

The Mystery of Sacrifice and Obedience



INTRODUCTION

- Man has a seeming endless list of ideas of sacrifices to please God. The question at the crux of sacrifice is this, "Will sacrifice bring anyone closer to God?"
- Sacrifice is pretty simple; you offer something to God that you value, with no hope of getting it back.
- Sacrifice always involves the choice of the person who makes the sacrifice.
- Obedience involves not only doing what we have heard God tell us to do; but doing it with a good attitude. Obeying with joy, even when we do not understand, is true obedience.

OBEDIENCE IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE

- 1 Samuel 15.
 - God tells the prophet Samuel to tell King Saul to battle the Amalekites. God is going to give Saul a great victory.
 - Saul is instructed to utterly destroy every living thing, human and animal, and bring nothing living back into the land of Israel.
 - After a great victory, Saul destroys only the despised and worthless animals along with most of the people. He brought King Agag back to Israel, and he saved the best of the livestock.
 - When Samuel confronts Saul over this, Saul starts making excuses and says, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord." In other words Saul saw nothing wrong with what he did.
 - Saul goes on to say that he saved the best of the land to sacrifice to The Lord. What could be wrong with that?
 - Then, as man has done since Adam and Eve in the Garden, Saul blames the people and says they made him do it.
 - Samuel responds to Saul's excuses saying, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry."

- “Shama”: to hear, and obey or take action with a joyful attitude.
 - Shama is the same Hebrew word used in Deuteronomy 6:4 when Moses shouted to the Hebrew people, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”
 - Samuel was telling King Saul that when you hear from God you are to take action or obey what you are told with a great attitude. To not do this is equal to divination or rebellion and as such is equal to witchcraft. I am convinced that it was this lack of obedience or rebellion that eventually opened King Saul to eventually seek the services of the witch of Endor.
 - ◇ Saul thought he could please God by doing what God said – but doing it his own way.
- Sacrifice means to give up or relieve yourself of something; be it money, possessions, or maybe even a part of yourself.
 - Sacrifices only represent that you acknowledge God, they do not necessarily mean you are following what God is telling you to do.
- Obedience is different than sacrifice.
 - Most sacrificial systems reduce serving God to a formula. This was one of the weaknesses of the Old Covenant; you could sacrifice your first-born lamb and your sin would be covered with no change of heart.
 - ◇ When you have a formula to serve God, you do not need a change of heart, you just do the formula and everything is okay.
 - ◇ In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus was telling the people that there was more to the Law of Moses than they thought.
- “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
- Here is a prime example of the difference between sacrifice and obedience: The Sacrificial law said sacrifice your passion and do not commit adultery and you will be okay. But Jesus was saying that entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven requires more than sacrifice; it requires obedience or what we might call the submission of the attitude of our heart.
- “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. Once again, Jesus was saying obedience is better than sacrifice because it takes a change of heart. This is why Jesus firmly told us that the Kingdom of God begins within us. Luke 17:21
- Thus, we can serve God with our lips and our heart be far from Him, but we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven that way.
 - Paul urges us to present our body as a “living and holy sacrifice,

acceptable to God." Paul is using the sacrificial language as an illustration for obedience. Romans 12:1.

- ◇ Paul is urging us to set aside our stubborn wills, our wayward carnality, and our self-centered egos; and force them to submit to the commandments of God. When we set aside our own personal desires and inclinations for the sake of obeying God, we are sacrificing ourselves for the sake of Heaven.
- A great example of obedience being greater than sacrifice is Abraham's almost-sacrifice of Isaac.
 - ◇ The story of Abraham and his near sacrifice of Isaac.
 - God finally gives Abraham the son he always wanted.
 - God tests Abraham and Abraham leads a faithful and righteous life.
 - God grants him great respect and favor.
 - God further tests Abraham by asking of him the ultimate question: will you give up that which you have waited all your life for and be obedient to me?
 - Abraham says yes and proceeds to bind up his only legitimate son, Isaac, and lay him upon a sacrificial altar.
 - Abraham raises his large knife and starts to sacrifice Isaac.
 - God is pleased with Abraham, stops the sacrifice, and saves Isaac; all because God desires obedience more than sacrifice.
 - ◇ Sometimes we will find that it is difficult to separate sacrifice from obedience until we have completed the task God has asked us to do.
- In Jesus Christ we find the perfect model of obedience.
 - In obedience to the Father, Jesus cast aside His deity, and He humbled Himself. In addition, He only did that which He saw the Father doing. He only spoke as the Father spoke. He even said that when you see Me you see the Father. John 14:9.
 - ◇ Jesus walked in perfect submission as He heard and saw what the Father said and did. As His disciples, we are to take on His nature and His mind and follow Christ's example as well as His commands. Our motivation for that measure of obedience is our love for Him.
- Obedience is the response of someone who is in a relationship of trust with God. Obedience is better than sacrifice because we are letting God be God and staying in relationship with Him as we gain dependence on Him and as we surrender to His will.
 - In return we find that blessings always follow obedience to God.
- Obedience to God is better than making sacrifices or offerings to Him even

when the sacrifice seems to be what needs to be done. Scripture says:

- Disobedience is an act of rebellion, rebellion is witchcraft.
 - Disobedience is sin.
 - Disobedience is a form of idolatry.
 - Disobedience disrespects God's word.
 - Disobedience is based on looking good to other people rather than to God.
- Jesus criticized the scribes, teachers and religious leaders of His time for similar practices. In Matthew 6 Jesus notes three religious activities:
 - publicizing fasting.
 - publicizing prayer.
 - publicizing giving .
 - One might say, "What is wrong with prayer, fasting, and giving?" The answer is nothing unless your attitude is wrong.
 - ◇ Jesus was chastising them and letting them know that this was not a sacrifice at all, but merely a means of gaining the attention of the people.
 - ◇ Like King Saul, the Pharisees wanted to look good in front of people rather than to honor God. As in the 1 Samuel 15 passage, the problem with prayer, fasting and giving was not the sacrifice of the offerings but the disobedience of God's commands and the desire for approval of people rather than the approval of God.
 - King Solomon said, "To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice." Proverbs 21:3. And Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees' you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Matt 5:20

CONCLUSION

The prophet Hosea wrote that God desires mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Hosea 6:6.

Sacrifice as a religious act can be merely an outward performance of a religious duty. In the Old Testament, many of God's children were quick to offer up sacrifices to Him, yet their hearts were far from Him. They honored Him with their lips, but God saw their hearts.

We are to obey God out of our love for Him. All of our good works and our good deeds have little meaning to God if our hearts are not right.

I believe there are seven sacrifices that God loves:

- Psalms 4:5 The sacrifice of righteousness — where we become a slave to righteousness instead of worldly lusts.
- Psalms 27:6 The sacrifice of joy — where we do not think of being a Christian as a burden, but as the Apostle Paul said, we press onward for the everlasting joy of Heaven that is set before us.
- Psalms 51:17 The sacrifice of a broken spirit and a broken and a contrite heart — where pride and pretense are never seen or even felt.
- Psalms 107:22 The sacrifice of thanksgiving and declaring His works with rejoicing — Where we recognize the Grandeur of how great God is.
- Psalms 141:2 The sacrifice of prayer and the lifting up of our hands — when we sacrifice our time to focus on His desires.
- Romans 12:1 The sacrifice of offering our bodies as to abstain from worldly vices.
- Hebrew 13:15 The offering of the sacrifice of praise — where we gain a new perspective of the greatness of God's acts and the frailty of man.

When you obey God, you walk with a deeper confidence knowing who you are in Him.

You will understand God's ways at a far deeper level because you have obeyed God and the way He has asked you to travel. The thinking of the world does not confuse you, because you are in relationship with He who overcame the world.

You hear from God more frequently because Jesus promised us in Mathew 13 that God will speak more often to those who hear Him and act on what He says.

Yes, obedience is better than sacrifice because obedience is the greater sacrifice. To obey you have to give up your desire in order to act on God's desire. This level of personal sacrifice may be invisible to man, but it is never invisible to God.

