

• *Grace – a different altar outside the camp*

They cannot regard people who despise Christ as their true spiritual home

• *Although we live in and serve God in this world, our ultimate focus is other-worldly*

• *Christians belong to the heavenly Jerusalem*

The sacrifices we offer are not literal but spiritual

1. *Praise and worship through Jesus*

2. *Doing good and sharing our material possessions*

These Hebrew Christians must live on grace, not Jewish food-laws^{□1}. They must live on a different ‘altar’ from the one in Jerusalem^{□2}. They must be ‘outside the camp’ of Judaism not within it^{□3}.

They cannot regard people who despise Christ as their true spiritual home. Our writer says: ¹⁴*For we do not have here any long-lasting city but we are seeking a city which is to come.* Christian salvation is ultimately other-worldly. True, we come to salvation in **this** world, and our life is affected in **this** world, and we have an impact upon **this** world. Yet although those things are true, our ultimate focus is not on this world at all! Abraham was promised the land of Canaan, but at the end of his life when his wife Sarah died he did not even have a place in Canaan in which to bury his wife! But then he knew that his final inheritance was not merely prosperity in this world. He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God^{□1}. The ‘Hebrew Christians’ were obviously finding it difficult to be told by their Jewish neighbours that no one in Jerusalem approved of them. The earthly Jerusalem and its leaders would only persecute them because they had become Christian people. It is difficult to be rejected by one’s own people. It is difficult to be Jewish and yet feel that you have no part in Jerusalem!

But the Christian does have a city to which he belongs! It is not on earth yet. It is a company of people who have believed in the Saviour who was crucified in the earthly Jerusalem, raised in the earthly Jerusalem, who poured out the Holy Spirit upon disciples in the earthly Jerusalem. But this Lord Jesus Christ is now in the heavenly Jerusalem. We belong to that city – Jewish believers and all who have become ‘children of Abraham’ by faith in Jesus. One day it will come down upon planet earth^{□1}. We are looking forward to that day even now.

The sacrifices we offer are not literal but spiritual. Our writer says: ¹⁵*Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God – the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.* ¹⁶*And do not forget to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.* The Christian’s praise is no longer a matter of killing animals. Instead it is a matter of praise and worship. Praise is offered to God through Jesus; that is the only way it can be acceptable. A second kind of sacrifice is doing good and sharing our possessions and finances. These kinds of sacrifice are indeed **sacrifices**; they cost something to the believer. The Hebrew Christians sometimes faced a hard struggle with many sufferings^{□1}, and had joyfully accepted the seizure of their possessions^{□2}. A willingness to share material possessions needed to be a way of life for them, and (in a variety of ways) we too are likely to find that God will put us into the same situation.

□1 13:9
□2 13:10
□3 13:11-14

□1 see 11:10

□1 see
Revelation 21:2

□1 10:32
□2 10:34

As best as we can we are to follow our spiritual leaders

• On one hand, leaders are told not to domineer over those in their care

• On the other, people are asked to be loyal to them – within limits

• Leaders have heavy responsibilities

• Ordinary people with a calling from God

• The true Christian leader lives for the spiritual progress of his people

• Their joy

As best as we can we are to follow our spiritual leaders.

¹⁷Follow your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over you as people who must give an account. Obey them so that they may do their work with joy and not with sorrow, for that would be of no profit to you. There is a two-sidedness in the New Testament instructions about leaders. On the one hand they are told not to domineer over those in their care¹. On the other side the people are asked to be loyal to them. Of course there are limits to our submission. No one is allowed to lead us into sin. We have at times to ‘obey God rather than men’². But exceptional situations aside, we are asked to follow those who lead us in the things of God. On their side they have heavy responsibilities. They are not only to preach, but also to care for the people to whom they preach! They have to watch to see what their preaching and guiding is doing in the lives of the people. Churches are not universities where we simply impart knowledge. They are the creations of God for the spiritual maturing of his people until we all ‘become a full-grown person’ in ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’³. The people of God have to flow together in unity and this involves loyalty to our leaders. It does not mean we regard them as infallible or as super-saints. They are ordinary people in many ways but if the calling of God is upon their lives we should be loyal to them, and give them the joy of fruitful ministry.

Our writer passingly mentions the greatest privilege of Christian ministry. It is the joy that we find in the spirituality of the people of God. The true Christian leader does not live for money or for fame. He lives for the spiritual progress of his people. ‘For what is our hope or joy or crown before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?’ – says the pastor to his people¹. The people are tied together with their leaders. They are their glory and their joy². So – says our writer – don’t damage the joy of your leaders. Their job is to keep the people rejoicing in their salvation. They get their own joy when they see it happening.

¹ 1 Peter 5:3

² Acts 5:29

³ Ephesians 4:13b

¹ see 1 Thessalonians 2:19

² see 1 Thessalonians 2:20



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