

Unit III: Christians and Sacrifice

All We Need Is Love (and Sacrifices and Praise)

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 146
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 13:1-21
PRINT PASSAGE: Hebrews 13:9-21

KEY VERSE

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. (Hebrews 13:15, KJV)

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Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. (Hebrews 13:15, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Compare the ways that the author of Hebrews instructs believers to show love via Jesus' model of love.
- Value the love that Jesus showed to God and for us by enduring such sacrifices.
- Renew your commitment to love others as a sacrifice that pleases God.

*Key Terms

Abiding (verse 14)—Greek: *menó* (men'-o): staying; remaining; “continuing” (KJV); “enduring” (NIV).

Authority (verse 17)—Greek: *exousia* (ex-oo-see'-ah): power to act; weight; control; jurisdiction; “right” (verse 10, KJV).

Praise (verse 15)—Greek: *ainesis* (ah'-ee-nes-is): commendation; presented to God for some benefit received.

Profit(ed) (verse 9)—Greek: *ópheleó* (o-fel-eh'-o): assist(ed); do/did good; “benefit” (NIV).



The Biblical Context

The book of Hebrews was written to encourage Jewish Christians to remain faithful to Christ and Christianity despite the extreme persecution they suffered because of their break from Judaism. Jewish believers who confessed Christ as Lord and Messiah were being persecuted by those who were of the same heritage but not the same belief. Thus, some of them wanted to recant their faith in Jesus or find a way to be Christians without enduring the subsequent suffering for their decision. The unnamed author makes his appeal by presenting Christ as superior to Old Testament Judaism by contrasting Him to angels, Moses, the Aaronic priesthood, and the Mosaic Law. The book was likely written before the Temple in Jerusalem's destruction, sometime around AD 65. Given that this sermon-like discourse was written to Jewish Christians, it is hard to think that the author would not have mentioned its destruction—as it would have given good weight to his argument of Christ's superiority. In addition to urging his audience to persevere in Christ, the author issues five solemn warnings and encourages heeding them: neglecting salvation, unbelief, spiritual immaturity, failing to endure, and refusing God. A unique feature of Hebrews is the author's inclusion of God's faith heroes as examples of believers who persevered despite difficulties and adverse circumstances (see Hebrews 11). Structurally, the book has three primary sections. The first chapters, 1–10, portray Christ as superior to the old covenant and its ritualistic elements. The second section, chapters 11–12, encourages believers to persevere in their faith. The third, chapter 13, gives final instructions for Christian living, a prayer request, and a benediction.

Reproach (verse 13)—Greek: *oneidismos* (on-i-dis-mos'): a reviling; an insult; "disgrace" (NIV).
Sanctify (verse 12)—Greek: *hagiazó* (hag-ee-ad'-zo): to make holy, consecrate; hallow; purify; set apart or treat as holy; "make . . . holy" (NIV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

Love is the theme of countless songs, movies, stage plays, and novels. However, the word *love* can mean different things depending on the context. For example, saying "I love fried chicken" vastly differs from saying "I love my child." The love for fried chicken leads to its consumption, while the love for children results in cherishing and caring for them. Humanity uses various meanings of love to express emotions in relationships and activities. The Greeks used four words for love: romantic love (*eros*), friendship love (*philia*), familial love (*storge*), and unconditional love (*agape*). Love is a central theme in the Bible—Christians are commanded to love God and one another. However, God's command to love is on a higher plane than humanity's understanding. When His Word commands us to love, we are instructed to demonstrate selfless, sacrificial care and concern for others, modeled after God's love for us—agape love. This love intentionally seeks the best for others, regardless of their behavior or responses.

Agape love is the love that God demonstrated toward humanity by sacrificing His Son to redeem us (see John 3:16). Therefore, loving as God commands involves demonstrating selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional love in all aspects of life, even when undergoing external persecution. How can this be done? The author of Hebrews provides the answer in the closing chapter of

his book—by looking to Jesus' example of love. Despite the suffering He endured, He demonstrated profound love, and we are called to model this example.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Love Obeys (*Hebrews 13:9-17*)

KJV

9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

10 We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

11 For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

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.

NIV

9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so.

10 We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp.

12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

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

17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

The final chapter of Hebrews offers guidance for Christian living. Hebrews 13 provides practical instructions for applying Christian principles in daily life, summarizing major themes previously discussed. One key theme is love, and the chapter begins with a call for the audience to continue loving each other as brothers (see verse 1). From a biblical perspective, love is fundamental to obeying God and guiding Christian conduct, as outlined in these passages. The chapter warns against being misled by strange teachings emphasizing empty rituals over God's grace (**verse 9**). The author mentions ceremonial foods as an example of these rituals, noting their ineffectiveness in making one more acceptable to God. Some recipients of this letter seemed to have embraced these "strange teachings," believing that abstaining from certain foods would enhance their acceptability to God.

Drawing on his strategy of comparing the old covenant to Christ, the writer argues that one's observing rituals cannot make him or her pleasing to God. He states that those who pursue salvation through the old covenant's "altar" cut themselves off from the benefits of the "new" covenant's altar, which is by faith in Christ and not works of the Law (**verse 10**). The solution is to accept, appreciate, identify with, and embrace Christ's suffering and death outside Jerusalem's gates to sanctify believers through His blood, symbolized by the animal sacrifice for the nation's sins on the Day of Atonement (**verses 11-13**). In **verse 14**, readers are challenged to focus on what is eternal rather than temporary. Jerusalem and its religious system, on which many relied, were temporary and would be destroyed. Therefore, Christians were urged to keep their eyes on the heavenly city to come. Since the requirement to bring acceptable animal sacrifices to God to atone for sin was no longer necessary, the writer encouraged his audience to offer the sacrifice of Christ-focused praise to God, do good, and give sacrificially instead (**verses 15-16**).

Finally, **verse 17** reminds the readers to make their spiritual leaders' job easier and not harder by respecting their leadership through obedience, as this is profitable for the followers. Rejecting, rebelling, and refusing to accept God-ordained leadership ultimately harms the followers themselves. To indeed follow these instructions for Christian conduct, the necessity of demonstrating love cannot be overstated. Love is the foundation for all these actions, whether avoiding strange teachings, focusing on the eternal, or offering praise and doing good. By loving one another deeply and genuinely, believers can embody the principles laid out in Hebrews 13 and live lives that honor God.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can the church avoid being drawn away by strange teachings but demonstrate love?

Love Cares (*Hebrews 13:18-21*)

KJV

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.
20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,
21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

NIV

18 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way.
19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.
20 Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,
21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The writer reveals his sincere concern and love for his readers in these verses. He begins by requesting prayer to ensure that he continues conducting himself honorably and with a clear conscience (**verse 18**). This request for prayer reveals the writers' understanding that those claiming to teach God's Word are held to a higher standard and need the prayers and cooperation of those they lead, characterized by a spirit of brotherly love and submission. This request for prayer underscores the responsibility of all believers who are blessed with the leadership of godly leaders who demonstrate that they are living for Christ and love his people genuinely. In **verse 19**, the writer identifies a specific prayer request—that he will be restored to his readers soon. The urgency expressed in this request attests to his sincere wish to see them again and that he needed God's help to accomplish it. The context suggests that an unrevealed obstacle was a barrier to his seeing them presently. Still, he believed that God would respond to their sincere prayers for him.

The writer's prayer for his readers in **verses 20-21** affirms his genuine love for them. He begins his prayer by highlighting God's and Christ's attributes and themes previously explained in his letter. He identifies God as the source of peace, the God of resurrection and life, and Jesus Christ as the great shepherd of the sheep who established an eternal covenant between God and humankind through His shed blood. Thus, the message to his readers was to trust in God's peace, the assurance of His resurrection power, and the surety of the new covenant

that Christ affirmed by His death on the Cross instead of returning to Judaism's ineffective rituals and regulations. He then prayed that God would equip them to do His will and that they live in a way that pleased Him through their faith in Jesus Christ. Likewise, our love for God and others should motivate us to pray that He "makes us ready" and to provide the guidance needed to live out His will as the collective faith community to glorify Christ in all areas of our lives.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What would be the spiritual impact on the church if believers expressed their love for their leaders and one another by praying for them consistently and specifically?

A Closing Thought

The author of Hebrews concludes his writing by urging his readers to allow brotherly love to continue (see Hebrews 13:1); he instructed them on their moral and religious conduct before requesting prayer and praying for them. Hence, the underlying theme in this closing passage is Christian love, without which it is impossible to obey his instructions. God's standards counter our innate selfishness and propensity to rebel against Him. Therefore, obeying them requires cultivating a love for Him and others. Acknowledging Christ as the perfect sacrifice, pledging allegiance to Him, identifying with and sharing the disgrace of the Cross, depending on God's grace as the source of spiritual maturity, offering perpetual praise, doing good works, obeying and praying for spiritual leadership and each other—all necessitate creating and maintaining an intimate relationship with God founded on a deep and abiding love for Him.

Your Life

The author of Hebrews highlights Jesus' sacrificial death outside Jerusalem's gates to sanctify those who believe in Him as a demonstration of love for us to model. So, this week and in the future, consider and commit to making a sacrifice for someone in need physically or spiritually as proof of your love for Christ and your desire to emulate His love for His glory and honor.

Your World!

Hebrews' author urged his readers to offer the sacrifice of praise to God perpetually. Offering God praise is considered a sacrifice because it involves self-giving and the spiritual discipline of putting aside personal concerns and distractions to express love for Him authentically. Therefore, assess how much time you spend focused on activities and thoughts that revolve around you instead of prioritizing praising God above them. Then, seek the Holy Spirit's help to renew and align your heart and mind with His will so that "praise becomes what you do" as your continual response of gratitude for His love for you.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, Your Son's willing sacrifice for us showed us the depths of Your love for us and gave us a pattern to follow in our relationship with others. Therefore, we renew our commitment to love others unconditionally as a sacrifice pleasing to You for Your glory, honor, and praise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson explores our privileges and responsibilities as God's spiritual house and royal priesthood built on Christ as our foundation and cornerstone. Read 1 Peter 2:1-12.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, August 25	"A Sure Foundation"	(Isaiah 28:14-22)
TUESDAY, August 26	"Let Us Enter the Lord's House"	(Psalm 122)
WEDNESDAY, August 27	"Offer a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving"	(Psalm 50:1-15)
THURSDAY, August 28	"One in Christ Jesus"	(Galatians 3:23-29)
FRIDAY, August 29	"One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism"	(Ephesians 4:4-16)
SATURDAY, August 30	"Everlasting Joy of the Ransomed"	(Isaiah 51:9-16)
SUNDAY, August 31	"Rejected by Mortals, Chosen by God"	(1 Peter 2:1-12)

Notes