

Title: Sacrifice, Sharing and Shepherds  
Date: March 11, 2018  
Subject: Giving praise to God, doing good and following shepherds  
Scripture: Hebrews 13:15 - 19

Billy Graham was in a small town to preach during his early years. He wanted to mail a letter so he asked a young boy where the post office was. The boy told him. Graham thanked him and said, "If you'll come to the Baptist Church this evening, you can hear me tell everyone how to get to heaven." The boy replied, "I don't think I'll be there... You don't even know your way to the post office."

We know the way to get to heaven is through faith in Jesus. What do we do while waiting? Respond to all that God has done for us.

READ 13:15-19

#### I. Response to God

Jesus acts as a priest in heaven to present our offerings to the Father. He has also made his followers "a royal priesthood...that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). It's as simple as this -- since Jesus saved us, we sing his praises -- literally and figuratively. We offer sacrifices of praise as continual acts of worship. This has been regarded as the greatest privilege and highest motivation of the believer. We're alive to give thanks to God.

The text describes praise as the fruit of our lips. It comes from what's inside. It's not to be an occasion where we say one thing and do another. Words and life are to match. Lips are representative of the entire life which is what we're told to give as a living sacrifice (Roman 12:1).

Shelly Esser shares a story of a 92 year old woman whose husband of 70 years recently died (Just Between Us, Spring 2018, p. 46). "She was moving into a nursing home...After hours of patiently waiting in the lobby, she was told her room was ready. She smiled sweetly. While gingerly maneuvering to her room with her walker, she was given a visual description of it. Including eyelet curtains that had been hung on the window. "I love it," she said with enthusiasm. "Mrs. Jones, you haven't even seen the room...just wait," her escort said.

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," she said. "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. I already decided to love it. I make a decision every morning when I wake up. I have a choice: I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work (she is legally blind), or I can get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away just for this time in my life."

We can choose our attitude – praise or “non-praise.” Billy Graham wrote, "Ingratitude is a sin, just as surely as is lying or stealing or immorality or any other sin condemned by the Bible. Nothing turns us into bitter, selfish, dissatisfied people more quickly than an ungrateful heart. And nothing will do more to restore contentment and the joy of our salvation than a true spirit of thankfulness."

Matthew Henry, British scholar who authored a Bible commentary, was robbed by thieves who stole his wallet. Later he wrote in his diary: "Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my money, they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, and not I who robbed" (7700 Illustrations, #6578).

II. Response involving people v. 16

Does verse 16 make you think you're hearing things? “Don't forget. Don't forget. Don't forget.” There's a good reason it sounds familiar. Go back 14 verses to verse 2. READ. And now “Don't forget to do good and share with others.” Sounds like something a mom would holler to her kids as they leave for school

*Do good* is simple to understand. Do good and not do bad. The idea is heavily peppered in the Bible. It demonstrates our repentance and turning to Christ (Acts 26:20). It copies Christ's example who laid down his life for us so that we seek “not to love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:16 – 18). We were created for this (Ephesians 2:10). Scripture is given to equip us for the task (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

*Share with others* comes from the word *koinonia* from which we get the idea of fellowship – sharing of life with others in the family of God. It's about being with others in the journey to heaven, participating with one another. Share. Be generous. Help each other.

Perhaps no passage sounds so Hebrews-esque as Titus 2:11 – 14. “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

Chip Ingram in a message on this passage (Doing Good, 1/9/15) makes four points. “Doing good matters as it reveals 1) God's passion for all people, a supernatural demonstration of the Gospel, 2) God's presence in our lives, announcing it to others who need to see the light, 3) the priority of our lives – the use of our minds, words, lives (time, energy, dreams, money) shows our real priority, 4) God's purpose for our lives.”

The walk is to match the talk. We please the Lord by speaking our praises to him and by acting in a loving way toward those who are on the journey to heaven with us. Doing good and sharing are sacrifices that are pleasing to God. If they're offered apart from Christ they're wrong and offensive to him.

Pamela DeSantis tells a story about her travel agent sister Laura (Readers Digest). She “often visits different countries exploring new locations for her clients. She heard about a beautiful hotel on top of a mountain on the Greek island of Ikaria and rented a moped to find it. After searching for hours, Laura stopped at a small restaurant with tables on a porch and ordered a cup of coffee. A half-hour later she was ready to set out again and asked for her bill, but the proprietor said there was no charge. “That is very kind of you, but I insist that you let me pay.’ ‘Ma’am, there is no charge for the coffee because this is my house.”” He willingly shared and did good to a lady who didn’t deserve it.

### III. Response to leaders 17 - 19

Leaders aren’t limited to pastors. It’s those in leadership positions, most likely elders. Leaders have a humungous responsibility for those they’re leading. They keep watch over the souls of people. They’re shepherds. Psalm 23 presents the Lord as the shepherd drawing from how human shepherds act. They guide the sheep into places where they can eat and drink. They guard and protect the flock by looking out for attacks by wolves or other beasts. They go with the sheep during difficult times – the valley of the shadow of death. Sometimes they have to correct the sheep because they’re going in a harmful direction. Involved in rescuing those who are straying or in danger. They lead in the path the sheep are to take, directing them to the goal.

Spiritual shepherds are to lead the flock into places where they can eat and drink of God’s Word. They guard and protect the flock by looking for attacks from without and within. They seek to rescue and restore. They walk with the sheep during the difficult times of life. Sometimes they have to correct and warn. Shepherds lead in the path the sheep are to take, directing them to the goal to live in the house of the Lord forever.

Paul expresses being a shepherd this way, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). The example would be the teaching and conduct. The limit would be only as he follows Christ. It isn’t so much following a human leader, which the apostle decried, but following the Lord.

He talks about the burden he carried when he described his sufferings. “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?” (2 Corinthians 11:28, 29). Shepherds keep watch over the souls of the flock.

Leaders will have to give an account of themselves as they are people under authority. In some ways they give account now. But the bigger picture is appearing before the Lord in heaven to give account. Kind of a scary thing. In James, “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1).

Need to understand there’s a two way street. Those who are being led are to OBEY YOUR LEADERS. No, it’s not like having a spiritual drill sergeant. I didn’t serve in the military. The closest thing I

had were my high school football coaches. Practice opened with calisthenics. Toe raisers. Arm spins. Neck rotations. But then there were the up-downs. Oh, those up-downs. Should have been called down ups because started in the up position. Whistle! Hit the dirt and get back up - fast. Jog. Hit the dirt. Back up. Repeat for as long as the crazed coach, I mean nice coach, felt necessary to toughen us up or because he had a few too many drinks the night before and this was his way of working out his hangover. At least that was the scuttle butt from my teammates. We were to obey their orders. When we ran plays, if they said to run at the hole the guard was supposed to make and there wasn't a hole, you were supposed to run up their back. Obey or else.

Sadly, spiritual leaders have abused their authority. A mega church of over 12,000 in Seattle (Mars Hill) was a case in point. Leadership used bullying, intimidation, coercion, and verbal aggression to control. It collapsed when the truth came out. "It was a defeat for the gospel...a colossal Satanic victory" (John Piper, *Gospel Herald*. Retrieved 2015-08-03).

The picture in Hebrews is of loving, servant leadership. There is to be a yielding obedience and submission to those who are in spiritual authority as given by the Bible and the church. Follow as follow Christ. New Bible Commentary on this passage, "Instead of allowing themselves, therefore, to be perverted by strange doctrines, let them with a ready confidence and compliance follow the teaching of their leaders."

Just the mention of *obey* and *submit* can raise the hair on our necks. A rebel streak seems to be inborn in Americans. One of our earliest flags, flown during the Revolutionary War, bore the motto "Don't tread on me!" The motto remains emblematic of many, even among followers of Christ. "Don't tell me what to do. Don't even insinuate what I should be doing, I'm my own person. I'll do what I want."

A fellow pastor writes of "situations where church members should submit, even though it may be difficult...a very popular author was coming to our small town to speak. The problem was, this man had left his wife for another woman. The church he attended had disciplined him, but he told them that they couldn't do that, and he kept on with his popular ministry. We told our people that as elders, we did not want them to attend his talk, because to attend it was to give endorsement of his sin. Later I was grieved to hear that several of our members went anyway" (Steven J. Cole, *Your Duties Toward Church Leaders*, bible.org).

It comes back to the idea of leaders giving an accounting. It's not only of their leadership but also of the followership. The reason to obey and submit is so that the work of the leaders will be a joy both now and when they report to the Lord. It brings joy in the present when people put God's Word into practice, grow in the faith, in grace, in wisdom and the knowledge of the Savior. The Apostle John wrote that it gave him great joy to know that people were faithful to the truth and walking in it (2 John 4, 3 John 3, 4).

That kind of activity will enable the leader to give a joyful account to the Lord. “He was a wonderful servant. What a pleasure to hear her pray. He really dug into your Word and listened to it. She held firmly to the faith.”

The opposite is making leaders’ lives burdensome now and in heaven when the reporting is being done. The burden has been described in other translations as groaning, sighing, grief, sadness, sorrow and complaining. Imagine a leader coming before the Lord, complaining, “She didn’t hold to the faith. He provoked in the wrong way. She was self-centered. He wouldn’t listen to your Word. Why did I have to deal with them?”

Sounds like Moses when the Israelites complained about not having meat. “He asked the Lord, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?...If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin” (Numbers 11:11-15).

The good news is presented by Charles Pfeiffer. “The accounting will be joyous if the members of the church have been faithful in Christian life and witness, but it will be sad if there are those who have denied the faith or have become carnal in their lives” (The Epistle to the Hebrews, p. 121).

There are also ramifications for those who don’t obey and follow. That kind of attitude has no advantage. There’s nothing helpful or beneficial in it. It will be a loss, unprofitable, a cause for suffering and even harmful both now on earth and when we come before the Lord in heaven.

Another thing that is helpful is to pray for leaders. Cuz goodness knows we need it. The writer said his conscience was clear in the way he had communicated truth to them. But he also wanted his manner of life to match. Integrity in inner life in relation to sin and outer life in relation to temptation, service and obedience.

Paul often asked people to pray for him. Some of his requests -- be rescued from those who are disobedient, that his ministry would prove acceptable to the saints (Romans 15:30-31), that he could open his mouth and boldly proclaim the gospel (Ephesians 6:19), that God would open up a door for the word, and that he could make it clear (Colossians 4:3-4, 2 Thessalonians 3:1).

The great English preacher Charles Spurgeon met an American minister who said, “I have long wished to see you, Mr. Spurgeon...In our country there are many opinions as to the secret of your great influence. Would you be good enough to give me your own point of view?” After a moment’s pause, Spurgeon replied, “My people pray for me” (in Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* [Banner of Truth], p. 44).

To localize it, pray for me and the other leaders, the elders as we seek to give spiritual leadership. And to recap the earlier -- give sacrifices of praise to God, do good and share with others as we live in the world and respond to what God by our responses to Him, to fellow brothers and sisters and leaders.