

Sundry Exhortations

"Through him, then, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips which make confession to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them: for they watch in behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account, that they may do this with joy, and not with grief, for this were unprofitable for you" (Heb. 13:15-17).

Three different exhortations are found in these verses. Two concern sacrifices the Hebrews were urged to make; a third was an appeal that they be submissive to those who ruled over them.

They were urged to offer A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE. Since Jesus is our mediator to the Father, we are commanded to offer a sacrifice of praise through Him unto the Father. This sacrifice of praise is the fruit of our lips and involves any praise which men give God, whether singing, praying, or speaking to others. God is worthy of praise and it is right that our lips should confess and acknowledge His wondrous attributes. Most often when "confession is made," men identify this to be an admission of wrong doing. It does mean that as is seen in Acts 19:18 where Luke records, *"Many also of them that had believed came, confessing, and declaring their deeds."* Sometimes the word is simply an acknowledgment of a truth. Timothy was reminded of the Good Confession which Jesus made before Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13). Jesus did not sin but He did acknowledge He was a king before Pilate (1 Pet. 2:22; Jn. 18:33f). But there was more in Jesus' confession than "meets the eye." By confessing He was a king, He laid claim that He was the Messiah and all things attendant to that. Jesus said, *"Everyone therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven"* (Mt. 10:32f). These two verses are antithetical -- opposites. Confessing Christ before men is the opposite of denying Christ. Our sacrifice of praise which we are to continually offer is done in our songs, prayers, and other words for it is, remember, *"the fruit of our lips."*

Hebrews also were to offer a SACRIFICE OF DOING GOOD AND COMMUNICATING. Here is a "silent witness" of the Pauline authorship of Hebrews. To "communicate" is used two ways by New Testament writers: 1) to have a share in (which several other New Testament writers use) and 2) to give a share to or to go shares with. It is used in this latter sense almost exclusively by Paul (cf. Gal. 6:6; Philippians 4:15). Because it is used in that

sense here, this strongly suggests Paul to have written those words. By saying, "*to do good and communicate forget not,*" the writer just urged the Hebrews to be mindful of the needs of others and to supply those needs when they were able to do so.

"*Obey them that have the rule over you and submit to them.*" Christians are commanded to obey civil authorities (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1). However this appeal which Hebrews were directed to do, is not submission to civil authority; rather it is an appeal that they submit to those who had rule in the church for civil authorities do not watch in "*behalf of your souls.*" That is the function of elders to "*watch in behalf of the souls*" of members (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Elders have a fearful task in giving account for souls in their care. The writer urges that the Hebrews should live in such a way that the account elders give of them should with be with joy, not grief. And, does it need to be said that elders equally need to be conscious of the grave responsibility in their hands, that they not neglect the souls of a single sheep under their care?

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