

Sacrifices of Praise

Are you taking a college course or something?" Assad asked Grady, who walked up to the dining table, his arms full of books. Assad had come to his cousin's house for Grady to change his oil.

"What is this?" Assad asked, picking up a heavy book.

"It's like a reference book for the Bible," said Grady.

"You know most people today just look up things."

"I do that too, but I also like books. I'm old-school."

"Right. Me too," said Assad, sitting down at the table.

"So, what are you studying?"

"The new birth in Christ believers experience because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Pastor is teaching a series on it."

"It sounds Greek to me." Assad laughed.

"It doesn't have to, if you accept Christ."

"I told you, man. I'm not ready yet," said Assad, standing up. "And if your pastor is teaching a series on this stuff, why are you beating your brains out?"

"I'm responsible for my own knowledge and love of Christ," replied Grady. "I study because I want to know more. And what Christ did for me on Calvary continues to motivate me to learn and love Him."

"One thing is for sure, cuz," Assad said, opening a large bag of chips in the kitchen. "I can always count on you to find a way to talk about God."

1. *Do you tend to share a lot of details or skip to the main points of a matter?*

2. *Describe a time you have found rich truth buried in the details of Scripture.*

3. *Why do you think details matter to God?*

Jesus' Sacrifice for Us

Hebrews 13:9–14 KJV

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

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

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

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. 13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. 14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Hebrews 13:9–14 NIV

⁹ Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so. ¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

¹¹ The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. ¹² And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. ¹³ Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. ¹⁴ For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

The writer of Hebrews has spent the first twelve chapters trying to show those who have placed faith in Jesus not to envy the Jewish laws and rituals. Jesus' sacrifice for our sins is superior to anything the old covenant offered, with its burnt, peace, grain, and sin offerings (see Lev. 1–6). Those were "ceremonial . . . external regulations applying until the time of the new order" (Heb. 9:10)—the "order" established by Jesus, our great high priest.

The Jewish priests would eat some of the meat offerings made at the temple, as well as the bread of the presence.

But here, they have no right to eat from the “altar” of Christ’s sacrifice (v. 10). There are at least two possible meanings of this “altar.” First, it could be a metaphor for the Communion table, since Jesus made bread a memory of His sacrifice (see Matt. 26:26). Second, this “altar” might be a metaphor for the cross. As Paul writes, “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

The author reminds readers of the “sin offering” of the Day of Atonement (Heb. 13:11). In a foreshadowing of Jesus’ sacrifice, the “high priest [carried] the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering.” The priest sprinkled the blood from the sacrifice of a bull on the mercy seat of the ark, to atone for his own sins. Then he sprinkled the blood from the goat, to atone for the people’s sins. The bodies of those sacrificed animals were burned outside the Israelites’ camp, because they were associated with sin (Lev. 16:27). Thus the writer of Hebrews is showing that these sacrifices prefigure the sacrifice of Jesus, who “suffered” outside the city of Jerusalem for the sins of the people, to make them “holy” (Heb. 13:12). His death outside the city shows that He was an outcast, “despised and rejected by mankind” (Isa. 53:3).

For us to find grace, Jesus Himself was disgraced. If we are to follow Him, we must be ready to suffer like He suffered. The result of following Him is not to be accepted and adored by others but to receive “the disgrace he bore” (Heb. 13:13). We can endure suffering because we remember that this world is not our home. We look forward to an “enduring city” still “to come” (v. 14), a city “whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10; 12:22).

4. *What “strange teachings” (v. 9) were early Christians tempted to follow?*

5. *Why is it significant that Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem?*

6. *What can believers who suffer anticipate in the future?*

Our Sacrifices for Jesus

Hebrews 13:15–21 KJV

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. 16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

18 Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. 19 But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

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

Hebrews 13:15–21 NIV

¹⁵ Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. ¹⁶ And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

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

¹⁸ Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. ¹⁹ I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

²⁰ Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Because Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice, believers

are inspired to make sacrifices for Him. Believers give a continuous “sacrifice of praise” (v. 15) from their lips as they thank Him for all He has done. Believers also sacrifice through their service for Him, as they “do good” and “share with others” (v. 16). For the audience of the letter, a new community of fellowship and sharing would be important, since Jewish Christians might easily be alienated from the wider Jewish community.

This new community of Christians can have confidence in their leaders, because all leaders of God’s church “must give an account” of their actions to God. While some might think they can lord authority over those under their care (as some have), no leader is exempt from standing before God and answering for what he or she does (see James 3:1). If a leader is godly, however, those they lead should gladly follow, making the “work” of leading a “joy” to them and a “benefit” to the community (Heb. 13:17).

As a leader for his audience, the author of Hebrews believes that he is delivering a godly message for them. Twice he asks the audience to pray for him, so that his conscience would remain clear, so that he can continue living a godly life (v. 18). He urges them to pray to clear some obstacle that prevented him from coming to visit them (v. 19).

In his closing benediction, the author exalts Jesus as the one whom God raised from the dead, our “great Shepherd of the sheep” (v. 20), and the one through whom the eternal covenant was sealed in His blood. The writer asks this God of peace to “equip” the readers with everything they might need to do His will (v. 21). This group of struggling believers could be assured that they had made the right decision to follow Jesus Christ.

7. *What sacrifices should we offer to God?*

8. *How does the author describe what God does through Jesus?*

9. *How should the Christian community respond to leaders?*

To Sacrifice or Not to Sacrifice?

Niko had a decision to make: either accompany his friends to the premiere of the latest action movie that he had been dying to see—or follow through with his commitment to a service opportunity at his church, for homeless families. He was bummed because the movie was playing at the same time that he would need to be working.

As a newly baptized Christian, Niko knew that the right choice was to honor his commitment and show hospitality to the unhoused; but he couldn't help wanting to skip out on that to go and have some fun with his friends. Just as he was about to call them to confirm his presence at the movie, he thought about what his baptism meant. He had committed to living for Jesus, who was willing to suffering and die for others. Niko then realized the route he desired to take.

Jesus did His work in His ministry and sacrificed His life for us. There were many other things that Jesus could have done with His time, but He willingly devoted it to protect us, as a shepherd. That kind of protection, nurture, and love from Jesus can be emulated by His followers— if they are willing to look to His example of hospitality: sharing hope, loving each other, remembering those in prison, and other endeavors that could emulate the selfless sacrifice of Christ.

10. *Since it is impossible to live up to Jesus' perfect standard, when do you feel that you are "off the hook" in how you live?*

11. *Since we look forward to a future hope of a heavenly city, how hard should we work to make people feel comfortable, respected, and seen?*

12. *When have you "sacrificed" something for the good of the whole, the sake of evangelism, or the good of someone else?*

Reminding Ourselves of Christ's Sacrifice

We have been studying how Jesus' sacrifice can inspire us to offer our own sacrifices. What you are asked to do is to keep the gift of Christ before you as you go about your week. As you are reminded of God's love expressed through Jesus, you should find yourself encouraged to show hospitality and care for those around you.

► *Where could you write the key verse and place it around your home? Where do you most need to be reminded of your own "sacrifice of praise"?*

KEY VERSE

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

—Hebrews 13:15 KJV

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

—Hebrews 13:15 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 25 through August 31

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Isaiah 28:14–22—A Sure Foundation.

Tues. Psalm 122—Let Us Enter the Lord's House.

Wed. Psalm 50:1–15—Offer a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving.

Thurs. Galatians 3:23–29—One in Christ Jesus.

Fri. Ephesians 4:4–16—One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.

Sat. Isaiah 51:9–16—Everlasting Joy of the Ransomed.

Sun. 1 Peter 2:1–12—Rejected by Mortals, Chosen by God.