Hebrews 13:15-19 "His Sacrifice, Our Sacrifices" **

Main Idea: According to Hebrews 13:15-19, the reality of Christ's sacrifice should produce in us a willingness to offer sacrifices to God. His sacrifice leads to our sacrifices. What kind of sacrifices does He deserve and desire from us? Our text mentions four types.

- I. The Lord made a sacrifice for us (15a).
 - A. He went outside the camp to die for us (12).
 - B. We must go outside the camp to live for Him (13).
- II. The Lord deserves sacrifices from us (15b-19).
 - A. We should offer Him the sacrifice of our lips (15).
 - 1. Our worship is supposed to be continual.
 - 2. Our worship is supposed to be public.
 - 3. Our worship is supposed to be through Jesus and for Jesus.
 - B. We should offer Him the sacrifice of our lives (16).
 - 1. Worship that pleases God involves doing good.
 - 2. Worship that pleases God involves sharing what we have with others.
 - C. We should offer Him the sacrifice of our obedience to our church leaders (17).
 - 1. Church leaders have God-given expectations.
 - a. They are to watch over the souls of local congregations.
 - b. They will give an account to the Lord for each person entrusted to them.
 - 2. Church members have God-given expectations.
 - a. They are to obey and submit to their leaders.
 - b. They are to make their work a joy.
 - 3. When leaders and members fulfill their God-given roles, everyone benefits.
 - D. We should offer him the sacrifice of our prayers (18-19).
 - 1. Prayer is a wonderful way to help each other.
 - 2. Prayer opens up doors of additional ministry opportunity.

Take Inventory: Ponder two questions...

- 1. Have I accepted His sacrifice for me?
- 2. Is His sacrifice leading to my daily sacrifices for Him?

Let's write a story together. I'll begin the story and you come up with the ending. Here we go...

Once upon a time there was a homeless beggar who was living under a bridge. Living isn't the right word. He was barely *eeking* out an existence day to day. His meals consisted of garbage remains he could find. His clothes barely kept the chill from his bones. He had no family nor friends nor any hope that life would ever change.

One icy winter morning he slipped as he leaned to get a drink and fell into the fast-moving river. His frail body soon went limp as hypothermia set in. He would have died except a man happened to be crossing the bridge at that very moment who saw his lifeless body in the water. The traveler rushed into the raging river, risking his own safety in order to pull the helpless man to the shore.

As it turned out, the rescuer happened to be a quite wealthy nobleman and for reasons that later baffled the townspeople, this rich nobleman not only saved the beggar's life but afterwards took him to his posh home to live, not as a servant in an outbuilding, but as an adopted family member. The nobleman actually gave the pauper his own room in the house, five sets of tailor-made clothes, a place at the family dining table, and most impressive of all, a signet ring which authorized him to spend the master's own resources. And so, because of the nobleman's generous sacrifice, in one day the beggar went from rags to riches.

After five years of living in abundance, the one-time beggar left the castle one morning on a vacation trip. As he journeyed down the road he recognized a landmark he hadn't seen since the day the nobleman rescued him. It was the bridge that used to be his home. Unpleasant memories flooded his mind as he approached the structure, when all of a sudden he heard the sound of a voice screaming. He looked over the bridge's edge and saw someone thrashing in the river below. He made his way down to the riverbank for a closer look and sure enough, there was an elderly man drowning just thirty feet from him. There was no one else in sight. It was obvious that if he didn't take action immediately, the elderly gentleman would soon perish.

And so, without hesitation, the man...

Now you finish the story. How should the story end? How about this ending? And so, without hesitation, the man sacrificed his own safety to rescue the helpless stranger, and brought him to shore, and did it gladly as he recalled his own rescue five years prior. That's a pretty good ending, isn't it?

Now here's an ending I doubt anybody would suggest. And so, without hesitation, the man climbed back up the riverbank, hopped into his carriage, and headed down the road on his vacation trip, while the elderly gentleman sank to the bottom of the river. That's an unthinkable ending to the story, isn't it? When you have received a second shot at life because of someone's sacrifice for you, the appropriate response, should you be given the opportunity, would be to gladly make a sacrifice for the good of someone else.

Now ponder this question. What's the appropriate response to the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us? Indeed, He didn't *almost* die for us. He *died* for us. He sacrificed Himself for us in order to rescue us from perishing forever. And so how do we respond? Sadly, if we're honest with ourselves, far too often it's story-ending number *two*. Every day the Savior who rescued us gives us opportunities to reflect His love, but so often we miss the opportunities because we're preoccupied with our own agenda, our vacation trip.

I need passages like the one before us. We all do. We need regular reminders of the rightful way to respond to what our Savior did for us. According to Hebrews 13:15-19, the reality of Christ's sacrifice should produce in us a willingness to make sacrifices. His sacrifice should lead to our sacrifices, hence the title of this message, "His Sacrifice, Our Sacrifices".

What kind of sacrifices does He deserve and desire from us? Notice our text. Verse 15 begins,

"Through Jesus (lit. "through him"), therefore." Stop there. Notice the *therefore*. What follows takes us back to what was just said about Jesus previously. So before we examine the text before us we must return to the verses we looked at last time and remind ourselves of an important truth we considered.

I. The Lord made a sacrifice for us (15a).

How did He do it? According to verse 12, "And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood." What did Jesus do?

A. He went outside the camp to die for us (12). The Holy One, Jesus the Son of God, went outside of the Holy Place in Jerusalem and went to unholy, desecrated ground on Golgotha, in order to die in the place of unholy people so that by means of His suffering and death He might make people holy. That's an amazing sacrifice, my friend, an unmatched sacrifice. The Holy One bore our sin in order to make us holy by His blood.

And what does He invite us to do? We find the invitation of the book of Hebrews in verse 13, "Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore." Keep in mind this letter was first sent to Hebrew Christians, some of whom, due to persecution, were pondering going back to their old ways in Judaism. Don't do that, says the writer of Hebrews. Don't go back to the traditions of the past. Simply put, Jesus went outside the camp to die for us. So...

B. We must go outside the camp to live for Him (13). Outside the camp. You can't straddle the fence. Judaism was a means to an end. The laws God gave to the Jews were intended to point us to the Messiah. Now that He has come, you must leave the camp and go to Him. That's the way the story is supposed to end. The Lord made a sacrifice for us. Consequently...

II. The Lord deserves sacrifices from us (15b-19).

His sacrifice is supposed to lead to our sacrifices. That's what verse 15 says, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice..." Notice, it's *through Jesus*. We don't offer God sacrifices in order to merit His favor. We're sinners who can't earn His favor. But we can come to Him, through the means He has provided for us, *through Jesus*. And if we've come to God through Jesus, the fitting response is to offer God sacrifices.

In 1 Peter 2:5 Peter clarifies that we offer "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God *through Jesus Christ.*" Paul likewise emphasized in 1 Corinthians 8:6, "There is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through* whom all things came and *through* whom we live."

Now what kind of sacrifices should we offer the Lord who saved us? Our text mentions four types of sacrifices in verses 15-19.

A. We should offer Him the sacrifice of our lips (15). "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name."

The background of verse 15 is the Old Testament sacrificial system. The Jews were required to offer numerous sacrifices. In fact, in Leviticus 1-7 God gave His people eight chapters of detailed instructions about offerings to Him: burnt offerings, meal offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and trespass offerings. Through all of this the Lord was teaching His people many lessons, but let me highlight this one. He wanted them to know that sacrifice was part of worship. God deserves our worship and one of the primary ways we worship Him is through bringing sacrifices to Him.

Hebrews makes it clear that's true for us, too. Notice the language of worship in Hebrews 13. Let us OFFER to God a SACRIFICE of PRAISE, the FRUIT of our lips. In the Greek, the verb "offer" is a technical term which means "to offer the sacrifice of animals" (see Heb. 5:1; 9:26; 10:1).

We don't need to offer God the bloody sacrifices of animals any longer, for the Lamb of God has been slain. But there are sacrifices the Lord desires from us, and these sacrifices are to be a tangible expression of our worship. We learn three things about worship here.

- 1. Our worship is supposed to be continual. "Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise." Under the old covenant, a good Jew would travel to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at least three times a year. Our sacrifice is to be continual.
- 2. Our worship is supposed to be public. We're to bring "a sacrifice of praise." It's supposed to be "the fruit of lips that confess his name." Notice the verbal element in this. Worship is supposed to involve our mouths, our lips. It's one thing to express our indebtedness to God in private, and that's good. But it's another thing to allow people to hear how much He means to us in public. And according to this verse, that too is good, indeed it's commanded.

Don't just *think* praise. Express it. Express it out loud. Express it so it can be heard. Raymond Brown remarks, "It is one thing to express one's indebtedness to God; it is quite another to allow other people to know how much he means to us." [1]

That's one of the primary reasons we gather on the Lord's Day for corporate worship, to verbalize our praise. Our worship is to be continual and public. We're supposed to be using our voices to call attention to the wonderful name of the person that rescued us. What name?

3. Our worship is supposed to be through Jesus and for Jesus. "Through Jesus let us offer to God a sacrifice...the fruit of lips that confess His name." In order to worship God acceptably, we must come through Jesus. In our worship we must express praise for Jesus, for His "name." His name represents who He is and what He did.

Beloved, think about it. We have so much for which we ought to offer the Lord our praise and thanks. Right here in Hebrews 13 we've seen a host of praise-worthy benefits. We ought to praise the Lord for the brotherly love we enjoy (verse 1), for the expressions of hospitality we've received (verse 2), and for how God's people have shown compassion to us and helped us when we were in need (verse 3). We should offer Him praise if we have loving and loyal partners in marriage (verse 4), if He has met our financial and material needs (verse 5), if He has provided us with help in a particular problem (verse 6), and if He has graced our lives with pastors, deacons, Sunday School teachers, and other church leaders who have helped us know Christ and live for Him (verse 7). For these and an unending host of other reasons, we ought to offer God a continual sacrifice of praise. [2]

Are you doing that? Do you make it a point to use your mouth to call attention to your Savior's worth? Do you do it in your daily devotional time with Him? Do you come to the church's worship services with that aim? His sacrifice deserves our sacrifices, and it starts here, by offering Him the sacrifice of our lips.

B. We should offer Him the sacrifice of our lives (16). "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

That's interesting. We're to offer God a sacrifice of praise, but here's another kind of sacrifice that pleases Him, doing good and sharing with others. With such sacrifices, says the writer, God is pleased.

There's something that's every bit as important to God as your praise on Sunday. What's that? It's your life during the week. Worship is a 24/7 responsibility. Here we learn that the kind of worship that pleases God is expressed in two ways.

1. Worship that pleases God involves doing good. When we do the right thing with a motivation to bring honor to God, that's worship. When others are cutting ethical corners at work and we do the right thing out of a desire to please the Lord, that's worship. And the fact that writer says, "Don't forget to do that," implies this isn't natural and requires intentionality. As does this...

2. Worship that pleases God involves sharing what we have with others. The Lord has given us many things, and He wants us to share what we have with others. The writer has already given some examples, such as showing hospitality (13:2) and ministering to those in prison (13:3). The Greek term is koinonias. Literally, "Don't forget fellowshipping." To fellowship is to share. When we share a meal because of Christ, that's not only fellowship but can be an expression of worship if it's done through Jesus and for Jesus.

Do you want to please God? Then offer Him the praise of your lips and generous deeds from your life, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Keep in mind that such sacrifices don't earn salvation. God's salvation is a free gift based on the merit of Christ's work. The reason we're to do good and share with others is not to earn God's favor but because of it. Remember, His sacrifice leads to our sacrifices, the sacrifices of our lips and the sacrifices of our lives. [3]

Take another look at the final phrase in verse 16, "for with such sacrifices God is pleased." With such sacrifices. There's more than one kind of sacrifice that pleases God. A song sung in church with a grateful heart? Yes, that's an acceptable, God-pleasing sacrifice. But so is giving a generous gift to a missionary, or taking a meal to a house-bound widow. And the thing about a sacrifice is that it costs you.

What have you done recently for the honor of the Lord that *cost you*? How have you denied yourself, how have you sacrificed for His glory recently? May I remind you that we take free-will offerings each week as a church for this very reason? We don't charge you to be a member of this church. We don't monitor your income and take a percentage. We do give you the opportunity to give freely and generously, and indeed our ministries depend on it. When you give your offerings to this church, you're engaging in an act of worship to the Lord, and you're also providing for the needs of missionaries who are taking the gospel to six continents; you're making possible ministries to children, teens, and adults in this community; you're funding teaching ministries like our counseling training program; you're unleashing benevolent ministries and outreach ministries such as CRADLE; you're making it possible for us to pay light bills and gas bills and water bills so we can use this facility to teach God's Word four services a week, and so on. *Don't forget to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.* By the way, if we do forget, these ministries can't happen. But when we remember, when we give generously, the ministries go forward and God is pleased.

The two sacrifices we've just discussed are clearly called sacrifices in our passage—verse 15 calls verbal praise a *sacrifice*, and verse 16 calls doing good and sharing *sacrifices*. The next two sacrifices I'm going to mention are not called sacrifices per se, but in light of the context it would seem they could be, if done for God's honor.

C. We should offer Him the sacrifice of our obedience to our church leaders (17). "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

It's interesting that the writer addresses the treatment of church leaders three times in chapter 13. Verse 7—"Remember your leaders...and imitate their faith"—probably referring to previous church leaders who are now in glory. Verse 24—"Greet all your leaders," a reference to present church leaders. And the verse we're considering, verse 17, also a reference to present church leaders. Verse 17 is a gold-mine in terms of church polity, for here we learn what God expects of both church leaders and church members.

Let me clarify something. All who are in Christ are equal in terms of status and worth (we are all unworthy!), for the ground is level at the foot of the cross. But by God's design, there are functional distinctions. Not everyone is to lead the church. When a person who is not gifted or called by God to be a leader seeks to exercise leadership in a church, that's a problem. Likewise, it's a problem when a person is gifted and called by God to lead, but refuses to do so. So let's explore these functional distinctions carefully. According to verse 17...

1. Church leaders have God-given expectations. What are they? Two are mentioned.

a. They are to watch over the souls of local congregations. "They keep watch," says our text. When this verb (agrupnousin) is used in other places, it has to do with the kind of action necessary for prayer (such as in Mark 13:33 "Be alert!"). The term means "to keep oneself awake, to be awake." Gromacki explains, "It connotes a mental and spiritual sensitivity toward moral danger. Pastors must carefully supervise the moral and doctrinal health of their spiritual flocks." [4]

So being a church leader is like being a shepherd. And who's the object of the shepherd's watchful care? The NIV says, "They keep watch over you," but the Greek text is literally, "They keep watch for your souls." Granted, it's not that a pastor cares only for the spiritual well-being of his flock, for the term "soul" can refer to a person's entire existence. And so a pastor cares when his people lose their jobs, get cancer, and so on, for it's not just the soul that matters to him, but the entire life of those under his care.

Yet the primary concern of the church leader is the soul. He's to be a doctor of the soul, which means his work is more than just declaring truth, as vital as that is. His God-given assignment is soul-care, and that requires personal involvement, modeling, rebuking at times, and encouraging all the time.

Commentator Warren Wiersbe, once a pastor himself, confessed, "Quite frankly, it is much easier to 'win souls' than it is to 'watch for souls' (see Ezek. 3:16-21). The larger a church grows, the more difficult it becomes to care for the sheep. Sad to say, there are some ministers whose only work is to preach and 'run the program'; they have no desire to minister to the souls placed in their care." [5]

Wiersbe's right. There's lots of pressure on pastors (from the outside and self-imposed) to win souls, but there's little talk about watching for souls. Yet according to God's Word, it's vital. It's the sum of what God expects of a church leader, to watch over the souls of his people.

What does that mean? If you're a church leader, you need to know for it's what God expects of you. If you're not a leader, you need to know for this is what you should expect of your leaders.

The great English Reformation preacher, Hugh Latimer, cites the example of the shepherds in the nativity story (Luke 2:8 "keeping watch over their flocks by night") to illustrate the pastor's calling: "Now these shepherds, I say, they watch the whole night, they attend upon their vocation, they do according to their calling, the keep their sheep, they run not hither and thither, spending the time in vain and neglecting their office and calling.... Here, by these shepherds, all men may learn to attend upon their offices and callings. I would wish that clergymen—the curates, parsons, and vicars, the bishops, and all other spiritual persons—would learn this lesson by these poor shepherds; which is this, to abide by their flocks and by their sheep, to tarry amongst them, to be careful over them, not to run hither and thither after their own pleasure, but to tarry by their benefices and feed their sheep with the food of God's Word, and to keep hospitality, and so to feed them both soul and body." [6]

That's what God expects of church leaders, and so should you. They're to watch over your souls. We learn something else about church leaders from our text...

b. They will give an account to the Lord for each person entrusted to them. "They keep watch over you as men who must give an account."

Beloved, what you think concerning matters of this church matters to me and I always welcome your feedback. But please realize to whom it is that I will give an ultimate account for how I serve as your leader. It's not to you, but to Him. I am responsible to Him and one day will report to Him concerning you and how I cared for your souls.

So will you, fellow church leaders. I think there's a principle here that applies not just to pastors but to all pastoral staff, elders, deacons (who function as elders in this church), Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, children's ministry leaders. If you're a *leader* in some capacity, you need to consider this. You will give an account for how you care for those He has entrusted to you.

That's a staggering thought, one that would overwhelm me if I didn't know that my Savior is gracious and merciful. All of us are going to be judged by the Lord for how we served Him, says, 2 Corinthians

5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." But church leaders will face an even greater examination according to James 3:1, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."

When a church leader does something that you don't like, please consider two things. One, he may well be wrong, so pray for him. But two, he may be doing what he is doing because he's seeking to please the One to whom he will give account, and because he's concerned about your soul he's willing to take action that you may not yet fully appreciate, but one day might.

- 2. Church members have God-given expectations. What are they?
- a. They are to obey and submit to their leaders. That's what the text says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority."

Let it be clear. In the ultimate sense, the Christian is answerable to Christ alone. Christ is the Lord and Master and Judge. It's what Christ thinks that matters. So ultimately, it's His assessment that should be our concern.

But the Great Shepherd has given the church under-shepherds. We can't see Him but we can see them and the Savior has chosen to manifest His care through them. And the Savior tells church members to obey and *submit* to their church leaders. Will grudging obedience do? No. Our text says...

b. They are to make their work a joy. "Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you." That's interesting. It's not to a church member's advantage to resist the leadership of his shepherd. If you make your pastor's work a burden, that will not be to your advantage. Why not? Because he'll have to spend his time and energies going after you, challenging you, confronting you, and seeking to restore you, instead of feeding and nourishing you and helping you grow.

I think of a school teacher. A good school teacher has so much they wish to impart to their students to help them grow and develop. But if the student is disruptive, who suffers? The student does. The fact that he grieves his teacher means that he misses out on the benefit he could receive from that teacher.

Calvin made this observation about how to treat church leaders, "The heavier burden they bear the more honour they deserve, for the more trouble anyone takes for our sakes, and the greater difficulty and danger he incurs for us, the more are we obliged to him." [7]

Let's be honest. It's not always easy for church members to obey their leaders—in fact, you might downright struggle at times. And it's not always easy for church leaders to watch over the souls of congregants. If it were easy, these commands wouldn't be here. But here's the beautiful thing to keep in mind...

- 3. When leaders and members fulfill their God-given roles, everyone benefits. Church leaders benefit, for their work is a joy. And church members benefit, for their obedience brings advantage to them. And most of all, the Lord benefits, for willing obedience from church members to church leaders is another kind of sacrifice that pleases Him greatly. One more...
- **D.** We should offer him the sacrifice of our prayers (18-19). "Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon."

Pray for us, literally, "keep praying for us." The fact that the writer is asking his readers to pray for him says something to us about the spiritual condition he presumes they have. We have wrestled throughout this epistle with the spiritual state of its readers. Is Hebrews written to true believers, or to professing believers, or to apostates who are about to defect from the faith? Philip Hughes makes the observation, based on this prayer request, "He can hardly ask them to pray for him if he has decided that

they are already in a state of apostasy."

We learn a couple of things about prayer from these verses.

- 1. Prayer is a wonderful way to help each other. The writer asks his readers to pray that he'll be restored to them. The fact that he wants to be restored indicates that he knows his readers personally. Apparently, he used to live with them and quite possibly was one of their leaders (which would explain why he gives this request right after addressing the way to respond to church leaders). Why he needed to be restored we're not told. Perhaps he had been in prison or sick. Whatever it was, the hindrance was out of his control. But prayer could make a difference and so he requests it.
- 2. Prayer opens up doors of additional ministry opportunity. That's why he wanted to see them, and why he asked them to pray for his restoration.

I'm intrigued by the reason he gave for this request. In the Greek text the word "for" appears as a connection between the first two sentences in the verse. It reads, "Pray for us *for* we are sure that we have a clear conscience..." That's a strange reason to give to support why you're asking for prayer. Typically we would say, "Pray for me *for* I'm struggling," or "Pray for me *for* I have a particular need." But the writer says, "Pray for us *for* we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way." Why does he give that particular reason for supporting his request for prayer? Since he doesn't tell us, we can't be sure, but Leon Morris suggests, "It seems that the readers have been accusing the writer of some fault." [9]

It's pretty hard to ask people to pray for you if you've wronged them and have some unconfessed fault hanging over your head. But that's also the case if there's some *perceived* fault.

That may be the case here. What might this perceived fault be? Again, the text doesn't specify, but the request itself may give a clue. He asks the readers to pray that he may be restored to them. That might suggest that the readers have attributed his absence from them to some unworthy motive. Such as, "You said you were coming to us, but you haven't shown up. Aren't we good enough for you? Is some other ministry giving you a bigger paycheck? The writer defends himself, asserting he's got a clear conscience and has in no way sinned against his readers.

That's the heart of a person who's gripped by Christ's sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice for us leads to our sacrifices for Him.

<u>Take Inventory: Ponder two questions...</u>

- 1. Have I accepted His sacrifice for me? Christ went outside the camp. Have you gone outside the camp? Christ gave His life on the cross to rescue sinners from their sin and its penalty. Have you accepted His sacrifice? Have you accepted Him as your Savior and put your faith in the work He accomplished for you?
- 2. Is His sacrifice leading to my daily sacrifices for Him? Are you offering Him the sacrifice of lips that praise His name? How about the sacrifice of a life that's full of sacrificial deeds? What about the sacrifice of obedience to your church leaders, and if you are a leader, the sacrifice of losing sleep as you watch over the souls of those entrusted to you? And how about the sacrifice of diligent prayers for the good of others? His sacrifice should lead to our sacrifices. It's the perfect ending to the story.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Raymond Brown, p. 261.

^[2] I'm indebted to Raymond Brown for his insight on this point; see p. 260.

^[3] See also Micah 6:7-8; James 1:27; Romans 12:1; Phil. 4:18.

- [4] Robert Gromacki, p. 222.
 [5] Warren Wiersbe, pp. 328-9.
 [6] Hugh Latimer, in Philip Hughes, pp. 586-7.
 [7] John Calvin, p. 213.
 [8] Philip Hughes, p. 587.
 [9] Leon Morris, p. 153.
 [10] Observation by Moffatt, in Leon Morris, p. 153.