

## *Lips of Praise • Hebrews 13:15*

For me, it's that time of year again . . . birthday time! Having a birthday coming up means that my family is asking me what I want for a gift. So, I've prepared a birthday list. Number one on my list is a coaster to put under my ice tea glass on the table next to my chair in the family room. Second on my list is a pair of stereo speakers, the ones I bought in college that have been packed away in the back corner of our laundry room since the day we moved into our house. Now, that may seem like a rather easy list . . . so I added a vacation trip to Australia!

I don't know about you, but I have mixed emotions about writing my own gift list. In some ways it seems a little pushy to tell those I love what I'd like. The other side of me says that telling them is better than getting ties I would never wear and socks that don't fit.

Did you know that God made a wish list of gifts that he would like to receive from us? It's a good thing! After all, how do you shop for God? If anyone has everything and is tough to buy for, certainly that's true of God!

What do you think God has on his list? Do you think he wants planets or kingdoms or mansions? Hardly! Maybe if you're a reader of the Old Testament you might suggest sheep or goats or other animals to sacrifice. No, not any more. Those days are long gone. In Hebrews 13 we learn that those are no longer appropriate gifts.

What God wants most from us is that which only we can give to him. It is found in the little list in Hebrews 13:15. There we read, "*Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.*"

In terms of praising God, this is the only time in the New Testament that this particular Greek word for praise is used. It means to recognize the worth of, to extol, to honor.

When our sons were playing city football one of our sons brought home from his coach a letter urging parents to be sure to praise their children for everything good they did in football games.

Children like to be praised. Adults like to be praised. I like to be praised. And, God likes to be praised! God delights in our telling him he's great. He thrills to hear us say, "Good job, Lord! You are absolutely super! Well done! Right on!"

There are two ways we are to praise God. First, we are to "*continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.*" To the Hebrew readers of the first century that was a new idea because sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament were only offered periodically. Many people only sacrificed once a year; some only once in a lifetime. But when Jesus came, the animal sacrifices ended but the frequency increased.

The rationale of this is simple: God is continually blessing us so we ought to continually praise him. God gives to us the blessing of breath. Ask someone with emphysema what a blessing that is. He gives to us the blessing of freedom when people around the world would love to share with us the freedom we so often take for granted. God gives to us the blessing of the church while millions of people around the world do not share that privilege and do not have the freedom to worship God as we do. And best of all, God gives to us the blessing of salvation. Study some of the writings of other religions around the world that offer little hope and no assurance for eternity.

But these are only the general things that most of us share. Think about the specific blessings of God for your individual life. Maybe occasionally we ought to take time out as I did this week and make a specific personal list. Include on your list dreams that have come true, answered prayers, crises that have been resolved and needs that have been provided. In my life there has been a continuous flow of blessings from the Lord, certainly more than enough to warrant a continuous flow of praise from me!

The Greek words translated "continually" in our English Bible are "dia pantos." They are the words for "through" and "all." When put together

***God is continually blessing us  
so we ought to continually  
praise him.***

they mean “through the whole period of time . . . from beginning to end.” Through all circumstances, through all relationships, through all places, through all time we are to continually praise God.

If we were to take that quite literally it would be impossible for us to do anything else. We wouldn’t be able to sleep or eat or work or carry on a conversation. All we would be doing 24 hours a day would be praising and adoring God.

Over the summer months I developed a lingering cough. I coughed my way through all of August and most of September. I coughed continually. That doesn’t mean that I had a non-stop cough every second of every day. But I coughed “through all”—on water skis; during church, two funerals, college lectureships and church consultations; while watching TV, lying in bed, shaving in the morning and eating in the evening—continually coughing. Actually, I got so used to it that it just became a rather natural part of my life, work and conversation! It was continually there even though I said and did other things as well.

That’s exactly the way we are to continually praise God—when we’re working, watching television, driving the car, going to church, on vacation, at weddings and funerals, on cloudy days and sunny days. Continually! Not every second, but continually. We ought to praise God until it is a natural and normal part of life, almost as if it were like breathing.

It’s sort of like carrying on a continual conversation with God . . . always telling him how great he is; always acknowledging his tremendous worth; always connecting all of life with the God who is always blessing our life; continually offering up a sacrifice of praise.

The benefits of this are tremendous. When praise becomes a way of life, we are changed. Praise changes pessimists into optimists, sourpusses become sweetie pies. But even if you and I don’t get a single benefit, God is still worth all of our continual praise just for himself.

Most of what we’ve talked about doesn’t take much of a sacrifice. In fact, we may wonder why that word would even be used in this verse. Certainly it is used because of the comparison earlier in Hebrews 13 to the sacrifices that were made in the Old Testament but are no longer necessary. But, still, there is the sacrificial part of our praising God.

The word “sacrifice” still means “sacrifice.” It is giving up something that costs us something.

The emphasis here is clearly on the praise and minimally on the sacrifice. But, let us commit to a willingness to pay a price to praise God. It may be getting up early every morning for quiet time with God. It may mean regularly beginning that time with praise, telling God how great he is. It may be the sacrifice of sleep and comfort to better praise God.

Suppose you are scheduled to give a major speech at work or at school. You are nervous and scared. You pray and ask God to help you do well. Your speech is a smashing success. It’s interesting, informative, entertaining and effective. Afterwards there’s a lot of praise. You feel really proud. Would you be willing to sacrifice your pride and give the praise to God?

Or maybe life gets very tough. Finances are poor. Friends disappear. Health is crummy. Emotions are depressed. You are all set for a super duper pity party. How about sacrificing that pity party, sacrificing feeling sorry for yourself, and instead have a praise party for God?

The last part of Hebrews 13:15 is a grammatical apposition to the first part. That means it is a further definition or description, sort of saying the same thing but in a little different way: “. . . *let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.*” This further description of praising God has to do with what we say to others about him.

God likes his name! God likes to be referred to personally. He likes it when we speak of him as the person he is.

It is offensive when we gratuitously speak of God as “the man upstairs”, for example. Suppose one of my children was in conversation with a neighborhood child and the other child said to my son, “I hear you almost drowned in the lake and had to be pulled out. Who saved you?” And my son points up to my bedroom and says, “The man upstairs saved my life.” Then the conversation continues and another child says to my daughter, “You’ve got a lot of nice stuff . . . a bike, a skateboard, a boat, skis. Where did you get all that stuff?” She turns around and points to my room and says, “The guy upstairs gave them to me.”

Finally, the neighbor child asks, “Who is this guy upstairs?” and one of my children says with embarrassment, “My father!”

That would be awful! I don’t know if I would be more hurt or angry if my children did not refer to me by name. It would be horrible to think that they might be embarrassed to refer to me as their father.

I am a person and I expect to be acknowledged as a person. To some I am “Leith”, to others “Dad” or “Pastor” or “Mr. Anderson”. I have different titles for different relationships. But whichever of my names is used, I expect to be called by name by those with whom I have a special relationship. And so does God! Let us be very careful to let the fruit of our lips confess God’s name.

Our God is far more than the God of Sunday morning hymns. He is the God who comes home to our houses, so we ought to personally acknowledge his name in our homes. He is the God of the workplace, so we must give him the credit for our business successes as well as our spiritual successes. He is the God of our healthy days and of our hospital days and so he must be personally acknowledged by name on all of our days. *“Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name” . . . personally.*

Some of us don’t mind acknowledging God’s name silently, but we are reluctant to be verbal about it. We’re sort of “silent Christians”. That’s like being a silent husband who says, “I dearly love my wife. I would give my life for her, but I don’t feel comfortable talking about her. It’s like my old Uncle Arnold used to say, ‘Two things you should never talk about are politics and wives!’ So, I just try to keep her a secret. I never mention her name. After all, wives are kind of personal and private, you know!”

***You can fulfill God’s wish list through Jesus Christ. But it is only possible when you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.***

Nobody can keep quiet about those they really love! And when we really love God we acknowledge him verbally. We confess his name.

Bobby Richardson was a New York Yankee baseball player for ten and a half years. Five times he won the Golden Glove award for excellence in fielding. He played in seven All-Star games and five World Series. When Bobby Richardson retired from the Yankees in 1966 he was specially honored by teammates and fans in a ceremony at Yankee Stadium. His words were few: “How lucky it has been for me to have been a Yankee. To God be the glory!” Bobby Richardson wasn’t reluctant to be verbal about confessing the name of God with his lips.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:32, *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.”*

St. Paul wrote in Romans 10:9-10:

*“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

Please understand, this does not mean that every other expression from our lips is “Praise the Lord!” or “Hallelujah, to God be the glory!” But it does mean that we verbally confess God by name as a natural part of our

lives and conversation. When we get a new job and are being congratulated we can say, “Thanks, I am really glad for the new position. In fact, I believe that God is the One who got it for me.” Or, when facing a problem we can confess, “It’s a tough time for me right now, but I have decided to just trust God and I believe he will take care of me.”

Think about it. Pray about it. Ask for and look for opportunities to confess God verbally in ordinary conversation, special occasions and every-

where in between. *“Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.”*

Before leaving Hebrews 13:15, I must confess having done something of an injustice to the verse as originally written in the New Testament. I have saved until last what the Bible purposely put first. You see, Greek is a highly inflected language. Unlike English, you can tell which part of speech a word is in a sentence no matter where it appears in the sentence. For example, in English there is a great deal of difference between the word order of “The pet shop owner ate the gerbil” and “The gerbil ate the pet shop owner.” But, in Greek there would be no question as to who ate whom. The endings of the words clearly show who ate whom regardless of the word order in the sentence.

There is a luxury that comes with that because the Greek word order can be used to show emphasis and importance. When the Greeks wanted to really emphasize the importance of something they put it first in the sentence. You could tell what the speaker thought was more important—the gerbil or the pet shop owner—by which word was first in the sentence.

That is precisely what happened in Hebrews 13:15. It begins with Jesus Christ, the most important of all! *“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.”*

Only through Jesus Christ are we able to praise and worship God. Otherwise our words are as futile as the falling leaves of autumn. Only through Jesus Christ do we have the desire or the power

to confess the name of God with our lips. Without him we have no relationship to God, no channel of worship, no reason for praise, no Lord to confess. Only through him!

That, of course, is the most important point of life. You can fulfill God’s wish list through Jesus Christ. But it is only possible when you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

If, perchance, you do not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, come to him today. Talk to him in prayer right now. Confess your sinfulness. Claim him as your redeemer. Become an eternal child of God. And then:

*“Through Jesus . . . let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.”*

*Faith Matters®* is the Broadcast Ministry of  
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church  
6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
www.faithmatters.fm  
©Leith Anderson