

## Calves of the Lips

Written by Jerry Johnson

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One of the most engaging expressions of the worth of vocal praise is found in Hebrews 13:14: “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” I suppose this might be broad enough to include prayer, singing, or vocal praise of any sort.

In the first place, note that such an offering is first a sacrifice. It is a sacrifice of praise. It is ongoing and ceaseless—offered continually the writer says. It is first conceived in our spiritual heart, then articulated, spoken, becoming the product of our lips in speech or song. I would think the verse is suggesting what it names only in part—that the sacrifice of our lips are words of praise and adoration, expressions of gratitude, of thanksgiving, of honor and reverence.

Sometimes, our shallow minds fancy we must move a mountain to catch the eye and ear of God; we must offer the bullock, the lamb of the first year. But inspiration here says that the humble expression of praise welling up from our heart, expressed in song or simple articulation, is sacrifice. Acceptable, meaningful, worthy sacrifice. What is here referenced as “fruit of our lips,” in actuality, is first the fruit of our heart.

Here is something all can do. It matters not that we cannot preach... there is no condemnation there. But we can all offer our daily sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. We can do that.

I am reminded of King David, perhaps far from the temple, in battle or for other cause, petitioning, “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psa. 141:2). This is to say, “Oh God, will you not accept my prayer, though I be far from the temple; accept it as you do the incense offered by your servant the priest, and the offering of the lamb in the evening sacrifice.”

Perhaps this is akin to Hosea 14:2 where the prophet speaks again of those far from the holy city and temple worship, exclaiming, “Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.” “Calves of our lip” he says. I see here a pointed reference to the bullocks,

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the heifers offered in temple worship, except, in exile, it was impossible to offer any such. This is very similar to Hebrews 13:15, "the fruit of our lips." God both required and deserved the sacrificial offering, the calf. Since that could not be, the prophet was petitioning that the praise, the devotion offered from sincere lips be accepted, just as were the "calves" of the temple service. "Calves of the lips." A bloodless, but very acceptable offering. How this should cheer the heart of that good brother or sister on the sickbed, unable to attend the public worship of the church, yet offering the "calves of the lips"-their own sacrifice of praise in song or prayer as they meditate of God and His worshipping family, -jj