Obedient Heart Fellowship

Sacrifice of Praise?

By Jim Huskins
McDowell County

At its core, the Bible is a handbook on sacrifice. Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins, but what does that mean? The key to understanding the ministry of Jesus is the intimate knowledge of the Book of Leviticus. Otherwise, we will never comprehend that Holy God cannot abide sin, that sin always results in a penalty of death, and that God's system for resolving our guilt is substitutionary sacrifice.

Only the death of one who is blameless can produce forgiveness. Under the Levitical priesthood, animals were slaughtered so that sinners might be spared. Since animals are incapable of sin, they are all innocent in God's eyes. Sacrificed animals had to be "clean" as specified by Leviticus 11. The only mammals acceptable for sacrifice were cattle, sheep, and goats. The only acceptable birds were pigeons and turtledoves.

Being a member of an appropriate species was not enough. Any bull, heifer, sheep, or goat presented had to be the best available. Keepers of livestock improve their flocks and herds by breeding outstanding specimens. Since God only accepts animals with zero defects, sacrifice always results in the loss of the best breeding stock.

The book of Exodus tells of God freeing his people from Egyptian slavery. The Hebrew name for Egypt means "place of confinement and distress." In the Bible, Egypt is a metaphor for sin. The final step to freedom was a sacrifice known as the Passover Lamb. During the 1600 years between Moses and Jesus, an incalculable number of perfect lambs was sacrificed. It is no accident that John the Baptist refers to Jesus as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

We are uncomfortable with the notion that our sin makes us unacceptable to God. We would rather pretend that once we "ask Jesus into our heart," God ignores our sins. We may occasionally feel pangs of guilt when we sin, but that may not lead us to study the Book of Leviticus. It might, however, turn our attention to something called "sacrifice of praise."

A similar idea in scripture is the "sacrifice of thanksgiving." Psalm 50:14 says, "*Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High.*" "I can do that," we think. "I can make praise and thanksgiving my sacrifice. I won't have to shed blood or give away anything costly." The only problem with this plan is that we do not understand sacrifice. We equate "praise" and "thanksgiving" with the emotional catharsis many experiences through religious entertainment.

The Bible insists on a connection between true worship and holy lives. James 1:26-27 says, "*If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."* One cannot be "unstained from the world" while pursuing worldly satisfactions. If we love Jesus, we must keep His commandments.

The danger in worship and praise is that we try to use it to "buy God off." If we go through the motions of worship as defined by our congregation, we think that is enough. Instead of worship which overflows from obedient, faithful hearts, we offer God mere lip service.

God rejects our superficiality. Jesus was often confronted by religious leaders because He and His disciples did not follow manmade traditions. His response to one of those encounters is Mark 7:6-7, "And he said to them, '*Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"*

Sin is so offensive to Holy God that only innocent blood can make atonement. "Manmade commandments," say we can live any way we like as long as we show up regularly to sing and dance and wave our hands. Popular teachers including Andy Stanley proclaim that Christians are not even required to keep the Ten Commandments. They love to quote Hebrews 6:14, "*For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."* Those teachers always omit the surrounding verses. Twelve and thirteen say, "*Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness."* Fifteen and sixteen say, "*What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?"*

"Sacrifice of thanksgiving" has nothing to do with words we say or sing. Our only legitimate expression of profound gratitude for the gift of salvation by grace through faith is to live in obedience to God's instructions. The "sacrifice of praise" is presenting our bodies to God as "instruments for righteousness." Righteousness is keeping the law. Either the writer of Hebrews was insane, or Andy Stanley is wrong.

The wages of sin are death. Animal blood could not ultimately atone for sin. The only means I have to avoid death is faith in the Perfect Son of God. He offered Himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for me. I owe Him everything. I can only thank Him through a constant, legitimate effort to live as He lived, but His walk is demanding. He knows when I am faking. He will never settle for my lip service. Perhaps that is why God says in Psalm 50:9, as rendered by the RSV, "*I will accept no bull from your house."*

Obedient Heart Fellowship meets each Sabbath (Seventh Day) at 2460 US 221 Business N. Marion, NC. 10:00 A.M. 828-460-7913

Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

Check out our Website-www.brcnews.com
And find us on Facebook