

Sacrificial Worship

Romans 11:36-12:1

Introduction

Before Genesis 1:1, the Trinitarian God existed in three holy, loving, giving, praising, communicating, worshipping persons. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always been sacrificing and giving glory to one another. Adam and Eve were made in the image of God as worshippers. We have been taught that some people are “religious” and therefore worship whereas others do not. But in fact everyone worships whether they’re aware of it or not. We ascribe glory and offer sacrifice in everything we do to someone or something whether it be ourselves, our hobby, our spouse, our children, our parents, our family, our country, our planet, our God or whatever else we most value. The Bible describes worship as sacrificial, whether it occurs in the Old Testament or the New.

Drawing Near in the Old and New Covenants

We tend to think that old covenant worship was conducted through sacrifice, but now that Jesus has come as the lamb of God to take away the sins of the world, sacrifices are no longer part of worship, formal or informal. But it would be more biblical to see the Levitical animals as the shell and the *sacrifice* as the kernel (Heb. 9:12). The point of offering bulls and goats wasn’t to alleviate God’s hunger (Ps. 50:7-15), but by faith to cleanse from sin by pointing forward to Jesus *and* as a means of devotion and communion (Lev. 1:2, 3:11). This means that we can learn from the Mosaic sacrificial system. While the details of the various offerings are complex, the same five-step sequence was followed in each: 1) laying hands on the head of the animal to indicate substitution; 2) slaughter because the wages of sin is death; 3) presentation of blood for cleansing; 4) burning of part of the animal to indicate transformation of the worshipper and food for God; 5) meal for covenant fellowship with God (e.g. Lev. 1:3-9).

Every offering includes the idea of cleansing from sin, but each of the three main animal offerings has a specific emphasis and portrays a different aspect of worship. We see the logical order when they are offered together (Lev. 9). The Sin Offering (Lev. 4) comes first, focusing on the sprinkling of blood for cleansing from sin. Second, the Ascension Offering (Lev. 1), badly translated as “whole burnt offering”, unique includes the burning of the entire animal which ascends in smoke to God in devotion, consecration and transformation. Third, the Peace Offering (Lev. 3) highlights the climactic meal where the worshipper eats and communes with God. There is also a fourth animal sacrifice, the Guilt or Trespass Offering (Lev. 5:14—6:7) which deals with sins against holy things, as well as non-animal offerings such as Grain and Firstfruits Offerings (Lev. 2, 2:14). We have left the shadows of animal offerings (Heb. 10:1), but we take what we learned with us and worship Jesus as we confess sin, consecrate ourselves, and commune with him at the Lord’s table.

Living Sacrifices

We want our worship here to be faithful and sacrificial, and to set the tone for the rest of our lives. In repentance, sacrifices are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart; in faith they are doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly (Ps. 51:16-17; Mic. 6:6-8). All sin at root is idolatry, putting something in place of God. Paradoxically, putting God first, sacrificing everything for him, gives *us* our greatest joy and turns out to be the only way to be glorified.

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