

Lesson 54
Christian Responsibilities
Hebrews 13:7-14

Did you know that you are part of a great community? I am not talking about the world community, or the United States community, or the Roanoke community, but I am referring to the community of the redeemed, the community of the elect. We Christians are part of God's community, and we have certain responsibilities in and to this community.

This community of Christ draws men from every race, every social strata and every country into one family because all know and love the person of Jesus Christ. The relationship between true Christians in this community is closer than ties with family or friends.

The words of the great hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers," expresses these community responsibilities so well.

*"Like a mighty army
 Moves the Church of God;
 Brothers, we are treading
 Where the saints have trod;
 We are not divided,
 All one body we,
 One in hope and doctrine,
 One in charity."*

When we sing this song it appears at times to be a little hypocritical because on the surface it appears there are many divisions among Christians, and real communal spirit is only of the lips and not of the heart.

This has caused someone to revise the words of "Onward Christian Soldiers."

*"Like a mighty turtle
 Moves the Church of God;
 Brothers, we are treading
 Where we've always trod;
 We are much divided,
 Many bodies we,
 Strong in hope and doctrine,
 Weak in charity."*

Rest assured that the true church of Jesus Christ is strongly united because all true believers are born again by God, united to Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Many divisions in the Body of Christ would be minimized greatly if Christians were faithfully carrying forth their responsibilities as members of God's community.

BACKGROUND

These Hebrew-Christians had certain responsibilities that they were to perform if they were to push on in faith for Jesus Christ.

Many of these Hebrew-Christians were compromising their faith in Jesus Christ because they were receiving persecution from the world. They either wanted to give up Christ and go back into Judaism or lay low as Christians so as not to make waves.

The author gives these Hebrew-Christians some antidotes to their problem, and most of these can be applied right over into our twentieth century Christian scene.

RESPONSIBILITY TO FOLLOW LEADERS - Hebrews 13:7-8

“Remember those who led you ...” -- If these Hebrew-Christians were going to push on in the Faith and keep from falling into apostasy, they were to remember their original leadership who ruled over them. This in context refers to the apostles, evangelists, and pastor-teachers who first taught their fathers about Christ.

In the Christian community, God has appointed leadership, and this leadership is to be followed. Only when a Christian exercises his responsibility to follow leadership will the spiritual community be kept from division and schism.

“... who spoke the word of God to you ...” -- Their original leaders had been faithful teachers of the true gospel and the whole counsel of God. These leaders were to be followed because they were men of God’s Word.

Christian leaders are not to be primarily charming personalities, scintillating joke tellers, crowd pleasers, or men of eloquence, but they are to be men of the Holy Scriptures. True under-shepherds declare the Word of God uncompromisingly to people!

“... and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith.” -- These Hebrew-Christians were to follow the example of faith and holy living they saw in their original leaders. Notice carefully, they were not instructed to follow men, but their faith and their holy acts.

As Christians, we should seek to mimic the faith and the righteous acts of our leaders, but to follow men will always bring disappointment for all men have feet of clay. We are not to mimic their mannerisms, personalities, or methods, but their faith.

When I was a young man and a very new Christian, I had an idol. I wanted to be just like this man in everything because I thought him to be such a great Christian. I preached his sermons, used his mannerism, developed his sense of humor. He preached in a white suit, so I had to get a white suit. He had a red Bible, so I had to have a red Bible. I was mimicking the man, but not the man’s faith. I thought that this man hung the moon, but later he terribly disappointed me. So crushed, I thought about abandoning the Faith. What is my point? If we mimic men, we are in

trouble, but if we mimic the faith of men, we are not in trouble.

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, yes and forever.” -- The original leaders followed Christ and these Hebrew-Christians were also to follow Christ because He never changes.

Christ is always the same Lord to all Christians of all time. What He was to men and women of the past, He can be to us today, absolutely changeless. It is the changeless Christ that is a great refuge in a changing world.

We today might look back to the men and women of our past who have influenced us for Christ - Luther, Calvin, Knox, Whitefield, Wesley, Moody, Graham, a Sunday school teacher, or a parent who has led us to Christ and established us in Christ. Their Christ is our Christ, and their faith is our faith. The unchanging Christ is a summons to an unchanging faith in Him. Christ is the center, the focal point of all faith, and those who know and love Him are satisfied spiritually.

RESPONSIBILITY TO HOLD RIGHT DOCTRINE - Hebrews 13:9-12

“Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings ...” -- The unchangeableness of Christ moves the author to say something of Christ’s unchangeable truth as found in the Holy Scriptures. These Hebrew-Christians were to be true to the teachings of Christianity. In context, the ***“varied and strange teachings”*** refer to Jewish food restrictions and external religious demands that false teachers said were necessary to be a spiritual person.

Christians, we are not to be led astray from the truth, from the right course, by various and novel or unheard of teaching. It is one of our responsibilities in the Christian community to maintain sound doctrine, for this will cause the people to grow strong. ***“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming”*** (Eph. 4:14).

“... for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace ...” -- Some of the Hebrew-Christians felt they had to keep the strict dietary laws of Judaism if they were to be genuinely saved. They were legalistic because they wanted to add something to the death of Christ for salvation, but the author points them to the way of grace in Christ Jesus. It is grace, not legalism, that causes a person to grow up spiritually. ***“... but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”*** (2 Pet. 3:18).

“... not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited.” --The dietary laws of the Mosaic Law were all designed by God as types and shadows to point forward to Christ. Then Christ came to this world, the old covenant (Mosaic system) was done away with. Yet people still want to put Christians back under the Law and in so doing they become legalists. Those who practiced these legalistic dietary laws were in no way spiritually benefited, for these were but shadows that pointed forward to the living Christ.

Christians, be so very careful of legalists who say, ***“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch”*** (Col. 2:21), for these things are the commandments and teaching of men (Col. 2:22).

Legalism takes many forms such as giving up meat for Lent, burning candles for certain religious observances, counting beads, or any form or ceremony upon which some religious value is placed. Let's face it honestly, high ritual is living in Old Testament patterns. Externalism benefits no one spiritually although it may make a person feel religious. Ritualism, externalism, does not strengthen the heart, but grace does. If we try to feed our hearts on empty religious ordinances, then we cannot be strengthened by God's grace. If we put value in the external, then the real thing can have no meaning to us.

I once had lunch with a man that I had witnessed to about four years earlier. At that time this man was steeped in the ritualism of a particular denominational church. He liked what I said and appreciated Grace Church, but for him there was not enough ritual in the service. Since that time, he has been gloriously saved by God's grace and affiliated with another church in our city. But he said to me, "At that time I was worshiping worship." He had externalism without internalism in Christ; he had form without power.

"We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp." -- In the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement a sin offering was made once a year for the sins of the people. The priest killed a bullock to cleanse the priests and a goat to cleanse the people, and the High Priest took the blood and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat, but the bodies of these dead animals were taken outside the camp and burned. The priests and others could eat the meat of burnt offerings, but not the sin offering.

Notice carefully the author says, ***"We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat."*** We Christians have an altar which can be eaten. What is the altar? The altar is Jesus Christ Himself, and the sin offering was a type of Christ. Today Christ is our altar and our sacrifice, and we may partake of Him by faith.

This verse states clearly that the only altar the Christian has is Jesus Christ. The erection of any other altar in the church or the introduction of any other sacrifice requiring a material altar is derogatory to the perfect and complete sacrifice of Christ.

God has done away with all ritual with its emphasis upon the external and is dealing with men on the basis of the real and spiritual sacrifice of Christ. Man fulfills his proper functions only by receiving what God has done in Christ without any need for observances, or candles, or form, or ceremony, but by a quiet act of faith. This is the simplicity of belief in Christ. It is so uncomplicated, so simple, and so available to all!

"Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate." -- The sin offering on the Day of Atonement was a type of Christ who died for sin and sinners. Christ through His death set a people apart to God; He sanctified them in that He saved them and separated them unto Himself. The true people of God are blood-bought people through the death of Jesus Christ. Christ, the sinless One, became an outcast when the sin of God's people was laid on His account, and He suffered outside the gate in order to remove the curse He bore for them. Christ suffered neither in the temple nor inside the walls of Jerusalem,

but outside the walls on a hill called Golgotha. The blessed Son of God was rejected by men and the nation of Israel, but He died because He had to bear the sins of men in His sinless body.

RESPONSIBILITY TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST - Hebrews 13:14

“Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” -- These Hebrew-Christians were suffering social persecution and the author tells them that this is part and parcel of being a Christian. Part of being in the Christian community is the need to suffer for Christ, and God has planned it that way. ***“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake ...”*** (Phil. 1:29). We, as Christians, must be willing to be rejected by men just as our Lord Jesus was rejected by men. To identify ourselves with Christ is to identify ourselves with His reproach. We, like Christ, must put up with misunderstanding, abuse, and persecution from those who are not Christians and who are very often antagonistic to Christ.

This exhortation packed a wallop for these Hebrew-Christians. For them to follow Christ, they had to give up their whole Jewish culture. They had to abandon the rites and ceremonies and religious works of Judaism. They were mocked, ostracized, snubbed, shunned, and rejected, but it was better to bear the reproach of Christ and be saved than to compromise and be lost.

It costs to be a follower of Christ, and our Lord warned us of this fact. ***“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”*** (John 15:19). He who confesses Christ openly and seeks to live unto Him must go forth “without the camp.” The world hates Christ and the religious organized church wants nothing to do with a dedicated, Spirit-filled Christian. To follow Christ is not easy, but it is a blessing, and it benefits us spiritually. ***“... that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death ...”*** (Phil. 3:10). In Christ, we find more than the world could ever give - salvation, peace, joy, hope, and satisfaction, and that is what all men are secretly seeking.

“For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.” -- We suffer reproach with Christ because we are an eternal and spiritual people who live for our eternal, heavenly city. We live now in light of eternity, knowing that one day we shall be with Jesus in the heavenly city. Since we are not of this world, we can not expect to be accepted by this world. Our true homeland is in heaven where Christ dwells. Our present suffering is nothing when we realize that through the eternal ages, forever and ever, we shall be with Christ in His Father’s house of many mansions.

CONCLUSION

What are you seeking in life? Surely you would say peace, joy, security, and satisfaction. Have you found it? You never will until you come to Christ, for He alone came to give men an abundant life. ***“... I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly”*** (John 10:10).

However, to get peace, joy, security, and satisfaction, you must accept Christ’s terms and not

your own. Christ says you must receive Him as your Lord and Savior. You must believe that He died for your sins and recognize Him as Lord of your life. Salvation is a free gift, and all those who yield to Christ shall be set apart to God through the precious blood of Christ.

It is so easy to become a Christian, for all one has to do is accept the complete and perfect death of Christ for His sins and invite Christ to rule His life. However, it is not always easy to live for Christ because the unsaved world despises Jesus. However, those who really come to Christ would rather die than give Him up for in Him they have found the answer to life and death.

What are you seeking in life? Please change the “what” to “who.” It is not things that will satisfy you, but a person. Trust Christ, and He will bring you peace, joy, security, and satisfaction.