

## “Lips AND Labors” – Hebrews 13:15-16

Brandon Holiski

Southern Oaks Baptist Church

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com)]*

Take a Bible and meet me in Hebrews 13...

We have less time than usual today, so I guess it's good that we only have one verse to get through. I'd like to read it with the verse we covered last week though, because the two are related. You will recall that the author of Hebrews concluded his main argument with a call for us to offer up “*acceptable worship*” to God with “*grateful*” hearts and in “*reverence and awe*” (12:28). Appreciation and awe. That is the manner of worship. But what does worship consist of? That is the text we considered last Sunday, when we jumped a little ahead to the middle of chapter 13. There we saw a couple verses that help us understand what “*acceptable worship*” looks like on the ground. And in these two verses we discover that worship is what we do in and through our words and works. It's what we do with our lips and labors in response to who God is and what God does. The verse we considered last week got at the lip-side of the equation. Today we will consider the labor-side and how the two relate.

So let's get both sides fresh into our memory by reading the text. I'll read verses 15 and 16. Follow along as I do. This is God's Word...

*“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. <sup>16</sup> Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”* (Hebrews 13:15-16)

Now then, as I mentioned, last week we considered verse 15 and discovered that “*acceptable worship*” involves...

### **LIPS that PRAISE GOD**

That probably surprised no one since generally when Christians speak of “worship” they are referring to the times when we sing songs of praise to the Lord, usually on Sunday morning. We say things like, “What time is *worship* at your church?” or “Quick, we don't want to be late for *worship*!” and in both instances we are referring to a religious service. Or within the service we might distinguish between parts like—a welcome, preaching, and *worship* (the last of which involving the songs we sing). And, of course, we even have a genre of music called *worship* music. So we, naturally, associate the language of worship with stuff that involves us in speaking or singing. But, as I hope you have been coming to appreciate more and more the longer you have been at this church, worship involves these things, but it's not limited to these things. Worship can include far more than that. If that's where our definition of worship ends, it is woefully inadequate. And that, friends, is why verse 15 is followed by verse 16. The second verse is meant to teach us that our worship shouldn't be “all talk and no action.”<sup>1</sup> Our definition of worship, in other words, should also include...

### **LABORS that PLEASE GOD**

With this, our attention shifts to verse 16. “*Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*”<sup>2</sup> As believers, we are invited to offer up to God the sacrifice of our labors, our

compassionate service to our neighbor, as an act of worship. Once again, this is not something we do to earn God's approval. It's a response to our having freely been given God's approval in Christ, through faith. It's worship. And as such it's marked by appreciation and awe (see 12:28-29). And it is the logical outworking of our salvation. Thus, Paul wrote,

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* (Ephesians 2:8-10)

We were saved by an act of God's grace. We were saved *for* activity of good works that God has planned out for our lives.

But remember, the author is employing priestly language. These labors are spoken of in the context of our worship. This should blow up any definition of worship that is limited to what we do when we gather corporately on Sundays or what we do in private when we sing our praises to God. Biblical worship is more expansive than that. “Through [Christ's] once-and-for-all offering, everything we do can be offered up as a sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15).”<sup>3</sup> Worship is life. It's offered by our lips and labors. It's a response to who God is and what God does and everything in our day can be connected to these realities. I appreciate what Bob Kauflin (one of my favorite writers on the subject of worship) says on this matter. It's worth quoting at length:

“In fact, the New Testament writers consistently take Old Testament words related to worship—words such as *altar, sacrifice, priest, temple*—and apply them to life in general...Romans 12:1 is one of the most familiar passages that connects worship to all of life: ‘present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.’ The sacrifices that please God are no longer bulls, rams, and sheep, but our very lives, indicated by Paul's intentional use of the word ‘bodies’.... That means our worship is revealed not simply in meeting but in the way we live every day...”

So what does it look like to worship? It's doing everything to draw attention to his greatness and goodness. It's doing the things God commanded us to do and avoiding the things he has forbidden, all with a heart that seeks to please and reflect the Savior whose sacrifice rescued us from eternal damnation. It's loving our spouse and children, serving others, spending our money, helping the poor, driving our car, going to school, and working our jobs in ways that bring glory to the Savior whose praise will never cease. Biblically speaking, there's no sacred/secular distinction in our lives. Every moment is an opportunity to worship God. Church buildings aren't sacred, and family rooms aren't secular; both are places where God can be worshiped in spirit and truth....

Sunday may be the high point of our week, but it's not the only point. During the week we live lives of worship when we love our families, resist temptation, courageously speak up for the oppressed, stand against evil, and proclaim the gospel. In all these things we are the worshiping church scattered.”<sup>4</sup>

That broadens our definition of worship, doesn't it? God is saying that doing good can be something that He receives as worship. So we are told, in verse 16, “*Do not neglect to do good...*”

This isn't the first time the author has told us not to neglect something, is it? The closing exhortations, here in chapter 13, began with the command to “*not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares*” (13:2). We know that, in their “*former days*”, they had willingly paid a price in order to show kindness to their persecuted brothers and sisters (10:32-34) and that, evidently, they had continued to do so. The author has assured them that God would not “*overlook*” (the word for “neglect”) all “*your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do*” (6:10). And, while a different wording is used, they were also instructed to not be like those who “neglect” to regularly gather with the church. That's the “*habit of some,*” he says, but don't be like them. They're not models of truth because it is God's will for us to meet together, to corporately worship and encourage one another, especially as “*the Day [is] drawing near*” (10:25).

Here the author speaks more generally. Doing good can include any number of things, including all those things mentioned. But he doesn't just say "do good" to others. He also says, in verse 16, that we must "not neglect...to share what you have" with those in need.

The word for "share" is a famous Greek word—*koinonia*—perhaps you've heard it thrown around in Christian circles from time to time. Often it's simply translated as "fellowship" and so we have begun to think of it as the word for "hanging out" or, for you Baptist-lifers, "potlucking." Yet, while "fellowship" is an appropriate translation in some contexts, it can obscure that the Greek word (in its various forms) often has financial connotation in the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> Paul, for instance, uses the verbal form (*koinonēo*) in Romans 12 to give basically the same instruction: "Contribute [that's the word] to the needs of the saints and show hospitality" (Rom. 12:13). So this generosity at the very least includes financial offerings for the sake of others and for the sake of Christian ministry. It's worship. And when it's given cheerfully and sacrificially and response to God's goodness, it is acceptable worship. And so Paul could say to the Philippians,

*"I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me....it was kind of you to share [συγκοινωνέω] my trouble. <sup>15</sup> And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership [κοινωνέω] with me in giving and receiving, except you only. <sup>16</sup> Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."*  
(Philippians 4:10, 14-20)

Do you see? "It is God we serve when we minister to others, and put their well-being ahead of our own financial gain." It is worship. And "through" Christ it is "pleasing to God" (Heb. 13:15-16).

But this call in Hebrews 13 to "share what you have" was not a call, as one commentator points out,

*"[...to some] form of Communism; it was a gospel-driven desire and kindness to care for one another. Where we see the church, we should see a willingness to share. God is pleased with such simple acts of love."<sup>6</sup>*

This is not Communism. This is priesthood. What did our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, do for us? He opened a way—through His sacrifice and priestly activity—for us to "draw near" to God. Do you remember what we were told at the end of chapter 4?

*"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* (Hebrews 4:14-16)

His priestly work, in other words, supplies our need. Now, in response to that, the believer is called into priestly service, which at the end of chapter 12 was described in terms of offering up "acceptable worship, in reverence and awe" (12:28). And, as I suggested last week, that "acceptable worship" is now defined as the sacrifices of our lips and labors here and verse 15 and 16 of chapter 13. Therefore, I conclude, that this is not Communism. This is priesthood. Christ's priestly activity supplies our greatest needs. Our priestly activity, likewise, involves meeting the needs (albeit, secondary and more temporal needs) of others. So believers are instructed, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (13:16). Again, note the priestly language of that verse. Our priestly service is reminiscent of Christ's—it meets needs. It joins God

in His mission. Indeed, as Miroslav Volf expresses it, “Christian action is nothing less than cooperation with God.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, just like we discovered when considering the praise of our lips, the labors of our lives can be evangelistic when people come to see them as offerings we make to our Lord. Jesus cautions that you are not to flaunt our good works before the eyes of others in order to gain their praise (Matt. 6:1ff), but if you are doing good to others and sharing with others who have need, then sooner or later someone is going to notice. And when they do, the hope should be, what Jesus described in Matthew 5:16—“*that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*” In other words, it is possible for our labors to impact more than just the immediate and surface need that they address. They can bear witness to Christ. They can glorify God.

Parents, you should take this to heart because your kids are watching your life. What will your actions teach them about the Lord? How are they influencing their thinking? Do you realize the great potential your labors have to help your children understand God and His Gospel? But you’ve got to connect the dots for them. Let me give you an example that involves a father-daughter relationship.

Corrie ten Boom offers us a wonderful example of this. She was raised by a godly father who operated a shop, though they were still quite poor. One morning when the family gathered to pray, they were concerned about the bills they had to pay, so they asked the Lord to send a customer to buy a watch from her father’s store. And guess what? A customer did come, and he picked out one of the most expensive watches. But while he was checking out, he remarked to Casper (Corrie’s father) that another salesman had recently sold him another watch, but it was defective. So Casper asked to see the watch and discerned that the watch was actually fine, it just needed some minor repairs. He told the customer this and then refunded his money for the watch he had intended to buy from them.

Corrie was puzzled by her father’s actions. “Papa, why did you do that? Aren’t you worried about the bills we have due?” And her dad answered, “There is blessed and unblessed money,” explaining that it would not glorify God to profit by allowing another merchant’s reputation to be dragged through the dirt. He then encouraged Corrie to trust that the Lord would meet their financial needs in another way and, sure enough, a few days later another man came to Casper’s store to purchase his most expensive watch. The proceeds from that sale not only paid their bills, but also funded the next two years of Corrie’s education.<sup>8</sup>

“What an excellent reminder this is that in the context of financial pressures and temptations our godly use of money will teach our children what it is to trust the Lord, while also revealing to God the fervency of our own trust and devotion.”<sup>9</sup> We must teach our children to see our godly living and our godly responses as acts of worship we offer to God. Help them to see how your generosity is connected to the generous nature of Christ’s salvation. He has given so much to you, so you can freely give with abandon for the needs of others. And, prayerfully, by God’s grace, your worship may lead them to worship. And not just them. Others too.<sup>10</sup> But our chief aim is the way those labors, viewed through the lens of worship, can please the Lord. Therefore, what an assurance it is for us to be told, at the end of verse 16, that these “*sacrifices are pleasing to God.*”

This explanation is very important. First of all it confirms that acceptable worship is not just the sacrifice of praise we offer with our lips, but also includes the “*sacrifices*” of our labors on behalf of others. Both please the Lord. Both are acceptable gifts of worship.

But this also reminds us that our “‘horizontal,’ human-to-human forms of service have a ‘vertical’ dimension as well, for God counts them as sacrifices offered to him and pleasing to him.”<sup>11</sup> Which is why Paul could, for example, compare the financial support that the Philippians gave him to “*a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*” (Phil. 4:18). That is the biblical basis for calling our collection each week an “offering.” But, if done correctly—cheerfully given, costing us something, and offered in faith—it is a kind of “sacrifice” that pleases the Lord.

But let's consider one more significant question...

### **Why Lips AND Labors?**

In other words, why is it important that our worship employ *both* our lips and our labors? Let me briefly suggest three reasons. First...

#### *Because One Without the Other Leads to Problems*

When we worship with our lips and not our labors, we are, by definition, hypocrites. When we say that God means so much to us and is worthy of our praise, but then we fail to live lives of obedience and service we show that our praise is mere lip service. How can we praise Him as Lord and then refuse to submit to His Lordship? We cannot. That would be the height of hypocrisy. It's the kind of thing Isaiah and Jesus spoke of when they referred to those who praise God with their lips, when in fact their hearts are far from him. We are told that our worship is in vain when this is the case (Matt. 15:8-9; Isa. 29:13).

On the other hand, when we do good deeds, but never employ our lips, we can do all the social justice we want and we will miss the opportunity to glorify God before men and women. As one writer put it: "In the pantheon of the modern world, adoration identifies the God in whose name one engages in action. Without adoration action is blind and easily degenerates into a hit-or-miss activism."<sup>12</sup> People may think you're great. But hopefully your goal is that people will think your God is great. And for that, you're going to have to open your mouth eventually.

But here's a second reason lips and labors go together...

#### *Because One Confirms the Legitimacy of the Other*

If we are all words and no works, then our words probably don't mean much. If we are all works and no words, then our works expose a lack of true devotion, maybe even cowardice.<sup>13</sup>

Miroslav Volf hit the nail squarely when he wrote,

"There is something profoundly hypocritical about praising God for God's mighty deeds of salvation and cooperating at the same time with the demons of destruction, whether by neglecting to do good or by actively doing evil."<sup>14</sup>

So if we neglect to do good and share with others, then it shows just how empty the words we sing on Sunday really are. You can fool the people in the pew, but not the God of heaven. Let's think about the issue of generosity, since that is the example given in our text. Here we discover just how useful our bank accounts are as a measure of our worship. I don't mean the bigger the bank account the better the worshiper. That's not the case. I mean how we use the resources that God gives us to steward says a lot about the condition of our hearts and the true nature of our worship. As George Guthrie writes,

"Money is an area that tests the authenticity of our devotion to God. The heart that is too close to the back pocket is out of place and grows numb to the good gifts and provisions of God. [Our use of money] provides an arena in which great spiritual vitality can be grown and demonstrated."<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Richard Phillips points out that “Just as with our speech, it is only when the heart has been weaned from the world and draw close to God that we can use our money as an instrument of sacrificial worship and service.”<sup>16</sup> If you can’t say “Amen,” go ahead and say “ouch!”

“False religion is always exposed by its attitude toward possessions. ‘You cannot serve God and money,’ Jesus said (Matt. 6:24). James 1:27 adds, ‘Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.’ This is not works-righteousness, but the true and spiritual worship that God demands all through the Bible. The prophet Micah also dealt with this contrast between external religion and true religion. Micah is asked, ‘With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?’ To this he replies, ‘He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’” (Mic. 6:6–8).<sup>17</sup>

So what does how you use your money and resources say about your worship? Are you beginning to see why lips and labors must go together? Because one without the other leads to problem. Because one confirms the legitimacy of the other. And, finally, just for good measure...

### *Because They Embody the Great Commandments*

What’s our mission statement at the church? “We exist to glorify God through Gospel-transformed lives.” And how do we aim to accomplish this? “By actively embracing 3 GCs—Gospel-Centrality, the Great Commission, and the Great Commandments.” What do we mean by the “Great Commandments?” The answer Jesus gave to the man who asked Him what the greatest commandment was. He said,

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”* (Matthew 22:37-40)

In short, love God and love neighbor. You could make the case that these two ideas correspond to our two verses this morning. Look again at verse 15.

*“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”* (Hebrews 13:15).

Is the “*sacrifice of praise*” that is found on our “*lips*” not an expression of our love for God? Of course it is. And what about verse 16?

*“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”* (Hebrews 13:16)

Is that not about loving our neighbor? Of course it is. So here’s what I need you to see then: practicing the Great Commandments—loving God and neighbor—is about worship. Because that’s what those verses are about, right? They are describing “*acceptable worship*” (12:28), “*sacrifices [that] are pleasing to God*” (13:16). Living the Great Commandments is about worship. And, therefore, we will live out our mission statement to the degree that we learn to live all of our lives as worship.

But the closing thought must be that all of this is possible only “through” Christ. There is no acceptable worship from us unless we are first found in Him. So I’ll end our consideration of these two verses with the same thought that launched our consideration of these two verses last week.

“Apart from the trail he has blazed by his life and his death, apart from the access he has won for us with his blood, all the obstacles of our sin and God’s holiness stand firm against us. God’s wrath remains in deadly opposition to us, so that no one is received by God except ‘through him.’”<sup>18</sup>

We are received through faith in Christ, not our works for Christ. Without Him, we would have nothing pleasing to bring to God. In other words, it is Christ’s sufficient and atoning sacrifice *for us* that issues in worshipful sacrifice *from us*, and both to the praise of His name. And all God’s people said? Amen!

Let’s pray...

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 1334.

<sup>2</sup> David L. Allen claims that “Everything commanded in 13:1-8 can be summarized as ‘doing good and sharing’ in v. 16. *Hebrews* (NAC; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 623.

<sup>3</sup> Bib Kauflin, *Worship Matter: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 206.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-207, 210.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, “Hebrews” in *Hebrews-Revelation* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 210; Dana M. Harris, *Hebrews* (EGGNT; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019), 418; William L. Lane, *Hebrews* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991), 2:552; Allen, 623. Cf. Acts 2:42-45; Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 4:15. Indeed, on the basis of some of these verses, Thomas R. Schreiner claims, “The word ‘share’ (κοινωνία) almost certainly refers to giving to meet the needs of others”. *Commentary of Hebrews* (BTCP; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 424.

<sup>6</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Hebrews* (CCE; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 232.

<sup>7</sup> Miroslav Volf, “Worship as Adoration and Action: Reflections on a Christian Way of Being-in-the-World,” *Worship Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers), 210.

<sup>8</sup> These details were drawn from Richard D. Phillips, *Hebrews* (REC; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 615-616.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 616.

<sup>10</sup> “In the pantheon of the modern world, adoration identifies the God in whose name one engages in action. Without adoration action is blind and easily degenerates into a hit-or-miss activism.” Volf, 210.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, 210.

<sup>12</sup> Volf, 210.

<sup>13</sup> “Through our speech, our whole attitude is revealed with devastating accuracy. Jesus said, ‘Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks’ (Matt. 12:34). What is in your heart will come out your mouth; the only way, therefore, to have a clean mouth is to have a clean heart. Clean and wholesome speech, therefore, indicates a whole life lived to the praise of God. So powerful is our speech as a gauge of our true spiritual condition that Paul used it in Romans 3 as a summary of natural man’s depravity: “‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness” (Rom. 3:13–14). That alone sufficiently describes Western culture today; behind the veneer of our prosperity, the common manner of speech reveals a rot of the soul. Some of the worst sins committed against God are committed by the tongue. Some of the greatest harm done to other people is done by the tongue. ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones,’ we say, ‘but words can never hurt me.’ That is simply untrue. James says, ‘The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.... It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison’ (James 3:6, 8). All of us can think of things said to us, perhaps recently, perhaps years ago, that have scarred us deeply, that have created a whole world of evil in our lives. We likely have done the same to others. Words are powerful weapons, but also powerful instruments of blessing and worship.” Phillips, 613.

<sup>14</sup> Volf, 211.

<sup>15</sup> George Guthrie, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 448-449. Cited by Phillips, 615.

<sup>16</sup> Phillips, 615.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 611.