

Hebrews Chapter Thirteen (vv.15-25)

The *practical* emphasis in the closing chapters of Hebrews is: faith (11); hope (12) and love (13). The chapter has been summarised as: Love for the **Saints** (v.1); Love for **Strangers** (v.2); Love for **Sufferers** (v.3); Love for **Sanctity** (vv.4-6); Love for **Scripture** (vv.7-9) and Love for the **Saviour** (vv.10-14). *Love is demonstrated by: separation* (vv.10-14); *sacrifice* (vv.15-16) and *submission* (v.17).

The Demonstration of Love: Sacrifice (vv.15-16)

15 *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips ~~giving thanks to~~ (confessing) his name. 16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

Let it not be thought that Christians do not offer sacrifices! The **spiritual** sacrifices of these verses are fitting for those who separate themselves unto Christ (v.13) and live in earnest expectation of heavenly glory (v.14). It is through the Lord Jesus ('by Him') that Christians can offer acceptable spiritual sacrifices to God today. He no longer demands sacrifice in the form of ritual or ceremony, but in word and deed. The first sacrifice is that of 'continual' **praise** or 'thanksgiving'. This was once associated with animal sacrifices (Leviticus 7.12), but no longer (as suggested in Psalm 50.12-15). Believers are to be in the 'constant habit' of thanking God for His Son and the work of Calvary (see Luke 2.13, 20, 19.37, 24.53). This is a continual, daily exercise, not a fair-weather offering (note the contrast with the once for all offering of Christ, 9.28). In every circumstance and even during times of particular difficulty we should give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5.18). This sacrifice of praise is also called the 'fruit of our lips' emphasising verbal worship (cf. Hosea 14.2 where the captives could offer no physical sacrificial bulls and but only the 'calves of their lips'). Through this 'speech to God' we 'confess' His name suggesting a perpetual public acknowledgement of all that God is: His person, character and work. *Note. There is the fruit of our lips and the fruit of our lives (Galatians 5.22-23).*

Verse **16** indicates a second spiritual sacrifice which is directed *manward* rather than *Godward*. Of course the link between the two verses is plain: *Without such practical expressions of love the praise of God lacks integrity. There cannot be lip service without life service! Confession without action is hypocrisy (1 John 3.18, 4.20).* This also illustrates the difference between a **holy** priest (1 Peter 2.5) and a **royal** priest (1 Peter 2.9). As **holy** priests we enter *in* to the 'holiest' to worship. As **royal** priests we go *out* into the world to witness. Life service is demonstrated through 'doing good' or 'showing kindness' by 'communicating' or 'sharing' material blessings with those who are in need. Joseph of Arimathaea is one of only two men in the NT described as 'good' and he certainly spared no expense for His Lord (Luke 23.50, John 19.38-39, cf. Acts 11.24). 'Communicating' is the word for 'fellowship' and so suggests 'making oneself a sharer or partner in another's need' (cf. 13.3, 5). We are never (present continuous tense) to 'forget' or 'neglect' these sacrifices, remembering that they are 'well-pleasing' to God. *God has no pleasure in animal sacrifices (10.8), but His heart is pleased when He hears the voice of praise and sees the kindly deed.* So the writer has spoken of the spiritual sacrifices of **song** (v.15) and **substance** (v.16). Note also the sacrifice of **self** (Romans 12.1-2).¹

The Demonstration of Love: Submission (v.17)

17 *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

The writer returns to the spiritual leaders of the flock, not now those who have died (v.7), but those who presently serve among them. They are to be 'obeyed'. This has the idea of being so persuaded by one's manner of life and teaching that they become an object of trust and confidence (like sheep and the shepherd). Given their powerful spiritual example in word and deed (cf. 1 Peter 5.2-3) it is easy to 'submit' or 'yield' to their faithful teaching and guidance. This is in *imperative* form and presented as something which was to be a lifelong habit for the Hebrews' own benefit. These spiritual leaders act like shepherds 'watching' over the spiritual welfare of the saints. To 'watch' is to 'go sleepless' or 'keep awake' like those who are 'nursing a critical case'. It was the responsibility of these leaders to minister against the attraction of Judaism and the possibility of immorality or bitterness arising in their midst (v.15). After all they would be giving account to God for the way they had conducted this ministry in a future day. This work was not for their own personal gain; but service for the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5.4).

The responsibility of the saint is therefore to 'trust' and 'yield' to the caring advice and guidance of the spiritual leader. This will bring 'joy', making their work glad and happy. Any who do not follow their example bring 'grief' or an 'inner

¹ *If verse 10 speaks of the **brazen** altar then verse 15 is the **golden** altar, the place where sweet incense continually ascended to God (Revelation 8.3-4). Also, verses 11-14 concern the sin offering, whereas verses 15-16 indicate the peace offering (Leviticus 3). In this offering there was both something for God (the fat) and the priestly family (breast). Likewise there is the sacrifice of praise (for God) and of substance (for the priestly family; the church).*

groaning' (Mark 7.34, Romans 8.23) expressive of a task which is thankless, unappreciated or even opposed. This sort of attitude would result in no spiritual gain or advantage for the believers.

A Word of Petition (vv.18-19)

18 *Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.* **19** *But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.*

The writer's request for prayer is characteristic of the apostle Paul who often requested that the saints (collective and individual) would pray for him (Romans 15.30-32, Ephesians 6.18, Colossians 4.2-4, 1 Thessalonians 5.25, 2 Thessalonians 3.1, Philemon 22). The request was first general (v.18), then specific (v.19), 'urging' that they pray he might be 'restored' to them. The word 'restore' is used in a medical context (Mark 3.5) and means 'restore to a former state'. He wanted to enjoy future times of fellowship like they had had in the past, but at present the writer was otherwise detained, possibly in prison. The use of 'the sooner' (comparative) suggests that their prayers would restore him *more quickly* than if they did **not** pray. It is important that we pray earnestly and, where possible, specifically. Prayer is powerful! This request for prayer was based on two conditions the writer was fulfilling: he had a good **conscience** (*inwardly*) **because** he was purposing to **live** honestly (*outwardly*). He was worthy of their prayers because he could say with a clear conscience that he lived 'honourably' before God. This was no doubt general, but in the context of the Hebrews he had served and taught them faithfully. *The believers can pray confidently for him since his actions correspond to the irreproachable conduct expected of spiritual leaders.*

A Word of Supplication

20 *Now the God of peace, that brought ~~again~~ (up) from the dead ~~our Lord Jesus~~, th(e)at great shepherd of the sheep, ~~through~~ (in) the blood of the everlasting covenant, even our Lord Jesus,* **21** *Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever.*

The writer has asked that the Hebrews pray for *him* (vv.18-19), now he prays for *them* (v.21). His prayer is addressed to the 'God of Peace'² who raised or 'led' the Lord Jesus 'up' from the dead which was fully in accordance with the terms of the eternal (new) covenant, established in His blood (Ezekiel 37.5, 26, Zechariah 9.11, Hebrews 9.14-15). It is a covenant of **life**, not death! The One who is alive from the dead is the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. This speaks of divine pastoral care in the wilderness as He leads us to glory. In John 10 the Good Shepherd died to save us; in Hebrews 13 the Great Shepherd lives to keep us.³ Referring to the Lord Jesus as Shepherd is a statement of deity (cp. Psalm 79.13, 80.1) and emphasises His incomparable superiority to Moses (Isaiah 63.11-13). It is 'through' the Person and work of this Shepherd that God can accomplish the request of this prayer. God is constantly 'working' or 'creating' in us that we might be 'well pleasing' to Him. This He does by 'perfecting' or 'fully equipping' us in the sphere of good works for the purpose of fulfilling His will. *MacDonald: God places the desire in us; He gives us the power to do it; then we do it; and He rewards us. Glory to His name!*

A Word of Exhortation

22 *And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words.*

Again the Hebrews are 'urged', this time, to 'bear with' or 'patiently permit' the 'word of exhortation', i.e. the entire epistle. They must not become impatient with, or hardened to the word, but heed its spiritual teaching. After all, it was merely an 'epistle' or 'message in written form' of 'few words' (4953 in the Greek to be precise). This is the ninth longest book in the NT, but contains relatively few words given the importance of the teaching contained within (see 5.11). How essential it was that they heeded the message that Christ is better and persevered in faith to the end.

A Word of Information and Salutation

23 *Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you.* **24** *Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you.* **25** *Grace be with you all. Amen.*

The Hebrews are informed that Timothy, obviously well-known to the believers, had been 'released'. This suggests he had been imprisoned of which we do not read in the epistles. It is possible that this took place shortly after Paul wrote 2 Timothy in which he encouraged him to endure persecution without fear. Timothy was one who had heeded the word of exhortation! The mind of the writer was to visit the Hebrews in person accompanied by Timothy. The final word is that 'greetings' might be sent to **all** the spiritual leaders and saints as it was possible some would not be at the public reading of the epistle. The Italians with the writer sent their own greetings to the Hebrews which could suggest that the letter was written from Rome. The epistle closes with the familiar **Greek** greeting of 'grace'; a word of particular importance in the context of the Hebrew epistle. The same grace by which we have been saved (2.9), is the same grace by which we are kept (4.16) and the same grace that will bring us to heaven (11.16).

² *Peace with God is due to sins forgiven. The Peace of God is known in the trials of the way. The God of peace suggests His continual presence with us; receiving the giver of the gift Himself. God is the author (source) and dispenser (giver) of peace.*

³ *Good Shepherd (John 10) emphasises His past work at Calvary. Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13.20) emphasises His present work in Heaven. Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5.4) emphasises His future coming and reward.*