

A Call to Faithfulness in NT Worship

Hebrews 13:8-17

Halifax: 2 June 2024

Introduction:

Today in our study of the epistle to the Hebrews, we come to Hebrews 13:9-17.

- We have seen that chapter 13 gives rules of conduct for us as those who are going to the house of God in glory in the way that God opened for sinners through His Son.
- Hebrews 13:1-7 gave us moral rules of conduct, but verses 9-17 instruct us about worship.

It is so easy for God's people to get off track in their worship.

- We'd rather not hear anyone say that. We'd rather that it was not true.
- But it is demonstrated over and over that it is true.

In both the Old and the New Testament, we never seem to be content with the worship that God appointed for us.

- In the Old Testament, God gave them a lot of rituals to show them how sin would be forgiven and to keep before them their need to be forgiven.
- These rituals kept them at more of a distance from God because by them the worshippers were reminded that the way to God had not yet been opened.
 - Nevertheless, God did have actual communion with them. He insisted that their sacrifices for sin be done only at the one tabernacle or temple that He appointed.
 - He wanted them to have a heart for Him the way David did—and not just to perform ceremonies.
- But despite the abundance of ceremonies they did have, they always seemed to want to have more.
 - This displeased God. It was not what He wanted.
 - The reason seems to be that people have a tendency to add extra ceremonies to hide behind—because as sinners, we are not comfortable to come before God.
 - We are sinners and He is holy, and rituals create a distance—they kind of go between us and God so that our connection is not so direct.

In the New Testament, the rituals are almost completely removed.

- Jesus is the true priest who replaces all the ritual priests.
- He is the sacrifice that actually takes away our sin, so He replaces all the OT sacrifices.
- When we have faith in His saving work, we are called to come boldly and openly to the throne of grace—as those who have been cleansed by His blood.

But what a hard time we have with that!

- Even while the apostles were still ministering to those in the churches that they themselves had established, there were already lots of church members who seemed bent on multiplying rituals.
- Drawing near to God, coming boldly before Him, was too much for them to handle.
 - Instead of seeking to find rest in the saving work of Jesus, they sought to obtain comfort by putting rituals between them and God.

- The apostles corrected them, but after they were gone, churches began to multiply all kinds of rituals—putting priests, godly saints who had died, and various ceremonies, washings, and dietary rules between us and God...
 - They acted as if we did not even have a saviour who has cleansed us from our sin.
 - Sure, they talk about Him, but when it comes to actually resting in His work and coming boldly before God—not that!

This letter to the Hebrews is helpful because it addresses this problem very directly.

- It addresses it as it was found in the Jewish believers.
- They had a tendency to return to (or cling to) the rituals that God had given them in the Old Testament. They had the added pressure of unbelieving family that wanted them to do this.
- The idea was that they might hold on to Christ as Messiah, but join with the other Jews in the rituals of their ancestral religion—rituals that were no longer appropriate now that Jesus had come.
- So Hebrews gives us rules here in verse 9-17 for maintaining the simple worship that God appointed for us now that Jesus has come and reconciled us to God by the cross.

We need to look at these because the tendency to put things between us and God continues.

- In churches that maintain NT worship, people often zone out—they don't do the thing that they are meant to do—focus on presenting themselves before the throne of God through faith in Jesus.
 - It is too much for them, so they zone out and think about their work or their hobby or their friends or sometimes things that are a lot worse.
- When they do this, they know that it is not good.
 - So when worship is presented to them that puts things between them and God, they are able to focus better and it eases their consciences.
 - Whether they go with the traditionalist route of praying to saints and getting priests to waddle around altars and offer sacrifices, or the non-traditionalist way of adding multimedia, drama, interviews with celebrities, and worship teams with drums and guitars and songs with words that don't make them uncomfortable,
 - They put a distance between them and God, but since they are doing religious things that engage them, they feel good about it.
- Yet, all the while, they are not coming boldly to our holy God—brazenly perhaps—but not openly and boldly to Him as those resting in Christ alone.

So today, I want to run through this whole section in Hebrews that calls us to faithfulness in NT worship so that we might have an overview of what God wants in our worship.

- I hope that it will help us to focus on actually presenting ourselves before God in Christ when we worship—actually coming before the true God as He is revealed.
- So listen now as I read our text to you. Hebrews 13:8-17.
- This is God's holy word:

Hebrews 13:8-17: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. 9 Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them. 10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle

have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³ Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. 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. ¹⁶ But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. 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.

Thus far the reading of God's word.

- Let's look at the five things we must do if we are to stay on track with the worship that God has given us in the New Testament.

I. First, we must see that our hearts are established (or strengthened) by grace.

A. In verse 9, we are warned about being carried about with various and strange doctrines or teachings.

1. Since Jesus is always the same (as it says in verse 8), and since His apostles and prophets laboured over the course of 40 years to set up the way the church is to worship according to Christ's commandments, we should not accept various and strange doctrines that come along later.

- When people came along and said we should pray to Jesus' mother who is with Him in heaven, that was a strange teaching that should have been rejected.
 - You can't find one shred of teaching about that in the New Testament.
- And today, when someone comes along and wants to have a stage with actors at church, or to have a musical production with lots of instruments performing for us, those are strange practices that are strange to the New Testament.
 - Even though lots of churches may have started doing some of these things, they are various and strange teachings to what Jesus gave us in the NT.

2. Sometimes, people will argue that they find these practices help them feel closer to God, but that is not how we are to decide what we ought to do.

- We are to focus on doing what Jesus gave us to do through His apostles and prophets.
- God is the one we are worshipping and we are to do what He wants. We are not to receive teaching that is not based on His Word.

B. Instead of following various and strange doctrines to strengthen our walk with the Lord we need to have our hearts established by grace.

- Verse 9 says, **"For *it is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.**

1. The temptation for the Hebrews was to go back to their old worship with its rules about abstaining from certain foods so they could worship at the altar at Jerusalem...and bring the animal sacrifices to help them walk with God.

- God appointed those things for them to do before Jesus came, but they were not to rely on them now.

2. Now, their hearts were to be established by grace. What does that mean?
 - That means that instead of doing all sorts of ritual sacrifices for sin and for strengthening their relationship with God, they were to rely on Jesus did.
 - They were trust in Him.
 - That is how they would be changed now that He had come.
 - Not by doing all kinds of rituals and things, but simply by keeping their eyes on Jesus as He is revealed to us in God's word—as the one who came and died for our sins that we might be pardoned.
3. How do you grow in grace? Can you answer that?
 - It is not by abstaining from foods, priests in vestments offering sacrifices at an altar, watching multimedia presentations at church or dramatic representations of Bible stories.
 - It is by the foolishness of preaching. We receive the word of God, delivered to us with authority by a herald who speaks in the name of Christ.
 - We are to receive it as it is in truth, the word of God. We are to engage with God as the one who is addressing us with His own word.
 - Satan and your flesh will do everything to disengage—or even to get you to just be an analyst or a theology lover instead of one who encounters the living God by the Holy Spirit!
 - It is by prayer that you receive the grace of God.
 - We must actually bring our hearts before Him in the church's prayers.
 - Actually engage with God, actually praise Him, actually thank Him, actually plead with Him for His glory to be revealed, His kingdom to come, our needs to be met, our obedience to be true, our forgiveness to be complete, our repentance to be full.
 - We are to be strengthened by the LORD actually working in us to transform us—by His grace—His saving work.

TRANS> This brings us to the second thing that is mentioned here.

II. We are to claim the blood of Jesus to make us right with God.

- A. The author of Hebrews makes much here of Jesus being crucified outside the camp.
 1. As our sin bearer, he was cut off from the city in which God had caused His name to dwell and from the people who had been appointed to represent Him on earth.
 - Bearing our sins, He was crucified outside of the city, like the animals that were offered for sin and could not be eaten by the priests because they were unclean.
 2. Jesus did all of this because He was bearing our sin.
 - It says in verse 12 that He sanctified us by His blood.
 - In other words, it was by His death for our sins that we are reconciled to God. Our sins made Him unclean, but they make us clean.
- B. We are to claim His blood that was shed for forgiveness—for our forgiveness.
 1. There is no other recourse.
 - Jesus is the only way.

2. But if you embrace this way, you will not incur the favour of the world, or even of the mainstream churches.
 - No. You will be rejected.
 - You will be put outside the camp to bear the reproach of Jesus.
 - They will not claim His blood alone for remission of sin.
 - They look upon that as a disgraceful, unworthy thing to trust in. It is too raw. It makes them very uncomfortable.
- C. The encouragement is given that we have no continuing city here.
- We are looking for the city whose builder and maker is God.
 - The one that He is establishing for those who claim forgiveness and new life by the blood of Jesus Christ—who rest not in what man does, but in Christ who is proclaimed to us in the gospel.
- III. The third thing we must do to stay on track with NT worship is to come before the Lord with simple praise.**
- This is sacrifice God wants:
 - **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.**
- A. In praising Him, we seek to elevate our hearts to grasp the glory of our God.
1. We want to see His purity, His holiness, His wisdom...
 2. We want to delight in His mercy and love that has secured our pardon in such a marvellous, self-giving way. We want to be filled up with the wonder of what He has done.
 3. We want to gain an awareness of the power of the gospel that has rescued us from hell and that has transformed our stoney stubborn hearts to turn to God and to love His ways. We want to gain an awareness of that power so that we might praise our God.
- B. Our New Testament praise is quite simple and unadorned.
- It is “the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.”
1. It is not our performance—it is our simple proclaiming of His praise with our lips.
 - The New Testament knows only of simple singing of praise.
 - It is not some grand performance that is the focus. It is our God of holiness, wisdom, truth, mercy, love, power, and goodness.
 2. See to it that your hearts are engaged.
 - Praise must come from a loyal heart, a heart delighting God. Without that, it is no praise at all to Him who sees the heart.
 - It is to this that we aspire.
 - Ask God to enlarge your heart to praise Him.
- IV. The fourth thing we must do to stay on track with NT worship is to do good and to share.**
- A. This is described as another kind of NT sacrifice that God wants.
- Verse 16 says: **But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.**

- New Testament sacrifices are not priests offering sacrifices, the sacrifices are to be our love and care for each other in response to what Jesus has done for us.
- We look at how He has loved us and done so much for us.
 - When we grasp it, it results in that same love flowing out of us to the people around us.
 - We do good and we share.

B. Giving gifts is part of our worship to God.

- It includes not only monetary gifts—to support missionaries, ministers, and brothers and sisters in need,
 - But also hands-on service that gives to others—doing good for them.
 - In the assembly, we dedicate our gifts and our services to the LORD.
 - We offer them to Him.
- This has replaced ritual sacrifices. These are the sacrifices the Lord wants now.
 - **V. 16: With such sacrifices, God is well pleased.**
 - He loves to see His people offering these sacrifices.
 - He sees the new life that He has put into us beautifully showing itself, loving each other as He has loved us and given Himself for us.

V. The fifth thing we must do to stay on track with the worship God has given us in the NT is to obey the elders of the church.

A. A church is an assembly that has officers God has appointed to lead in His name.

1. They are elders, mature men, called and chosen and ordained to receive those who confess Christ and to remove those who cease to confess or walk with Him.
 - Among the elders are ministers of the word who preach the everlasting gospel and who teach us Christ's commandments and way of living.
 - Their task includes keeping the worship of the church true to what the LORD established for us through the apostles—as we have seen—neither adding nor taking away from it.
 - Their task is also to admonish the people—to bring God's word to their minds, especially when they have forgotten it. They do this publicly and privately.
2. You are to be submissive to them.
 - You are to make their job easy by your eagerness to receive admonition:
 - **V. 17 puts it like this: 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.**
 - See that you are a delight to them. See that you welcome the word.

B. Whenever the elders stop leading according to God's word or the members of the church stop submitting, the church goes off track.

1. How is it that it ever came about that churches should have people who are sexually immoral as members in good standing?
 - Somewhere, the elders stopped upholding the truth and the people stopped submitting to the truth.

- The elders stopped admonishing and they stopped removing those who refuse to follow Christ.
 - They did not remove men from their own number who embraced heresies and lived ungodly lives.
2. If our desire is to go on in the truth, we must maintain the order that God has established with these elders in the church.
- The New Testament church is not disorganised, with no membership and no officers who rule and to whom members submit.
 - The church Jesus established is a church that has such officers.
 - Lots of people do not want to have elders ruling—they want everyone to be the same rank. They are like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who stood up against Moses and Aaron and said, (Num 15:3): **“You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?”**
 - But we must not err in the other way either.
 - The NT church is also not a church where one man rules in the church.
 - The only head is Jesus, who is in heaven.
 - On earth, it is not ‘he who rules over you, ‘but always “those who rule over you.”
 - At every level, there is a plurality of elders who lead.
 - When this is rejected, we end up with something other than the church that Jesus established.

Conclusion:

Brothers and sisters, how glad we should be for the Lord’s directives about our worship!

- In the New Testament, our hearts are established by grace, not rituals...
- We claim the blood of Christ shed outside the camp, not ceremonies, to make us whole.
- We bring simple praise to God—giving thanks with our lips—very simply so we can focus on the one we are praising instead of on the praise!
- Our sacrifices now (besides simple praise) are doing good and sharing.
- And we to submit to those God has placed over us to lead His church.

This is the NT worship that God has given us.

- See that you do not get off track.
- Our Lord does not change. Neither does His worship.
 - We are called to come before Him by the blood of Jesus and the washing of the Holy Spirit. We are to come boldly before the face of God.