

Hebrews 13:15-16 "Offer a Sacrifice of Praise to God"

As we've studied the book of Hebrews we've seen how our writer has tried to encourage his readers to stay true to Christ as they better understand His salvation and His person, being the Son of the living God.

A lot of contrasts have been made showing how Christ is infinitely above those things related to the O.T. It gives us shadows, Christ is the substance and fulfillment. It reveals Christ as in a mirror dimly, Christ comes on the scene as one who is the Life and the Light as He shone in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it.

The O.T.'s rules and regulations dealt with men in a temporal sense; Christ deals with us in an eternal sense. The O.T. law could not do more than be a tutor or to lead us to the One who would come. Christ is the Master who came, and leads us to the throne room of God through His blood and resurrection.

This is not to suggest that God, through His prophets in the O.T., did not give eternal promises along with hope, but it was hope deferred in one sense. We read in PRO 13:12 "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."

There were many O.T. believers whose hope was deferred in the sense that they did not see the Messiah come in their lifetime, but the promises in which they hoped, by faith in God, allowed them to have their hope fulfilled and it was a tree of life to them as they looked to the future, even as did Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who longed for that city whose architect and builder is God.

But our writer's point is that, now that we've trusted Christ, we have a hope in the Messiah who most assuredly came and will come again. Our hope in His second coming may be deferred for a time, but our hope doesn't rest in what we can see with our physical eyes, but in what we can see with spiritual eyes of faith.

This is how the O.T. saints saw their hope in God and this is how we must live life daily; knowing that we don't have a High Priest who is limited like the priests of Israel, but we have a High Priest who is fully God and fully man and who has accomplished our redemption, and yet He is a Priest who is very aware of our weakness.

HEB 4:14-16 "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

This High Priest does not need an altar like that of the Priesthood of Aaron upon which to bring a sacrifice. This High Priest is both altar and sacrifice, well pleasing to the Father. And this is what we saw last week in our text when our writer said in HEB 13:10 "We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat."

He was comparing the temporal with the eternal. He essentially said, Israel has an altar upon which they still offer sacrifice, but it is of no value to them because the altar in Israel pointed to Christ and now He has come; why would you continue with that which is no longer needed?

But in our text this morning our writer reminds us that though we may not have a physical altar, as did Israel up until A.D. 70, when it was destroyed by the Romans, we must still bring sacrifices unto the Lord. The question is what kind of sacrifices? Let's look at our text.

HEB 13:15-16 "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

These are very interesting verses in that they show us that not only are we to bring a sacrifice of praise to God, it also shows us how we are to bring this sacrifice to God. Notice how verse 15 begins. "Through Jesus". There is no other way to approach God than through Jesus Christ. There is no sacrifice that is pleasing to God unless it is brought to the throne through Jesus and His sacrifice for us.

His sacrifice was a sacrifice of His life to pay our debt, which was death. Our sacrifice of praise is in response to His and is one of thanksgiving. But what form does our sacrifice of praise to God take?

Arthur W. Pink notes four distinct things concerning our sacrifice of praise to God. The first one he mentions has to do with a heart attitude which David spoke of in PSA 51:17 "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

David, an O.T. saint, understood that a true sacrifice of praise did not ultimately reside in an animal being slain as in a peace offering. Our peace comes from first realizing that we are not at peace with God because of sin, but our peace comes from Christ.

This is what Paul says in ROM 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Pink quotes Charles Spurgeon who said, "When the heart mourns for sins God is better pleased than when the bull bleeds beneath the axe."

We see this very clearly when God told Israel in ISA 1:11,15-16 "The multitude of your sacrifices - what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. 15 When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; 16 wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong,..."

The sacrifices of Israel may have been according to the prescribed law but those sacrifices we see in Isaiah were not the result of a broken spirit or a contrite heart. There is where we must begin to realize that to approach God it must be with an understanding that sin has separated us from Him and this should cause us to humble ourselves before Him.

This is why David was grieved in the 51st Psalm. That was a psalm which was penned after Nathan the prophet came to David and revealed David's sin of murder and adultery with Bathsheba. David knew that all the animal sacrifices in the world could not really deal with his heart.

It was David's heart, which God saw as broken and contrite, and it caused him to repent of His sin. But you know what's interesting about the 51st psalm is that though David's heart was grieved over his sin, he knew where he would find forgiveness and it was this reason he could offer a sacrifice of praise.

PSA 51:7-10 "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. 10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

This was also true of what we read in Isaiah where God called for Israel to repent of their sin and return to Him. He wasn't interested in their animal sacrifices alone, He was interested in them realizing that for them to truly enter into communion with Him they must first repent and return to Him as He extended hope.

ISA 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

This was a promise for all who would turn from their wicked ways and embrace their Messiah by faith.

It is realizing that we are sinners who have found grace in Christ, and then humbly accepting His provision for our sin, that enables us to offer a sacrifice of praise to God through Jesus Christ. This is why we never want to become callous to sin. Unrepentant sin only breeds more sin and causes our hearts to become hard and unwilling to offer a sacrifice of praise to God.

This doesn't mean that a broken and contrite heart is not a heart full of joy. The joy comes from realizing God's acceptance of us, despite our sin, as we flee from sin into His arms of forgiveness.

The second sacrifice which A.W. Pink mentions is where the believer presents unto God his offering of Christ each day. What he means by this is that a believer initially comes to God totally dependent on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, but we should never stop coming to God offering thanks for that sacrifice on our behalf.

It is a conscious act of thanks and adoration with a thankful heart instead of a carnal approach to life which Paul addresses in EPH 5:4.19-20 "Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, **20 *always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.***"

Paul said to the Philippians in PHI 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, ***with***

*thanksgiving*, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

To the Colossians he said in COL 2:6-7 "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and *overflowing with thankfulness*."

Even our writer has brought this attitude out in our letter in HEB 12:28 "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, *let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe*,"

As we offer unto God the gift of life we received from Christ each day, realizing that it is His life given for us, we will offer to God a sacrifice of praise continually.

The third sacrifice which the Christian presents to God is himself, according to Pink. To be truly thankful is to give full allegiance and full devotion to the One who gave us this awesome life in Christ.

ROM 12:1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

We are to be living sacrifices unto God. This means that our very lives, as we live them in the power of the Spirit unto His glory, are in themselves, a sacrifice of praise. We've all heard the expression that a living sacrifice is much harder to control since it has a tendency to want to crawl off the altar.

There's where some of us are at times, thinking that we can get off the altar and do as we please. But when we realize who our altar is, then we must conclude that to get off of our altar we are actually moving away from Christ Himself, which is to say, that we are not willing to abide in Christ.

Is that a thankful heart? No. That's the heart which must go back and realize that sin is not something that pleases God. That's a heart which must be broken and contrite before God as they are willing to humble themselves before God. But then that heart

should rejoice in the forgiveness found in Christ as they then find their thankfulness each day in Christ's sacrifice on their behalf.

It's then, and then only that the Christian will begin to offer himself or herself before God on a daily basis to be used of God as they trust and obey the Lord. Thankfulness and gratitude to the Lord will always do that. It will always avail itself to the leading of the Shepherd. Why? Because in gratitude, it knows that to follow anyone or anything else will always come up short of the infinite grace and love bestowed on us by Christ.

This is what Paul meant when he said, "for me to live is Christ." Paul was a man who understood what it was to have dishonored his God as he sought to destroy the church. When Christ gave him life, he could do nothing else but to give Christ himself wholeheartedly.

He didn't give himself to Christ only on Sunday, or Wednesday, but every moment of his life. That's what gratitude and thanksgiving will do when we realize that without Christ we are eternally lost, and then we act on that thanksgiving by offering our bodies to him, since Christ literally sacrificed His body to be offered up for us.

Our writer speaks of offering a sacrifice of praise to God, which is the fruit of the lips that give thanks to His name. This does not mean that our sacrifice of praise to God is limited to just the fruit of our lips, but it certainly is a very important part of our giving ourselves to Him.

Notice that it's referred to as fruit. Dr. Donald Guthrie notes that the "fruit reveals the character of its source, as the fruit of a tree reveals the nature of the tree. Lips accustomed to acknowledge God will be constantly singing His praises."

You ever find a doctor who is just great in the way he or she deals with you; the kind of doctor who listens to everything you share about your particular problem; someone who's patient and willing to take the time to meet your need? And then they always seem to have just the right answer to your problem as they prescribe the right treatment and you get better. And as if it doesn't get any better than that they charge half of what every other doctor charges. (Am I pushing that just a bit?)

It's that kind of doctor you would sing the praises of to your friends. You would want them to know about a doctor who is

everything they need. You would go out of your way to let others know that their seeking is over when it comes to a physician.

And the reason you do that is because you're thankful for such a person. In gratitude you refer patients to him. I wonder why it's so hard for some to be thankful enough to God who's healed us from sin which kills and separates us from God for eternity. And I would include myself in this category. I'm amazed at times when my gratitude seems to wane, when His love for me never wanes.

Can we get as excited about telling people about Christ as we do telling people about a doctor whose the best thing since Monday night football? The fruit of the lips is a fruit which comes from God to be given back to God.

One of the fruits of our lips is what we see in ROM 10:9-10 "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

This is not a formula for salvation by way of verbal expression only. The fruit of the lips goes way beyond making noises with your mouth. The fruit of the lips is conveying the truth in your heart with your lips and life. That fruit will be tasted by those who come into contact with us whether we can physically talk or not.

PHI 2:9-11 "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Every knee includes you and me. To bend the knee is to show adoration. To bend the knee is to reverently thank God with our lives. To bend the knee is ultimately to bend the heart, which takes us all the way back to David's prayer in PSA 51:10 "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

It is this posture of the heart that allows us to offer a sacrifice of praise to God that is pleasing in His sight, because it's a sacrifice of praise done in faith. But you'll also notice in verse 15 that this sacrifice of praise is to be continual. In the O.T. the sacrifices were brought at certain times under certain circumstances, but for the believer today our sacrifices of praise should be done continually.

But how can we do this when our lives are so busy? How can we do this when it's so hard to put aside enough time for our families and friends? And yet, is Christ not our most important friend? Is He not the One who brought us into the family of God? Have we so soon forgotten how to be thankful and show Him gratitude? Or have we forgotten from what heights we've fallen as we tried to stand before a righteous God in our own unrighteous deeds?

Praise God for His grace and mercy who has saved a wretch like me. The fruit of our lips should declare Him in the morning and in the evening. We should shout from the rooftops of the greatness of our God. The prophet Hosea says in HOS 14:2 "Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips."

The fruit of our lips comes from grateful hearts. But the fruit we demonstrate should never be limited to our lips.

HEB 13:16 "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

This is the fourth sacrifice of the Christian that A.W. Pink mentions regarding our text. But as he points out, the lips of man will not praise God if there is no life in the body. "There can be no acceptable praise unto God until we have offered ourselves unto God as those alive from the dead, for as PSA 115:17-18 says, "It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to silence; 18 it is we who extol the LORD, both now and forevermore. Praise the LORD."

Those who pay only lip service to God cannot offer a true sacrifice of praise with their lips or life.

ISA 29:13 "The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."

And so the order we see here in our text is, as Pink points out: To first bow before God in the spirit of genuine repentance; then we receive Christ's gracious provision by faith as we present His sacrifice to God for our forgiveness. Then we yield ourselves to Him unreservedly as His purchased people; and then we render praise and thanksgiving for His amazing grace toward us.

This is where our sacrifice of praise begins. It begins with a humble attitude as those who are thankful and grateful for so great

a salvation. Not thankful in the way where we show it only at the beginning, but to be thankful everyday of our lives by the way we approach our God each day with the fruit of our lips. But as I said, the fruit of our lips is only the beginning.

HEB 13:16 "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

This is where the rubber meets the road. When we talk about the sacrifice of praise unto God we are talking about a renewed heart that is willing to count the cost of following Christ and in return offer our bodies a living and holy sacrifice unto God. It is in this way that we offer praise to God and in the process God is glorified in and through us.

Asaph the Psalmist declared what God said in PSA 50:23 "He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me,".

This is great news for all of us because here we see that you don't need to be a Pastor, you don't need to be a missionary, or a great evangelist or have lots of money to honor God with a sacrifice of praise.

Any believer who offers thank offerings with their lives and lips honors God and God is pleased. How is this done in a practical way? Well, verse 16 of our text touches on it. "...Do not forget to do good and to share with others, ..."

How do we do good? What does this mean? Does it simply mean following the 10 commandments? Well, the Pharisees appeared to follow the 10 commandments along with all the rest. But did Jesus consider their works good?

No! Our good works are works which God is doing in our hearts and which in turn we express through our lives.

EPH 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus to do good works*, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

But these good works are not necessarily the great things we usually associate with good works, like pulling someone from a burning building or traveling to South America to help poor people rebuild their community after a tragedy like an earthquake.

Those may certainly be good works, but what about being a faithful husband or wife as unto the Lord? What about being a good mom or dad to your children bringing them up in the

discipline and instruction of the Lord? What about helping out with the children during the service here on Sunday mornings? What about being the best employee you can be at your job?

As our hearts are desirous of pleasing Christ and then doing those good works which help the body and honor God we are in fact offering a sacrifice of praise to God which pleases the Lord as we do them through Christ who lives in us.

The psalmist says in PSA 66:1-2 "Shout with joy to God, all the earth! 2 Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious!"

Are we making His praise glorious by giving Him thanks for His salvation as we then do those works that please Him?

It's not talking about works, but doing those works. This is where our praise costs us something. It costs us some time, some effort, some money. But what can compare to the riches we have in Christ and the treasure we are storing up in heaven by trusting God and being obedient to His will as we love Him and show that love with gratitude?

Do you see how praise to God is much more than gathering together and singing to God? Unfortunately, many Christians believe that if they simply come out on a Sunday morning and offer praise to God with their lips that they've offered a sacrifice of praise to God. In one sense they may have if their hearts were engaged in the process.

But if the heart is engaged to the things of God than our actions will follow what we sing with our lips. Those in jail will be visited, those who are poor will be helped, those who have no food will be fed. Those who don't know Christ will have the Gospel preached to them.

There are lots of things we can be doing in our community. And we have the privilege and responsibility to offer to God a sacrifice of praise as we meet needs here in this church and reach out to our community with the love of Christ. How much are willing to have our sacrifice of praise to God cost us something?

But when we consider what Christ gave up for us, the cost really is insignificant, and the rewards are eternal. "With such sacrifices God is pleased." And isn't that the reason He has called us out? To please Him and love and serve Him as we serve and love one another.

As we offer our sacrifice of praise to God may we consider the God who enables us to accomplish those good works He has prepared in advance for us to do.

Paul put it this way.

EPH 3:16-21 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."