

## **"We Have An Altar"**

*"Be not carried away by divers and strange teaching: for it is good that the heart be established by grace, not by meats, wherein they that occupied themselves were not profited. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat that serve the tabernacle ..." (Heb. 13:9-10).*

It was once a popular practice among denominations that during their services they would have an "altar call": sinners were invited to come and "pray through" until they received the "Holy Ghost," "salvation" or perhaps some other item they sought for. The Hebrew writer has spoken here of an altar his Hebrew brethren had which others had no right to partake of. By examining the exhortations he uttered and enlarging upon these verses, one can come to an understanding as to what the writer meant when he said, "We have an altar."

*"Be not carried away by diverse and strange teaching."* The writer does not identify those who taught divers and strange teachings, but the context indicates it was those who taught the law; those who persistently troubled these young Christians. His later declaration, *"Those that serve the tabernacle,"* is clear reference to Judaism (Heb. 13:10). So, the divers and strange doctrines were not something newly formed, that system had been around many centuries! Still, it was different from the gospel they had believed and obeyed and they were to "steer clear" of it!

*"For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not by meats ..." To "establish the heart" is to secure the heart. The heart is the core of man's being. The wise man wrote, "Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). The attitude of the heart leads either to justification or condemnation. God hates "haughty eyes" (a proud heart). He looks upon the humble: "but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2). A heart which is established by grace is a heart which realizes its failures and sins, which knows that it stands by the grace of God. It realizes it does not deserve the salvation provided by Christ, it is humbled by the outpouring of God's love when He allowed His Son to die in our stead. On the other hand a heart "established by meats" is a heart which feels that just complying with decrees brings salvation, such a one who "works his salvation" is devoid of the humbling realization that it is by "grace ye have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works that no man should glory" (Eph. 2:8-9). Obedience is essential to salvation: God will render vengeance to those who obey not the gospel, but obeying God to be saved by his grace and keeping commandments to earn salvation are not the*

same. Those who seek to earn salvation (occupied thereby) will find no profit therein.

*"We have an altar, whereby they have no right to eat that serve the tabernacle."* The contrast clearly is between Christians and Jews.

*"Tabernacle"* stands for the temple with all its functions, for the Jerusalem temple's earliest roots were the tabernacle erected by Moses (at God's direction) in the wilderness while yet they were at Sinai. Central to that tabernacle (and temple) worship was its great brazen altar. There daily sacrifices were slain, atoning for the sins of the people. Part of the worship was to eat, in many instances, portions of the animal which had been slain. The same was true in pagan worship: witness Paul's instructions about eating meats offered to idols in both 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. And, in keeping with this though Jesus said, *"... verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves"* (Jn. 6:53-54). Paul told the Corinthians, *"For our passover hath been sacrificed, even Christ"* (1 Cor. 5:7).

When one sought to be justified by the *"shadow"* which the tabernacle service gave, he could not be justified by the sacrifice of Christ. The writer has labored extensively to show the superior nature of the religion of Christ over that of Moses. Again he reminds them they cannot have both -- it was either Christ or Moses!

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