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“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)

November 2022

No. 443

BE A SACRIFICE, NOT A TRANSACTION

Do we know what it means to sacrifice ourselves for God? Two people can use the same word yet be using completely different definitions of that word. “Sacrifice” is a word where most of us probably share a similar definition, whether we’re applying it to sacrifices we make for family, work, or even our hobbies. However, when it applies to making sacrifices for God, do we share the same definition that God has for a sacrifice?

A popular passage we often use in regards to sacrificing or dedicating yourself to God comes from Paul’s letter to the Romans (12:1).

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Let's analyze it closely:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,...

Paul spent the letter to the Romans up to this point (chapters 1-11) building a case for Christ, the new covenant, and perfect law of liberty. That is, God's mercies realized through Christ's life, death, and resurrection brought *equal access* among all people to the opportunity of salvation through those who *chose* to answer (6:3-5) the invitation that was provided to all - all, of course, being in need (Rom. 3:21-23). This was groundbreaking in the sense that at the time of Paul's writing, much of the world continued to believe salvation was determined by the immutable and unchangeable characteristics of one's genealogy. Those tracing their lineage back to Abraham (the Jews) had access; those who could not (Gentiles) had no access. Paul clarifies here and in other letters that it is not your background that decides your fate, it is your choice and actions (2 Cor. 5:10). So, with the consideration of what God's mercy brought to all people, those who have chosen to serve God rather than the flesh now have an end of the deal to uphold:

...that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice...

Here's where we have to examine what we think sacrifice means. Today, our generic definition of sacrifice is probably somewhere along the lines of giving up some of our resources - whether time, energy, or money - in exchange for something or someone else. Really, it sounds like a typical transaction we make on a daily basis. We give up money in exchange for food at a grocery store. However, we would elevate the usage of "sacrifice" over "transaction" when an act causes us a greater expenditure of resources to the point of potentially risking detriment to ourselves; the cost is greater. New parents exchange time they would be sleeping to care for a newborn, to the point of spending the next days (or years) perpetually exhausted and unable to function at their best. So note, God deserves more than a transaction; He deserves sacrifice. What we're asked to

sacrifice is not necessarily our physical body as an object, but rather the actions and abilities of the body and mind. That is, our resources form the sacrifice: time, thought, energy, effort, actions, words, etc.

Now at the time of reading Paul's letter, the mention of sacrifice grabbed the attention particularly of readers from the Jewish background (whether among the few Jews who converted or those who had not). When we think of the Old Law we eventually think of all of the rituals and actions required of the Jews. There were designations of clean and unclean things, specific instructions for what to do if one came across unclean things, detailed instructions for times of year, and of course, instructions regarding making sacrifices. A prime example comes at the very beginning of the book written to the tribe of Levi. The Levites served as the religious duty leaders at a time when there was no real separation of civic duties and religious duties (i.e, no separation of "Church" and "state"), for the Jews' religion was their government. Thus, the Levites led and served as prime examples of good, religious citizens. It is striking that the first set of instructions to them in Leviticus 1 was on how to conduct a burnt offering sacrifice:

If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire

WE ALWAYS HAVE TIME FOR
THE THINGS WE PUT FIRST

upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire: And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar: But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. (Lev. 1:3-9)

Although God does not require this burnt sacrifice from us, there are some notable aspects in these instructions that are common across all such sacrifices God required:

1. The best was offered.

God demanded that what was offered to Him was without blemish, which essentially amounts to finding the best of the herd or flock. Even if you had 5 of an animal that was without a visible fault, the only way to truly ensure this offering was definitely unblemished inside and out was to choose the healthiest and fittest available to you.

2. It was voluntarily offered without reservation.

For many, especially those already poor and without much, it was a big deal to take the very best of your herd and “give it away.” A major aspect of this sacrifice is the fact it is to be offered voluntarily when there are so many other uses for the best of your herd. The best of your herd would fetch the greatest monetary price at market. The best of your herd could be used for breeding better stock in the future. You were to put these other uses of your resources aside so that you had no reservation in offering your best towards God.

3. All was dedicated towards God.

All portions of the animal slain as part of the sacrifice were used. Nothing was wasted, sold, or used elsewhere. The people had no reservation in choosing the resource to offer which in this case was an animal. There also was no hesitation or reservation on their part in all of it going to God.

These are the principles God requires in a sacrifice. Paul notes this in presenting ourselves as a sacrifice as we finish the first verse of Romans 12:

...holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

We are instructed to live holy - morally blameless - and pleasing unto God. In the example of an animal sacrifice in Leviticus 1:3-9, notice the outcome of following those 3 principles was a sweet smell to God. Was it the animal itself that pleased God, or was it the actions of the sacrificer? If having been added to God's Church your living sacrifice meets these principles, it will be a sacrifice accepted by God. Finally, to be this living sacrifice, is something to dedicate yourself towards - fully. Reasonable means rational, logical, and well-thought. It is your intentioned reasoning (i.e., a voluntary offering) by which you present your life as a sacrifice.

Do we present our time, energy, money, words and actions as a sacrifice towards God with these principles? Let's take a low lying example: the worship service. When we arrive and begin, are we 1) giving God our best effort we have to offer; 2) are we there voluntarily without thinking about where else we could be or what else we could be doing; and 3) is our attention fully dedicated from start to finish? Essentially, when we're there, are we really *there*? Attention spans are short and are only getting shorter. We all likely have been distracted at one time or another; I know I have failed at times. We lose focus in prayer, we drift in thought away from a message and towards lunch plans, we sing hesitantly, and sometimes we go through the motions (a transaction) more so than giving God our best

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

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(a sacrifice). Does God get a sweet scent from our service or a whiff of rotting complacency and indifference? Obviously, our life is to represent a sacrifice outside of the service as well.

We are fully capable of great sacrifice. Parents make great sacrifices for their children, who then later in life go on to return great sacrifices in caring for their parents. We go to great lengths for family, friends, and good neighbors. These sacrifices may come via lending or spending money on them, traveling great distances for them, or even helping them around the house or yard. These sacrifices meet every criteria God looks for in sacrifices to Him. We give the best of our herd (effort, time, money), we do it willingly without reservation because of our love for them, and we will run ourselves ragged for them, giving everything we have. Such capability for sacrifices is evident even in our hobbies. Not many hobbies or activities that we really enjoy are without some sacrifice. If we like to work in the garden simply for the aesthetics of the yard, it takes our time, energy, and money. It's hot, we sweat, and it's never actually physically comfortable to be on your knees in dirt...but we do it the best we can, readily, and fully. If we like going to sporting events or theaters, it takes time to travel there, it takes time and frustration to find parking, tickets are not cheap, and the seats aren't really comfortable...but we do it the best we can, readily, and fully. Despite our great capability of sacrificing, sometimes we're oddly selective with them; we have the energy to go to work but not the energy to make it to services. The drive to the beach isn't too bad but we can't make it over to a neighbor's in need. We have time to watch 8 straight episodes of a show but not enough time to study God's Word. Yes, we're capable; we're just picky.

We need to give God the best of our herd. When Paul continues on in Romans 12:2 telling us to “...*be not conformed to this world,*” he means to be the offering without blemish amongst the world who rejects the Gospel to serve the flesh instead of God. We're to be the best of the herd, a living sacri-

fice, through all times, not just when it's convenient to us. Otherwise, we're not voluntarily offering our life to Him. When we get home from school or work, there are so many things we can think of to do with our "free time." Are we willing to put away the desire to relax in the recliner or do those other hobbies when there's a phone call to a brother or sister in Christ we need to make? Are we willing to turn off that show we're bingeing to study God's Word for ourselves or with a non-believer whom we're trying to bring to God's mercies? Being a living sacrifice broadly comes down to us putting the desires of the flesh to serve ourselves behind so that we can present the best of our efforts to God. Does God get the best of the herd from us? Does God get the best of our energy, our time, our words, and our actions, or do we keep some of that for ourselves instead of offering all of it to Him? If Jesus had held back part of His resources instead of fully sacrificing Himself on behalf of our sins, would we even have the hope of salvation?

Jesus asked the rich young ruler to sacrifice his monetary resources, but despite every other commandment he kept from his youth up, he refused to give Jesus his full sacrifice (Luke 18:18-24). When Martha complained of no help from her sister, Mary, Jesus noted Mary made the right choice. While Martha sacrificed time with Him to run the logistics of hospitality instead, Mary sacrificed such earthly motions to focus on Jesus and His Word (Luke 10:38-42). Mary chose the good part and was the best of the herd in that moment. Yes, we're capable of great sacrifice. Our service to God is more than a series of transactions. It is our deliberate choice, our reasonable service, to be the best of the herd, giving God our best, fully, and without reservation - the same sacrifice Jesus made for us.

BEN

FAITH MAKES THINGS
POSSIBLE, NOT EASY

FROM THE SCRIPTURES: ABOUT THANKFULNESS

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. (Deu. 8:10)

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. (Psa. 100:4)

Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing. (Psa. 107:21-22)

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: (Col. 1:12)

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. (Col. 3:15)

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. (1 The. 5:18)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Who spotted Moses in the Nile placed in an ark of bulrushes?
2. Who was the successor to Moses?
3. Who preached, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"?
4. To whom did Jesus say "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God"?
5. Who does Paul say is head of the woman?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH