

Praise God and do good - Hebrews 13:15-19
James Muldoon - Carey Baptist Church – 17 February 2008

Hebrews 13 gives us some of the nuts and bolts of living a Christian life which works. This morning there are three instructions. There's very little connection between them, but they're instructions which we need if we're to work and persevere as Christians.

i Sacrifice

v11-14 set the scene for this morning's passage. They teach us that Jesus suffered to make sinners clean and pure and to give us an enduring home in heaven. It is only because of what he has done that **v15-16** have any relevance to us. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? If not, the best thing you can do is pray to him now. Ask him to forgive you for everything you've done wrong. Trust him to save you. Devote your life to him. Don't delay! Come to him right now!

v15-16 teach that, because of all Jesus has done, as holy people heading for heaven, Christians need to offer two kinds of sacrifice. (A sacrifice is something offered up to God)

The first sacrifice (**v15**) is all to do with words. The Christian's entire life ought to be a song of adulation to God. It ought to be our normal state to be praising God. The gratitude which we feel to the Lord ought to be continually escaping from our lips in the form of praise. Not that we can stop everything else! But you should cultivate such a close relationship with the Lord that your heart naturally turns to his praise whenever you can. Do you do that?

The second sacrifice (**v16**) is all to do with deeds. We're to love other people, and we're to show that love by how we act: we're to do good to them and we're to share with them.

And that's important! You can't genuinely offer a sacrifice of praise to God if you're not also offering this kind of sacrifice of service to others. Your love for the Lord is too shallow for words if you do not love your fellow men. **Micah 6:6-8** teaches that in an old covenant context.

Thankfully **v16** teaches that when you do good to others, that is actually a sacrifice to God! When you share with others, that is actually a sacrifice to God! You can serve God by serving others. What is more, **Mark 9:41** teaches that he will reward you for it. So get out there! Do good! Share! And who knows? If you do that, it might even revolutionise that first sort of sacrifice, that sacrifice of words of praise to the Lord.

ii Submission

In many churches, authority is a real problem. Sometimes leaders refuse to exercise authority. Sometimes leaders exercise heavy-handed authority. **v17** helps us to get the right balance in the matter of authority and submission in the church.

First, it affirms that there are to be leaders in the church. They are there to head things up, to lead the way, to guide the affairs of the church. Leadership is appointed by God.

Secondly, church leaders are to watch over the souls of the members of the church. All the time leaders are meant to be keeping their eyes open, looking out for dangers which might come at the church, for church members who might be in difficulty, for church members who might be struggling spiritually.

Thirdly, they lead the church as men who themselves are under authority. When the end comes and we all stand before the Lord Jesus Christ on the Day of Judgment, church leaders will have to give an account, not only of how they have lived their lives, but also of how they have carried out their ministries.

Fourthly, if their leaders are fulfilling their rôles as they should, the church should obey them and submit to them. They should make their work a joy, not a burden. If their work is a burden, the church as a whole will be disadvantaged, says the writer, and that's no good.

There's a delicate balance here, then. Church leaders have awesome responsibilities: to lead, to keep watch, and to do it all as Jesus wants. And when they do that the church as a whole has a responsibility too: to obey them and to submit to them. If leaders and church both carry out their responsibilities well, that's a recipe for a church which works. That's why Satan often attacks at this very point. May God help us always to keep the right balance!

iii Supplication

In **v18-19**, the writer, asserting that he has a clear conscience and that he desires to live honourably in every way, asks the Hebrews to pray for him. There are two helpful lessons to draw from this.

Firstly, it's significant that the writer asks the Hebrews to pray for him at all. It shows his humility because he asks for help. He asks the very people to whom he is writing to pray for him. And if the writer of a Bible book was humble enough to ask for help, how much more should we? Sadly, our Western self-sufficient individuality often stops us doing so.

Nevertheless, you should not shy away from asking other Christians to pray for you. Who is praying for you? And do they actually know what you really want prayer for? Surely there's someone you could confide in. Christians were never meant to go it alone. May we help one another to persevere here.

The second lesson from **v18-19** is that the writer regards prayer as a powerful force. He places great importance on prayer. He clearly believes that events can be affected by prayer. He has faith that God can alter circumstances in answer to prayer. How often we have to remind ourselves of that! But **v18-19** rebuke us for our lack of faith. They tell us to have confidence that God can alter circumstances in answer to prayer. That's true supplication.