

• *It is always foolish to stay within a religious group trying to pretend that we are something different from what we really are*

• *The Christian cannot stay within any Christ-rejecting people*

• *The right thing is to make a break and become more distinctively and obviously Christian*

**They must live on a different 'altar' from the one in Jerusalem**

• *The Christian altar is 'Jesus' death on the cross*

• *We trust his blood to give us eternal redemption*

• *The privilege of fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ*

**They must be 'outside the camp' of Judaism not within it**

It is always foolish to stay within a religious group trying to pretend that we are something different from what we really are. These Jewish Christians, it seems, were tempted to pretend to be more Jewish than Christian because they would have less persecution if they were treated as Jews. But actually they did not belong to old-style Judaism. The Christian cannot stay within Christ-rejecting Judaism, nor even pretend to do so. The same principle applies to lots of other religious groupings. The Christian cannot stay within any Christ-rejecting people. You may say, 'I am staying there to be a good witness' – but your witness will fail (as Lot's 'witness' seemed to be nothing but a joke<sup>1</sup>). You may say, 'I want to win them to something better' – but have you ever succeeded in doing so? They are more likely to win you! And if you have children, what about your children? Do they get any blessing by your keeping them within something to which you do not **really** belong and which you are endlessly criticizing? The truth of the matter is: our writer knows that the right thing to do is to make a break with their Jewish past and become more distinctively and obviously Christian – regardless of what it might cost them. These Hebrew Christians must live on grace, not Jewish food-laws<sup>2</sup>. Don't cling to anything which does not really belong to your identity in the Lord Jesus Christ. Live on God's grace instead.

1 Genesis 19:14

2 13:9

**They must live on a different 'altar' from the one in Jerusalem.** <sup>10</sup> *We have an altar from which the worshippers in the tabernacle have no authority to eat.* In the tabernacle system of ancient Israel there were sacrifices (for example, the grain-offering) which were largely given to the priests for food. They – and they alone – were allowed to eat the 'bread of the presence' which was on the table in the Holy Place of the tabernacle. The ordinary worshipper was excluded from eating any of the grain offering or the 'bread of the presence'. Our writer uses this as a picture. **We Christians** have the privilege of having an altar from which those people who are still clinging to the Mosaic covenant are getting nothing!

What is the Christian's 'altar'? It is certainly not the so-called sacrifice of the mass! It is surely Jesus' death upon the cross. We eat Jesus' body in the sense of feeding on his atonement for us. We drink his blood in the sense that we trust in his blood to give us eternal redemption, daily cleansing and protection as we move towards our everlasting inheritance.

The privileges are entirely different from what they were in the days of Moses. Under the law the people working inside the tabernacle had special privileges. The people had to face the fact that the way into the holiest was not available to them. But now it is the other way around. For all of the people who trust in Jesus there is access to the blessings of Jesus. Those who love the tabernacle system and the law of the Mosaic covenant exclude themselves and miss the blessings of the new covenant! If you live like a kind of Old Testament Christian obsessed with law and ceremony and ritualistic religion, you will miss the blessings of the power of the Holy Spirit. You will miss the joys of fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We have an altar which the legalists know nothing about!

**They must be 'outside the camp' of Judaism not within it.** <sup>11</sup> *For those animals whose blood is carried into the holy places through the high priest – it is their bodies which are burned outside the camp.* <sup>12</sup> *So also Jesus, in order that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside the gate.* Again our writer is using the symbolism of the old covenant but with a striking application. In the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, the blood from the sacrifices was taken into the most holy place – the Holy of Holies. But the bodies were burned outside the camp, a

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• We too go 'outside the camp'

**What is 'inside the camp' for us?**

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• We should go 'outside the camp'

(i) To achieve something for God

(ii) Because Jesus is there

• Leave Pharaoh's palace if need be, and join the people to whom you really belong

place which was despised and considered unclean. The writer uses this as a picture of Jesus. His blood was presented to God in heaven and makes atonement effective for those who believe. But at the same time the Lord Jesus Christ was totally despised by the majority of the people of Israel. His blood was presented to God in heaven, but he was crucified outside the city wall of Jerusalem – because the people hated the thought of any crucifixion taking place inside the city itself. But in order that the people of God might be 'sanctified for ever'<sup>1</sup> it was suffering that he had to gladly endure.

<sup>13</sup>So then – our writer says – *let us go out to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him.* If Jesus went outside the camp for our sake, let us be willing to go 'outside the camp' of old-style Judaism for his sake. We apply the principle to our own situation. We go 'outside the camp' of the world, of dead religion, of anything which does not really belong to our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Inside the camp of Judaism (or whatever is 'inside the camp' for us) there was respectability, acceptance by 'the establishment', chances of promotion and of worldly success, maybe financial prosperity and an easy life. What is 'outside the camp' (of Judaism – or whatever is 'outside the camp' for us)? Misunderstanding perhaps. Rejection and scorn. The loss of our good reputation, maybe the loss of income or 'pension scheme' or worldly success. Maybe there will be plenty of abuse if we go 'outside the camp'. Our family might scorn us. Our friends might desert us.

But there are two good reasons why we should go 'outside the camp' when necessary. (i) We are more likely to achieve something for God. Compromise and respectability and the easy life never did much for God in the long run. We may think we are achieving something by staying inside the place of security and compromising what we know to be right – but we shall only have the blessing of God if we stay faithful to God whatever it might cost us.

(ii) The greatest thing of all is: Jesus is there. Jesus is outside the camp, not inside it. We shall never find Jesus by staying within 'the establishment', or within respectable but Christ-rejecting 'high society'. The Jews who crucified Jesus missed the greatest blessing of their lives. These Hebrew Christians who were suffering so much had something their critics and persecutors knew nothing about. They had the presence of Jesus in their lives. Our writer says to them: don't lose it! Continue believing no matter what persecution you might face. Endure the shame as Jesus did. Because when you are 'outside the camp' Jesus will come to you and use you. Leave Pharaoh's palace if need be, and join the people to whom you really belong.

<sup>1</sup> see 10:10



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