

## #21 Hebrews 13b

Tom Tillman

**Verse 15:** Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name.

Therefore by Him... the only way that God hears anyone's prayer or praise is if they are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and our prayer goes through Him, our only Mediator, directly to God the Father.

God does not hear the prayer of those who have not put their trust in Jesus Christ.

For the eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous,  
And His ears *are open* to their prayers;  
But the face of the LORD *is* against those who do evil. 1 Pet 3:12

The LORD *is* far from the wicked,  
But He hears the prayer of the righteous. Prov 15:29

If I regard iniquity in my heart,  
The Lord will not hear.

<sup>19</sup> *But* certainly God has heard *me*;  
He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Psalm 66:18

But what is a 'sacrifice of praise?' It is simply praising Him when we don't feel like praising Him, when we are beset by fear, worries, anxieties, doubt, in the midst of trials or temptations. The best example in Scripture is Job. He went through worse trials than most ever will but in the middle of it, he said, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.' Job 13:15 Trusting Him is a form of praise; it is saying, I believe Your Word. I believe and trust that You are able to perform Your Word. I believe that You are trustworthy.

**Verse 16:** But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

While we are praising God... we shouldn't let that be the end of it. Do good and share; do what is right, do good for others... but always remember... his main point here is that we are to be sharing with those who are part of this congregation. That should always be the number one priority of any church body: the care and well being of each and every member of that particular body... not the neighborhood and not the city and not the world... the church family... according to God's Word... that is number one.,, if not, that church is sorely lacking with wrong priorities. After the body is cared for, then we look outward to the neighborhood, the city and the world.

God never intended for any Church to seek to 'love and serve the city' when, at the same time, some within that body are lacking basic needs.

God is well pleased when we are faithful to look after each other, especially when we are willing to sacrifice so that others in the body can have their basic needs met.

**Verse 17:** Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Here he is referring to those in church leadership, to the authority which God has established within the Church. It means the pastor or bishop and elders of each particular church. It does not mean a centralized hierarchy such as a pope and cardinals and bishops... it definitely does not mean some kind of 'mother church.' This is one of the areas where Baptists, at least 'Conservative Baptist,' have the right idea. No centralized authority tells a Baptist church what to do or not do. That's why it took so long for this church to decide on a new senior pastor. In many denominations, the central authority says when it is time for a pastor to leave and they dictate who the new pastor will be... like it or not.

In Romans 13, Paul is referring to civil authority, city, state and national authority: 'Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.'<sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.<sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want

to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. <sup>4</sup> For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. <sup>5</sup> Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. <sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.' Rom 13:1

However, in both cases, whether civil authority or ecclesiastical authority, it is clear that those in authority have been established by God and will answer to God, when they stand before Him to give account as to whether or not they were faithful in the office God raised them up to fill.

**Verse 18:** 'Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. <sup>19</sup> But I especially urge *you* to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.'

Paul, if it is in fact Paul who wrote this letter, is once again asking for prayer for himself and those with him. One of Paul's 'confederates' is, of course, Timothy whom he had left in Ephesus as pastor; in just a few verses further, he will reference Timothy. He doesn't say, 'Pray for us that we will be able to have a good conscience' but, rather, he says, 'Pray for us **because we do** have a good conscience... we are living honorably... we are not in sin or deceiving others, we are not hypocrites... pray for us.' Here we see that the writer of Hebrews is not simply writing to some group of Jews somewhere... he is writing to a group with whom he had been previously; he says, 'that I may be 'restored' to you...' Perhaps he had even brought the Gospel to them originally and led the very first ones to the Lord in salvation... as Paul had with so many others; he was the one who evangelized many cities establishing churches where he went on his missionary journeys.

**Verse 20:** 'Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant...

God, the Father, brought up the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead because He had not been conquered by sin and death, He had conquered death. Death could not hold Him because, although He was born into and had lived within a body of flesh, He had never sinned in that flesh. He was able to become our eternal Great High Priest, the executor of His own last will and testament, the everlasting covenant by which we were allowed, because of faith in Him, to become children of God, fellow heirs with Him, heirs of all that is. That last will and testament, the New Covenant was initiated through His blood. He was the only one who could be that one, perfect sacrifice acceptable to God; although He is the Son of God, He had also become one of us, a son of Adam, He had undergone and withstood every temptation and trial and He had remained pure, holy and sinless throughout.

**Verse 21:** '...**make you complete** in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.'

How does He make us complete? James tells us in the very first part of his letter:

James 1:1 says: James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. <sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Notice to whom James addressed his letter: to Hebrews, to the twelve tribes who were scattered abroad in Asia Minor, outside the borders of Israel... to the same places that Paul wrote his letters, but Paul was writing primarily to Gentiles. The James said, ' Consider it all joy, my brethren, **when** you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be **perfect and complete**, lacking in nothing.'

We'll get into this more next week, but see how that it is God Who works in us to make us complete: He causes trials. Day in and day out, never ceasing He is always working within us to complete us in Christ... to 'make us complete in every good work to do His will, working in us what is well pleasing in His sight. He is

constantly working within us to produce patience and endurance. And whose work is it as we are accomplishing 'good works'? It is God's work. Remember what Paul wrote: '...work out your salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for **it is God who is at work in you**, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. Php 2:12 And... 'For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.' Php 1:6

The reason He is constantly working within us, pushing, poking, prodding, testing and trying... to more and more, day by day, form us into the image and likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ so that we would bring glory to Him, so that He would glorify Himself through us.

**Verse 22:** And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words. <sup>23</sup> Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.

Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

<sup>25</sup> Grace *be* with you all. Amen.

This has been a letter of exhortation. Exhortation means: an address or communication ***emphatically urging someone to do something.***

The writer has been emphatically urging his readers to do something. To those who are genuine believers, he has been urging them to leave behind all of the trappings of Judaism, all of the symbols, rituals and codes of law, to come all the way to the freedom in Christ of the New Covenant. And he has been urging emphatically those who have believed but have not come all the way to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to, in fact, come all the way, to not fear persecution but to put their whole faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here we find out that Timothy was also imprisoned for the faith. He had now been released and the writer expected Timothy to accompany him when he came again to visit this group of Hebrews. Once again, this does sound like Paul has been the author and he is in Italy, perhaps Rome.

As we finish up our study of the Book of Hebrews, we need to be reminded that in order to correctly understand what God is saying in this book, we must remember that it is different from most of the New Testament letters, in that it is not written exclusively to believers, to the Church, as are most of what Paul wrote. This letter is written to 3 distinct groups of Hebrews, not Gentiles, and only one of those groups is comprised of born again believers. The 3 groups are: 1) born again believers, members of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Church, 2) unbelievers who had become intellectually convinced of the truth of the Gospel but had not yet come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They were in danger of knowing the truth but then turning away from the truth, going into apostasy and being lost forever, 3) unbelievers who were drawn to the Gospel, drawn to believers, even drawn to Jesus Christ but were not believers and were in danger of being lost forever.

Because the writer is, in fact, writing also to those in groups 2 and 3, many have mistakenly believed that the Letter to Hebrews was teaching that a child of God could turn away from faith and lose their salvation. That is why the several warnings in this letter have been so often misunderstood. The most difficult challenge is in chapter 6:4 where it says that for those '**once enlightened**' who fall away, it is impossible to renew them to repentance, that they 'crucify again for themselves the Son of God.' That is mistakenly taken to refer to born again believers, but it never refers to those being warned by any 'labels' that would refer exclusively to born again believers such as, born again, holy, righteous, saints or the like. They are like the ones who fill so many churches today: people who have been exposed to the truth but have never really exercised saving faith... they make look right, act right and speak the right words but have never trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross, they have never been born again. Actually, that is the very reason that the term 'born again' is so offensive to so many liberal denominations and to Catholics. Jesus said, 'You must be born again.' These others maintain that doing good works is all that is necessary for salvation.