

Christian Sacrifice

Hebrews 13:15-16

Culture, tradition, and habit can be dangerous to the spiritual condition of human beings.

That is not to say that everything in every culture, tradition, or habit is inherently bad, but every culture, tradition, or habit is formed by human beings who, according to the Word of God, have been corrupted in their nature with a bent towards rebellion against the LORD.

Because that is true the patterns of life that are built into us by the environment that we grow up in can often engrain in us things that are contrary to the worship of God.

Now the degree to which that is true will depend on your family experience.

A child growing up in a Christian home with bible believing parents who model genuine discipleship day after day, will have a very different experience than someone growing up in a godless home, some of which may even call themselves Christian, or someone who grows up in the culture of a false religion.

Whether the degree is small or it is great when a person is confronted with the message of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone they are confronted with a choice.

The choice is to turn away from that which is false and turn towards that which is true.

That is a difficult choice and one that can only be arrived at by the grace of God.

It is a big deal for a person to realize that things they have been taught, things they have celebrated and enjoyed, things they have trusted in, and things that connect them to family and friends are wrong and need to be turned away from.

That was the case for the people who first received the book of Hebrews.

It is called Hebrews because the people who it was first written to were mostly Jewish.

Now, if you know your Bible, then you know that Christianity is not against Judaism.

Jesus, in His humanity, is Jewish. It was through God's choosing of Abraham and fulfilling His promise to make Abraham into a great nation that Jesus came into the world.

What did Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount?

He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17).

All the ceremony, ritual, and sacrifice of the Old Testament scriptures was pointing to what Jesus would accomplish on the cross.

It showed the desperate need people have to deal with the breaking of God's law.

Day after day sacrifices were made but they were never enough and so the people had to come back time and again to make offerings to the LORD.

Jesus' sacrifice was different, however, it 'fulfilled' the law. In other words Christ's death and resurrection were sufficient to make people fully right with God which meant that no further sacrifice had to be offered.

More than that, it made offering more sacrifices wrong because to offer any more would be to deny the value and effectiveness of the LORD's death.

It is saying to God, "The gift of your One and Only Son is not enough!"

Try and put yourself in the shoes of a Jewish person accepting the gospel.

Many of the traditions, the ceremonies, and the sacrifices that have been kept for your entire life are no longer to be celebrated.

That is a big deal. It is easy to see how some people could work their way into the church attempting to lure people back to offering bulls, goats, and sheep at the temple.

It is easy to see why some people, perhaps many people, would be left asking the question "What now?"

If we need to stop with the ceremony and sacrifice of animals, then what do we do now?

[That is what our text this morning **Hebrews 13:15-16** answers. What does God want us to bring before Him for proper worship? Now, you might be tempted to say, "I'm not Jewish, I've never sacrificed an animal to deal with my sin before God, so what does this text have to do with me?" Answer, there are all kinds of traditions and influences in all kinds of cultures and family experiences that are contrary to Christian Worship, that deny the value, worth, and sufficiency of Jesus. Because that is true every believer ought to have a clear understanding of what kind of sacrifices we are supposed to bring to God in worship. Our text gives us two categories of Christian sacrifice (by that I mean acts of worship) and the result of doing them. First, let's look at the two things that Christians are called to offer God. Number one...]

Point #1 – Christians are called to offer to God never ending and true praise. (Verse 15)

Disciples of Jesus are not to compartmentalize their worship, but rather their worship is to be part of their entire way of life.

In the verses leading up to verse 15, the writer has shown that going back to Old Testament ceremony and sacrifice doesn't do a person any good.

He makes it clear as he has several times in the letter that it is the blood of Jesus that makes a person "holy" that is set apart as belonging to God.

Because that is true he writes this in the first half of **verse 15a**.

The believer in Jesus Christ comes to God empty handed. We do not come with animal sacrifices seeking to satisfy the wrath of God, we do not come

with our own good works thinking they can outweigh our bad on the scales of justice (anyone who thinks that way is blind to how bad they truly are), we do not come with a bag of money, and any power or influence we may have in this life is meaningless before the throne of the ruler of the universe.

We come through Jesus period.

Now, we are to offer something to God it says here.

We are to offer a ‘sacrifice of praise.’”

We come to God empty handed based solely on the person and work of Jesus to declare the greatness of Who He is and what He has done.

Notice it says here we are to do this “continually” that translates two Greek words one meaning through and the other meaning everything.

The idea is that through every situation across all time those that come to God through Jesus are to offer a sacrifice of praise.

To that he adds this at the end of **verse 15b**.

The phrase ‘fruit of lips’ here means that this ongoing sacrifice of praise is what is naturally expected out of mouth of those confessing the name of Jesus.

That word ‘confess’ there is also critical to the point of this verse.

When I say the word “confession” what is the first thing that pops into your mind?

Confessing sin is the first thing that pops into my mind.

The bible tells us to do that. It says in James 5:16 “Therefore confess your sins to one another” or 1John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

What are we doing when we ‘confess’ sin? We are talking about them, but it is more than that isn’t it?

Confession is more than a verbal listing of sins, it is an acknowledgment that God’s ways are right and we are wrong for having violated them.

What is that? What are we doing there? We are saying with our mouth what is true about what we have done.

The Bible also uses the word confess in a positive sense.

Romans 10 and Philippians 2 both talk about ‘confessing’ Jesus as LORD.

That is saying with our mouth in an audible voice what is true about Jesus.

That is what is being said here. Now there is likely more to the phrase ‘confess his name’ than simple speaking the word Jesus.

Confessions in the earlier church were verbal expressions of what people believed about God.

That is almost certainly how we should understand this phrase.

People who ‘confess His name’ are people who verbally articulate things that are true about Christ.

Do you know Who Jesus is? Not a made up person you call Jesus but the real Jesus of the Bible?

Are you willing to say with your mouth that He is Lord, that He is the Son of God equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, that He is truly human, completely without sin, died on the cross to pay your penalty of disobedience, raised from the dead, living and reigning at the right hand of the Father, and will return again to judge the living and dead?

This is what it means to ‘confess his name’ and the fruit of that is a ‘sacrifice of praise’ continually offered to God.

You see, when you know in your heart and say with your mouth what is true about Jesus, then all of life becomes a reason for the praise of God.

[I’ve noticed over the years that when I work at a particular project, I begin to notice the same kind of work everywhere I go. I don’t generally look up at roofs, but when I re-shingled mine a few years ago I started looking at everyone else’s too. If I make a piece of furniture I start looking more carefully at coffee tables and book shelves. Whatever the task that is occupying my mind that is what I’m paying attention too.]

It is very similar in the Christian life.

When you know and speak about the marvels of Jesus regularly you begin to pay attention to the ways in which the glory of the gospel is touching your life.

Now someone might say, “I have things to do! I have to go to work or school and I have appointments to keep. I can’t be thinking about God all the time.”

I know some tasks take more focus and concentration than others, and I know that some people are not great at multitasking, but to approach any task as something separate from worship is to disobey what we are commanded here.

We can praise God for everything. We can trust God in everything.

Don’t think that you can divide your life into categories that include the LORD in a few and exclude Him in everything else.

[Jesus Christ is LORD of all, not of somethings but of everything. Let me ask you, do you enjoy speaking about the things of God or do you shy away from them. If someone was to ask you this morning about who Jesus is, what could you tell them? Is your faith shallow only effecting the fringes of your life, or is it pervasive in everything you do. As Christians we are called to offer never ending and true praise to God. Secondly....]

Point #2 – Christians are called to offer to God a life of righteous generosity. (Verse 16a)

To be sure a follower of Jesus must seek to avoid what is evil in the Lord's sight, but we must also strive to do things that please Him like sharing what we can with others.

To the sacrifice of praise command, this is added at the beginning of verse 16.

It is easy to forget things isn't it?

Sadly, I forget things all the time.

Can anyone else relate to that?

I have found that if there is something that I need to remember, I had better take some steps to make sure that happens.

I need to make a note, write it on a calendar, and put it into my phone to remind me.

That is the idea of this command.

Another way to translate this verse would be "do not neglect to do good."

Neglect is simply inaction. It is not doing what you are supposed to do.

It is easy to spot neglect in a number of circumstances.

Any gardeners in the room this morning? What happens if you neglect your garden?

If you neglect to change the oil in your car eventually it will stop running.

If you neglect to do laundry you will run out of clean clothes.

We could go on and on with examples, but it is fairly easy to see the pattern here.

When we neglect things there is a consequence to it.

So if we neglect to do good what will happen?

Evil will gain ground.

Because that is the case there is no such thing as neutrality in the war between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Darkness.

To do nothing, to neglect doing good is to participate at least to some degree in evil.

Now, in order to do good we must know what good is.

When the Bible tells us about good and evil, it is always talking about it from an objective perspective.

It is not something we decide for ourselves it is information we receive from God Himself.

God shows us right and wrong in nature and He has given human beings a conscience to discern between good and evil.

Unfortunately, humanity has a default condition of rebellion against God so people have twisted nature and have dulled their consciences.

As bad as it is, however, I am convinced there is a remnant of truth on the hearts of all people and that

is why they get so angry when their evil is confronted, because they know it is wrong and the only way to ease their conscience is to deaden it by shouting down any opposition to their evil desires.

God has also graciously given us more than nature and conscience He has given us His Son and His written word.

Knowing the Bible is the only way to know what good truly is.

That takes effort and so it cannot be neglected.

“Don’t forget to do good...AND [he goes on to say] to share with others.

The word ‘share’ here translates the Greek word “κοινωνία” which we most commonly translate as fellowship.

The most vivid picture of this word, in my mind, comes from Acts 2:42-47.

It is a description of the community life of the early church. It talks about believers learning the word of God together, breaking bread together, praying together, and sharing their possessions with each other.

This kind of sharing of life and material goods is a public declaration of the goodness of God in our lives.

Why do we have things to share? Because God has given them to us.

What are we saying when we are willing to share? We are saying that God has been so incredibly good to us that we know we have more than we need. We are also saying that we trust God with tomorrow. We have no need to hoard stuff as if our lives depended on things because they don’t, our lives depend on the LORD.

You see living a righteous life of generosity is also an act of worship an offering to God.

[This is what Christian sacrifice, at least in part, looks like. It looks like continual praise that is the result of confessing Christ and it looks like living a life of righteous generosity. That brings us to the result of doing these things. From the end of verse 16 we see that...]

Point #3 – God delights in a life of genuine Christian sacrifice. (Verse 16b)

When the grace that God shows us in Jesus Christ translates into a life of worship God is happy.

The word ‘for’ in the middle of verse 16 is the key word here.

What is the reason we should continually offer praise to God? What is the reason we should do good? What is the reason we should share what we have with others?

Why do all of this? **Verse 16b.**

That is a tremendous statement that is only possible for the Christian.

You see a non-Christian may do many things that from the outside looking in appear good.

They may give money to charity. They may help someone across the street. They may rescue someone from a burning building, help educate the less fortunate, provide medical care to those in need, and the list can go on.

Would you agree that all of those things are good? Of course they are, but at the same time the unbeliever is staining those good deeds with the evil of idolatry.

It is impossible to please God in any way while at the same time rejecting God.

That is why it says earlier in Hebrews 11:6 that “without faith it is impossible to please God.”

That changes when we make sacrifices/offerings through Jesus.

When we do our good works through Christ it means that we have confessed/acknowledged our rebellion against God, we have admitted our need of a saviour and have trusted in Christ alone for forgiveness.

So instead of our good works being stained with idolatry, they are made holy through faith and God is pleased!

Don't miss understand here. We are not made holy by our works. That happens through Jesus' blood. Our works are made holy by our faith in Christ and that is what is pleasing to God.

That is the motivation we need to be sustained in this life.

If what we do makes God happy then we are happy.

[We know this is true. Just think of the last time someone said to you “Good job!” Even if it was a complete stranger how does that make you feel? Makes you feel happy right? Now, what about when someone you really care about (Maybe your Mom, Dad, Child, Spouse, etc) what about when they say it! Does it make you more or less happy than when the stranger says it? More right?]

You know the Bible says God is to have the first place in our heart.

He is to command our highest affections, we are supposed to care about Him more than anything or anyone else.

I know we are imperfect on this side of heaven, but we at least know that God is supposed to have the highest place in our hearts.

If we know that and we want that, then what is going to be the result of knowing He is “pleased which our sacrifices/our acts of worship?”
It’s going to make us happy.

Christian sacrifice, truly understood, is no burden it is a joy.

It is a delight to offer to God a sacrifice of genuine and true praise, it is a delight to do good, and it is a delight to share God’s blessings to us with others because these are the things that our eternally glorious Father in heaven is pleased with.

May God be so kind to us that all of us here this morning would find our joy in Christian sacrifice.