

6. The writer's exhortation to go to Jesus outside the camp and abide with Him there was a call to embrace Him in truth, which meant embracing His reproach. Jesus incurred this reproach by assuming authority over Israel's structures and practices and sitting in judgment of them. So it would be for His followers; His reproach would fall upon them if they embraced and lived out His claims and judgment. That is true of *every* disciple, but the writer was here concerned with his Hebrew brethren. In their case, sharing Jesus' reproach involved joining Him outside the "camp" of Israel, abandoning Judaism as having found its goal and fulfillment in Him.

Israel's covenant life had revolved around its sacrificial system; in the words of the author, the covenant was founded upon the Levitical priesthood (7:11-12). Indeed, sacrifices and offerings were the very marrow of Israel's ongoing life with God. No Jew could conceive of a relationship with Yahweh apart from them. But now, the entire former order of things was set aside in Jesus the Messiah – not because He denied or abrogated them, but because He fulfilled and transformed them. Living with Yahweh as His covenant children is still a matter of sacrifice and offering, but in a new way that the former sacrificial order only hinted at. Those who abide with Jesus outside the camp have the obligation to offer up the sacrifices of praise, thankfulness and love (13:15-16).

- a. The writer seems to have drawing from Israel's *thank offerings*, which were a particular form of peace offering. The peace offering signified the right relation – the state of peace or completeness – between the offerer and Yahweh, and so focused on a fellowship meal in which both priest and offerer ate of the sacrifice (Leviticus 7:11-34). The peace offering presupposed that there was no offense or uncleanness standing between the offerer and Yahweh, and so it often followed a sin offering and/or guilt offering (Leviticus 4-6).

Being one form of peace offering, the thank offering allowed various sacrificial animals (Leviticus 3), but that animal was presented along with an offering of unleavened cakes (Leviticus 7:11-12). Thus the offerer supplied "fruit" from his own provision as the content of the fellowship meal between himself and Yahweh. This is the imagery the Hebrews writer alluded to when he spoke of the *fruit* of thankfulness – i.e., lips that give thanks to Yahweh – being the *substance* of the sacrifice of praise (13:15; cf. Psalm 54:6, 56:12, 116:17).

It is also noteworthy that the writer specifically mentioned thanksgiving directed toward God's *name*. This is a Hebraic idiom that expresses the idea that God's name is synonymous with God Himself. The premise is that God has disclosed His name to human beings, and by this means has identified the truth of who He is. This is most evident in His covenant name given to Israel: *I am and will be who I am* (Exodus 3:13-14). This name expresses, not the nature of God's inner being, but who He is in relation to His creation. As His *covenant* name, it told Israel that they were to know Him as the faithful, unchanging God who always keeps covenant and fulfills His word and promise (cf. Exodus 3:13-17, 6:2-8). Thus "giving thanks to God's name" entails expressing gratitude to Him for His faithfulness to His word (cf. Psalms 18, 44, 54, 100, 105, 106, 138).

This idea is reinforced by the fact that the Greek verbal form rendered “give thanks” actually denotes *confession*. It literally translates *speak the same*, and in biblical usage characteristically refers to a person’s agreement with the truth as God discloses it. Confession, then, is agreement with God, and this is the basis for the connotation of thankfulness/thanksgiving. This parallels the Hebrew scriptures, which have no distinct concept of thankfulness, but treat it as an aspect of confession. And because confession is verbal agreement with God, it is closely aligned with the idea of *praise*. Confession, then, is typically expressed in thanksgiving and praise; hence the Hebrews writer’s assertion that the “*sacrifice of praise*” consists in “*giving thanks to God’s name.*” The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament underscores the same truth in its treatment of thanksgiving:

*“The best rendering of the term is confession... this verb was predominantly employed to express one’s public proclamation or declaration of God’s attributes and his works. This concept is at the heart of the meaning of praise. Praise is a confession or declaration of who God is and what he does. This term is most often translated “to thank” in English versions, but such is not really a proper rendering... the O.T. does not have our independent concept of thanks. The expression of thanks to God is included in praise; it is a way of praising.”*

In summary, then, to offer to God a sacrifice of praise is fundamentally to agree with Him concerning His disclosures in word and work – not only *what* He has said and done, but the *meaning, purpose* and *goal* of His words and deeds. And this agreement in the heart and mind cannot help but provoke gratitude and praise – inward exultation that erupts in words and actions that attest, affirm, and adorn what God has said and done; words and actions that “speak the same” as He has spoken in His Son: “*Through Him then...*” (cf. 1:1-3; ref. also John 1:1-18).

The writer underscored all of this by calling for giving thanks to God’s name. Moreover, by specifying the divine name as the subject of this gratitude, *the writer shifted it away from personal concerns or benefits*. It’s not that thankfulness for personal blessings and benefits is wrong, inappropriate or irrelevant. Indeed, God wants His children to be mindful of and give Him thanks for His myriad mercies and acts of care and concern for them. But this fatherly care isn’t arbitrary or sentimental, but derives from and serves His ultimate purpose for His children in His renewed creation.

And if God’s interaction with His children is set within His larger purpose, their thankfulness and praise needs to follow this same pattern. Gratitude and thanksgiving are the centerpiece of praise, which itself is *confession* – agreeing with God. And agreement with God involves perceiving and acknowledging His words and works *as He does*, according to the truth of their intention and ultimate end. Thus true gratitude for personal blessings and benefits – gratitude that is *praise* and pleases God – regards those blessings in terms of His goal to perfect a people in His Son, through whom He will fill His creation with His own wisdom, love and power (1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:9-23; Revelation 21-22).

- b. The sacrifice of praise, then, consists in a life of continual, conscious thankfulness to the God who has made Himself fully known in the Word and Work that are Jesus the Messiah. It is a life that confesses the truth as it is in Him, thereby bringing to the covenant God and Father the sacrificial “fruit” that is worthy of true worshippers, even as His prophet Hosea longed:

*“Return, O Israel, to Yahweh your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Yahweh. Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously, that we may present the fruit of our lips.’”*

The sacrificial fruit of confession consists in continual praise and thanksgiving. But because confession involves owning the truth, it goes beyond verbal agreement. It expresses itself in a *truth-affirming manner of life*. Hence the writer includes the sacrifice of enacted love within his sacrificial prescription (13:16): *“Stop neglecting the mutual care, helpful kindness and goodness appropriate to your common union in Jesus, for God takes great delight in such sacrifices.”*

The writer didn’t elaborate further, but he clearly was aware that the pressures and adversity afflicting his readers were distracting them from a proper concern for one another (cf. 13:2 – “stop neglecting to show hospitality to strangers”). Their suffering was turning their attention toward themselves and their own need, and so undermining the common-union and burden sharing that should mark them as Jesus’ followers (cf. Acts 2:42-47). But if they were to be truth-tellers, their confession needed to go beyond thanksgiving and praise; they needed to confess with their *lives* the truths they extolled with their lips. And yet the author had a concern beyond simply his readers’ consistency in practicing what they preached. *He wanted them to step back from their circumstances and challenges and rethink them in the light of their new life in Jesus and what it means to share in Him.*

- This reordering of their minds would provoke a disposition of grateful praise, whatever hardship and injustice they were enduring.
- And it would also turn their gaze away from themselves to their brethren who were also experiencing the same ordeal of suffering as fellow-sharers in the Messiah (ref. again 10:32-34).
- In this way they would become ministers of goodness and truth to those outside the household of faith, bearing Jesus’ fragrance and attesting the power of His gospel by being one as He and His Father are one.

Thus they would show themselves to be true children of God, sons and daughters who manifest His life and likeness by devoting themselves to His perfect law of love – the law that is the fullness of the Father’s Torah (Matthew 22:35-40; Romans 13:8-10); the law that is fully revealed, fully embodied, and fully realized in the Son of the Father’s love and His loving sacrifice (1 John 4:7-12).