

## Conclusion: The Walk and Worship of the Believer

### "Serve God Acceptably"

#### Hebrews 13:1-25

The title for this final study on of the book of Hebrews from chapter 13 is actually taken from verse 28 of the previous chapter. The exhortations of chapter 13 are not random rules to follow, but are the practical outworking of the call in 12:28 to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."

The key ideas in the last two verses of chapter 12 are:

- We are recipients of an unshakable kingdom, which speaks of security in Christ.
- We are to serve (worship) God acceptably.
- This service is marked by reverence and holy living.

Even though Hebrews 13:1 begins a string of short exhortations, the context goes back to the "wherefore" of 12:28, and can be understood as, "in the light of what's just been said..."

It might be seen something like, "Because we are part of an eternal kingdom and are called to serve God in 'reverence and godly fear,' don't let your love for one another grow cold, but keep it alive."

#### I. SERVE GOD ACCEPTABLY IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS – VS. 1-6

##### A. Love in the fellowship – vs. 1-3

1. Cherish the Family – "Let brotherly love continue" (vs. 1)

- a) The first point the author of the letter to the Hebrews is making is that of “brotherly love.”
- (1) The word used here (φιλαδελφία) is a compound word with the meaning of “dear, loved, cherished friend” combined with that for “brother.”
- (a) In its use in the Bible, it speaks of a warm, affectionate love within a family – in this case, the family of God, or more specifically and applicably, the local church family.
- (b) This isn’t just liking someone, it’s cherishing them as family because they are family in Christ.
- (c) The first part of the word (φιλέω) was used by Peter in his response to Jesus when He asked him if he loved Him. Jesus asked if he loved Him (ἀγαπάω) – would you sacrifice yourself for me in love – and Peter’s response was “I love (φιλέω) you – I cherish you, have great affection for you, but not sure if I’m ready to lay my life down for you.
- (2) This term is only used 4 other times in the Greek New Testament.

Romans 12:10

<sup>10</sup> Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

1 Thessalonians 4:9

<sup>9</sup> But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love [ἀγαπάω] one another.

### 1 Peter 1:22

<sup>22</sup> Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see *that* ye love [ἀγαπάω] one another with a pure heart fervently:

### 2 Peter 1:7

<sup>7</sup> And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

- b) In the biblical pattern, service and obedience to God are always connected to love for His people (cf. Deut. 10:12-19; Matt. 22:37-40; 1 John 4:20-21).

### Deuteronomy 10:17-19

<sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God *is* God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: <sup>18</sup> He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. <sup>19</sup> Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

### Matthew 22:37-40

<sup>37</sup> Jesus said unto him, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.** <sup>38</sup> **This is the first and great commandment.** <sup>39</sup> **And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** <sup>40</sup> **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.**

### 1 John 4:20-21

<sup>20</sup> If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? <sup>21</sup> And this commandment have we from him, That he

| who loveth God love his brother also.

- c) The first practical step given for the call to “serve God acceptably” is to love the brethren.
  - d) This is seen as something to be done continually – we are never to stop loving fellow believers.
2. Care for the foreigner – “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers...” (vs. 2)
- a) This has the same root prefix to the word as did the one for “brotherly love” (φιλέω) with a different ending. In this case it’s one that means stranger, or foreigner.
  - b) It’s equivalent to the Hebrew גֵר, a word for resident alien or sojourner living among Israel but not native-born.
  - c) In first-century Christianity, it was used for traveling believers who were either displaced by persecution or itinerant teachers needing hospitality (3 John 5-8), as well as unknown outsiders, whether saved or not.
  - d) It’s primary focus within the context of the book of Hebrews, as used here, it is most likely referring to hospitality toward traveling Christians who were displaced because of persecution.
  - e) This reflects God’s own love for the “outsider.”

Matthew 25:35

<sup>35</sup> For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat:  
I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a  
stranger, and ye took me in:

- f) It’s coupled with an example: “for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” We find an Old Testament equivalent to this when

Abraham (and Lot) entertained the “men” (Gen. 18-19) without knowing they were angels.

Genesis 18:2

<sup>2</sup> And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw *them*, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

3. Comfort the forgotten – “Remember them that are in bonds...and them which suffer adversity” (vs. 3)

- a) The impact of this verse is to remind us to be vigilant in our compassion for those of the body of Christ that might otherwise be forgotten as we struggle with our own cares and concerns. We need to be careful we don’t adopt “an out of sight, out of mind” mentality.
- b) This speaks to the immediate historical context of those believers to whom this letter was written that were facing strong persecution and some had already been imprisoned and were suffering greatly because of it.
- c) “As bound with them” – “put yourself in their place”
- d) “As being bound yourselves also in the body” – this is speaking of the physical body, not the body of Christ.

“As being bound” – in the weaknesses and pain of this frail body.

**B. Loyalty in marriage – vs. 4**

The author of Hebrews (by inspiration of the Holy Spirit) moves from general love in the body of Christ to specific relationships (marriage) to moral purity in those relationships. If the Apostle Paul is

the human author of Hebrews (and I believe he is), this is a pattern he has used before. Colossians 3:12-14 leads into 3:18-21, where marriage is addressed right after love in the body of Christ.

1. The value of marriage – “Marriage is honourable in all” (vs. 4a)

- a) “Marriage is honourable” – the word for “honourable” (τίμιος) is translated “precious” in other Scripture and is a word that means of great price or value.
- b) Marriage isn’t just a sociological arrangement between two people; it’s a God-given treasure, to be guarded and cherished.
- c) When the Bible says, “Marriage is honourable in all,” it uses a word that elsewhere describes the blood of Christ and the promises of God. That tells us what God thinks about marriage.

1 Peter 1:19

<sup>19</sup> But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

2 Peter 1:4

<sup>4</sup> Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

d) The contrast between how God views marriage as given in the Bible, and how our modern culture views it.

(1) Marriage in God’s Word (precious, of immense value)

(a) Created by God (Gen. 2:24) – not man’s

invention, but God's design.

(b) Blessed by God (Matt. 19:6) – "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

(c) Picture of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32) – a sacred mystery that reflects the Gospel.

(d) Guarded by God (Heb. 13:4) – He esteems it highly and defends it against corruption.

(2) Marriage in modern culture (common, disposable)

(a) Redefined by man – reduced to a legal contract, subject to preference and change.

(b) Trivialized in entertainment – mocked, ridiculed, or portrayed as a burden.

(c) Undermined by immorality – cohabitation and adultery present counterfeits.

(d) Abandoned for convenience – divorce and abandonment treated as normal.

2. The purity of marriage – "The bed undefiled" (vs. 4b)

a) Intimacy in marriage is not sinful but sacred (1 Cor. 7:2-5)

(1) Set apart by God – it's not man's idea but God's gift, set apart for marriage (Gen. 2:24)

(2) Blessed by God – within marriage, it's pure and undefiled (Heb.13:4). Outside of

marriage, the same act is sin. God's boundary makes the difference.

(3) To be honored, not corrupted – calling it sacred means it's not common, not casual, not to be treated like any other physical act. It belongs in the sphere of marriage covenant loyalty and love.

b) The term "undefiled" (ἀμίαντος) is found 3 other times in the New Testament, each time translated "undefiled." The word is one that carries the alpha privative in front of a word that means to defile or pollute. In other words, it means it is without the capability of being defiled or polluted.

#### Hebrews 7:26

<sup>26</sup> For such a high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

#### James 1:27

<sup>27</sup> Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.

#### 1 Peter 1:4

<sup>4</sup> To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

3. The violation of marriage – "God will judge" the immoral (vs. 4c)

a) "Whoremongers and adulterers" – the first term speaks of intimacy outside of marriage and the second of breaking the marriage vows and intimacy while one is married.

b) "God will judge" – God Himself enforces the

sanctity of marriage.

- (1) Considering the entire text is speaking to believers, this is to be taken predominately with that in mind, but the way this is worded, it is all-encompassing. Whether believer or not, God will hold everyone accountable for sexual immorality, whether married or not.
- (2) For the believer, that means discipline now and accountability later in loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat; for the unbeliever, it means ultimate condemnation.
- (3) This isn't meant to rob the Christian of assurance, but to remind us that grace does not erase God's holiness.

### **C. Leaning on the Lord – vs. 5-6**

1. Reject covetousness – “Let your conversation be without covetousness...” (vs. 5a)
  - a) In 1611, when the King James was translated, the word conversation didn't just mean “talking.” It meant your whole manner of life – your behavior, conduct, and morals. That's exactly what the Greek word here (ἀναστροφή) means: the way you live, your whole pattern of life. Today we use “conversation” mainly for speech, but in the language of Scripture it goes much deeper. It's not just what you say, but how you live.
  - b) So, let your whole manner of life and conduct be without “covetousness.” The literal definition of this word (ἀφιλάργυρος) is without love of silver (or money). It means to be free from greed; not driven by money or material possessions.

Applied today: not just obsession with cash, but the restless desire for more – more status, more

stuff, more recognition.

2. Rest in contentment – “be content with such things as ye have...” (vs. 5b)

- a) Contentment isn't settling for less, as some may consider it today; it's trusting that God's presence is enough.
- b) “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” – if we trust in that promise, no matter how little or how much we have, God will never abandon us.

Deuteronomy 31:6

<sup>6</sup> Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he *it is* that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

- c) The world says security comes from money, but God says it comes from His presence. That's why the answer to covetousness isn't more possessions, it's a deeper trust in the promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

3. Rely on Christ – “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear...” (vs. 6)

- a) God's presence gives courage.

Psalm 54:4

<sup>4</sup> Behold, God *is* mine helper: the Lord *is* with them that uphold my soul.

Psalm 118:6

<sup>6</sup> The LORD *is* on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

- b) Confidence in Christ frees us from the bondage to money and fear of man.
- c) With Christ as our helper, we already have the

greatest treasure the world's ever known.

Conclusion to this point:

The Holy Spirit gives us in these verses a view of what it looks like to serve God acceptably in the everyday relationships of life. We are to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, to open our homes with hospitality, to stand with the suffering, to hold marriage in honor, and to walk free from the bondage to greed by resting in God's presence.

All of these commands remind us that the Christian life is not lived in isolation. Our faith touches our family, our church, our neighbors, our marriages, and even our possessions. And at every point the call is the same: trust God enough to live differently from the world.

When we love one another, when we show hospitality, when we remember the suffering, when we guard purity, when we rest content, we declare by our lives that Christ is better. And when He is our treasure, we can boldly say, *"The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."*

A missionary once said, "The Christian life is more like a compass than a clock." A clock tells you how to manage your minutes; a compass tells you where you are headed. These verses in Hebrews don't just fill our schedules with more things to do — they point our hearts in the right direction. They turn us toward love, purity, compassion, contentment, and confidence in Christ. If our compass is fixed on Him, we won't lose our way, no matter what we face.

## II. SERVE GOD ACCEPTABLY BY HONORING SPIRITUAL

## LEADERSHIP – vs. 7, 17, 24

The book of Hebrews has been encouraging endurance and faithfulness in every area of life (faith, worship, perseverance, holiness). As the book of Hebrews closes, the Holy Spirit reminds us of many practical ways we are to serve Him acceptably. But three times in this chapter we find the same phrase: “them that have the rule over you” (vs. 7, 17, and 24). Whenever the Bible repeats itself, it’s not by accident – it’s for emphasis.

Some of the most difficult messages to preach for a pastor are about leadership. The last thing I want is to sound like a “little dictator” building a “kingdom.” That’s not what this passage is teaching, and it’s not what Christ has called pastors to do. What this passage is showing us is how God has designed the church to flourish under biblical leadership.

These verses aren’t about personalities or power – they’re about faithfulness to Christ. Pastors are called to speak the Word of God, to watch for souls, and to walk alongside the saints. And God’s people are called to remember, respect, and recognize that leadership – not because pastors are special, but because Christ is the Chief Shepherd and He cares for His flock through under-shepherds. So rather than being a message about authority, this is a message about how together we serve God acceptably when we follow His design for the church.

I want to begin this message by explaining that phrase: “that have the rule over you” in some detail so we understand it within its context here.

- Explanation of the word for “rule over you” (ἡγούμενοι)
  - It’s a verb that means to lead, to guide, to go before. Not “rule” in the sense of dictator, but

to guide, to direct, to lead responsibly.

- In secular Greek at the time of the New Testament writing, it was used of a leader, a chief, or one who goes ahead of others. In the context of Hebrews 13, it clearly speaks of the spiritual leadership (pastor) of the church.
- The emphasis is on guidance and oversight, not power. These are spiritual shepherds, not political rulers.
- How this phrase ties to the New Testament pattern of pastoral leadership
  - In the Pastoral Epistles, and the book of Ephesians (the doctrinal book for the church), the church office described here in Hebrews is that of “elder, bishop (overseer), and pastor.”
    - “Elder” (πρεσβύτερος) – used of spiritually mature leaders

Acts 14:23

<sup>23</sup> And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Titus 1:5

<sup>5</sup> For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

- “Bishop” (ἐπισκοπή, ἐπίσκοπος) – this focuses on the function of oversight, not the title. The word is translated “overseers” in Acts 20:28.

Acts 20:28

<sup>28</sup> Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost

hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

#### 1 Timothy 3:1-2

<sup>1</sup> This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. <sup>2</sup> A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

#### Titus 1:7

<sup>7</sup> For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; [Paul uses "bishop" right after mentioning "elder," showing it's the same office.]

- "Pastor/Shepherd" (ποιμήν, ποιμαίνω)

#### Ephesians 4:11

<sup>11</sup> And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

#### Acts 20:28

<sup>28</sup> Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

- All three of these terms are used in overlapping way in two passages to show they all speak of the same office, as does Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24 – the office we call "pastor" today.

#### Acts 20:17

<sup>17</sup> And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

## Acts 20:28

<sup>28</sup> Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed [shepherd, pastor] the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

## 1 Peter 5:1-2

<sup>1</sup> The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: <sup>2</sup> Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

- Someone might ask, “Why didn’t the author of Hebrews just use one of those other terms?”
  - Hebrews is less concerned with church structure and more focused on endurance, faith, and perseverance.
  - By using a broader term like “rule over you” (ἡγούμενοι), the writer emphasizes function (guiding, leading, watching) rather than office titles.
  - This keeps the focus on the practical relationship between the flock and their leaders, not on official titles or positions.

### A. Remember their example – vs. 7

1. “Remember them” (μνημονεύετε τῶν) – the word is used here is not pointing to a mere mental act of recollection but has a sense of holding in esteem or honoring. In the context, it’s clearly indicating the spiritual leadership (pastor) of the church.

2. "Who have spoken unto you the word of God" – this connects with the Apostle Paul's writing to Timothy.

1 Timothy 5:17

<sup>17</sup> Let the elders that rule well [προηστάμενοι καλῶς] be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

3. "Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation"
- a) These are leaders who faithfully taught the Word and lived out their faith.
- b) The "end of their conversation" is not speaking of their death, as some teach, but is speaking of the outcome or fruit of their life of faith.

1 Timothy 4:12

<sup>12</sup> Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

- c) There's a parallel text in 1 Thess. 5:12-13 that bears review in relation to these verses in Hebrews 13.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

<sup>12</sup> And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; <sup>13</sup> And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves.

- (1) "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you"
- (a) The word for "know" (εἶδω) means "to see," and as it's used here, to recognize and acknowledge.

(b) The word for “labour” (κοπιάω) is one that means “to be worn out or fatigued.” It speaks of the strenuous, exhausting effort in ministry. It stresses the cost of the word: sweat, weariness, sacrifice.

(2) “And are over you in the Lord” – the word for “over you” (προϊστημι) is different than in Hebrews 13.

In Hebrews 13, the word for “rule over you” means “those who guide you” – it’s about spiritual direction and example. In 1 Thessalonians 5, the word means “to stand before” – those who manage and care for the flock. Put together, the New Testament shows us that pastors both guide the church and take responsibility for its care. They lead by example and by oversight.

#### 1 Timothy 3:4-5

<sup>4</sup> One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; <sup>5</sup> (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

#### 1 Timothy 5:17

<sup>17</sup> Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

(3) “And admonish you” – translated “warn” in Acts 20:31. Literally means to put sense into the minds of people. Dr. Robertson said: It’s “a thankless, but a necessary, task.”

#### Acts 20:31

<sup>31</sup> Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

- (4) "And to esteem them very highly" (καὶ ἠγεῖσθαι αὐτοὺς ὑπὲρ ἐκπερισσοῦ) – the word for "esteem" has the same root as the one as translated "have the rule over" in Hebrews 13.

In Hebrews 13, the focus is on the leader's responsibility: they are leading the flock.

In 1 Thess. 5:13, the focus is on the congregation's responsibility: they are to esteem/regard their leaders highly in love.

- (5) "In love" (ἀγάπη) – "not in fear, nor in hypocrisy and dissimulation; not in word and in tongue only, but from the heart and real affection..." (Gill)
- (6) "For their work's sake" (διὰ τὸ ἔργον αὐτῶν) – the word for "work" here is different than that for "labour" in verse 12.

"Labour" describes what pastors are doing: they toil, pour themselves out, exert themselves to the point of weariness.

"Their work's sake" describes why they should be esteemed: not because of personality, position, or title, but because of the work itself – the ministry of the Word, oversight, and admonition.

d) "And be at peace among yourselves."

- (1) This "peace" is specifically tied to the relationship between leaders (pastors) and members in the congregation.
- (a) Strife often arises when leadership is resisted or not esteemed.
- (b) Peace is preserved when the flock

honors its shepherds and when shepherds serve faithfully.

(2) Paul is saying: "When you honor your leaders rightly, love one another well, and guard against conflict, you preserve the peace that Christ intends for His church."

4. Believers are strengthened when they recall faithful shepherds and imitate their example of trust in Christ.

## **B. Respect their oversight – vs. 17**

1. "Obey them...and submit yourselves"

I have been asked on several occasions in the past as to why I "dig into the original language" in my study. It may be asked, "Isn't our King James Bible enough?" The answer is yes – our Bible is faithful and trustworthy. However, as we hear the word "obey," we usually think of blind compliance: do what you're told without question (which is how the Greek word translated "obey" in Gal. 6:1 is used). This word is different, as we'll see.

By my studying the original languages and the words the Holy Spirit chose on purpose helps me from making errors in interpretation and application. If I simply went by the word "obey" in English without further study, the word would mean, as found in the 1828 Webster dictionary: "to comply with the commands, orders or instructions of a superior, or with the requirements of law, moral, political or municipal; to do that which is commanded or required, or to forbear doing that which is prohibited."

- a) "Obey" (πειθεσθε) – be persuaded, yield to guidance. This isn't blind obedience, but willing responsiveness to godly leadership grounded in the Word of God.

The call to "obey" involves following the direction and teaching of the pastor/elder, particularly in matters of doctrine and spiritual guidance. The underlying idea is that the leaders' authority is not absolute or arbitrary but is grounded in their role of caring for the spiritual health of the congregation through faithful teaching.

The obedience is not simply to the person of the leader, but to the authority they represent – God's authority exercised through their role as shepherds of the flock. The obedience, therefore, is connected to the spiritual care and doctrinal integrity that the pastor provides.

- b) "And submit yourselves" (ὑπεικτε)

(1) Means yielding without resistance. Submission is voluntary, flowing from trust in God's order, not coerced.

(2) Submission is to the work and Word faithfully carried out, not to arbitrary authority.

#### 1 Corinthians 16:15-16

<sup>15</sup> I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas [most likely a pastor], that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) <sup>16</sup> That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with *us*, and laboureth.

2. "For they watch for your souls, as they that must give account..." – this speaks of the

seriousness of shepherding.

- a) The meaning of the word “watch” (ἀγρυπνοῦσιν) is to stay awake, keep vigil. Pastors are entrusted with the responsibility of guarding and caring for the spiritual well-being of their congregation. This includes teaching, counseling, guiding, and admonishing where necessary, all with a view to their ultimate good and spiritual growth.
- b) Pastors will “give account” (λόγον ἀποδώσοντες) – this is judicial language, used of giving an account before God.

Romans 14:10-12

<sup>10</sup> But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. <sup>11</sup> For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. <sup>12</sup> So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

- c) This word ties this accountability directly to the act of watching for souls – it’s not just a general accountability of all believers, but specifically pastoral responsibility.

- (1) All believers give account (Rom. 14:12)

2 Corinthians 5:10

<sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it* be good or bad.

- (2) Pastors give special account for teaching/watching

James 3:1

<sup>1</sup> My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

#### Acts 20:26-28

<sup>26</sup> Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. <sup>27</sup> For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. <sup>28</sup> Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

#### Ezekiel 33:6-9

<sup>6</sup> But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. <sup>7</sup> So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. <sup>8</sup> When I say unto the wicked, O wicked *man*, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. <sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

(3) The pastor's work will be tested for faithfulness.

#### 1 Corinthians 3:9-15

<sup>9</sup> For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's

building. <sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. <sup>11</sup> For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; <sup>13</sup> Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup> If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

- d) For the pastor, faithfulness, not results, is the measure of accountability. We will not be judged for the results we cannot control, but we will give account for our faithfulness in teaching, warning, and watching over souls
  - e) For the congregation – make their account a joyful one by responding with trust and obedience.
3. "That they may do it with joy, and not with grief" – when the congregation follows the godly oversight of their pastor, they make that pastor's account before Christ a joyful one; when you resist without cause, you not only grieve them but also burden the work they must one day answer for.
4. "For that is unprofitable for you"
- a) The word "unprofitable" (ἀλυσίτελος - only used this one time in the Greek) means of no

advantage, harmful, or worthless. In its use here, it gives the sense of, "it will do you no good," "it won't benefit you."

- b) This points back to the last phrase: "with grief." the loss is borne by the congregation in the here and now: they lose joy, fruitfulness, blessing.
  - (1) If the pastor serves joyfully because the flock responds well, they gain.
  - (2) If he serves with "grief" (groaning) because of resistance, they lose.

"And even for your own sakes you should make the work of your rulers easy and joyful, for otherwise it cannot profit you. Your unwillingness to listen to them means that you are out of sympathy with their teaching and that it can do you no good" (Expositor's Greek Testament).

Think of a doctor. He is accountable to the medical board for his practice (like a pastor giving account to Christ). But if his patients resist his treatment, they're the ones who suffer in health. It's "unprofitable" for them, not just discouraging for him.

### **C. Recognize their fellowship – vs. 24**

1. "Salute all them..." – You'll notice it says "all them that have the rule over you" in the plural. Some people point to this as proof that every local church must have multiple elders. I don't believe that's what this verse is teaching. Remember, Hebrews wasn't written to just one congregation – it was meant to be read aloud in many gatherings of believers. So naturally, more than one church, and more than one pastor, would be included in these closing

greetings. The point here is not about church structure, but about honoring the spiritual leadership God has given – whether in one church or in many.

2. “And all the saints” – Leaders (pastors) are not singled out above the body but greeted together with “all the saints,” showing shared fellowship and unity.
3. Biblical leadership is not just about authority (vv. 7, 17) but also about relationship (v. 24).
4. Honoring leaders includes recognizing them in fellowship, not only in submission.

Conclusion to this point:

As we’ve seen, Hebrews closes with a repeated reminder about our relationship to those who lead in the church (the pastor). Three times the Spirit of God points us to this principle – remember their example, respect their oversight, and recognize their fellowship.

The goal, however, is not to elevate men. It’s not about building a pastor’s kingdom or protecting a leader’s pride. The focus is Christ Himself. Verse 20 calls Him “that great Shepherd of the sheep.” He is the One who purchased the church with His own blood and He’s the One who equips both leaders and followers to serve God acceptably.

So, when we honor biblical leadership, we are really honoring the Lord who gave it. When we follow the example of faith, we are following Christ. When we submit to godly oversight, we are trusting Christ’s care for our souls. And when we recognize leaders in fellowship, we are celebrating the unity Christ has given His body.

The church should never be about personalities or power struggles. It should always be about Christ, our great

Shepherd. And the way we serve God acceptably in the church is by remembering, respecting, and recognizing leadership as part of His loving design for His people.

### **III. SERVE GOD ACCEPTABLY IN OUR DOCTRINE – VS. 7-9**

As with every part of Hebrews 13, the last message to honor spiritual leadership wasn't a detour from the theme – it's part of what it means to "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." We serve Him acceptably in our relationships, in our doctrine, in our worship, in our obedience, and yes, even in the way we respond to those He has placed as shepherds of the flock. It's all one picture – a church living under the care of the Great Shepherd.

#### **A. Remembering faithful leaders (v. 7)**

1. As we saw a couple weeks ago when we studied this verse in a separate message, to "remember" here means more than recalling their names. It is to keep in mind, to call to attention their faithful example and the truth they taught.
2. The emphasis is not merely on the men themselves (although that's part of it), but on the message they delivered.
3. They faithfully ministered the Word; now the congregation is to imitate their faith, not come up with new doctrine or ignore the teaching.

2 Thessalonians 2:15

<sup>15</sup> Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

2 Timothy 1:13

<sup>13</sup> Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou

hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

- To serve God acceptably, the church must treasure and carry forward the doctrine handed down by faithful men of God.

## **B. Relying on the unchanging Christ (v. 8)**

1. The foundation of sound doctrine is not the leaders themselves, but the unchanging Christ they proclaimed.
2. His person and work do not shift with culture or time – He is eternally the same:
  - a) “Yesterday” – the Christ of history (creation, incarnation, Calvary)
  - b) “Today” – the Christ of present help (interceding, saving, sustaining)
  - c) “Forever” – the Christ of eternity (coming King, eternal Priest)

Malachi 3:6

<sup>6</sup> For I *am* the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

James 1:17

<sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

- Serving God acceptably requires anchoring our doctrine to Christ’s unchanging person, not the shifting winds of modern thought.

## **C. Rejecting strange teachings (v. 9)**

## 1. The peril of drifting – “Be not carried about”

- a) *μη περιφέρεσθε* – the picture here is a ship that is swept away, or whirled around without an anchor; or as debris that swirls about during a storm.
- b) This teaches that when a believer lacks grounding, he becomes vulnerable to every new teaching that blows through.

### Ephesians 4:11-14

<sup>11</sup> And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; <sup>12</sup> For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: <sup>13</sup> Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: <sup>14</sup> That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

## 2. The plurality of error – “Divers and strange doctrines”

- a) “Divers” (*ποικίλος*) – a word that means variegated, or multi-colored. It can also be seen as something that is many-sided, or a multitude of forms.

Error is rarely one thing; it takes countless disguises. That’s how the Devil uses it.

- b) “Strange” (*ξένος*) – a word that means foreign or alien. In this case, foreign to the gospel of grace. What doesn’t align with Christ is “strange.”

### Galatians 1:6-9

<sup>6</sup> I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: <sup>7</sup> Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

#### Colossians 2:8

<sup>8</sup> Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

- c) Every age has its “strange doctrines.” In the first century it was ritualistic Judaism. In our day, it is legalism, prosperity gospel, mysticism, or progressive theology (which we will look at later) – to name a few.
3. The priority of grace – “it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace”
- a) The word for “established” (βεβαιοῦσθαι) means to be made firm, settled, stabilized.
  - b) The heart is not secured by rules, rituals, or experiences. It is established by grace.
  - c) The entire epistle of Hebrews has urged believers to rest in Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice and priesthood, not in ceremonial observances (7:18-19; 9:9-10; 10:1).

#### Acts 20:32

<sup>32</sup> And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance

among all them which are sanctified.

2 Timothy 2:1

<sup>1</sup> Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

- Grace is not just the starting point; it is the stabilizing power of the Christian life.

4. The “profitlessness” of ritual – “not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein”

- a) The reference to “meats” here is pointing to the ceremonial foods and ritual observances under the law (Lev. 11), as well as many more that were added by the Jewish rulers and tradition since the giving of the Law.
- b) The book of Hebrews has repeatedly shown the inability of the Law to change the heart.
- c) Outward observance and appearance occupied the believers in the church then, but did not profit them. It showed activity without heart transformation that can only come through Christ.

Colossians 2:16-17

<sup>16</sup> Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: <sup>17</sup> Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Romans 14:17

<sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

- d) “Meats” today that are used as a substitute for grace may include:

- (1) Legalistic standards – making external rules the measure of holiness rather than inward transformation by grace. This isn't to say that standards are wrong, but if we use those standards to say someone is or is not saved, they become a "meat" that is profitless.

Galatians 3:3

<sup>3</sup> Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

- (2) Empty rituals and formalism – going through ceremonies, liturgies, or even repetitive church practices without the heart engaged.

Isaiah 29:13

<sup>13</sup> Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

- (3) Sacramental substitutions – treating baptism, communion, or, as some, confirmation as if they themselves convey saving grace, rather than pointing to Christ who saves.

1 Corinthians 1:17

<sup>17</sup> For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

- (4) Prosperity promises – seeking financial blessing or health as proof of God's favor, rather than the riches of His grace in Christ.

1 Timothy 6:5-6

<sup>5</sup> Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. <sup>6</sup> But godliness with contentment is great gain.

- (5) Cultural Christianity – equating church membership, social responsibility, or national identity with true faith.

Matthew 7:21

<sup>21</sup> Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

- (6) Performance-driven ministry – finding security in activity (programs, busyness, numbers, etc.) instead of resting in God's grace.

Luke 10:41-42

<sup>41</sup> And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: <sup>42</sup> But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

- (7) Mysticism and subjective experience – chasing visions, dreams, or emotional highs as proof of spirituality rather than trusting the sufficiency of Christ and of His Word.

Colossians 2:18-19

<sup>18</sup> Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, <sup>19</sup> And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered,

and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

5. The protection for the church (linking vs. 7, 9, and 17 together)
  - a) Vs. 7: Remember faithful leaders – they proclaimed the truth.
  - b) Vs. 9: Resist false teaching – don't drift from the truth.

This points back to the beginning of the book of Hebrews, and ties the content of the entire book together.

#### Hebrews 2:1

<sup>1</sup> Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip.

- c) Vs. 17: Respond to watchful leaders – they guard your souls from error.
  - God's design for protecting His people from strange doctrines is the faithful ministry of His Word taught by faithful shepherds.

Conclusion to this point:

Serving God acceptably is not only about how we treat one another or how we respond to leadership, but also about how we guard the truth of the gospel. We remember the faithful leaders who delivered the Word of God to us, we rely on the unchanging Christ who is the anchor of all doctrine, and we reject strange teachings that would sweep us away. The believers addressed in Hebrews were tempted to retreat back into rituals; the church today is tempted to chase novelties. Both paths lead away from grace, but the Spirit says, "*It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.*" That is where stability lies, that

is where profit is found, and that is the only foundation upon which a church can serve God acceptably.

#### **IV. SERVE GOD ACCEPTABLY IN OUR WORSHIP – vs. 10-16**

In understanding what it means to “*serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear,*” we have found that we do that in our love (vs. 1-6), in our doctrine (vs. 7-9), in honoring the pastor (vs. 7, 17, 24), and in these verses we will see how we do that in our worship.

The old covenant (the Levitical Law) was full of visible altars, offerings, and sacrifices, but in Christ, these have been fulfilled and transformed into the new covenant (something we have seen numerous times throughout the book of Hebrews). We no longer draw near to God through shadows and symbols, but through the truth of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. Our worship is not tied to an earthly altar, but to a heavenly Savior. It is not confined to a temple made with hands, but flows from hearts made alive by grace.

In this section, the Holy Spirit points us to three marks of acceptable worship:

- Our altar in Christ – recognizing that the cross is the only ground of our approach to God.
- Bearing His reproach – identifying with the rejected Savior even when it costs us.
- Offering spiritual sacrifices – giving God the praise of our lips and the service of our lives.

This is the worship that is “well pleasing” to God. It’s not the dead ritual of the old covenant (or any other dead rituals found in churches today, for that matter), but a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1-2).

##### **A. Our altar in Christ (vv. 10-12)**

1. Verse 10 contrasts the altar of Judaism which is restricted to priests with the “Christian’s altar” (Christ and the cross), which is accessible to all who believe.
  - a) “*We have an altar*” (θυσιαστήριον) – as the Old Testament worship centered around the altars in the Tabernacle/Temple, the worship of the New Testament believer centers around Christ and His cross as the true place of atonement.
  - b) “*Whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle*” (eat - φαγεῖν) – this phrase points back to the previous verse and the term “meats.” Under the law, only priest could partake of certain offerings (Lev. 6:16-18). By contrast today, all believers are made priests (Rev. 1:6) and have access to the benefits of the sacrifice of our Savior.
2. Verses 11-12 expand on the “altar” imagery of verse 10.
  - a) The Old Testament pattern – sin removed “*without the camp*” (vs. 11).

(1) Day of Atonement – Lev. 16:27

Leviticus 16:27

<sup>27</sup> And the bullock *for* the sin offering, and the goat *for* the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy *place*, shall *one* carry forth without the camp; and they shall burn in the fire their skins, and their flesh, and their dung.

- (a) The blood of the bull and goat was taken into the Holy of Holies.
- (b) Their carcasses were carried outside the camp and burned.

(c) What atones for sin before God is offered inside; what carries the defilement is removed outside.

(2) Other sin offerings – Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:11-12, 21; 6:30

Certain sacrifices were burned outside the camp as a symbol of removing sin and uncleanness from God's dwelling place.

(3) The "camp" symbolized the place where God dwelt in their midst. To be cast outside was to bear shame, separation, and uncleanness.

b) The New Testament fulfillment – Christ suffered "*without the gate*" (vs. 12)

(1) Jesus suffered outside Jerusalem's walls (John 19:17-20), at Golgotha.

(2) His rejection by the Jews parallels the rejected sacrifices burned outside.

(3) The typology found in this verse:

(a) Type: the blood brought in to the Holy of Holies. Antitype: Christ's blood secures access to God (Heb. 9:12).

(b) Type: the body carried outside the gate. Antitype: Christ's reproach, shame, and rejection.

c) Theological principles

(1) Separation from sin

(a) Sin is expelled from the camp, showing God's holiness.

- (b) Christ bore sin in our place "*without the gate*" (2 Cor. 5:21).

2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>21</sup> For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

(2) Rejection by the world

- (a) Christ was cast "*without the gate*," bearing our reproach, despised and rejected (Is. 53:3).

- (b) To identify with Him, we must be willing to go "*without the camp*" (vs. 13).

(3) True access to God

- (a) Being cast out of Jerusalem opened the way for us to be brought into the presence of God Himself.

- (b) The "*without the gate*" accomplished what the temple "*inside the gate*" never could (Heb. 10:1-14).

d) Application for believers

- (1) Holiness: just as sin was carried outside, we must separate from the defilement of the world (2 Cor. 6:17).

2 Corinthians 6:17

<sup>17</sup> Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you,

- (2) Identity: to follow Christ means sharing His reproach, even when it means exclusion or

shame (Heb. 11:26).

- (3) Hope: “We have a continuing city” (vs. 14) – our place is not in man’s approval, but in the eternal city God has prepared for us.

## B. Bearing His reproach (vv. 13-14)

### 1. The call – to go forth unto Him (vs. 13a)

- a) “*Let us go forth*” (ἐξερχώμεθα) – this is a continual call, not a one-time action.

The use of the verb here shows us that going to Christ “*without the camp*” is not a single step we took when we were saved, but a path we keep walking daily. Salvation brought us to Him once-for-all, but sanctification calls us to keep going out (“forth”) to Him – identifying with His reproach, separating from the world, and seeking the city to come.

- b) “*Unto Him without the camp*” – outside the approval of men, or of tradition, or of worldly practices, whatever they might be.
- c) To follow Christ means identifying with His shame and rejection.

Luke 9:23

<sup>23</sup> And he said to *them* all, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*

John 15:18-20

<sup>18</sup> *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.* <sup>19</sup> *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.* <sup>20</sup> *Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than*

his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

1 Peter 4:13-14

<sup>13</sup> But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. <sup>14</sup> If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

## 2. The cost – bearing His reproach (vs. 13b)

- a) The word for "*reproach*" (ὄνειδισμός) means disgrace, insult, and/or shame.
- b) It is the same word used of Moses, who chose the reproach of Christ over the treasures of Egypt (Heb. 11:26).
- c) The word for "*bearing*" (φέροντες) means to carry or endure. It's linked back to the first phrase of the verse – "*let us go forth*" – and describes the manner in which we go forth (i.e., "*go forth while bearing*").
  - (1) This is not passive (having reproach laid on us), but active: we are willingly carrying it. It paints the picture of shouldering a load.
  - (2) To "*go forth unto Him*" is not just to step outside, but to carry His reproach with us.
  - (3) Just as He bore our shame outside the gate, we now bear His shame before the world (Heb. 12:2 – He endured the cross, despising the shame).

## 3. The contrast – no continuing city, but one to come (vs. 14)

- a) The “*continuing city*” is speaking of one that is here on earth – like Jerusalem or Rome when Hebrews was written.
- b) “*We seek one to come*” – the eternal city that is prepared by God for His children (Heb. 11:10, 16; Rev. 21:2)
- c) As true worshippers, we willingly trade the fading approval of man for the everlasting presence of our Lord.

### C. Offering spiritual sacrifices (vv. 15-16)

When we hear the word *sacrifice*, most of us think of an altar and an animal being slain. That was true under the Old Covenant, as we have seen in this study of Hebrews, but in Christ the sacrifice for sin has already been made once for all. So, what does it mean for us to “*offer the sacrifice of praise*”?

A *sacrifice* is simply something that costs us something because we are giving it to God. In the Old Testament, it cost a lamb or a bullock; today it may cost our pride, our comfort, or our silence. When we praise God with our lips – even when we don’t feel like it, even when it’s hard – that is a *sacrifice*. When we give of our time, our resources, or our energy to do good for others in His name, that is a *sacrifice*.

So, when Hebrews speaks of “*the sacrifice of praise,*” it means that worship isn’t about convenience. It’s about giving something valuable back to the Lord who gave everything to us.

#### 1. The sacrifice of praise – vs. 15

- a) “*Sacrifice of praise*” (θυσίαν αἰνέσεως) – This is the thanksgiving offering that the Hebrews that received and/or heard this letter would have

been very familiar with from the Old Testament (Lev. 7:11-15).

#### Leviticus 7:11-12

<sup>11</sup> And this *is* the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which he shall offer unto the LORD.

<sup>12</sup> If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour, fried.

This was a voluntary offering, not required like the sin or trespass offerings. It was brought out of gratitude for God's deliverance, blessing, or provision.

- b) "*Fruit of our lips*" (καρπὸν χειλέων) – the text from Leviticus is the background the writer of Hebrews is drawing on when he speaks of offering "*the sacrifice of praise.*" Just as Israel expressed thanksgiving with an animal and bread offering, believers now express thanksgiving with the "*fruit of our lips*" – praise to God.

## 2. The sacrifice of practice – vs. 16a

In English, when we hear "*but,*" we usually think of a sharp contrast, as if the second part cancels the first. But in Greek, the word for "*but*" (δὲ) here doesn't cancel – it connects. It's saying, "Yes, bring the sacrifice of praise with your lips – *and don't forget* that true worship also shows itself in doing good and sharing with others." In other words, worship isn't just what we say, it's what we do.

- a) "*To do good*" (εὐποιΐας) – acts of kindness as practical worship. Our deeds become an offering when done by faith in Christ.

b) *"Communicate"* (κοινωνίας) – the root idea of this word is that of sharing or participating in something with someone. It's often seen as "fellowship."

(1) Throughout the New Testament it is used broadly of fellowship with Christ and His people, but also very specifically of sharing material goods (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; Phil. 4:15).

(2) In Gal. 6:6, it clearly applies to supporting teachers: *"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."*

(3) So, while in this verse it clearly includes all kinds of generosity – doing good, meeting needs, showing kindness – it is also a reminder (considering the context of verse 7 and 17) that part of our worship is sharing with those who minister the Word to us. It is a sacrifice well-pleasing to God when we both lift our voices in praise and open our hands in generosity.

### 3. The sacrifice that pleases – vs. 16b

In this verse, we are reminded that worship is not only about what we give but about who receives it. The only measure that matters is: *Does it please God?* We live in a world and culture that seeks the approval of men above all else, but Scripture calls us to live and worship for an "audience of One."

Conclusion to this point:

We are called to "go forth...unto Him," "without the camp," "bearing His reproach." We found in this message

that we are not to be living for the approval of this world or even the security of religious tradition, but for the “city” that is yet “to come.” In the meantime, our worship is not measured by bulls and goats, but “by the fruit of our lips” in praise, by the good that we do, and by the generosity that we share.

When we give God the praise of our mouths and the devotion of our lives, we are demonstrating true worship that pleases Him. True worship is not to be confined to the sanctuary or to a song we sing in church; it is lived out in the daily sacrifices of praise, service, and generosity.

So let us serve God acceptably – not only with words lifted heavenward, but with lives poured out in His service. For with such sacrifices, God is well pleased.

## **V. SERVE GOD ACCEPTABLY IN OUR OBEDIENCE – VS. 17-19**

### **A. Submitting to spiritual leadership (v. 17)**

We dealt with this verse earlier in the study of this chapter so we won't spend much time on it.

1. Obey, in its use here, means to be persuaded and yield to guidance (not blind obedience).
2. Submit is the willingness to place oneself under the authority of another for their watch-care.
3. Obedience to spiritual leaders is part of serving God acceptably, because it reflects trust in the God who placed them there.

### **B. Supporting through prayer (vv. 18-19)**

There is a shift between verse 17 and 18. The author goes from speaking in the third person (them, they) to that of the first person (I, us, we). The two verses are connected but distinct.

Verse 17 exhorts the believers to obey their local pastors, but in verse 18 the writer steps down from the platform of authority as an apostle and stands “shoulder-to-shoulder” with those pastors. The connection is whether it is your local pastor or, in the case of the immediate context of Hebrews 13 (and the right interpretation), an apostle writing Scripture, all spiritual leaders need both respect and prayer, because all are accountable to God.

1. The request for prayer (vs. 18a) – “Pray for us”
  - a) This is to be seen as more of a humble plea, not an authoritative command. It may be an imperative verb grammatically but it is a call rather than command. It’s a choice they had to make.
  - b) Understanding the “one right interpretation” of this text, let me make a clear application that almost every source I study makes: pastors need the prayers of God’s people.

Arthur Pink wrote this on the subject:

The servants of Christ [ministers] stand in real and urgent need of the prayers of their people. They are but men themselves, ignorant, weak, and erring, and unless they are granted a double portion of the Spirit they are not equipped for their arduous and honorable calling. They are the ones who bear the brunt of the battle, and are the special objects of Satan’s attacks. They are often tempted to compromise, to keep back that which, though unpalatable to them, is most profitable for their hearers. In the face of many disappointments and discouragements, they are apt to grow weary in well doing. It is, then, both our duty and privilege to supplicate God on their behalf for daily

supplies of grace to be granted them from on High; that they may be delivered from temptations, kept faithful, steadfast and devoted.

2. The reason for prayer (vs. 18b)

It's not the content of what they should pray – he's not saying "pray that we have a good conscience" – but the basis on which the writer says "Pray for us." They can be confident in their prayers because they were living with integrity before God.

What the author is saying is, "We have a good conscience, namely in that we desire to conduct ourselves honestly in all things."

Consider this: the author is speaking in the plural, not just for himself. He couldn't possibly know what was in the conscience of the others to whom he refers, nor could anyone else. The evidence of their "good conscience," then, can only be seen in the way they lived their lives out in the open in the world.

Conscience is tied to behavior in other portions of the New Testament.

- a) Acts 23:1 – the Apostle Paul points to his whole manner of life as evidence of a clear conscience.

Acts 23:1

<sup>1</sup> And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

- b) Acts 24:16 (vs. 13-16) – conscience requires deliberate effort to live in a way that does not offend God or others.

Acts 24:16

<sup>16</sup> And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and *toward* men.

- c) 1 Timothy 1:5 – a good conscience is inseparably linked with love and genuine faith. It is seen as shaping our actions, not just our thoughts.

1 Timothy 1:5

<sup>5</sup> Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned:

- d) 1 Peter 3:16 – a good conscience shows itself in godly conduct even under slander.

1 Peter 3:16

<sup>16</sup> Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

### 3. The result desired from prayer (vs. 19)

- a) To “be restored to [them] sooner” was the true desire of the prayer.

Philemon 22

<sup>22</sup> But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

- b) “But I beseech you the rather to do this” – points back to the “Pray for us” in the previous verse and emphasizes the humble request rather than an authoritative command.

- c) Hebrews was written out of deep pastoral concern. Every warning, every exhortation, every doctrinal explanation was aimed at keeping these believers from drifting back to

ritual and away from Christ. When the writer asks to be “restored” to them, he is not thinking only of companionship and fellowship, but of ministry. His heart is that of a shepherd: he longs to be present with them so that their faith might be strengthened.

Romans 1:11-12

<sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;

<sup>12</sup> That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

## **VI. SERVE GOD ACCEPTABLY THROUGH GOD’S ENABLING – vs. 20-25**

### **A. The benediction of peace (vv. 20-21)**

Verse 20 is a clear presentation of the gospel message as a reminder to the Hebrews that were tempted to drift back into the rituals of the Law.

1. Peace secured in Christ (vs. 20)
  - a) The Source of peace – God Himself (vs. 20a)

“Now the God of peace”

    - (1) Only found 5 times in the New Testament and all are in the Apostle Paul’s writings, if we consider Hebrews written by him (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23).
    - (2) This signifies that God is the author and giver of peace.
    - (3) Peace here is not just the absence of conflict but the wholeness and reconciliation that is secured in Christ.

Romans 5:1

<sup>1</sup> Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

- b) The seal of peace – the resurrection of Christ (vs. 20b)

“...that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus...”

- (1) This is the only direct reference in the book of Hebrews to the resurrection.
- (2) Faith is not in a dead ritual but in a risen Savior.

1 Corinthians 15:17

<sup>17</sup> And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

- (3) The faith of the believers to whom the letter was written were facing a faltering faith if they forgot the resurrection.

- c) The Shepherd of peace – Christ’s ongoing care (vs. 20c)

“...that great shepherd of the sheep...”

- (1) Christ is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep and still leads the flock (through His under-shepherds as they teach the Word of God).

John 10:11

<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

John 10:14

<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

- (2) The reminder here is that their faith was not only in what Christ did, but in what He continued to do for His people.
- d) The security of peace – the blood of the everlasting covenant (vs. 20d)  
“...through the blood of the everlasting covenant...”
  - (1) This covenant is not temporary like the old, but eternal, unchanging, and guaranteed by Christ’s sacrifice (Heb. 9:12, 15).
  - (2) Our peace is secure because it rests on His blood, not our works.

## 2. Peace applied to believers (vs. 21)

### a) God’s work of equipping (vs. 21a)

“Make you perfect in every good work to do His will...”

#### (1) “Make you perfect” (καταρτίσαι)

- (a) This verb is in a form (optative mood) that expresses a wish or desire for an action to occur in which the completion of such is doubtful.
- (b) The word means to put in order, equip, furnish, restore, or make complete.
- (c) It does not mean to make morally perfect, but to supply what is lacking so something can function as intended. That’s how it is used in every case in the New Testament.
- (d) God doesn’t just call us to do His will; He equips us for it. When He says that we

are to “bear fruit” (John 15:1-14), He supplies the seed, the water, and the growth.

b) God’s work within (vs. 21b)

“Working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight...”

- (1) There is a play on words in the Greek in this verse that is very interesting. Connected with the first phrase of the verse, it literally reads: “May He equip you in every good work to do (ποιῆσαι) His will, doing (ποιῶν) in you what is pleasing in His sight...”
- (2) The beauty in this is: we “do” His will, because He is “doing” His work in us.
- (3) The same God of peace who called us to serve Him is actively shaping us to please Him.

c) God’s work through Christ (vs. 21c)

“Through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

- (1) Christ is both the channel (“through” Him) and the goal (“glory” to Him).
- (2) Every act of service points back to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Romans 11:36

<sup>36</sup> For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

**B. The benediction of grace (vv. 22-25)**

1. A plea for endurance (vs. 22)

a) "Suffer the word of exhortation" (vs. 22a)

- (1) "Suffer" (ἀνέχω) – to hold or bear up under, to endure patiently, to tolerate. Here, it can be understood as to accept patiently and not to lightly dismiss, nor resent what was given.
- (2) This is why some scholars consider this letter to have been a message that was either preached and later written down, or a letter written with the intention of being preached.

Acts 13:15

<sup>15</sup> And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men *and* brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

2 Timothy 4:1-4

<sup>1</sup> I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; <sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; <sup>4</sup> And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

- (3) The whole epistle is being described as a "word of exhortation."
- (4) The beginning of the verse – "And I beseech you, brethren..." – shows that the tone is not one of authoritative command but of pastoral tenderness. He's saying, "*I know*

*this wasn't easy to read/hear, but it was necessary. Please receive it patiently."*

- b) "For I have written a letter unto you in few words" – considering the depth of the subjects dealt with in this letter, the author is pointing out that he hadn't troubled them with any great length but simply got to the point of what he wanted to say.

## 2. A note of fellowship (vs. 23)

This shows the personal, pastoral heart of the writer. He valued relationships that he had made over the years.

## 3. A greeting of unity (vs. 24)

We dealt with this verse in a previous message. It shows a balanced recognition of leadership and membership – the whole body together.

## 4. A final word of grace (vs. 25)

- a) Grace is the final note maybe because grace is the first and last word of the Christian life.

John 1:16

<sup>16</sup> And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

1 Corinthians 15:10

<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

- b) Hebrews began with God speaking by His Son (Heb. 1:1-2) and ends with God's grace through His Son.

## Hebrews 1:1-2

<sup>1</sup> God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

Conclusion:

Hebrews 13 has shown us, in very practical ways, what it means to “*serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear*” (12:28).

- We serve Him in our relationships (vv. 1-6) – loving one another, honoring marriage, rejecting covetousness.
- We serve Him by honoring spiritual leadership (vv. 7, 17, 24) – following those who teach us the Word and watch for our souls.
- We serve Him in our doctrine (vv. 9-10) – holding fast to Christ, our altar, rather than being carried away by strange teachings.
- We serve Him in our worship (vv. 10-16) – bearing Christ’s reproach, offering the sacrifices of praise and generosity.
- We serve Him in our obedience (vv. 17-19) – obeying leaders, but also praying for them, that the Word might run and be glorified.
- And finally, we serve Him only through His enabling grace (vv. 20-25) – the God of peace, who raised Jesus from the dead, equips us in every good work to do His will and grants us grace to the end.

The chapter begins with love, warns against strange doctrine, lifts up Christ as our altar, calls us to obedience

and prayer, and ends with grace. All of it points to this truth: acceptable service is not about ritual, self-effort, or outward performance, but about Christ – His sacrifice for us, His reproach we bear, His Spirit working in us, and His grace sustaining us.