

**Record of Sermons delivered during the month of  
May 2019**

(added progressively after each Sunday)

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(see following pages)

**We Must Make Progress in the Christian Life – Pt 2**

per S Olyott

(review so far)

We continue with Stuart Olyott's, personalised sermon on Hebrews 13:1-6, using his 'first person' wording and his local location and time references (including his quotes of the KJV).

Last week we covered his treatment of the first of the helpful brief statements given by the Apostle as particular areas that should be given more than the ordinary amount of attention in guiding ones practical Christian living: verses 1 to 3, 'give particular attention to your relationships with other Christians'.

Now we move on to verses 4-6: 'give particular attention not to be infected with certain worldly attitudes'.

The Apostle, Christian friends, knew of two particular attitudes, which if they seep into a Christian ruin, that Christian's testimony. Therefore he feels that he must, before he closes his letter, – as he is writing to people who want to make progress in the Christian life – he feels he must speak on two subjects:

In verse four he speaks about a certain attitude to marriage. And in verses 5 & 6, he talks about a certain attitude towards money.

As I studied that this week, I just had to stand back from the Bible. In fact the words I first wrote are these, "It's almost incredible to me that the Apostle is writing nearly 2000 years ago. Almost incredible! Because his comments are as relevant to our situation in Liverpool in 1980 as they ever were to the original readers.

It's possible to have a 'worldly attitude' to marriage. It's possible to have a 'worldly attitude' to money. The Apostle says if you're going to make progress in the Christian life you've got to pay particular attention not to be infected by those attitudes.

Look at verse four and see what he says about marriage:

Now the First Century society to which he wrote, was thoroughly depraved. The marriage bond meant very little. "Only a piece of paper, and who cares for that!" So fornication was rife. Unmarried people having sexual intercourse together, was common. Regarded almost as normal. They are called here whoremongers

(sexually immoral in the ESV) – the word is fornicators.<sup>1</sup> And adultery was rife. Sexual intercourse between people one of whom, maybe both, but one of whom was married – people who were not nonetheless married to each other – was also rife! And society had got to the point where it no longer 'frowned' on it. So on the one hand you had total submissiveness.

Now many Christians had reacted to that in the First Century world. Far, far too much! They had over-reacted. They had fallen into another extreme. Some Christians were saying, that celibacy – never getting married – is God's perfect will. There is something superior about remaining unmarried. And some of them who were married, we're none the less, saying to themselves, "We cannot engage in the physical intimacies of marriage, because look what happens when you do!" So it was the complete extreme the other way. The Apostle now writes to that situation:

In the light of that situation it's amazing how balanced the Apostle's treatment is here in verse 4.

There is nothing dishonourable, at all, about the marriage relationship. How could that be anyway. Since God ordained it. Marriage is one of those creation ordinances which goes back to the beginning of the creation of the world! Physical intimacy within marriage is God's gift. Nothing defiling about it! In verse 4: *4: Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled:*

What is God's way? God's way is chastity outside the marriage bond; and enjoyment within the marriage bond. And through the centuries that's been a wonderful witness to the world. Wonderful witness. Because you've had faithful and loving partners. And stable and loving homes. Where the marriage bond has been honoured. There's been complete chastity outside the marriage bond. No forbidden sexual relationships, outside. The marriage bond honoured, and Christian partners enjoying the full enjoyment of each other, under God. It's been a wonderful witness to the world. It's been the very foundation of the Christian home, of which we've recently spoken, where hospitality is engaged.

"But," says the Apostle, verse four – the second half, "All! All who engage in improper sexual relationships, whether they be unmarried or married, God will judge!"

Profligate, licentious people, must someday answer to God for their thoughts, their words, and their deeds. Now young people should think of what the Apostle is saying. We all live in these days but they're particularly prone to its pressures. We all live in a day where it's taken for granted that 'sleeping around' is OK. We

<sup>1</sup> Πόρνους – pornos: a fornicator

all live in a day when it is thought that if marriage doesn't work you can slide out of it easily, and engage in another contract if you wish to. Oh why bother and just live with whoever you please, and go to bed with whoever you please, is the thinking of the day.

The Apostle, in the name of God speaks to you, says to you, "If you fornicate or commit adultery, God will judge you." There will be no exception.

Think about that also, those who willingly listen to smut. Willingly watch and listen to certain programs, where the marriage bond is laughed at and where ungodly attitudes are deliberately propagated. Minds deliberately exposed to it. Willingly. God will judge!

Thank God that there is pardon for every person who ever failed. Any who have committed fornication, may know with assurance, that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us, from all unrighteousness. The repentant sinner, however badly stained his record, and however awful the things done in the past, may enjoy the rest of his or her life with a clean heart, by the grace of God, and live a pure life from that hour onwards.

The same with all failures within marriage. There is forgiveness. Pardon for sinners who come confessing their sins repentantly. Who come to the Saviour. But for those who do not repent, who are 'hard faced' towards God, the Apostle holds out no future except the judgement of God.

Remember what Joseph said when tempted by Potiphar's wife. And learn this text. If you want the reference it's Genesis 39:9 ... *how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*

Now look at verses 5 and 6: Because the God who said, "You shall not commit adultery." Also said, "You shall not Covet." So we read: <sup>5</sup> *Let your conversation (manner) be without covetousness;* The God who gave the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." is the God that gave the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, "Thou shalt not Covet." Covetousness, which is the love of money, is as wicked in the sight of God as sexual sin.

It is the height of worldliness to put sins into categories, where fornication and adultery are very serious, but the love of money is something to be excused! However, in the same breath the Apostle speaks of one and then the other equally.

Covetousness is the love of things, but the particular word<sup>2</sup> that Paul uses here, means, very specially, the love of money. The love of things, especially money,

<sup>2</sup> **Ἀφιλάργυρος** – *aphilarguros* (a- not, phil- fond of, arguros-silver)

is as forbidden, as fornication and adultery. "The whole deportment of your life", says the Apostle, verse 5. (since that old word 'conversation' means your 'manner' of life) "The whole deportment of your life is to be free, from covetousness. "God's way for you", says the Apostle Verse 5, "is not covetousness. God's way for the Christian is contentment. Your philosophy is not, 'What more can I have'. Your philosophy should be: making do. Not wanting more", says the Apostle.

And that attitude is possible, because of the teaching of verse 5

I as a Christian don't face life alone. The Lord has promised to each one, of his children, His personal help. He'll never leave any of us -- (verse 5 at the end). He will never leave any of us in the lurch. God will never let any of us down. Other people take comfort from their possessions. How much they've got! But we take comfort from the fact, that God is with us. Providing for us. And this Heavenly Father, will throughout this life, supply all our needs. Our pride isn't in how much we've got, but our boast is that we belong to Him, and that he will never, ever leave us with insufficient.

Now this is a great Word (message) and an important one, to a materialistic age like ours. Where very little seems to matter, except 1) how much you earn and 2) how much you've got with what you earn. Politicians since the War have spoken, about nothing else. And God judges all their economic policies. When people see their standard of living threatened they cannot cope. Housebreaking is going on in our City at an unprecedented level. Because people cannot cope with a threat to their standard of living and they break in to steal other people's goods. Because all that matters in their reckoning, is that at the end of the day: How much have you got! Meanwhile the Christian can face life with cheerfulness. And he can boldly say, "The lord is at my side, there is nothing to fear. Even if they come and take away all my goods, ultimately there is nobody who can harm me.

<sup>6</sup> *The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

"Wherever He may guide me. No want shall turn me back. My Shepherd is beside me, and nothing can I lack." (Verse 2 REJOICE! 593)

Having him, I always have enough. That is why we should read Matthew Chapter 6:25 to 34. The Gentiles (pagans) were always seeking after this and after that, *but your heavenly father knoweth that you have need of all these things, seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.*

The Apostle now has been very specific. He's told me throughout the letter that I have to make progress. But if I'm not making progress with my relationships with other Christians and if I'm not making progress and keeping my mind **disinfected** from worldly views of marriage and money, then I'm not making

progress. Would you like then, an **antiseptic**? Which if applied regularly will prevent this infection ruining you:

Ingredient number 1: Expose your mind less to those media which foist in upon you, worldly attitudes about marriage and money. Does your daily paper constantly attack, God's creation ordinance of the sanctity of marriage, and display scantily-clad women with no other purpose than to stir up the lust of its readers? As a Christian you should abandon that paper. Boycott it entirely. Refuse to read it.

Why on earth so many Christian's are watching so many of the shows on television I cannot imagine. Unless there is smut, deliberately, in their minds. And the quiz programmes, that offer great sums of money where covetousness is on display, showing that such covetousness is in our minds also. Should we get pleasure from that?

Close your mind's to that. When Timothy is threatened with lust, Apostle Paul doesn't say to him, "Timothy, Timothy pray about your temptation." He says, "Flee youthful lusts!" (2 Timothy 2:22) That means throw down that paper. Turn off the TV and don't read that book if it stirs up any of these worldly attitudes. It's the old-fashioned truth, of mortification: Your hand offends you: cut it off. If your eye offends you: pluck it out. It's better to go to heaven without an eye and without a hand, without a daily paper and without TV, to having all those things and going to hell.

Ingredient number 2: Expose your mind to God's mind. That means listen to Bible preaching. Perhaps attending midweek services. Personal Bible reading. Even a few Christian books that might shake your attitudes.

Why not give more to the Lord's work, if covetousness is presenting a problem for you.

If we obey the first six verses of Hebrews chapter 13, it will be a revolution in the Church. Every Christian would be to me and to you, a Brother. None would feel estranged among us. Our Brothers in prisons elsewhere would be immeasurably heartened. The elderly would be encouraged by the care flowing to them by the whole fellowship. The world would look up and say, "See how these Christians love one another."

That great and New Commandment: to love one another, would be obeyed and all the world would know that we really are, Christ's disciples. And it needn't be a dream. The difference between it being a dream and being a reality, lies in the one word: Obedience.

[2139]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

## **A Proper Attitude to Church Leaders**

per S Olyott

(review so far)

We're coming to the end of our studies on the letter to the Hebrews. And we're finding in this last chapter that it consists of a number of brief statements. So far, they point out areas to which we should give particular attention, if we want to make progress in the Christian life. So much of this letter has been about making progress in the Christian life. It's been made clear that there are only two options available to us. We either go forward or we go out! Those are the only two options. We are to make progress in the Christian life, or we abandon the Christian life. There is no in between. It's very much like riding a bicycle: You either keep pedalling or you fall off.

But there are areas in our Christian life to which we've got to give particular attention. As the Apostle draws his letter to a close, he puts his finger on these areas, one by one. In the first three verses of chapter 13 he's told us that we must all give particular attention to our relationships with fellow Christians. Well a week or so has gone by since we heard that message and we have to ask ourselves if that is completely forgotten, or has it become part of our Christian obedience?

He also told us in verses 4 to 6, that we've got to give particular attention to stopping our minds being infected with worldly attitudes. Well hopefully we thought about that during the week: The world's attitude to marriage. Have we been infected by that, or have we taken the antidote? How about the world's attitude to money? Are we more free from that, a week later, after hearing God's word?

Rather unusually we will spend our time today on three verses that are not directly connected in the text: verses 7 and 8 and then verse 17.

We must not only give particular attention to our relationships with fellow Christians. We must not only give particular attention to preventing being infected by worldly attitudes. But we must give particular attention to having a proper attitude to Christian leaders. This is what these verses are about.<sup>3</sup>

Our whole subject this morning is: We must give particular attention to having a proper attitude to Christian leaders. We shall see that verse 7 speaks about past leaders, verse 17 about present leaders and verse 8 speaks about THE Leader.

Verse 7: Past leaders. That is, 'those who spoke to you'. Meaning in the past they spoke to you about the Word of God. Then the Apostle goes on to say, 'consider the outcome of their way of life'. These are people who have lived, led, preached. Given a

<sup>3</sup> We would like to go on to see that we must also give particular attention to grasping the fact that Christianity is a spiritual religion, but we'll keep that for next week.

holy example but now they've ended their mortal span. We can witness not only the way they lived but where such a life led them, up to the end of that life. The Apostle is talking about past leaders.

In verse 7, he's saying something like this to the Christians of his day: "In the past you had wonderful leaders. Call them to mind. Let the memory of those past leaders flash through your mind. Now they were men of Faith! And they were of note because they presented to you a true message. Other people may have spoken their own ideas but these men of Faith spoke to you the Word of God. Not only did they give you a true message, but they gave you a Godly example. Think about men like that, who are no longer with us. Consider afresh the lives that they lived and the way that those lives ended: Now Hebrews, instead of giving up the very faith in which they instructed you: Copy their faith. Instead of apostatising and turning your back on everything that they lived and died for, (you) live and die for the same faith!"

He's using the memory of past leaders as an antidote to apostasy. What the Apostle is commending here is really a tremendous antidote, to apostasy.

Think now of the Godly leaders that you've known or heard about. What lives they had. They had lives which the world could never have produced. And think of the way they died. "Our people die well!" said Wesley. Contrast this with the deaths of unconverted men and women. The world has no answer for lives like that. No deaths like that either.

Those lives, as we think about them, they are to us a demonstration of the power of the Gospel. The Gospel is not just a set of propositions. It is propositional truth but not just such a set of propositions. It is life transforming power! We've seen it in people who have been amongst us. We saw the Gospel was good for them in their life, and the Gospel was enough for them at the moment of their death.

"Now," says the Apostle, "think about them when you're thinking about turning your back on Christianity and going back to your Judaism."

Think about that! Does the world: other religions; and Judaism, ever produce lives and deaths like that? When we contemplate the lives of great Christians it encourages us to live like that. And as we consider the way they died, we seek to die like that also. And then we feel that we never again want to be like the rest of the world. Such a sure antidote.

It is an Apostolic command to call such people to mind. To sit down and think about them. Especially those from whom we heard the Word of God.

To think about their example. To look at their lives and to say, "What can I learn from the way he lived and died?" To imitate their faith, and by thinking upon them, not to capitulate to the temptation to be like everybody else. But to renew our determination

to live and die for the things that they lived and died for. It is a Christian Duty to walk down memory lane (not to live there) but to walk down there nonetheless.

Verse 17: This is about present leaders. The sort of men whom we've been speaking of, have come and gone. They'll never return and we miss them. With some we may only have had a fleeting acquaintance. Although they have gone The Church of Christ is not now, leader-less! Leaders have gone but the Church is not without leaders:

*<sup>16</sup> In place of your fathers shall be your sons;  
you will make them princes in all the earth.*

*<sup>17</sup> I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations;  
therefore nations will praise you for ever and ever. (Psalm 45:16,17)*

*<sup>4</sup> One generation shall commend your works to another,  
and shall declare your mighty acts.*

*<sup>5</sup> On the glorious splendour of your majesty,  
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.*

*<sup>6</sup> They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds,  
and I will declare your greatness. (Psalm 145:4-6)*

Moses goes but is followed by Joshua; Elijah goes but is followed by Elisha; Paul departs the scene but Timothy remains.

So in mourning the departure of previous leaders we must in no way look down on those that God has ordained shall take their place. We're not just to sit to think about past leaders, but we're to give due honour and respect to present ones. Those fine previous men, none of whom were without their faults, were called by God for such a time as that. There are other leaders who are called for such a time as now. God said to Joshua that He was as much with him, as He had been with Moses. It would be easy to remember how God was with Moses who is no longer with us, but to overlook the fact that the same God became with, Joshua who followed Moses. It's part of our obedience to remember former leaders. It's also part of our obedience to have a certain attitude to present leaders.

What then does verse 17 require of us? In relation to present leaders. Our duty is summed up in the first word: in one word. **Obey!** This duty is further underlined by a further word: **Submit**. There is a genius in the word of God. Why does the word of God say, "Obey" and then, "Submit"? Why not just leave it at "obey" rather than add, "submit"? From all sorts of walks of life, experience shows us, that you can 'obey' someone, while 'cursing' them in your heart. There's an external obedience, but there's no real submission of oneself. So Scripture says: when it talks of officers in the church, "Obey, submit yourself." Not just an outward compliance, but an

affectionate regard in the heart. A true submission to those whom God has put in charge of the church.<sup>4</sup>

Having said all that there are many people in Christian congregations, who cannot possibly display a biblical obedience to verse 17. Never having sought, in the context of biblical oversight, the oversight of an appointed Church Leader. They live as Christian 'freelancers', who on earth are answerable to no men and use the fact that Christ is the head of the church for having no answer-ability to any men. Even those whom Christ has appointed.<sup>5</sup>

Why are church officers to be obeyed and submitted to so freely? Continue to look at verse 17: *17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls.* Now we've learnt, if we've learnt anything from Hebrews, that our souls need watching. "Prone to wander – Lord I feel it; prone to leave the God I love!" REJOICE! 382 verse 2. We've been told again and again and again if we don't go forward we will certainly go back. I've been told to keep a watch over my brother. He's been told to keep a watch over me. We've been told we're in the race together and if anybody is beginning to slacken in the race that we've got to help each other along. We've been told to exhort each other while it's called, 'today'. We've been told to live our Christian lives in a community, of which we are all the shepherds of each others souls.

But there are those that are particularly appointed by Christ – to watch for our souls. (This is obviously the Eldership as we understand it from the rest of the New Testament.) These are the ones who particularly have to give an account to God for the example they've given; for the teaching that they've done and the care that they've shown. These are those who are particularly appointed by the Head of the Church to watch over our souls.

Now how much easier their task is when the proper respect is given to them.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes in a church you see the Congregation gloriously submitting to the Word as

4 (aside) The Apostle doesn't qualify this obedience: If an Elder comes into your home and you're the husband and father, the Elder has no right to tell you how to run your family. The family is the prime divine institution. God holds the man of the house responsible for the affairs of the family. He is prophet priest and king in that context. Similarly if you're a magistrate or judge or member of parliament and one of the Elders comes to your house, he has no right to dictate what you should say in Parliament or in Court. The State is a divine institution. Those who have authority in the State are responsible to God for the way in which they administer the States affairs. There are these circles of authority. These three divine institutions: Family; State; but also Church. It's in the question of our spiritual lives, that Elders have authority.

But even that authority is a delegated authority: If a father says to a child, "steal", a child is at Liberty to disobey. Because the father derives his authority from God. It's not an absolute authority. THE absolute authority says, "They shall not steal!"

If the State says to us, "Curse the name of Christ." the State has a delegated authority it's not an absolute authority, and because blasphemy is forbidden by THE absolute authority on such occasions as this, we would be perfectly at Liberty to disobey the State. And the same with the authority of Church leaders, they also only rule subject to the authority of God. So if any stage Church leaders should give a 'lead' that is not biblical, or give any direction, which is not in submission to the word of God, then of course the Christian conscience is free from submission at that point, obviously!

5 They hold that Church membership is not a biblical concept – that the early Church never had Church rolls. Well, this may be the case or not the case we don't know for certain. But the fact is that early church Christians, when they were converted – they were baptised. They immediately joined a recognisable group of Christians. They deliberately and voluntarily put themselves under the oversight of mature men of God who loved the Word. And they said to such people. "Oversee my soul!" If that isn't Church membership it's something very, very similar to it!

6 <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

it's taught. You see them recognising the Elders with obvious respect. You see them going to them openly, relating everything that concerns their soul and the good of the Church. It's a lovely relationship when such a relationship exists.

In other Churches you see, the situation is very different there are office bearers in name but there's no respect by the members. No affectionate regard for those men. People live like freelancers. They absent themselves without so much as a word to those who are the overseers of their souls. And whenever any question is asked about their spiritual life, however gently, their attitude is, "Who do you think you are?" Who profits most? Because whether the Church member co-operates or doesn't, the leaders remain answerable for the souls of the people. While if people will submit themselves, and build up this lovely and respectful relationship, with their office bearers, it's to their profit, because their pastoral care will be done so much more easily. But if people will be awkward and make their job difficult, none the less they still have to give account! Meanwhile the pastoral care becomes difficult and strained.

Christian lives are advanced far quicker, in an united church with respected office bearers, than in a Church riddled with division, individuality, and a, "Who do you think you are?" attitude.<sup>7</sup>

Now consider verse 8: Because in looking at human leaders we might take our eyes off THE leader! It's very important that THE leader be included at verse 8: <sup>8</sup> *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.* The whole of the letter to the Hebrews has been parading Christ's glories before our eyes. The whole letter has been telling us that all Christian progress depends on considering Him. Looking unto Jesus! I've been warned over and over again never to take my eyes off Him. And I need to be reminded of that, even when I'm being told to give respect to earthly leaders. Respect for leaders and a clear view of Christ, don't wipe each other out. Both may be done. Make sure that both are done.

That the reintroduction of Christ's supremacy is placed at verse eight, just after the reminder of past leaders (verse 7) and somewhat before the commendation of present leaders (at verse 17) reveals the centrality of Christ's role to the whole subject of Church leadership. How do we explain the existence of those gifted and godly men of the past? The word of God gives you the answer. <sup>10</sup>*He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.* <sup>11</sup>*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,* <sup>12</sup>*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,* (Ephesians 4:10-12) The explanation for leaders in the past is that **He** gave them! And the explanation for leaders in the present is also that **He** gave them.

<sup>7</sup> So the Apostle is telling us in this passage, that spiritual health is geared to remembering past leaders. And spiritual health is geared to having a proper attitude to present leaders. It's not 'either or' it's 'both and!' It's an act of hypocrisy to respect past leaders, in the spirit of verse 7, and not to respect present leaders in the spirit of verse 17. It's also totally an act of hypocrisy to think that the people who are leading, are the only ones who ever led, and to wipe out from your memory good men from the past. There's a wonderful spiritual balance here. It's not a submission to one that is required, but a submission to them (both). And authority is not invested in the Elder or even the Elders, but in the Elder-ship.

And sometimes we look to the future and ask, "Where will the future leaders come from?" And the answer remains: <sup>8</sup> *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.*

[2362]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**

**Delivered Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

[No recorded Sermon for this Sunday: Sermon delivered by Rev Ben Wingard]

## **Christianity Is a Spiritual Religion**

per S Olyott

(review so far)

As the Apostle brings his letter to a close we have seen: He gives a series of short statements. In this last chapter he is concentrating on particular areas in the Christian life, which need special attention. He's been telling us throughout the letter that we either go on or out. There are literally no other alternatives. We are either to make progress or we apostatise. We either become more holy or we are lost. We either become nearer to Christ or we end up walking out on Him. So he's closing his letter by showing that there are particular areas, which need special attention.

We saw in the first three verses, that we need to give particular attention to our relationship with other Christians. We saw in verses 4 to 6, that we need to give particular attention to, not being infected by worldly attitudes. Especially the worldly attitude to marriage and money! We saw last time that we should have a particular attitude to our religious leaders past and present. Especially THE Leader, who gives to us: all leaders, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever. Which leaves only the remaining verses: 9 to 16, which we will consider this morning, bringing us a fourth area, to which we should give particular attention. As a Christian you should give particular attention to grasping this point: That Christianity is essentially, not a religion of externals, rites and ceremonies, but that Christianity is essentially a matter of the heart, a spiritual religion!

Verses 18 to 25, are the Apostle closing his letter with exhortations and 2 benedictions.

Now, verses 9 to 16: Where we are told one thing that we must focus on is grasping the fact that Christianity is essentially a spiritual religion.

Follow as we go through the verses one by one. This ninth verse, as you can see, is a warning! Circulating amongst those early Christians were all sorts of strange teachings. Teachings which perverted the truth. Teachings that were likely to lead Christian's off the true Path. Away to False Gospels!

Things haven't changed very much have they? Amongst Christian's today there are all sorts of weird, and we might say wonderful – that is it's a wonder anyone believes them – all sorts of weird notions spread amongst Christians. Which actually threaten the true Gospel itself. That was happening even in the early Church!

As you can see from verse nine, one of the teachings that was circulating had to do with food (or 'meats' as it's called in the authorised version). There were people who were actually saying, "You will get nowhere in the Christian life, unless you partake of special, sacred, sacrificed food. You'll get nowhere unless you partake of these certain foods." You may be aware, if you have studied Leviticus, that some of the animals that we're killed in the Old Testament ceremonies were eaten afterwards. At least parts of

the animal were eaten afterwards, by the worshipper himself and his family and others whom he invited.

Now what seems to have been going on, with the members of the Hebrew Church, was that there were people who were saying, "Unless you sit down and you partake of these animals which have been used in sacrificial offerings in the temple. Unless you sit down with your Jewish friends who are still Jews and are not Christians, so that from time to time you partake of these particular foods, you're going to get nowhere in the Christian life! This food is special it's been used in Sacred Rites. It's been used in special offerings. It will do something for you. You should be found, from time to time, eating this food."

Now that teaching was sheer compromise with Jewish people!

People were saying, "That is the way forward for some of you." It meant that the Christians had no real break with Judaism! In fact it meant that by sitting down and eating the animals that have been sacrificed, they were still giving their tacit approval to the sacrificial system.

What's the Apostle's reaction to that? That sort of heresy might not tempt you and I that much, since very few, if any of us, are Jewish and we've never been in contact with a Jewish sacrificial system. (Which has been unavailable even to the Jews since the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.) But it was very relevant to those early Christians before AD 70, where sacrifices were being made every day, in their hundreds, at the Jerusalem temple. So what was his reaction? Verse 9, "Don't be carried away by weird notions!" And we could underline this, in red or fluorescent letters for this present time. <sup>9</sup> *Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings,*

And he goes on to say in the remainder of verse nine, "You're strengthened in your Christian life, friends, not by what you eat or what you don't eat but by God working in your heart. What I'm saying is proved by those who have given themselves to this so called special food. They haven't made any progress in the Christian life, because of these meals. They haven't profited by it! Because the way forward in the Christian life isn't by eating certain things or not eating certain things. It's a question of Grace! Spiritual Grace; Spiritual Life. Spiritual strength in the heart." The Apostle is showing to us all, in verse nine, the way forward for us all. What we all need, this morning, in our Christian lives, is not the adopting of certain 'outward' practices. Jesus said, "It's not what goes into a man that defiles him, it's what comes out of the man which defiles him." (Matthew 15:11 & Mark 7:15) So you don't give attention to what you eat and drink but to what comes out of the heart. Christianity is not a religion of externalism.

It's a religion which is concerned with the heart: The Roman Catholic church teaches, for instance, that the removal of 'original sin' is accomplished by Baptism. It doesn't matter what the heart of the baptised person is like, if they are baptised, then *ex opere*

*operato*,<sup>8</sup> original sin is removed! In addition other sins are removed by acts of 'penance'.<sup>9</sup> And that you are kept in a right relationship with God by the act of attending Holy Mass! Provided you do that and fit in with the structures, it really very little matters what's going on in the heart, because it is thought that Grace flows into the life, through the structures of the church. The whole approach is one of total externalism! And that has crept these days into much of what is called Protestantism. There are people in Protestant congregations who honestly think: that by being in church each Sunday morning, then everything for them will be alright. And that their 'good deeds' will earn them 'brownie points'. As long as they fit in with the appointed structures everything, is alright! That they going alright in the Christian life if they fit in with the appointed structures.

But that isn't the way it is, at all! The only relevant question is, "How is your heart doing? Is there more personal faith? More personal love for Christ? More personal grasp of Truth? More personal resistance to temptation?" In short. "Is there more personal holiness?"

Because Christianity is essentially a Spiritual Religion. A question of the heart.

Look now at verses 10 to 14, which are emphasising the same points. They are some of the most difficult verses, on the face of it, in the whole book.

You might be aware, that not all sacrifices, in Leviticus, were sacrifices of the eating sort. It was only for some sacrifices that the animal was eaten by the worshipper. There were some sacrifices where no part of the animal was eaten by anybody. Not even the Priests! Particularly the sin offering. What took place there was that the animal was killed on the altar, but nobody ate any part of it. Not even those who served in the Tabernacle (verse 10). The blood of the beast was brought into the inner shrine, to make atonement for sin, but the body of the beast was burnt outside the camp – as is referred to in verse 11. Now everything about that sin offering spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ! "There were people going on and on about sacrifices that we should eat. Well, we don't have that sort of altar", says the Apostle. "As Christians, the sort of sacrifice that we have and the sort of altar that we have, is not that sort at all. It's entirely different!

We have an altar (verse 10). We have an altar as Christians: (But it's not the thing that some churches have up the front. As a display of externalism, we shall see that it is contrary to the whole of the New Testament.) We have an altar. Our Altar is the

8 **EX OPERE OPERATO:** A term defined by the Council of Trent to describe how the sacraments confer the grace they signify.

9 Penance got into the RC language by a mis-translation of the Greek when Jerome translated parts of the NT into the common (vulgar) language of the day, Latin. Which version of the NT is called the Vulgate. The regular translation uses the English word 'repentance'. Which means 'turn from the sin' not 'to do something else to compensate for the sin'. Since this reinforces the fallen human nature to seek to practise a doctrine of Works not one of God's free Grace – through the only perfect Works, those of Christ.

Μετανοήσατε μετανοεῶ (from 3326 /μετά, "changed after being with" and 3539 /νοιεῶ, "think") – properly, "thinkdifferently after," "after a change of mind"; to repent (literally, "think differently afterwards"). see also

<http://ronaldvhuggins.blogspot.com/2016/01/acts-238-matthew-417-from-do-penance-to.html>

Lord Jesus Christ! That's why we should not erect any altars. There is a sin offering. It's His blood. Which was shed to set apart a people for God. Which is what the word 'sanctify' means. He suffered (verses 12 and 13). He suffered not in earthly Jerusalem, but outside it. It's very important that our Lord suffered outside and not inside the city. When our Lord took away our sin, He did it without any reference to the Levitical system. When our Lord took away our sin he stood completely apart from what was going on in the temple at the same time. Lambs for being killed in the Temple but THE Lamb was slain outside the camp.

The cleansing of sin and the cleansing of consciences is not achieved in any way by the Levitical System or what was going on in earthly Jerusalem. Our Lord secured it all, without any reference to those activities. Now all of this means two things to you as a Christian (verse 13). <sup>13</sup>*Therefore let us go to Him, outside the camp, and bear the reproach that He endured.*

If our Lord fulfilled the Levitical Rites and Ceremonies but had nothing to do with them when he took away sin, then we should join Him outside the camp and have nothing whatever to do with Levitical Rites and Ceremonies. That was a very important point for those early, once Jewish, Christians! Also our Lord was outside the camp because He was despised and rejected by the Jewish people – they having caste him out! And if we are to be identified with Him, we will be cast out also. So let us go outside the camp and bear the reproach. That's not such a hard thing to do (verse 14) because any reproach that we have to bear for the Lord Jesus Christ won't happen forever – we'll soon be in Heaven. Always weigh up the cost of the Christian life with the glory that awaits us! In such a way the cost will not be as great as it first appears. We only bear the reproach that Christ bore, in this mortal life. If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him

Our hopes (still in verse 14) aren't in an earthly City, an earthly Jerusalem, an earthly temple. We've seen that before in Chapter 12. Our hopes are in the Heavenly Jerusalem, which remains when everything else has been 'shaken' away!

There is no place for the Christian to have anything to do, with the old Levitical sacrificial system. The sacrifices which we offer are of a completely different sort. As we see in verses 15 and 16.

We're not required to take the long trek to Jerusalem. To kill lambs and bulls. To engage in all those rites and ceremonies.

But we are required to offer sacrifices: Verse 15, we offer our sacrifices through the mediation of Christ. The once for all Sacrifice. We also offer sacrifice through the fruit of lips that acknowledge His Name. The continual sacrifice of praise to God. That's the sacrifice you're called upon to bear, not a sin offering. One has been made for you, once for all. Never to be repeated. You're to offer continual praise to God.

And this is to be followed, verse 16, by the sacrifice of love to others – giving ourselves to good deeds. Acting to meet the needs of others. "Those are the sorts of sacrifices," says the Apostle, "That please God."

[2090]

**May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.**