

## EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS

### Message #39

### Hebrews 13:10-14

One of the most freeing theological truths that you can ever grasp is the Pauline truth that “you are not under law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14). Coming to the point where a person actually knows this and actually believes and actually lives this is difficult for some people, especially if they have been raised in a religious system that stresses law.

When this book of Hebrews was written, the Hebrews were struggling with the idea of turning away from the grace of God that is found in the cross-work of Jesus Christ and turning back to the old Judaist legalism in which they had been raised. Some were thinking about going back under the O.T. law.

To pin all of your faith on the cross-work of Jesus Christ for your relationship with God went against the grain of the first century religious world. First of all the Temple was standing in all of its glory with its beautiful altar, and the cross certainly didn't look like anything glorious. Second, Christ had died outside the city at Golgotha, so in all reality for these first century believers they have to trade the glorious things of the law for the reproach of the cross.

I want you to think for a moment what life would be like if you were part of a little Jewish church. You are used to all kinds of religious things, and now you meet with a small group of Christians and sing and pray and study the Scriptures with no real structured organization. This was a major spiritual culture shock.

Under the O.T. law there was solemn ritual and there was tremendous liturgy, and now you had a group of simple believers meeting in some house to study the Scriptures. There was no pomp, no great formality like there was in Jewish worship. You could certainly begin to feel inferior and that is exactly the way the formalistic religious people were making you feel. As the writer of Hebrews moves this epistle toward its conclusion, what he says is:

**THE GRACE OF GOD FOUND IN JESUS CHRIST OFFERS US SOMETHING FAR BETTER IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THAN ANY O.T. RITUAL COULD EVER OFFER, THEREFORE WE NEED TO GET OUTSIDE OF ANY RITUALISTIC LEGALISM AND DEFEND GRACE.**

We need to keep our faith-focus on Jesus Christ and our future. Jesus Christ did not “de-sacralize” a relationship with God, He “re-sacralized” a relationship with God. Jesus Christ gives us a sacred relationship with God forever.

Last time we were together we saw that we are not to be carried away by strange legalistic teachings, but we are to be strengthened by our focus on the grace of God. So some of the believers were thinking about tossing in the towel and heading back under the ritualistic legalism, and the writer of Hebrews says “don't you dare.” Don't you dare go back under the O.T. law codes. Don't you dare go back to dietary restrictions or rigid manmade traditions. Don't you dare!

There are a series of key motivating grace realities that are presented in these verses which are designed to prevent one from moving away from grace back under O.T. law:

**GRACE REALITY #1** – We have an exclusive altar and they don't. **13:10**

Now in **verse 10** we are told what we do have and in **verse 14** we are told what we do not have.

The O.T. law had dietary restrictions and impressive ceremony to go with it.

When the first century believers believed on Jesus Christ, they did so in the face of a religious world that had all kinds of altars. There were altars dedicated to various “gods” and there were sacrifices made on those altars. The Christians were even called “atheists” because they didn't have any altar and they didn't offer any sacrifices on an altar.

Let's see if we can relate to this a bit. Over the years we have had several visit our church that have come from churches that feature a great deal of external pomp. When you go to some churches, they offer various physical things that do seem to look impressive. Some have impressive statues and candles and stained glass and ornate decorations.

They have impressive structure and they feature solemn rituals and altars and liturgical garments. Some churches are so impressive that when you walk into them it is like entering the Rotunda of Washington D.C.

Now let's suppose that one Sunday some decide to go visit a Bible church like this one. We have a nice, clean facility here. We have nothing to be ashamed of when people come into our sanctuary, but we don't have anything that is unusually ornate. We can seat between 200-300 hundred people at one service, but we don't have any stained glass; we do not have great candelabras or any display of iconic formality.

If a person has been brought up in religion that is used to the pomp and the formality and all of a sudden he/she comes here, his former family and friends can begin to make him/her feel inferior. They can begin to put pressure on you that you are missing something by just focusing your faith on Jesus Christ and the Scriptures.

That is exactly what was happening to these first century believers. The religious people were making these Christians feel inferior by basically saying, where is your physical altar and where are your sacrifices and where is the pomp?

The writer says, “We have an altar” that gives us the privilege of actually fellowshiping with God. This is an altar that the rest of the religious world does not have. In fact, our altar is so exclusive that those O.T. priests who serve in the tabernacle don't even have a right to eat. The words “have no right” (εξουσιαν) are words that mean they do not have any authorized and official authority or jurisdiction to be able to even partake of what gives us access to God.

The writer here is clearly offering a sharp contrast between two ways to worship God and two groups of people. One is very ritualistic. The idea of “eating” the food of an altar was the idea of participating in the sacrifice and the results of the sacrifice (Leviticus 7:5-7; Numbers 18:9-10).

**What the writer is saying is your faith in Jesus Christ has not lost you something; it has gained you something.** Apparently some of the believers were wondering if they had lost something worthwhile when they lost their liturgy and ritual, things that appeal to the eyes and the emotions.

The writer says, we have an altar from which that O.T. priest in all of his pomp cannot even eat. We have a fellowship with God and access to God through Jesus Christ and His shed blood that the most decorated O.T. priest does not have. On the other hand, we believe in Jesus Christ and His sacrificial work that was done outside the city on Golgotha, and we have access to and fellowship with God.

In other words, the person who has not believed on Jesus Christ and continues to participate in religious ritual and Judaism has no access to God whatsoever. He has no relationship with God and he has no fellowship with God.

Now the Hebrews were obviously thinking about the altar in the Temple and realizing that since Christ had died on that cross, they didn’t have that altar anymore. So the writer of Hebrews says, I want you to know that “we do have an altar.” We have an altar that no O.T. person has a right to.

**GRACE REALITY #2** – We have a sanctifying sacrifice and they don’t. **13:11-12**

Now the “for” of **verse 11** further explains and develops the argument.

In Leviticus 16 there is a description of a sacrifice for sin that was to be offered by the high priest for the high priest and the people. A bull was to be offered for the sin of the high priest (Lev. 16:6) and a goat was to be offered for the sin of the people (Lev. 16:15). The whole business of sin offerings is discussed in Leviticus 4. The rules of the sin offering in the O.T. meant that the priest could shed the blood and burn the body, not eat the body. The priest had no right to eat the sacrifice because it was a sin offering. No O.T. priest could go outside the city and eat the animal sacrifice because the animal was taken outside the city and burned.

The contrast is between what the sacrifice of the animals couldn’t do as opposed to what Jesus can and does do. **The sacrifice of Jesus gives us free access to God.** Now the sacrifice of the animal meant that the blood was shed in the city and the body was taken outside of the city. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the shedding of His blood were outside the city. Therefore, if we want salvation via the blood that gives us access to God, we must go outside the city by faith to the cross of Jesus Christ. We must walk away from O.T. legalistic law and go outside to grace.

What the writer is saying here is that our relationship with Jesus Christ gives us total access to God, and those who live under the O.T. law do not have it at all. Our sacrifice sanctifies us in that it sets us apart to God forever. Their sacrifice in the city does not give them access to God but our sacrifice outside of the city sanctifies us and sets us apart forever.

There are two key points here that we do not want to miss:

- 1) Any person committed to O.T. law is excluded from grace.
- 2) Grace is offered outside of Jerusalem to any who will believe on Jesus Christ.

I love something Ben Witherington said in his commentary on Hebrews: “If one wants to get the benefits of Christ’s death, one must come forth out of Judaism, out of the camp, out of the Levitical system. Jesus died to sanctify his people by his blood. By doing so he changed the very nature of how believers are sanctified, who may be sanctified, and what the word sanctified means. It means morally, not physically or ritually, clean - a clean conscience, as our author has already put it” (*Hebrews*, pp. 361-362).

I want to make one other point. There are some who take this analogy way out of context and try to say that it refers to us eating the Lord’s Supper. But carefully observe this is about not eating and the word “altar” is not used in regard to the Lord’s Supper, it is the word “table” (I Corinthians 10:21). Jesus Christ finished all necessary work to forever save us and therefore we need a relationship with Him and not an altar. Romanists and some Protestants are very confused about this point. **Verse 13** says we go out to Him (Jesus Christ), not to it (an altar).

The point of the analogy is that we have a more superior sacrifice in Jesus Christ than any O.T. sacrifice because our Sacrifice gives us access to God.

### **GRACE REALITY #3 – We don’t have a city yet and they do. 13:13-14**

There are some who have totally misunderstood and misinterpreted **verse 13** to mean that this is teaching that Christians separate themselves from other Christians that they don’t think are as spiritual as they are. H. A. Ironside said this passage has been “gravely abused” in this regard (*Hebrews*, p. 173). The admonition here is not to separate from other Christians but to separate from the O.T. law and Judaistic ritualistic legalism.

All earthly cities are going to be destroyed. We are not looking to be involved in a formal religion that impresses a city; we are looking forward to a future eternal city that is found outside the city which we have right to by embracing grace. Embracing grace in this present world will often lead to “disgrace.” That word “reproach” (τὴν ονειδισμόν) is one that actually refers to disgrace. By virtue of the fact that there is an article “the” before the noun “reproach” indicates this is specific reproach that comes by believing in, living for, and standing for pure grace in a religious world given to works.

This book of Hebrews teaches there is not one work you can ever do to get yourself into the eternal city. There is only one Person who can get you entrance and it is Jesus Christ. You either place all of your faith in Jesus Christ and His cross-work or you will go to hell.

Visible religious practices are so impressive to people of this world. Those religious practices will put people into hell.

On that cross hung the only Savior who can save you from your sins. You cannot be saved by your religious ceremony or works, but only by Him.

**These verses do call us to separate ourselves from law. We are to fully embrace grace.**

We must come out in the open and out of the closet about Jesus Christ and the grace He gives. We are to believe grace, live grace, and communicate grace no matter how much reproach we may receive. We are called to live our lives outside of the religious Judaism and legalism and live in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

It has always troubled me that some churches seem to think it is cute to incorporate some of the O.T. rituals into some special service. I know of a church that actually brought in an unsaved Jewish Rabbi to put on a Passover meal just so the congregation could have the experience. What this text in Hebrews says is that is wrong. We are to break from Judaism not bring it into the church.

We don't need all of the physical ritual and material stuff, because we are not looking for a city here and now; we are looking for one in the future. As Ray Stedman said, "We are in no need now of ornate buildings, special ceremonies and elaborate ritual" (*Hebrews*, p. 155).

The hortatory challenge given to believers is that we need to make a clean break from law and believe and defend grace. We need to defend the cross-work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ's suffering and death is what saves, and that message is a reproach to most religious people in this world. We need to be people who will bear that reproach and defend that message.

These first century believers needed to be willing to make a clean break from ritualistic Judaism and religious legalism. They need to embrace grace fully and completely.

We need to leave the comforts of the religious world and go out and defend Jesus Christ. This world is not our home. We do not have an eternal city yet. We are looking for and longing for a heavenly city. We are a "pilgrim people."

One can stay stuck in his or her religious ritual and ceremony and participate in them all the way to hell. Or you can get out of that system and flee by faith to Jesus Christ and experience the sanctifying work of Grace.