

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (27-5-1979 Strandtown Baptist Church)

Hebrews 13:7-19
Additional Reading: Psalms 121-123

Introduction

This chapter started with gratitude for God's grace in salvation, to be demonstrated by concern for others, continence in personal living, and a life of contentment. Now the writer gives four more responsibilities. These are almost the main responsibilities of Church membership. Look in four directions: (a) leaders, (b) world, (c) God, (d) others.

Responsibility to leaders

Remember them who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation (Hebrews 13:7), i.e. remember your leaders, consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **Obey them that have the rule over you** (Hebrews 13:17). Submit to their authority. **They watch for your souls, as they that must give account.** Obey them so that their work will be a joy and not a burden.

First of all, look back to past leaders. Think of what they taught, and the example they set. Remember with gratitude your first teachers, who first taught you about God and the Lord Jesus Christ, simple hymns and prayers. One of the advantages of having Christian background from early childhood – the mind is able to reach back over many years. Our first teachers often come to mind. The reason we are able to withstand some temptations and live in a certain way is because of our early training. Certain things become unthinkable. From a young age we have learnt loyalty to the house of God, teaching about Christian conduct, and the need to know Christ, and be baptised and serve Him. Those early leaders may not have been brilliant scholars, and we may not see everything in quite the way they did – but what a foundation they laid. How it has stood us in good stead over the years.

Thank God for our first teachers. How often they despaired and thought of giving up in failure. Thank God they did not. Some did not live to see what their work wrought. Did they die feeling they had wasted their lives? Nice to think in heaven they know what good they did. Alas they have died and long since been replaced.

But Jesus was never replaced. **Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever** (Hebrews 13:8). Like a great mountain in the midst of the sea, He stands ever the same as one generation succeeds another. His pre-eminence is permanent. His leadership is forever. Greatest expression of gratitude to those who have meant so much to us is to be true to Him to whom they pointed us.

Meanwhile, as for our present leaders – we should be concerned and cooperate with them. In fact, we “obey them”. Not that they are dictators. But when they bring the word of God and teach out of the word of God – obey them. They have a heavy responsibility to discharge their duty. We should endeavour not to be a disappointment or discouragement. Greatest joy a leader can have is to see those

whom he leads established in the Christian way. **I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth** (3 John v.4). The greatest sorrow of a leader is to see those whom he leads getting further away from God. Those who are casual in Christian discipleship have no idea whatsoever what a heartbreak they are to their leaders.

Attitude to the world

Jesus suffered outside the city gate. **Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach** (Hebrews 13:13). We go outside camp, bearing the disgrace He bore... we are looking for a city which is to come and not one here. Jesus was banished from men, the reproach of a criminal was on Him. We also have to sever ourselves from the life of the world. Go outside the world's gate. Bear the same reproach as Christ. Separation and isolation is the lot of the Christian as well as Christ. Share the insults which He bore.

Not that we are not to play our part in the life of the world, serving fellow men, acting as salt, doing daily work well and faithfully. However, the world is society organised apart from God. Its standards and values are not God's, and the spirit of the world is to be avoided, as are its corrupt practices.

What does it mean in practice to go forth unto Him? We have to nourish our inner life of union with Christ, refer all our acts to Him, and practice living in His presence. Does that make us "so heavenly minded that we are no earthly use"? No! – men in union with Christ act with more decision, energy and effect in all common deeds of life. c.f. the Apostle Paul. John Wesley was one of the hardest workers the world has ever seen (250,000 miles on horseback, over 40,000 sermons) – he lived habitually outside the camp. The more our lives are wrapped in Christ, the more energetic we are in this world.

This world is not our home. We seek a city which is to come. This spurs us to be outside the camp with Him. It will be no sacrifice for us to come out of transient camp.

Response to God and love to others

By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually (Hebrews 13:15). Two sacrifices here – Christ's and ours. Through *His* sacrifice, we are to offer *our* sacrifice. His sacrifice wipes away our sins. His work as our High Priest guarantees our access to God. Through Him, as priests, we offer our sacrifice of praise and do good to others – praise of lips and praise of life.

We often forget we are priests – offering sacrifices of praise and our bodies. The text suggests that if there is in us any deep and real and abiding sense of thankfulness for God's gift of Christ, it is impossible that tongues should cleave to roof of mouth and we should be content to live in silence. Loving hearts must speak. **But to do good and to communicate, forget not** (Hebrews 13:16). What would we think of a husband who never felt the impulse to express his affection for his wife, or the mother who never speaks words of tenderness to her infant? What of the Christian who is never impelled to offer a sacrifice of praise for Christ?

We have to do this continually, not just on Sundays. **I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth** (Psalm 34:1). This is the very thing which we were made for. Man's chief end is to glorify God. Praise is His due, and we must not rob Him of it. It helps us to live as Christians, delivers us from all self-centredness, and makes us a means of usefulness.

In some monasteries and nunneries there used to be a provision made that at every hour of the day, and at every moment of every hour, there should be one kneeling figure before the altar, repeating the Psalter. Therefore praise went up without interruption day and night. A beautiful idea, but it fell down in practice. Yet a symbol of what we should be – with heart occupied with Him, and voice of praise continually raised to Him.

Then not only praise of lip, but praise of life too – works as well as words. Do good to others and share what we have. We glorify God when we minister to His people. **Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me** (Matthew 25:40). God is delighted with such sacrifices – when He hears the note of praise and sees the act of kindness – **With such sacrifices God is well pleased** (Hebrews 13:16).

We are afraid sometimes of thinking that there is, in the divine heart, anything like our delight in gifts that mean love. So deeply aware of our own imperfection, we feel it is degrading to Him to conceive of anything corresponding to our delight passing across it. But the Bible is wiser than we are. It tells us that however stained and imperfect our gifts, God will take them – through Christ – and is delighted with them.

Many parents have treasures from their children, e.g. a paper with misshapen letters and uneven strokes of crayon. To someone else, it is a piece of paper that should be thrown in the fire. But it is treasured because of whose paper it was, and whose first attempt at writing it was. Given as an act of love. If we being evil know how to take good gifts from our children, how much more will your heavenly father accept stained sacrifices if they are through Christ.

Conclusion

In response to our leaders, we should have gratitude for those in the past, and be obedient to those in the present. As regards the world, we need to be detached as we build up union with Christ. God must receive our sacrifice of praise, and to our fellow believers we must do good and share. With such sacrifices God will be well pleased.

How do we do this? **It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace** (Hebrews 13:9). Refuge and shelter in God. Heart is fixed. Trusting in the Lord. Makes character steadfast, calm and beautiful. Find Christ. Get near to Him. Let His grace flow into your life.