

THE  
**SACRIFICES OF  
RIGHTEOUSNESS**  
ALSO KNOWN AS A  
**LIVING SACRIFICE**

As we study the scriptures we read much concerning an aspect of worship referred to as “sacrifice.” We know that in the Torah, especially in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, we read of a litany of sacrifices known as the “sacrificial system” instituted by God and given to Moses that were to be offered up unto the Lord by His people. They each had different rites and they each served different purposes.

A question that arises many times is, “Why did God *need* for His people to offer these sacrifices to Him?” After all, if He is truly the God that He says He is, why does He “need” for us to bring to Him these or any other sacrifice? The answer is simple. God did not and does not “need” for us to offer any type or kind of sacrifice to Him. He was not and is not a “needy” God as the pagan gods were considered to be. God is in “need” of nothing. The “sacrificial system” was instituted by God for Mankind. It was instituted by God to aide and assist in the “need” that mankind had. Man was the one who had a “need.”

We were separated from God through sin. Man “needed” a way to be restored and reconciled back into a relationship with God. Sacrifices were instituted by God to do just that. Ultimately, He chose what would be the only sufficient sacrifice that would fully atone for the sin of all mankind – the Son of God, Jesus. Could God have instituted something else to meet that need? Yes, I believe He could have. After all, He is God. He could have done away with His Law, and consequently eliminated sin, because where there is no Law, there is no transgression of that Law or I should really say that there would be no knowledge of what sin was as Paul states in Romans 4:15. However, we must realize that the Law, the Word of God represents God. The Word is God (John 1:1). The Word, the Law, reveals to us everything that is God.

Psalm 138:2, tells us, *“I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving kindness and for thy truth: for **thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.**”* God Himself magnifies or places His Word, the Law, above His own name. What does God mean by this? It is like this, a person is judged and looked upon as good only if their “word is good.” If a person does not keep nor has integrity in the words they speak than that means their character cannot be trusted no matter what their name may be. It is the same with God. If God goes against or eliminates the very Word that reveals who He is then He is one who can never be looked upon as faithful or trustworthy because He would not have “kept His Word.” However, God never changes. If He did He would be like “any other man” – and we know He is not like any man.

In the beginning was the Word. The Word was God. The ways of God were always in existence. The Word, the Law, was in existence before creation was created. Jesus was the Word, the Law, incarnate (come in the flesh). From the beginning God had established a plan of reconciliation and salvation before Adam was created. Jesus was the *“Lamb slain from the foundations of the earth.”* God’s chosen plan of salvation was established from the beginning. Why? Simply because this was the way He chose to bring it to pass. Just as God never changes, neither does His Word change and therefore, His ways never change. Knowing this, the way of salvation that He established, through a sacrifice (Jesus), could never be changed.

We must realize that it was because of God’s infinite love, grace and mercy that He gave us His Word, the Law. God’s Word, the Law, defined for us what sin is by revealing that sin is in direct opposition to the character and nature of God and His ways. The Word, the Law, declares all to be unrighteous sinners. However, the Word, the Law in itself was not able to save anyone from their sins (Romans 3:9-20) nor could it remove the stain of sin. However, it is most vital for us to grasp the truth that it was also God’s love, grace and mercy that revealed (through the Word, the Law) the only means of salvation from this death and separation. He chose to do this through the system of “sacrifices” which would ultimately culminate in the perfect, “final sacrifice.”

As we know, the sacrifices found in the Torah were shadows and types of the “ultimate sacrifice” that was to come. The sacrifices found in the Torah were ineffective in bringing total and eternal reconciliation. Jesus became the once and for all “final sacrifice” who paid the ultimate price, the shedding of His precious blood, to atone for man’s sin. (Hebrews 10:1-18) Only Jesus can remove the stain of our spiritual uncleanness. There is no longer any need for any other type of blood or ritualistic type of sacrifice to restore and reconcile a person back into relationship with the Father.

It is now accomplished by accepting the free gift of salvation, through God’s love, grace and mercy, found only in that final sacrifice – Jesus. This was the plan in which God chose to work the work of salvation and reconciliation back onto Him. 1Peter2:5-9 tells us that we are now, through Jesus, a “*holy and royal priesthood.*” As this “*holy and royal priesthood*” unto God, we no longer offer up animal sacrifices, but rather we are to offer “spiritual sacrifices.” We are to now worship God with these “spiritual sacrifices” and everything that is contained in them.

The scriptures reveal to us four specific “spiritual sacrifices.” They are and in no particular order, the “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15); the “sacrifice of joy” (Psalm 27:6); the “sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Psalms 107:22; 116:17) and the “sacrifice of righteousness” (Psalm 4:5; 51:19). For our discussion, I would like to key in on the “sacrifice of righteousness.”

The “sacrifice of righteousness” is at the core of the believer’s lifestyle and worship. Everything we do now as a disciple of Jesus and as a child of God comes forth out of an attitude of heart resulting in offering “sacrifices of righteousness” unto the Lord. It is the essence and outgrowth of a lifestyle that truly recognizes what God has done for each of us. Therefore, if it is to be at the core of our worship as a child of God, we must truly understand what the “sacrifices of righteousness” are. Let’s see.

In my times of teaching on the aspect of “righteousness,” I would ask my students, “What is the definition of the term righteousness?” Before I would allow them to answer I would always ask them to please, not give me the standard “Christianese” definition. Invariably, they always would give the standard “Christianese” definition that we have all heard many, many times thinking that it was the sure fire answer that I would be looking for. They would invariably tell me, “Right standing with God.” And when they did, I would always say, “AAAAAGHHH!!!

Please, don’t get me wrong. This is not an incorrect answer. Therefore, knowing that this will always come up I am always ready with my second question, “Okay. What does being in right standing with God, really mean?” A “hush” would fall over the crowd.

You see, we can learn the standard answers and responses, however, most of the time we still do not really know what it means. We just know a standard answer. We hear this definition of righteousness from our pastors and leaders. Unfortunately, even many of them cannot give a true definition of righteousness because they are just repeating what they had heard and were taught. Therein lays the problem. For many of us we do not know the truth nor do we fully understand and grasp those things we say we believe in – even when it comes to one of the fundamental aspects of our faith known as “righteousness.”

The term “righteousness” does indeed mean to be “in right standing with God.” But what does that really mean? The simple explanation is this, through our acceptance of Jesus and what He accomplished, we now have the legal, spiritual privilege and right to have relationship and be able to communicate with the one and only true God. To be “righteous” in the eyes of God means to be totally accepted by, and acceptable to, God. He chooses to no longer look at you as a sinner alienated by sin but rather He accepts you as a “child of God.” Romans 3:20-26 tells us that through Jesus, who is righteous, we are looked upon by God, just as if we had never sinned. We are no longer separated and at enmity with God because of sin. Through the “Final Sacrifice” we are at “peace” with our Heavenly Father. We have been “set at one again” with God.

The other part of our discussion is the term “sacrifice.” The term, “sacrifice,” defined means to totally and utterly slaughter. All the animal sacrifices were to be placed on the “altar of sacrifice” - the Brazen Altar in the Tabernacle or the Temple or it could be on any other altar that was usually built of stones. The sacrifice would continually burn until there was absolutely nothing left but ashes. Nothing was discernable about what kind of animal the sacrifice may have been. The fire was so hot and kept burning so that even the bones would ultimately disintegrate into ashes.

If you think about it, this probably took some time – a lot of time. If you were going to offer up a sacrifice it was not going to be some haphazard offering that you would get done quickly and go on your merry way thinking that you did your religious duty to the Lord. No. it was something that meant you were going to spend some time and you were not going to be able to leave until the last ounce of flesh and bone was burnt into ash. It was meant for the one giving the offering to take the time to truly reflect on why they were offering the sacrifice.

The sacrifice was to be the best of what the individual had to offer. It also had to be offered exactly in the way God had prescribed. It could not be changed in any way by the individual otherwise it would not be accepted by the Lord. It had to be exactly what God had said and not what the individual may have thought God would want. That would be like the “way of Cain” and we all know that didn’t work out to well for him.

To offer a sacrifice meant that it was going to really “inconvenience” the person making the sacrifice. Even in the times of the priesthood, the priest may have done the preparation and placed it on the altar for “sacrifice,” however that person or family needed to stay there for the entire time to truly receive the blessing from offering that sacrifice. All of these sacrifices were to be symbols of total dedication unto God by His people. Unfortunately, by the time Jesus came on the scene, the sacrificial system became corrupted as we read of the times He “cleared” the Temple. (Matthew 21:12-13; John 2:13-16) There is much more to be discussed on both the topics of righteousness and of sacrifices but that is for another discussion.

The “sacrifices of righteousness” is expressed in the New Testament another way by Paul. In Romans 12:1 he states, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”* Paul states that we as believers are to be “living sacrifices.” Actually the term, “living sacrifice” is an oxymoron. The whole concept of a sacrifice is that it is slaughtered and burned until there is nothing left. Yet, Paul calls us to be “living sacrifices” as we are still alive living out our everyday lives.

We are to offer ourselves unto the Lord as a “living, breathing, dead person.” Dead to the things of the flesh yet with every breath we are to live unto the Lord. The sacrifices we are to offer now unto the Lord are our lives, the actions we do, the things we say, etc. Everything we do; every aspect of our lives; are to be acts of our total dedication, obedience and surrender unto the Lord. This includes loving our spouses, our children and others. It includes being faithful in our work places or at school; living a lifestyle of integrity. It includes the other “spiritual sacrifices” of thanksgiving, joy and praise. It includes prayer and praying for others. It means following and living the lifestyle role-modeled by Jesus. It means keeping His commandments.

The Amplified Version states it this way, *“Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies [dedicating all of yourselves, set apart] as a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God, which is your rational (logical, intelligent) act of worship.”* It infers that now as a child of God and a disciple of Jesus, being this “living sacrifice” is the **only** rational, logical and intelligent thing to do. Why? It is because of everything Jesus has done for us. He has reconciled us back into relationship with God, the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The only intelligent response to what Jesus has done for us is for each of us to choose to totally slaughter the things of the flesh and live our lives unto Him as a “living sacrifice.”

Colossians 3:1-5 tells us that we are to "*mortify the deeds of the flesh.*" The term "mortify" means to totally annihilate the things of the flesh and all of the old, sinful nature and its ways. It is expressed very well in the Amplified Version. It reads like this – "*So kill deaden, deprive of power, those animal impulses lurking within you...*" Whenever I read this verse in the Amplified Version, it reminds me of an old horror movie where the monster is "lurking" in the darkness or amongst the shadows just waiting to come out and pounce upon its victim. The only problem here is that the "monster" is me and the victim is me!!! It goes on to say that we are to kill deaden and deprive of power those things (and it names some) that cause us to enter into idolatry. These "animal impulses" drive me into idol worship. Unfortunately, the "idol" and the object of my idol worship, is myself!! I am the "monster" lurking within. I am the "victim." I am the "idol." Hmmm....

As we have been discussing, we are to be a "living sacrifice" unto the Lord. Therefore, we must lay those things of the flesh on the altar and crucify them. We are no longer to fulfill the desires of our flesh, but rather we are to seek after God's desires. Our "old nature" is to be "crucified" with Jesus. In Romans 6:6 it tells us that we are to "nail" our old sinful nature on the cross and leave it crucified there on the cross. Jesus died so that we too can crucify the old sinful nature. Our life as a "living sacrifice" is to be holy and acceptable unto God. As we actively do the Word and manifest the Godly lifestyle, our lives become an act of constant (24/7) worship unto the Lord, which is pleasing unto Him. (Hebrews 13:16)

The giving of our lives as "living sacrifices" unto the Lord is looked upon by Him as our "reasonable service." 1John 5:3 tells us, "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*" It is clearly stating that we are to keep His commandments found in the Word of God – from Genesis to Revelation. We are to live out in moral excellence the lifestyle that has been revealed to us through His Word – the moral and behavioral commandments. It is also clearly stating that these commandments of God are **not** burdensome or difficult for the child of God. They only become difficult when we try to do them in our own strength and ability or try to figure them out in our own understanding.

Many times, when I read 1John 5:3, I imagine a picture of what's going on in heaven when we go through our little tantrums concerning this. God the Father asks Jesus, "Why are they having so much difficulty with this?" Jesus responds, "I don't know. What do you think Holy Spirit?" The Holy Spirit says, "I don't know what their problem is either. I don't have a problem with it and I live in them and come along side them to help them do it. I don't know, Father. You're supposed to have all the answers." I write the above "tongue in cheek." However, I really think that they really have a hard time with this because, as we have said, the Father has done it all for us through Jesus and He has given us the Holy Spirit to be able to live it out.

*"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the **sacrifices of righteousness**, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar. - Psalm 51:17-19*

Psalm 51: 17 reveals to us what the preparation must be for the true child of God to offer up themselves as that "living sacrifice" holy and acceptable unto Him. It also teaches what the preparation is in offering the "sacrifices of righteousness" unto our God. It states, "*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*" What does this mean?

I believe that having a "broken spirit" is akin to the very first thing that Jesus taught His disciples on the "Sermon on the Mount" found in Matthew 5-7. The first thing Jesus taught concerning anyone who desired to be a disciple of His was that they must first be "poor in spirit." (Matthew 5:3) They must first be at that place where they recognize their need for God and that they need a Savior to save them from an eternity of being separated from God in the place of eternal torment – ultimately, the "lake of fire."

It is similar to when a wild stallion is “broken.” They believe they are free to run wild and do whatever they want to do and go wherever they want to go. They have no sense of usefulness. Their “wildness” must be broken so that they can be useful. Where the stallion is concerned, this is usually accomplished by a person who does the “breaking.”

However, it is quite different when it comes to being “spiritually broken.” This can only be desired, set in motion and accomplished by the individual who truly recognizes that they are wild and wondering aimlessly throughout life useless to what they were created for. Then they hear the “words” of hope and life from the Gospel. They hear it, recognize they need God, turn towards Him and totally surrender unto Him.

But remember, there is another aspect to Psalm 51:17. It has to do with having a “contrite heart.” The word “contrite” or “contrition” means to be as a rock that is grinded and pulverized into very fine powder. It refers to the fact that a person’s heart must be totally repentant. It speaks to a heart of true repentance. This means that it is a heart that was once hardened to God through sin but is now totally repentant and desires to turn away from that sinful way and turn towards their God. Both, “a broken spirit” and having a “contrite heart” are not just “one time and done” things. It is a continuous lifestyle of surrender, obedience, holiness and repentance.

We see in Psalm 51:18 that God will then restore the person (Zion) and the heart of the person (Jerusalem) who is truly “broken” (poor in spirit) and “contrite” (repentant). This is the “born again experience.” The “born again experience” only takes place when the will and heart of an individual truly recognizes they need God and chooses to turn away from their “wild stallion” lifestyle (repentance) and turns toward the God of their salvation.

As we continue in Psalm 51, after verse 17 and verse 18 are fulfilled, we see in verse 19 that only then can the individual offer to God the “sacrifices of righteousness” a.k.a. “living sacrifice” that is holy and acceptable to the Lord. The individual must first respond to hearing the “Good News,” then as they recognize their need for God, they choose to repent and turn towards God and accept the gift of salvation through Jesus. Now, as a child of God and a true disciple of Jesus, the “new creation in Christ” desires to be that “living sacrifice” who offers to God the “sacrifices of righteousness.”

Isaiah states that our own righteousness is as “filthy rags.” (Isaiah 64:6) This is literally saying that without God there is no righteousness within an individual. Paul states in Romans 3:10, that there is no one who is righteous in, of, or by themselves. We are only made righteous and justified through the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God – Jesus. The only “righteousness” we have is because the One who is righteous has made us righteous. It is God’s righteousness that we are now spiritually clothed in. He has placed His white robe of righteousness upon our back.

Therefore, when we offer up the sacrifices of righteousness, we are offering right back unto God the gift of righteousness that He has given to us by His love, grace and mercy. It is absolutely nothing of the flesh or of self. It is His righteousness. It is the privilege of a restored relationship, the ability to live as a child of God and live unto Him all the days of our lives that we are to now offer unto Him. We offer our lives as living sacrifices everyday (24/7) because our lives are no longer our own. Our “new life in Christ” is now His!!!

The sacrifices of righteousness a.k.a. being a living sacrifice, begins with your spirit being renewed through Jesus (2Corinthians 5:17). Ultimately, the “sacrifices of righteousness” is the offering up to the Lord all that we are because everything we are, everything we have, came from God and are His anyway. All that God has given us we now give it right back unto Him as that “living sacrifice” which is our only, rational, logical and intelligent thing to do as we offer unto Him our “sacrifices of righteousness.”