternal sense, we know that He is pleased with us as He sees us in our union with Jesus Christ by faith, right? Jesus is God's beloved Son with whom He is well-pleased and being found in Him by faith, we know that He is pleased with us as well. But, I think about this and I'm pretty sure that most of us do, I want Him to be pleased with how I live in light of the gospel grace I have received. I don't want to waste the grace that I have been given and that is why I am so thankful that God makes clear to us what pleases Him. God is saying to us in essence, through this pastor, “Here is what gives me pleasure. It is when there is a sacrifice of praise on your lips to me because of the mercies that I have given you in Christ and when you do good to one another and when you share your lives with one another. I take pleasure when you mirror the same kind of goodness, kindness, generosity and faithfulness as you see in Me.” And here is the thing, what pleases God is what is most beneficial for us. When we are

doing this, we are doing what we have been made to do. Let me just close with a couple of observations.

### Some Observations

1) All this is, is simply a life of seeking to live out the greatest commandments; do you see that? When one of the scribes asked Jesus what was the most important commandment, He said, **“The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”** (Mark 12:29–31, ESV) What a contrast that is to how many people view Christianity. For many the highest aspiration is to “get saved.” If they can just make it into heaven, that’s good enough for them. But that is not all that salvation is about. Justification, being saved, being forgiven and declared righteous by the blood of Christ, is not the end of our salvation. It is the hinge on which the door of the gospel turns, but it is a door that is meant to be opened and entered into life, life in the presence of God, so that we can live in joy and awe as His children in this world and offer our lives as sacrifices of praise for His pleasure. It is for this very thing that we have been saved, to live sacrificially before Him, to offer to Him a lifestyle of worship, for the blessing of others and for the glory of His name. This is what we are made to do.

2) The most needful thing for us as believers is to make ourselves happy in the Lord. George Mueller used to say that “the business of every day is first of all to seek t be truly at rest and happy in God.” Charles Spurgeon said something similar. He said, **“Dear brothers and sisters, be sure that you do not lose your joy. If you ever lose the joy of religion, you will lose the power of religion. Do not be satisfied to be a miserable believer. An unhappy believer is a poor creature; but he who is resigned to being so is in a dangerous condition. Depend upon it, greater importance attaches to holy happiness than most people think. As you are happy in the Lord you will be able to praise his name. Rejoice in the Lord, that you may praise him.”** Everything else finds its source here. It is impossible to pour out what Christ has not poured in. We must be reading His word, praying, reminding ourselves of the truth of the gospel, reminding ourselves of our calling to praise God and do good and share. This needs to be the root of everyday. It’s not magic; it’s supernatural.



**3) *Issue call to repent and believe the gospel. Searching for a variety of things, really looking for joy that can only be found in one place.***

Beloved, we have known each other and been in this together for a long time. Individually and as a church we have received great blessing from the Lord. Let's unite our hearts together in this great purpose, joining together with our hearts and with our hands to bless the name of the Lord, to live our lives in open and continual praise to Him. With our words and with our lives, with everything we have, let's recommit ourselves to giving to God the sacrifice of praise continually. With renewed minds, full hearts, and willing hands let's stir one another up to praise and to good works, to build and strengthen the church, our devotion to the Lord, our devotion to one another, and our devotion to proclaiming His gospel, so that we would be pleasing to God and know together the joy of the Lord.

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