

Hebrews

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Hebrews 13:15-19



Vss. 15-16

- The preacher's sermon ends with vs. 14. From vs. 15 forward he is giving strong advice to the church. These are not commands so much as they are firm reminders.
- For the Jews, the command, the opportunity, to make sacrifices in order to atone for their sins was supremely important. Temple sacrifice lay at the very heart of their faith. But what is a Jew to do now that the Romans have destroyed the Temple (70 AD)? Further, what the Christian faith requires is a rethinking of everything they thought they knew about God and worship. So here the preacher to the Christian Hebrews does not speak of a sacrifice of animals, but an offering, a sacrifice of praise. Indeed, when one made a Temple sacrifice, he was seeking to get something out of it. Here we see an unconditional offering straight from the heart, getting nothing in return but the joy of knowing you have expressed your love for the Father.
- Another act of worship is our service to others. Indeed, Ephesians 2:10 helps us to understand that such service is our basic job description. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them". After the Temple was destroyed even the rabbis began to teach that the study of theology, prayer, penitence, the study of the law, and acts of service to the poor were sacrifices equivalent to the old Temple rituals. And where does the sacrifice come from? Perhaps our money, but certainly our time and energy. When we serve others, we are literally laying down our life for them. And did not Jesus say in Matthew 25 that when we do such service for even the least of these, that we are really doing it to Him?

Vs. 17

- The preacher here returns to the question of the church's leaders and the church's relationship to them. If we are to say that God has called them to lead, then we are to submit ourselves to their leadership. It is the leaders God is holding accountable for

the church, just as the landowner holds the shepherds accountable for the sheep. The leader's job is not to merely hold the church together or only to grow the church. The command from Jesus is that we are to make disciples and to that end a church's leaders will be held accountable. The Apostle John is a good example of the kind of leader the preacher is referring to. In 3 John 4, John writes, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth". John's churches withstood the persecutions because the leaders at Ephesus and elsewhere were making disciples, not merely adding members. Thus, when the people see that the singular priority of their leaders is their benefit, rather than seeking power, then the members will respond with joy and never grief.

Vss. 18-19

- We do not know why the preacher, the pastor, of this congregation is away from them. It may be that he has been arrested since he hopes to "be **restored** to you the sooner".
- Whatever the reason, he needs them to pray for him and his companions. He does not pray for healing or release, or anything that directly addresses his being away from the church, he only asks that the church pray so they will continue to conduct themselves honorable in all things (Philippians 1:19-20). This is how we should pray for all of our leaders. Stanley Baldwin was Prime Minister of England for a number of years during the Great Depression. When he was elected his friends and supporters gathered around him to congratulate him, but he quieted them down by saying "It is not your congratulations I need. It is your prayers". If our leaders are absent, ill, or struggling for whatever reason, this is when we should pray the hardest. Only prayer will bring the best result.