

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part fifty-seven

Sunday, July 8th, 2018 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2057

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WHAT A CHRIST-CENTERED HEART STARTS TO LOOK LIKE

Hebrews 13:15-19 - "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. [16] Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. [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. [18] Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. [19] I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner."

In our last study we worked our way through some difficult verses - **Hebrews 13:9-13** - "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them. [10] We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. [11] For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. [12] So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. [13] Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured."

The central idea here is "***we have an altar***" (10) which accomplishes what all those Old Covenant sacrifices only pictured. Through Jesus there is a completed ***sanctification*** that was never possible before (12). These verses closed with the reminder that following Jesus means ***bearing the same "reproach" He endured*** (13). There is always a counter-cultural push-back if we demonstrate ***loyalty*** to Jesus.

Now we come to today's text. What happens when we come to the altar of Christ's shed blood? We get forgiveness, to be sure. But what comes next? How do lives ***take the shape of authentic sanctification***? After Jesus bears my own sin what does the blood of Jesus do to the rest of my life?

Our text contains a ***reminder*** and ***three commands***.

1) **WE ARE REMINDED ALL THE SAVING BLESSINGS OF GOD COME ONLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST**

Hebrews 13:15 - "**Through him** then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."

In just a moment our writer will command the church into deeds of generosity and compassion to others. But first he feels compelled to point out such deeds have no redeeming effect ***in themselves***. Just as only the high priest could provide the sacrifice of atonement, so only Jesus, our new covenant high priest, can provide approach to the altar of God. His blood is the new covenant sacrifice - as this letter has repeatedly insisted. I can't get to the altar of mercy and pardon through my own moral goodness.

There is such a tendency on the part of many contemporary writers and leaders to take the atoning significance out of the death of Jesus. They ***horizontalize*** the work of the cross into a demonstration of God's non-violent response to mistreatment. Applied to us the cross simply means be loving and forgiving to those who wrong you and the world will be a better place. Period.

And the Bible ***does*** hold up the death of Jesus as this kind of example. No question - **1 Peter 2:21-23** - "**For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.** [22] **He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.** [23] **When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**"

This instruction is based on the death of Jesus. But this isn't ***all*** we're told about the death of Jesus. We're also told Jesus defeated Satan and his powers through His death on the cross - **Colossians 2:15** - "**He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.**"

This is solid Biblical truth. Jesus **did** openly defeat principalities and powers in His death on the cross. But this too isn't **all** that He accomplished. And it's not what our writer is describing in our Hebrews text.

I'm sorry to labor this on a Sunday morning. My reason for doing so is right in this text and we'll get to it in just a minute. But I find it so dangerous and foolish the way many teachers, including **Bruxy and Greg Boyd and Brian Zahnd** teach that in recognizing these other facets of the atonement it is required that one **reject** the massive, overarching **penal substitutionary teaching of the New Testament where Jesus bears the Father's holy wrath against my sin on the cross.**

You can **YouTube** this for yourself. Bruxy clearly comes out and states these other scriptural explanations lead him to conclude that penal substitution is **wrong**. And that saddens me because he has a teaching voice among evangelical students.

These views of the atonement are not **either/or** views. They are all combined in the New Testament. But by far the most **dominant** teaching of the New Testament is Jesus bore both my sins and the Father's just wrath in His body on the cross. This **doesn't** mean I must reject other Biblical ideas included in the cross of Christ. Can we please think deeper and move past this?

Our writer makes the his purpose of the atonement consistently and repeatedly clear. Christ's shed blood did something deeper and bigger than provide example. It did more than promote compassion. And it did more than demonstrate God's triumph over the forces of darkness. While all of those ideas are included His death did more. It **provided access**.

That's why our writer pictures Christ's death as an **altar (13:10)**. And every Jewish reader of those words knew what an **altar** was all about. The altar meant **access**. It meant the removal of **sin and guilt that disqualified the one approaching apart from the sacrifice of another**. Only the most stubbornly blind reader could miss this emphasis throughout this entire letter to the Hebrews.

So **before** the moral instruction - before the command to be loving and compassionate our text jumps off the page with this great **"Through him...." (15)**. There is no sustainable path to pleasing God without this starting point - without this **altar**.

Our writer wants us to think through his logic. Here's what this means. It means anything I am to do **for God** is rooted in something God has already done **for me**. Nothing else **reaches God** - including my most charitable, compassionate impulses. That's why those words, **"Through him...."** are at the head of the verse (15). This is the gateway. His redemptive action anchors and generates my response.

2) THE LIPS OF A SANCTIFIED LIFE SPEAK PRAISE

Hebrews 13:15 - **"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."**

These are not the words of a worship leader in a charismatic church service. They are the studied, Biblically drenched words of a very deep-thinking theological mind. The first thing mentioned in response to a consideration of God's atoning grace in the Son is **praise**.

And lest we mumble something under our church-tradition breath about just worshiping and praising Him in our heart, our writer makes his idea more specific still - as though almost anticipating this mind-set - **"O yea, and when I say praise I mean your mouth - "the fruit of lips" - I mean your voice-box and lips! I mean making your gratitude to Jesus known - not just to yourself - but to everybody else!"** That's what our writer means when he says this verbal praise is done to **"acknowledge his name" (15)**.

3) THE CULTIVATION OF A PRAISE-FILLED LIFE CAN'T BE LEFT TO THE EMOTIONS, BUT MUST BE CULTIVATED AND NOURISHED CONTINUALLY

Hebrews 13:15 - **"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."**

In **13:1** our writer urged **brotherly love** to **continue**. This is the third time he has stressed the unpopular notion that **starting**

isn't the same as **completing** and **starting** doesn't guarantee **continuing**. Spiritual life isn't **self-sustaining**. You don't grow spiritually the way you grow physically. You can **put on weight** without thinking about it but you can't so **put on Christ**.

In this fifteenth verse our writer exposes the way our minds wander from **praise-filled gratitude**. Like an unanchored boat there are currents drawing us away from praise and thanksgiving. **Mistreatment** can cause bitterness. **Trials** can cause sorrow. **Worries** can cause fear.

On the other end of the spectrum - and probably more common - earthly treasures and cultural popularity can draw our hearts away from glorying in Christ to being seduced and distracted by false delights. It's never easy to live in this world having **"...no lasting city,"** seeking **"...the city that is to come"** (14).

And now we begin to form a proper framework for a Biblical understanding of **worship**. It has little to do with emotional release or a naturally expressive temperament. It is more about the **re-setting of the heart**. It is primarily commanded by God to **protect the heart from false delights**.

4) CHRISTIAN GOODNESS RUNS DEEPER THAN HUMANITARIANISM

To catch the full freight of our writer's thought let me string some sentences together as he wrote them - **Hebrews 13:15-16** - **"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. [16] Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."**

Now we can trace the theological framework for the moral instructions concerning **"doing good"** and **"sharing what we have"** (16).

Everything about my life must flow out of the atoning work of Jesus Christ for my sin - **"Through him then...."** (15). This includes my **worship** (15) and my **generosity** (16). The very best things I can do through my own instincts are spiritually barren. Everything about my life needs redeeming grace - including my good deeds and compassionate works. I need the blood of Jesus not only for my **worst** actions, but for my **best**. None of them stands apart from the atoning shed blood of Christ.

And the reason we need to rethink this is it answers one of the toughest questions critics of faith often ask. It explains why **morally good people** can be so completely **spiritually lost**. Morality outside of Christ can be helpful to other people but never be glorifying to God.

Here's how this plays out. **Gratitude to Jesus** (15) is the fuel for **kindness to others** (16). And now we can see exactly why our Lord framed the two greatest commandments in the sequence He did - **Matthew 22:36-39** - **"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" [37] And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."**

It's hardly ever stated that Jesus **answers** the question put to Him. There **is** a greatest commandment and Jesus **says** so. He states the second greatest because it must be kept second. It is the **fruit** of the first and has no eternal meaning apart from it.

5) THE HARDEST PART OF WATCHING OVER SOMEONE ELSE'S SOUL

Hebrews 13:17-19 - **"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. [18] Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. [19] I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner."**

This is the second time our writer turns his attention to the spiritual leaders of the people. He says they have one particular responsibility of **soul-watching** - **"...they are keeping watch over your souls...."** (17). He has already specified the **method of watching out for people's souls in 13:7** - **"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith."**

This verse helps explain our writer's thought in **verse 17** about **watching over the souls of others**. We can see this doesn't mean keeping people happy. It has to do with helping them care more about things they don't care enough about. Watching over souls through teaching the Word means helping them care more about things that **don't seem important yet**. Perhaps not even **convenient**. The Word is frequently going to come to many lives as a **bother**.

So this will be what faithful soul-watchers will do. They will replace false notions of success and power and security and happiness with the counter-weight of Scriptural truth.

And let me tell you something about that process. People don't always appreciate leaders meddling with their souls. People have rights. People have tastes. And usually they also have egos. They like leaders firing the Word of God at the sins of **others**. But they rarely like it when the Word slices into their own self interests. And they don't like the one who brings that Word either.

I've heard it a fair number of times as I've served here. **"Don't judge me!" "Who died and made you God?" "You're not perfect either, you know!"**

It would be easier not to mess with people's lives. It would be easier not to teach through the passages that our own courts and lawmakers find offensive. Just be quiet.

But then there are other words to consider - **Hebrews 13:17** - **"...for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account..."**

So here's where our text leaves faithful Word proclaimers. There are two choices. **First, you can choose to have people hate you. Or, second, you can face the judgment of God.**

There you have it. When you think it through it's no wonder these are his next words - **Hebrews 13:18** - **"Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things."**

Pray for pastors. They often live between two frightening choices. No pastor is any use to a church or the Lord unless he can keep a clear conscience before God's Word. No one likes to hear things that rebuke our ingrafted tastes and priorities. But it's our **souls** that need watching. Treasure the smile of Jesus over anything else and you'll have the kind of perspective that will keep you safe and eternally joyful.

And, believe it or not, we'll finish this entire letter next Sunday.