

**“Sacrifice”**  
**Hebrews 13:10-16**

**November 8, 2015**

**SI:** This fall we’re looking in detail at one chapter of Bible—Hebrews 13

It’s a series of short instructions

about how to cultivate brotherly love in our church.

Verse one is the theme verse of the chapter: Let philadelphia continue.

But we’re not left up to ourselves to figure out how to do it—  
we’re told through a series of instructions.

This morning I’m combining two of these instructions

because they both tell us to offer sacrifices to God—

one tells us to give him sacrifices of praise and the other to give him sacrifices  
in the form of generosity and good deeds to other people.

But before telling us to offer sacrifices to God,

the author of Hebrews reminds us of the sacrifice God made for us  
through the death of Jesus Christ.

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. 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. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

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

**INTRO:** One time we were driving somewhere and we came upon a couple  
whose car had broken down right on an interstate ramp.

It was very busy location, lots of traffic, and there was something about their  
body language that seemed to say they had no idea what to do.

So as we pulled next to them in the traffic,

we rolled down the window and asked them if they needed anything.

They said: Yes! Will you please take us to this place, it wasn’t far away.

So they hopped in and we took them there.  
But then things got complicated and they asked us to wait for them  
while they tried to get in touch with someone.  
But that didn't work so asked if we could drive them somewhere else.

It was on a Saturday and I had to preach the next day.  
I'm very jealous of my time on Saturdays.

I don't like doing things on Saturday if I don't have control of the time frame.  
Because I want to be able to study and prepare.  
So the longer this dragged out, the more antsy and agitated I became.  
This was supposed to be a very quick, painless good deed, and then we would be  
back on the road in a few minutes, but it was turning into a big rigmarole.  
Finally, we got them where they needed to go and said our goodbyes.  
So then I was able to start griping about how long that had taken  
and what a pain in the neck it had turned out to be.  
And my wife, the theologian, said—  
If it hadn't cost you anything, it wouldn't have been a sacrifice.

That was over 20 years ago (we were living in Florida).  
But I've never forgotten Allison's words because a light bulb went off.  
I know it sounds stupid, but until that moment,  
I had never really grasped that a sacrifice is costly.  
And costly things require expenditure and oftentimes that's painful.

It was actually a liberating thought to me.  
Because for some reason I had this notion  
that the sacrifices of the Christian life should be painless.  
That I should not even notice that it was costing me anything.  
That I should have said: This is no sacrifice, this is fun.  
Having a blast driving strangers all over Ft. Lauderdale on a Saturday afternoon!  
No. If it doesn't cost you anything, then it's not a sacrifice.

For my devotions I've been reading an old book by a German Lutheran pastor  
by the name of Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacker.  
His book of 53 chapters about Christ's suffering, his passion.  
It starts in the Upper Room and ends with his burial.  
And it goes step by step, as only a German could, meticulously examining  
every detail about how the Lord offered himself up as a sacrifice for our salvation.

In one of the chapters, Krummacker delves into that comment Christ made

in the Garden of Gethsemane when he saw the crowd coming to arrest him, led by Judas.

Jesus said to his sleepy disciples: “Rise, let us be going . . .”

Krummacher points out that Christ’s words are full of determination and courage. That’s amazing because just a short time before, Jesus was in such mental and spiritual agony over what he was facing that he prayed:

“Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me.”

But when he was reminded that this was God’s will for him, and that he had to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin, as Krummacher puts it: He steeled himself in body and soul and willingly emptied the cup.

Our Lord Jesus understood that sacrifice is costly, but it pleases God—so he did it.

Because above anything else, he wanted to please his Father in heaven. And through his costly sacrifice, we get grace and eternal life.

So Christ is both gives us an example and empowers us to please God with the sacrificial offerings he desires from us.

Let’s examine this theme in more detail and try to work it out practically.

I’ve got three points. They are a little long.

So don’t worry if you don’t get them right now, I’ll repeat them as we go.

1. The sacrifices we offer to God can only be given through Christ.
2. The sacrifices that please God are praise and good deeds.
3. These sacrifices make our church a place of brotherly love.

### **MP#1 The sacrifices we offer to God must be given through Christ**

Verses 10 through 14 refer to the animal sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

That was the most holy day of the year in Israelite worship.

The high point when a bull that was killed for the sins of Israel and then the carcass was taken out side the camp and completely burned.

There are dual symbols in that action.

It was a powerful symbol of the shame of sin. Exclusion. Rejection.

It was also a symbol of the complete removal of sin.

This was all a foreshadowing of how the Messiah would also bear our sin.

The remarkable fulfillment of this symbol was when Jesus himself was taken outside the city for crucifixion. He was rejected so we would be accepted.

But it's verse 15 that I really want to focus on:

“Through him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.”

Through Jesus, through his sacrifice, we offer sacrifices to God.

What does it mean that we offer sacrifices through Christ?

I want to answer that question and illustrate it with a story I've told before.

There's a famous statement about Charles Spurgeon that says he

occupied the same pulpit for 40 years “without ever repeating himself.”

Well, I'm no Charles Spurgeon, so I'm going to repeat myself, because it's a good story to help understand what it means to offer sacrifices to God through Christ.

Back in October of 2011 I was in India teaching a seminar on Christian worship to a group of pastors. These pastors were from animist and Hindu backgrounds.

We were studying the sacrificial system of Old Testament in Leviticus.

And I pointed out that in all of the Old Testament animal sacrifices, the same order was followed.

The worshipper would bring an animal and put his hands on the animal.

Then, after he did that, the priest would kill the animal and proceed with the rest of the ceremony. That was always the order.

First, the worshipper put hands on the animal, then it was slaughtered by the priest.

That the order was crucial because it signified substitution.

Laying on hands signified transfer of guilt from the worshipper to the animal.

And then after that transfer, it was killed in his place as his substitute.

That order of sacrifice pointed forward to Christ's substitution on the cross.

Our guilt was transferred to the Lamb of God, then he was killed in our place.

So the Old Testament sacrifices were all in response to God's grace.

They were pointing forward to his provision of forgiveness through a substitute.

Well when I said all that, and after my translator had translated it into Hindi, the room erupted into very animated conversation.

The men started talking very loudly and making gestures,

it looked like several of them were acting out something.

Others were nodding in agreement. Obviously something had struck a chord.

So I asked the translator what all this was about.

He said in their villages the Hindus often have animal sacrifices.

But they are always performed in the opposite order from Leviticus.

The animal is killed first, and then the worshipper comes and puts his hands on it.

It's a way of saying to the gods, this animal I've just killed is my gift to you.

Look what I've done for you. Now you have to do something for me.

I've made this sacrifice for you, now you can't be angry with me.

They said, Don't you see, it's the exact opposite of the Gospel.

The Gospel tells us because Jesus is our substitute, God has already blessed us.

We're already accepted through his sacrifice.

So we give our offerings to him out of gratitude, not to appease him.

They nailed it.

Hands were laid on Christ, our guilty hands—and a transfer took place.

Not just a symbolic transfer—like in animal sacrifices of Leviticus—  
but the real thing to which they had pointed.

Christ bore your guilt and shame in his body on the cross.

He was taken outside the city, rejected, exiled.

So that means you can come to God without fear and with a heart full of gratitude,  
and offer to God the sacrifices that please him through Christ.

That means your offerings and sacrifices don't make God love you more,  
they don't manipulate him into blessing you,

they don't appease his anger and keep him from punishing you.

Because he already loves you, he has already accepted you,

He's already committed to blessing you,

and has a wonderful home and destiny planned for you.

Then why do you sacrifice,

if you already have everything you need through Christ?

Gratitude, gratitude for God's grace, and a desire to please him.

So that leads us to the next logical question:

What kinds of sacrifices does God want from us? What pleases him?

## **MP#2 The sacrifices that please God are praise and good deeds.**

First, praise.

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 few things jump out at me.

Continually. This is not simply a command to praise God in church on Sunday.

This sacrifice of praise is not an occasional activity, it is a continual rhythm of life.

This is an aspect of daily life that touches on all callings and relationships.

Another thing that jumps out is “the fruit of lips.”

It's more than just being grateful, or being thankful in your heart to God.

Of course your heart is crucial, and God sees your heart.

But if it's really and truly in there, then it will be verbally expressed.

And that's what pleases God. He likes to hear it.

It's like the woman saying to her man: Tell me you love me.

Come on, baby, you know I love you. I said it when we got married.

I know, but I want to hear it from your lips. Tell me. You better tell her!

Not it's not that God is needy, that he has to hear our words of praise for his self-image or in order to be happy.

But it pleases him because it demonstrates the effect that his love has had on your heart. From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, said Jesus.

And God is pleased to see what is in there by his grace expressed.

Another things that jumps out is that this is called a sacrifice of praise.

When we give thanks to God out loud. When we say: God is so good!

It's a sacrifice. But how? Sacrifices are costly. That's the nature of them.

They aren't free, they cost you things. So what does it cost you to praise God?

One way praise costs you is that you have to give up complaining and grumbling.

Behind all complaining and grumbling is irritation at the Lord for giving you the life he's given you, or putting you in situation big or small.

Not to mention what it does to other people.

But giving up complaining and replacing with praise and thanksgiving is a sacrifice.

Because negative talk is a coping mechanism. Helps you deal with disappointment.

Grumbling gives you relief and catharsis.

This is harder for some Christians than others, giving up complaining.

Vocal expressions of praise come easier for some Christians than others.

Remember fresh and salt water can't come from same spring. God wants praise.

A quick negative illustration. Lori Lay, a member of our church who was a waitress at Cracker Barrel for many years, once told me that the hardest crowd to wait for is the Sunday afternoon church crowd.

She said they consistently impatient, complaining, and demanding—and the worst tippers. Not all, but enough to notice.

If that's your way of coping with the irritating things of life, will cost to give up and to replace with continual praise from your lips.

So what if the Cracker Barrel kitchen is taking too long. So what if they're out of the lunch special—you're not going to hell! God is good. Praise him.

And Christ has earned heaven for you, so leave that waitress a good tip.

That's the second sacrifice that pleases God.

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. That's about as blunt and straightforward as you can get.

There isn't really much more to say. You just have to work it out. But a couple thoughts.

"Do not neglect . . ." implies that this is something we tend to neglect. Like any positive command in Scripture, you have to be deliberate.

You have to be thoughtful. You have to look at people and notice them. You have to know enough about their lives to see needs they have and to recognize how sharing with them would help. Then you have to do it. You have to execute. Good intentions are meaningless.

Just like the sacrifice of praise, this is easier for some Christians than for others.

You look at some believers, their selflessness and continual giving amazes you. There are people like that in this church. I'm astounded and humbled. This is a time when you probably do need to compare yourself to other people. Imitate the lives of believers who do this well.

One more thought. The word "sharing" might make you think this is primarily a matter of those financially rich sharing with those financially poor.

That's certainly one important application. But the word is *koinonia*.

You probably recognize. It's the word "fellowship." Fellowship of body. That's a clue that this sharing is broader than money and financial resources.

Time with a person. Thoughtful words—of appreciation, of encouragement.

There are lots costly things we can give one another in the body of Christ.

As I said, take it to heart and work it out. Someone on your mind today.

That brings us to the last point.

Throughout this sermon series we've tried to be true to the theme of the chapter.

As I reminded you at the beginning, the theme is brotherly love.

So let's consider how . . .

**MP#3 These sacrifices make our church a place of brotherly love**

Some of the commands in Hebrews 13 are harder to apply in this way.

Like the one a few weeks ago about honoring dead church leaders.

How does that make our church a more loving place?

That was a hard one to figure out. This one's not hard.

If we are a congregation filled with people continually offering up a sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name, then it cannot help but cause us to love each other more.

Because these words of praise are a continual reminder that we serve the same God, and that this person I'm talking to has the same hopes and loves and destiny that I do, and I can learn from this person, and my life can be enriched by knowing him or knowing her.

It's like these words of praise connect us with the spiritual life of the person who utters them and lets us enjoy some of the goodness they've experienced.

I could give a million examples of this. Just last night at Abby Bright's wedding reception I overheard two conversations between pairs of Christ Cov members. And in their own words I heard them praise God for something.

One case his generosity and in another his wisdom for arranging complicated.

Those words of praise blessed me and made me love those people more.

I can't mention them by name, those were private conversations.

But I will give you one public example.

A number of years ago

Jim Burke's sister invited us to her house to celebrate Karen's birthday.

There was a table in her garage patio with all the birthday goodies she had prepared, with the birthday cake in the middle.

She said: Let's pray. I can't remember her exact words but she said something like this—Lord, you've given us all these sweet things to eat, they're going to be so good, we can't wait to eat them. They're sweet because you are a sweet God.

There was a childlike delight in her prayer, a delight in God and in his blessings.

It moved me. I looked up at the Amen and thought—

I've never prayed like that in my life.

I've never told God he's sweet to me like a birthday cake.

It filled me with a regard and appreciation for this humble Christian woman who let me have a peek into her spirit and her personal walk with her God.

She's with the Lord now, enjoying all the sweet things he has prepared for her.

There is no doubt in my mind that brotherly love increases in a church body where God is continually praised.

But I think that whether it is the sacrifice of praise or the sacrifice of good works and generous giving, there is one crucial element we can't forget.

These things have to be done to please God.

We're told that with such sacrifices God is pleased. That has to be our motive.

If we have other motives, these sacrifices don't promote brotherly love.



They can actually be detrimental to brotherly love.

Like what? What other motives might you have?

To impress people.

God did this, God did that. Praise God.

It could be artificial language you use to burnish your image as a spiritual person.

I don't think there is much of that going on in our church.

It's always a possibility, but I think the Lord has made our church a place of sober, honest conversation. It's not uncommon to hear members of our body even express their disappointment with God and perplexity at his ways.

That's good, because, among other things, it cuts down on fake spiritual talk.

But there is another bad motive that I think we do need to be aware of—

that motive is guilt. It especially applies to this matter of sacrifices of good works and generous giving.

If your motive is not to please God, but guilt because you have and this other person doesn't, then it's not for God doing it, it's to make yourself feel better.

It will not make you love this other person, it will make you resentful.

And it can trap you in a guilt-trip loop, where you never feel like you can say, that's enough, or no. And sometimes good reasons to say, enough, and no.

Working out the details can be difficult.

Questions your deacons struggle with all the time.

But here's a question you can ask yourself:

Am I doing this to please God or to assuage my guilt?

Maybe you still need to do it, just have to ask Spirit to change motive.

## **CONC:**

Take my life and let it be, consecrated, Lord, to thee

Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold;

Take my heart, it is thine own, It shall be thy royal throne.

It shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love, my God I pour, at thy feet its treasure-store.

Take my self, and I will be, ever, only all for thee.

Ever, only all for thee.