

SESSION TWENTY-SEVEN

SACRIFICES OF THE NEW COVENANT WORSHIPER*Heb 13:1-17***I. INTRODUCTION**

The final major movement of the book consists of Hebrews 11:1–13:17. This major unit discusses the means and responsibilities of New Covenant life! This is developed in four sections:

1. Examples of believers who responded to God in faith (11:1-40)
2. An exhortation to endure and accept God's discipline (12:1-13)
3. A final warning to follow Christ and the New Covenant (12:14-29)
4. Practical instruction for the New Covenant lifestyle (13:1-17)

These four sections are a fitting follow-up to the close of chapter 10 where the readers were exhorted: "you have need of **endurance**, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised" (10:36). The author explained in the subsequent verses that such endurance requires *faith*.

Beginning with Heb 11:1, the book takes on a much more practical tone (in comparison with the heavily doctrinal chapters of 1–10). He begins by giving ample illustration of other believers who responded to God in faith (and they too were motivated by reward beyond that achievable in this world! — note 11:6, 10, 13-16, 26, 39-40). Following the examples of faith, the author moves on in ch 12 to discuss our calling to endurance, for according to 10:36 this was the primary need of his audience. Endurance, however, must be understood in connection with divine discipline. Endurance implies obstacles to be faced, but God uses such things to *train us* and brings about maturity and holiness in our lives (when we submit and respond properly).

So, a decision must be made, and in 12:14-29 the author gives one final warning about the choice to pursue the New Covenant and remain faithful to Jesus Christ. Though the decision to respond positively will entail a difficult endurance with submission to God's *discipline-training*, the alternative of refusal carries with it the possibility of facing God's displeasure and judgment (note 12:25 - "much less shall we escape"; cf. 12:29).

Beginning with Heb 13:1, the author makes a series of brief exhortations of practical matters that the readers should follow. Having warned the readers at the close of ch 12 about turning away from the New Covenant, the author now makes the assumption that his readers will want to respond positively. Hence, the question arises: what practical steps should we take?

II. RELATIONSHIP OF CH 13 TO THE PRECEDING

Heb 13 may seem at first reading a random list of moral virtues with little or no connection to the rest of the book, but such is not the case. The whole drift of ch 11–12 has been on a practical note with elaboration about faith and enduring through discipline. In ch 13, the author spells out some very specific areas where a positive response to the New Covenant needs to take action . . . where "the rubber meets the road." The connection with the preceding material, however, may have a more specific relationship in regard to the theme of "priestly ministry" and worship. Ellingworth, quoting Vanhoye, calls attention to this in his commentary:

"Vanhoye 1977a also points out that the break with chap. 12 is not complete: 'the life of brotherly love constitutes an essential aspect of the worship which Christians must render to God; without brotherly love, there is no authentic worship.'"¹

The Theme of Priestly Ministry

Going back to Heb 3:6, the author had cautioned his readers, "Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." By house, the author is thinking of the worshiping community of believers and the active participation in it. In contrast to the literal physical tabernacle for those under the Old Covenant, believers in Jesus Christ become part of a new spiritual temple and have the responsibility to function as *believer-priests*. In regard to this house, we are assured that with Jesus "we have a great priest over the house of God" (10:21). But only as we embrace the New Covenant and faithfully carry out our priestly duties can we be said to be of "His house." Priestly service is expected of us, just as it was of the Levitical priests of the Old Covenant. Yet our service should be even more profound than theirs: "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve (λατρεύειν) the living God?" (9:14). The use of the verb λατρεύω is significant because of its connotations of worship and spiritual service. In fact, in just a few verses prior in Heb 9:9, the author had used the word λατρεύοντα (translated "worshipper") to describe those under the Old Covenant who worshiped God through the animal sacrificial system. Hence by service, the author is thinking primarily in terms of priestly service which stems from our calling and responsibility as believer-priests of Christ's *house*.

Not surprisingly, in the conclusion to his final warning in Heb 12:28, the author makes use of this term again: "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service (λατρεύωμεν) with reverence and awe." The question might be asked, "What would such an 'acceptable service' look like?" Apparently, Hebrews 13 gives at least a partial answer to this question.

There is a strong *priestly* overtone to Heb 13:1-17, in which the author plays upon this theme of the New Covenant priesthood. This comes out particularly in Heb 13:10 where the verb λατρεύω reappears: "We have an altar, from which those who serve (λατρεύοντες) the tabernacle have no right to eat." The author is wishing to emphasize that though we are no longer part of the Old Covenant priestly service, we are nevertheless called to a new and better priestly service. Under the

¹Vanhoye, 138; cited in Ellingworth, 693.

New Covenant, we do not have a restricted priesthood as did the Old Covenant in which only those from the tribe of Levi could be priests. Under the New Covenant, every believer is appointed a priest and is called to priestly service (cf. Rev 1:6). In fact, we are even to offer up sacrifices . . . not animal sacrifices, of course . . . but the kind of sacrifices that truly please God. Hence, the author goes on to say in Heb 13:15-16,

"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

So, since the New Covenant also has priests (all of us in Christ!), there is also a counterpart to the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant . . . spiritual sacrifices that should be offered up. These *new sacrifices* are the doing of the things that please God . . . practical acts of love and goodness that reflect His character. Even during the time of the Old Covenant, God had dropped hints that He delighted in acts of obedience more than animal sacrifices:

"And Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams'" (1 Sam 15:22; cf. Ps 51:16-17; Mic 6:6-8).

With these connections in mind, Hebrews 13 seems to suggest the kind of "sacrifices" that the New Covenant priests should be offering to God. However, several of the exhortations were particularly relevant for those who may have faced persecution for their faith in the past (recall 10:32-34), and who may have been struggling with continuance in the New Covenant community precisely because of hostilities that they had encountered. Hence, the reference to the prisoners (vs 2), having no fear of man (vs 6), Jesus' suffering (vs 12), and "bearing His reproach" (vs 13) were appropriate for those who might be discouraged and tempted to withdraw because of opposition they faced. The type of *communal spirit* and brotherly love to which they are commended in this chapter would certainly strengthen them for the challenges they would face as a believing community.

III. THE STRUCTURE OF HEBREWS 13

In general, Heb 13:18-25 seems as an epilogue to the book as a whole, so that 13:1-17 forms the conclusion to the last major unit of the book that began in Heb 11:1. Regarding Heb 13:1-17, there seems to be some break after vs 6. Heb 13:1-6 seems to be more individual oriented (stressing personal morality), whereas vv 7-17 focus more on the community and especially the religious aspects.

A. New Covenant Lifestyle: True Sacrifices (13:1-17)

1. Personal Morality (13:1-6)
 - a. Regard for others (1-3)
 - b. Sexual Purity (4)
 - c. Money and Possessions (5-6)
2. Community Religious Life (13:7-17)

- B. Epilogue to the Book (13:18-25)
 - 1. Request for prayer (18-19)
 - 2. Benediction (20-21)
 - 3. Epistolary Closing (22-25)

IV. PERSONAL MORALITY (13:1-6)

A. Regard for Others (13:1-3)

The Book of Hebrews has several notes of brotherly concern to it. First of all, we have been made "brethren" with Jesus Christ (ch 2), and hence brothers to one another. Heb 3:12-13 calls us to look after one another's spiritual condition and to be a help to one another:

"Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But **encourage one another** day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Such concerns are echoed again in Heb 10:24-25:

"and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

Further concerns surfaced in Heb 12:12-13,15 in regard to encouraging one another in the submission to discipline. Hence, it is not surprising that the author would point out deeds that would be in keeping with these "brotherly concerns."

1. "Let love of the brethren continue" (13:1)
This is a very general exhortation, but an appropriate introduction from which other matters will spring. Notice that the author did not say, "Let love continue only for those in your own denomination." Rather, all men in Christ are our brethren, regardless of their particular affiliation. We must treat them as "brothers."
2. Hospitality (13:2)
On the call to Christian hospitality, see Rom 12:13 and 1 Pet 4:9. In a day of expanding mission work and travel, as well as refugees fleeing persecution, this was important. This virtue was also seen as a mark of maturity and requirement of spiritual leaders in 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:8. The remark about "entertaining angels" is probably an allusion to Gen 18:2, 16. The point is not that we are likely to have angels come to see us, but that hospitality should be extended because one never knows whom he or she may be receiving (especially since such ones may be on an important mission for God).
3. Remembering the Prisoners (13:3)
This is a reference to those who had been imprisoned for their Christian witness and service to Christ (recall 10:34). Undoubtedly, they suffered under extremely unpleasant conditions. Whether or not the author's audience was closely connected with these prisoners is not clearly stated. Perhaps these were Christians (like Paul and Timothy) who were jailed in places such as Rome, i.e., spiritual leaders who needed the prayers of Christians everywhere (cf. Heb 13:23). Both Ellingworth (696) and Lane (2:515) reject the notion that being "in the body" refers to the body of Christ.

Lane notes, "The fact that those addressed have a body with a capacity for suffering means that they are capable of feeling the pain of those who are mistreated." Fellow brothers suffering in prison often needed the material help of other Christians (see Lane 2:514), which is one reason the believers were not to be handicapped by the love of money.

B. Sexual Purity (13:4)

Sexual temptation was a major struggle in the 1st century, just as it is in the current day and age. Nevertheless, God calls us to have integrity in this area of life. Yet we must guard against two extremes. There have been those in church history who have looked upon marriage as an indication of weakness and carnality . . . a sub-Christian interest in the pleasures of this world. Consequently, some have "forbidden marriage" (1 Tim 4:3), and advocated *celibacy* as the lofty ideal (my, how this has corrupted the Catholic church!). To such extremes, the Scriptures teach us: "let marriage be held in honor among all." Marriage, done God's way, is a wonderful gift from Him. Abuse of marriage, on the other hand, must not be tolerated. Hence, fornicators (cf. 12:16) and adulterers will be judged by God. This probably is directed first and foremost at Christians who do such things! Those who are in the New Covenant are warned not to transgress the laws of marriage, because God will very well bring temporal judgment on those who do (recall Heb 10:30 — "God will judge His people").

C. Money and Possessions (13:5-6)

Contentment is the goal of the Christian life, not accumulation of wealth. Hence, we are to avoid the "love of money" (cf. 1 Tim 6:6-10). This is a requirement of spiritual leaders (1 Tim 3:3), for their affections must be on the things of the Lord in order to lead God's people. There will be those, on the other hand, whom God has chosen to give an abundance of earthly treasures. Having money is not the problem, for the concern is with one's attitude toward money and how this may dictate what he does in life. 1 Tim 6:17-19 gives instructions to those believers who are wealthy. Thank God for those who are wealthy and can help fund the work of the Great Commission! We should be grateful to God for the role they play.

Vs 5b is a quote drawn primarily from Deut 32:6 (cf. Gen 28:15):

Heb 13:5b = οὐ μή σε ἀνῶ οὐδ' οὐ μή σε ἐγκαταλίπω

Deut 31:6 = οὐ μή σε ἀνῆ οὔτε* μή σε ἐγκαταλίπω
*mss A = οὐδ' οὐ

The point of the quote is that no matter whether we have money or not, we can always have the greatest treasure of all: God's fellowship. This promise in Deut 31:6 was originally given by Moses to Israel as they were about to enter Canaan, thereby promising them success over the enemies they were about to face. Hence, He will be there to help us through the most difficult times we may go through. The quote in Heb 13:6b is taken from Ps 118:6 (LXX = 117:6). Although verse six is related to verse five and the issue of money, the thought that we do not have to be afraid of man is very appropriate to the readers who were facing

persecution for their faith. [This was probably one of the factors leading them to withdraw from the New Covenant community].

V. COMMUNITY RELIGIOUS LIFE (13:7-17)

The unity of this section is reflected in the inclusio that brackets vv 7-17.

Heb 13:7 "Remember those who led (ἡγουμένων) you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."

Heb 13:17 "Obey your leaders (ἡγουμένοις), and submit *to them*; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

A. In verses 7 and 17, different leaders are in view.

Both Ellingworth (702) and Hodges (812) take the first as the "former leaders," i.e., those who are now dead. Ellingworth points out that (1) the readers are to "remember" them, which suggests that they were not currently having access to them; and (2) the past tense "spoke" (Aorist ἐλάλησαν) suggests that they no longer did so. This particular term "leaders" (ἡγουμένοις, vs 17) is a rather general expression (contrast deacon, elder, etc.). Synagogue leaders were usually called ἀρχισυνάγωγος (Acts 18:8,17). But in Acts 15:22, Judas and Silas were called "leading men" (ἄνδρας ἡγουμένους) among the brethren from Jerusalem.

Though these early "leaders" have come and gone, there is security in knowing that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." The departure of human leaders who are looked up to can be upsetting and disrupting. However, the king who is over all remains on the throne. Our focus must be on Him, not His subordinates!

B. False Teachings (13:9)

In contrast to the faithful teachings of these early leaders, the readers were apparently being exposed to "all sorts of outlandish teachings" (Ellingworth sees this as a hendiadys, p. 707).² Nevertheless, they ought to follow those teachings that emphasize *the grace of God* . . . not those that draw them into legalism. For those of us who are New Covenant priests, *grace* is what strengthens our hearts. We came to know Christ through the gospel of grace, and we are to draw upon grace for our spiritual pilgrimage to God's "rest" (4:16). In contrast, the Old Covenant priests partook of certain foods as part of the sacrificial system. That in itself did not really benefit them. Ellingworth notes, "the reference is likely to be to a whole manner of life in which foodstuffs played in some way a central role" (708). Thus, the author is thinking, not merely of food itself, but of the Levitical cultus and the Old Covenant regulations. These do not really strengthen (cf. 9:9-10).

² A *hendiadys* refers to two words in the text that function together to express a singular idea. In the case of Heb 13:9, the word Διδαχαῖς (teachings) is followed by the adjectives ποικίλαις καὶ ξέναις ("deceitful and strange"). The adjectives, however, may be a hendiadys meaning "all sorts of outlandish teachings."

C. The Contrast of Priestly Systems (13:10-16)

The thought about the Old Covenant priests in vs 9 leads into a larger discussion contrasting the two systems. The author points out "we have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." In the Old Testament, the priests derived some benefit from the altar where the sacrifices were presented . . . they often got to eat some of the sacrifices. They were forbidden to eat the blood or fat (Lev 3:16-17; 7:22-27) and were not allowed to eat the burnt offerings. However there were many other sacrifices in which they ate the meat or grain (note Lev 7:35-36 - "it is their due forever"):

1. portion of grain offerings (Lev 2:3,10; 6:16; 7:9-10)
2. from guilt offerings (Lev 5:13; 7:6) and sin offerings (Lev 6:26, 29)
3. peace offerings (Lev 7:13-14, 29-34)

Nevertheless, that entitlement does not extend to the New Covenant. Any priest who remained a part of the Old Covenant had no status in the Church and no divine entitlements to the benefits of the New Covenant. Rather than seeking the altar of the earthly system, these Jewish believers are reminded that they have a *new altar*, probably a metonymy for the "sacrifice of Christ" since the altar was the location for sacrifice to be made (note 13:12; cf. 9:26, 10:10). The reference to *our altar* is not an allusion to the Eucharist, as many have asserted.

Another analogy is drawn by reflecting on the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament (see Lev 16:27). On this occasion, the blood of the animals was brought into the tabernacle, but the bodies were taken outside the camp to be burned. The skin, flesh and dung were regarded as "unclean." Wishing to make a parallel, the author points out that Christ suffered outside the gate. He literally suffered outside Jerusalem, but we should note that His sacrifice was outside the system of Judaism. Hence, the author exhorts his Jewish readers, "Let us go out to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." That is, he beckons them to come out altogether from Judaism (severing all emotional and social ties) and fully embrace Jesus and the New Covenant. "They must leave behind all that belongs to the world of prefiguration and seek the accomplishment of the promise in Jesus" (Lane, 2:545). They may suffer reproach in doing so, but they are reminded that the same was true of their Lord. True worship is outside the camp of Judaism, though faced by reproach from those within the "camp." In Heb 12:2-3, the author had spoken of Christ's reproach. So we should not be hesitant to share in the disgrace He bore (cf. Heb 11:26; 10:33). In reality, rather than being "unclean," the readers are "holy" or "sanctified" (2:11; 10:10, 14).

To decisively *leave* Judaism is analogous to Abraham's decision by faith to depart his earthly home and obey God "by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance" (11:8). He did this, because "he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (11:10). Thus, the readers are to join in Abraham's pursuit of the "city which is to come," obviously a reference to the heavenly New Jerusalem (cf. 12:22). It is there that we shall experience the unshakable kingdom of our Lord (12:28). For the author's readers, the earthly Jerusalem had lost all redemptive significance.

As the readers do come out of Judaism, however, they are not left without sacrifices to offer to God. Animal sacrifices (though at one point part of God's will) were not really what God

desired anyway. When it comes to worship, God is primarily interested in a heart of obedience and a heart that is concerned for justice, truth, *hesed* (Hebrew for "loving-loyalty), and mercy. On "sacrifice of praise," this Greek expression is used three times in the LXX (see Ps 50:14 [49:14 in LXX]; Ps 107:22 [106:22 in LXX]; and Ps 116:17 [LXX 115:8]). The latter passage in Ps 116:16-19 is particularly instructive. This underscores *public praise!*

In vs 15, the phrase "giving thanks to His name" (so *NASB*) is literally "confessing His name" (compare Heb 3:1; 4:14; and 10:23). Further insight comes from 1 Tim 6:12 and 1 Jn 2:23. The first aspect of our "sacrifice of praise" is the willingness to *confess His name*. The readers are not only to hold fast their confession (10:23), but to openly confess Jesus as Messiah. Further sacrifices are found in acts of love (13:16).

D. Submission to Spiritual Leaders (13:17)

This verse implies that the readers that were tending to withdraw from the New Covenant community did so apart from the spiritual leaders of that community. The call to obey and submit to these leaders God had invested with authority suggests a certain tension between the readers and their leaders (which seems to assume that the latter had remained faithful). Lane (2:554) suggests that the source of the tension had arisen from the readers's allurements to false teaching:

The near context refers to the "various strange teachings" (v 9), which distort the word of God proclaimed in the past and which threaten the stability of the assembly in the present. If there is a direct connection between that disturbance and the admonition in v 17a, this can only mean that tension existed between the members of the assembly and their leaders. The source of that tension was the group's attraction to the "various strange teachings."

Verse 17bc provides a motivation for submission to the community leaders. The clear implication is that spiritual leaders will give an account of their ministry to God. Those who are following, however, should not make their task more difficult.