

Lesson 55
Christian Obligations
Hebrews 13:15-17

What are your obligations as a Christian? Perhaps you are one of those superficial Christians who thinks that because you are not under the law but under grace you have no other responsibility than to love your neighbor. It seems to me that the “love only” kick some people are on is a religious copout so they will not have to be responsible before God or have demands placed upon their lives. Christ, however, does demand changes in our lifestyles, but these changes are always for our own good.

Christians do have many obligations to God, to man, and to the church, and unless they are faithfully fulfilling these obligations and responsibilities, they as individuals are not maturing and the local church is weakened. There are hundreds of commands and principles of the Bible which Christians are to keep, but today we are only going to take up a few of them because we are expounding this practical section of the Book of Hebrews.

BACKGROUND

To understand this section of Hebrews, one must understand the background for this book. These Hebrew-Christians were undergoing tremendous social persecution from the unsaved Jews in their community and these unsaved Jews looked at Christians as apostates from Judaism. The Jews were constantly reminding these Hebrew-Christians of the virtues of Judaism. Judaism had a literal temple standing in Jerusalem, a literal priesthood, a literal altar upon which literal animal sacrifices were made daily and beautiful ritual that added so much to worship. What did these Christians have? Where was their temple, altar, and sacrifices? These Jews felt the Hebrew-Christians were giving up the real and the literal for that which had no reality at all.

However, the Hebrew-Christians had spiritual realities that the Judaizers knew nothing about. Christians have the spiritual fulfillment of Old Testament rites and rituals because Christ has come to whom all these things pointed. Now Christians are spiritual seed of Abraham because they believe the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob which included the promise of Messiah.

“Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘AND TO SEEDS,’ as referring, to many, but rather to one, ‘AND TO YOUR SEED,’ that is, Christ ... And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:16, 29).

Christians have a spiritual temple with Christ as the Head.

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole

building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

Christians form a spiritual priesthood and can offer up sacrifices to God. ***“But you are a CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ...”*** (1 Pet. 2:9). Christians have a spiritual altar which is Christ Himself. ***“We have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat”*** (Heb. 13:10). Christians also offer up spiritual sacrifices. The most important spiritual sacrifice is the dedication of the life to God. ***“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship”*** (Rom. 12:1). However, this also includes the sacrifice of praise, performance, and pocketbook.

Hebrews 13:15-16 gives us the legitimate way of worshiping God under the New Covenant, for we offer up spiritual sacrifices from the heart. Sacrifices under the New Covenant are better than any sacrifices in the Old Covenant.

THE CHRISTIAN’S OBLIGATION TO GOD - Hebrews 13:15

“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God ...” -- Christians are to offer continually and daily the sacrifice of praise to God. Praise to God is not something that we do on Sunday a few hours, but is a continual thing. God wants us to be a people who know how to say, “Praise the Lord,” as we see His hand of mercy all about us. We should go to bed each night saying, “Praise the Lord,” and we should awaken every morning saying, “Praise the Lord.”

“I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; the humble shall hear it and rejoice. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together” (Psalm 34:1-3).

When we praise God, we are concerned about the worshiping of His person. God is to be our portion daily and we are to be in love with Him.

You may gauge the spiritual life of a Christian by noting the absence or presence “of a complaining spirit. A Christian cannot praise God and complain at the same time. If all a person does is gripe, grumble, groan, moan, and complain, it shows that he knows nothing about praising God in worship.

“...that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” -- Surely God wants us to give thanks to Him, for thanksgiving is concerned with the gifts that come our way from God. ***“... in everything give thanks, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*** (1 Thess. 5:18). However, the word “thanks” really is a Greek word that means “confess.” The idea is that we are to be confessing God’s name before men, telling them of His love, mercy, and grace that is manifested in His Son, Christ Jesus.

As we confess God's works before men, some men will not like it; others will be won to Christ. But whether our testimony is accepted or rejected, to confess His name continually is to offer praise to Him continually. Witness for Christ is part of our worship to God.

THE CHRISTIAN'S OBLIGATION TO MEN - Hebrews 13:16

"And do not neglect doing good ..." -- Another sacrifice Christians offer up to God is our desire to live holy lives and manifest good works and kind deeds towards our fellow men. We are not to neglect to do good to men because we have been created for this very purpose. ***"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"*** (Eph. 2:10).

God is not one whit concerned about our external, religious facades, but He desires to have His people love Him and manifest Christ-like lives. God hates religion but loves men who do good works because they love God and want to please Him.

"... and sharing ..." -- The King James Version says "communicate" which is a word that means "to hold all things in common" or "to share." Christians are to share their material blessings and monies with their brothers and sisters in need. To share is to offer up a sacrifice to God and to truly worship God. Christianity is "people centered" and we must be concerned about the genuine physical and financial needs of true Christians. ***"But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"*** (1 John 3:17)

To have all things in common is not Communism. Communism says, "What is yours is mine." But Christianity says, "What is mine is God's; therefore it is yours." Communism is forced, but Christianity is voluntary where we long to help those in need.

The giving of money to the Lord's work is a spiritual sacrifice and a form of worship to Almighty God. God wants His people to give liberally so He can bless them. A general biblical principle is that when we give liberally, God blesses us with more abundance.

"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed" (2 Cor. 9:6-8).

In some cases there may not be any material blessing in return for faithful giving, but there is always spiritual blessing, and that is more important. One thing for sure, we cannot outgive God. Those who dare to step out in faith and give liberally unto the Lord will be greatly blessed of God.

"... for with such sacrifices God is pleased." -- God is pleased when Christians offer up the sacrifices of person, praise, performance and pocketbook. God is not pleased with sham, superficiality, hypocrisy, externalism, ritualism, or churchianity, but He is pleased with men and

women whose hearts beat for God and who offer up spiritual sacrifices from the heart.

Think about this! You can make God happy. He is pleased and happy when by faith you bring spiritual sacrifices to Him. God delights in the faith exploits of His people when they offer up spiritual sacrifices to Him.

THE CHRISTIAN'S OBLIGATION TO THE CHURCH - Hebrews 13:17

“Obey your leaders and submit to them ...” -- Each Christian has responsibilities to the church, but the main one is to be in submission to leadership and in our case at Grace Church this means submission to the elders. Elders are undershepherds of Christ, and to obey leadership is to obey Christ. An individual Christian or a local church cannot grow in a balanced way spiritually without submission to church leadership.

No Christian is responsible to follow blindly self-appointed or inadequate or unqualified leadership, but he is responsible to follow God-appointed leadership that seeks to lead the people by the Word of God. One of the reasons so many churches have gone liberal is because the people blindly followed inadequate and unbelieving leadership. On the other hand, one of the main problems in fundamental circles is that people refuse to follow leadership of any kind and every man does that which is right in his own eyes. Fundamentalists often react to unpleasant experiences in liberal churches.

A few months ago a young man who had been attending Grace Church for a while came into my office and said to me, “I am ready to submit to you, Dr. Arnold, and the elders of Grace Church as my leaders. Would you help me to grow and correct me when I get out of line?” This is the right attitude towards God-appointed leadership in the local church.

“... for they keep watch over your souls ...” -- The elders in a local church are responsible for the spiritual welfare of a local church which includes the spiritual lives of each individual and the church collectively. Elders are guardians of each member's soul. Elders are to exercise discipline upon the members of a local church whenever there is doctrinal or moral error or when there is a disruption of the unity of the local body.

Church discipline has a strange ring to modern ears, but it was a common practice of the church in the first century, and much of the weakness of the church in the twentieth century is due to lack of church discipline.

Elders are never to be on a witch hunt, or snoop in people's private matters, or be lords over the flock, but they are to be guardians of the flock.

“...as those who must give an account.” -- Elders must give an account to God one day for their actions, and their discipline will be greater in time for failure to exercise good leadership over the people.

Eldership is a serious office and this verse ought to strike terror into every elder's heart for God holds him accountable to lead the people. Remember, elders, if you lead the people with biblical

principles and exemplify a Spirit-filled life, and your sole desire is to please the Lord and strengthen the saints, then God will give you an obedient and submissive flock.

“Let them do this with joy and not with grief ...” -- Obedient and submissive sheep are a blessing to the elders or undershepherds, but disobedient and unsubmitive sheep bring great grief to an elder’s heart. No elder worth his salt delights in exercising discipline, but he does it because he is being obedient to God.

“... for this would be unprofitable to you.” -- When elders must discipline the flock, it is quite unpleasant for the one being disciplined, for with discipline from the elders comes loss of reward from the Lord. The profit comes when the flock is obedient and submissive to their elders.

CONCLUSION

One of the key words in Christianity is “submission.” Have you ever submitted yourself to Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? Do you know Christ as the One who died for your sins and rose from the dead? You cannot live for Christ until you know Christ personally.

If you are to be saved, have your sins forgiven, and be granted eternal life, you must trust Christ and receive Him into your life. Trust Christ, submit to Him as Lord so you may be able to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto God.