

Hebrews 13:15-25

¹⁵Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

¹⁸Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. ¹⁹I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Vss. 15-16: The preacher to the Hebrews continues to protect his congregation from apostasy amid tribulation and persecution by urging the new life upon them; to live out the faith. Faith active in love inherently has protective failure for the preservation of faith, because it is the gift of faith being exercised.

Of this section (15-16), the Epitome of the Solid Declaration of The Lutheran Confessions states, “In these last times it is certainly no less needful to encourage people to Christian discipline (to the way of right and godly living) and to do good works. We need to remind them of how necessary it is that, they exercise themselves in good works as a declaration of their faith [Matthew 5:16] and gratitude to God.”

Vs. 15: “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”

- A. Luther says that Christ offers us as a sacrifice. (AE 35:99) That is, no longer do we speak of sacrifice in terms of what gains merit with God. That once-for-all sacrifice has been accomplished when Christ gave us His body and blood on the cross of Calvary. Now, the sacrifices are responses of thanksgiving and praise back to God in response to the one-time sacrifice. But the only way this happens is to be in Christ and Christ in us, so that any good sacrifice we give comes by the life and

power of Christ. Thus, Christ sacrifices us or causes us to be a living sacrifice to God in our service to Him and our neighbor.

- B. The fruit of lips is the result of a living faith within us. And whoever truly confesses Christ, must also live for Him. He or she who lives for Him also truly confesses Him. You can't have one without the other if these are genuine.
- C. Kleinig explains that this section is about serving the Living God. (709)
This is the life that remains faithful through the ups and downs: we are always serving God.
- D. The sacrifice of praise is especially connected to the reception of The Lord's Supper.
- E. These sacrifices of praise occur only through Jesus.

Vs. 16: "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

- A. In addition to offering up a sacrifice of praise, we offer up a sacrifice of charity.
- B. Here, *koinonia* is put forth: it is a sharing. In the Christian faith, we share a common confession of faith; and we share resources to serve and help one another. Moffatt: "To share with others, to impart to them what we possess, is one way of worshipping God." (*The International Critical Commentary*, 237)
- C. Some theologians would say that the fellowship is only spiritual as in confessing a common faith, but we are recommending a both-and instead of an either-or, especially as this entire section of Hebrews is pointing to the practical and empirical expressions of faith.

Vs 17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

- A. These leaders are not the same as mentioned in vs. 7: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith."

- B. These were leaders from your past who were formative in the transmission of the saving faith, leading you to Christ (though it is possible that the leaders referred to in vs. 17 were/are also in this position).
- C. But these v. 17 leaders are your current leaders. Their authority is of one source and one source only: The Word of God. We are always to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. (1st John 4:1) We are to be as the Bereans who even tested what St. Paul preached to them in Acts 17.
- D. When these leaders are faithful, we must obey them as they instruct us in the Word of God. And these leaders if they are faithful understand that their purview of direction does not go beyond the Word of Christ.
- E. What are these leaders doing? “they are keeping watch over your souls” ...they are truly pastors, and they will have to give an account to God. The Christian can ease their responsibility by helping to make their service a joy instead of an unnecessary burden.

Vs. 18: “Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.”

- A. We cannot underestimate the value and importance of retaining a clear conscience. The preacher is aware of the temptations to compromise the faith amid hardship. We must, however, continue to have a clear conscience by acting honorably in all things most especially in our faithfulness to the Word of Christ and love toward one another.
- B. The connection to verse 17 is that those who are leaders must especially have a clear conscience: faithful to God in preaching and teaching the Word in truth and purity and faithful to God’s flock for the care of souls. It is a noble task and a heavy one. He requests prayer from the people. Pastors and those serving in the auxiliary offices need prayer from the people.
- C. What cleanses the conscience? The blood of the Lamb. (9:14 and 10:22)

9:14: “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

10:22: “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Vs. 19: “I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.”

- A. Vs. 18 is not a request, but a command: “Pray for us!”
- B. Here in vs. 19 he is urging them to “the more earnestly to do this”
...prayer is extremely important. James 4:2: “You do not have, because you do not ask.”
- C. Pastors and auxiliary servants need to constantly be restored to maintain a clear conscience so that their service will not have anything interfering with their ability to faithfully carry out the holy ministry.

The Benediction:

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

- A. “The God of peace” is Pauline. Romans 15:33: “May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”
- B. Our emphasis about God is that He is the God of peace and grace, we do not emphasize His power, authority, and sovereignty. Is He powerful? Does He have all authority? Is He sovereign over all things? Of course, but this is not the way we know Him, really know Him. He is the God of love and mercy. The Father who loved us this way: He sent His only Son to live and die for us. We emphasize the God of peace. The Scriptures do the same.

- C. God the Father is credited for bringing Jesus His Son back from death. (Hebrews 13:20, Acts 2:24 & Galatians 1:1) Elsewhere the Holy Spirit is responsible for raising Christ: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” (Romans 8:11, see also 1st Peter 3:18) Furthermore, Jesus raised Himself from the dead. (John 2:19 and John 10:18) That is, the Holy Trinity raised Jesus from the dead.
- D. Before going on, look ahead to verse 21. If God has the power to raise Jesus from the dead, we know that He is more than able to “equip [us] with everything good that [we] may do his will.”
- E. Jesus is called here at vs. 20: “the great shepherd of the sheep” = John 10 is the Good Shepherd chapter of the Bible, the great elaboration of this title of Christ. As long as we hear the voice of our great shepherd, we will be enabled to live in God’s will.
- F. Vs. 20 also brings out, “by the blood of the eternal covenant” = Only here in the entire New Testament is the new covenant called “eternal.” And that is exactly what it is. Jesus is our New Covenant and the Last Covenant. Jesus will never become obsolete. His covenant will last forever. To have the blood of Christ is to have the “It is finished” from the cross of Calvary. It secures our eternal life.
- G. Vs. 21: “equip you with everything” is also translated as “perfect you”...Christ makes us “perfect” in the sight of God. We are complete in Christ, even in the good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10)
- H. Vs. 21: The Greek for “perfect” *kataristisai*, is God’s workmanship and is where we get the English word “artist.” You are a work of art in Christ.
- I. Vs. 21: “working in us” = who is really responsible for all our good works? God is. He is working in us. He works through us. What we do is done by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the life of Jesus in and through His people. Thus, it is impossible for a Christian to ever take credit for anything good they might do. Thus, we say, “Soli Deo Gloria!”

Final Greetings

²² I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³ You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. ²⁴ Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. ²⁵ Grace be with all of you.

- A. We end with the preacher's personal notes.
- B. Preachers "appeal" to their hearers. The word is also translated as encouragement. The preacher who does not encourage his hearers might want to reconsider his vocation.
- C. He calls them brothers (male and female co-heirs, brothers and sisters in Christ). He is preaching to family, the family of God.
- D. He requests that they "bear" and hold up this sermon of exhortation and encouragement. He is here referring to his sermon as a word of consolation. He appeals to them to accept his faithful word of encouragement and consolation.
- E. Vs. 23: This Timothy is probably the same one who was the co-worker of St. Paul. He is a "brother" to the author of Hebrews. They are probably co-workers. Timothy had been in prison. Endurance for the Gospel and persecution on account of it continued in the lives of the leaders of the church. We know that this "sermon" was written down. The author desires to see his congregation when he comes back to them (hopefully with St. Timothy).
- F. Vs. 24: with this direction to give greetings represents the expectation that this letter is read out loud. It is a sermon intended to be read aloud.
- G. The people of God are called "saints" for that is what they are "holy ones" and we are to never forget it. Satan tries hard to make us doubt it. He is a liar.
- H. This verse seems to reinforce the idea that this congregation is in Rome, since fellow-believer now outside of Italy send their greetings back to the home church.

- I. Vs. 25: “Grace be with all of you.” Could there be a better ending? The free gift of God’s love and mercy in Christ Jesus. That’s grace. G = God’s, R = riches; A = at; C = Christ’s; E = Expense. The gift is free for us. It was not for Christ, but He gave it while being obedient to the Father and while loving us with the most wondrous love the world has ever known.