

# A LIVING SACRIFICE

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In ancient times, the Israelites were given numerous types of animal sacrifices to perform including the burnt, sin, trespass, peace, and grain offerings. They were not only a part of the national ceremonies on holydays, new moons, etc., they were also a part of individual worship. For example, the sin and trespass offerings were performed when someone transgressed God's Law. The freewill peace and grain offerings were used when someone wanted to honor and give thanks to God.

Animal sacrifices were part of the temple rites and rituals that fell under the responsibilities of the priests. However, as Paul explains in Hebrews chapters 6-10, the Aaronic and Levitical priesthood has been superceded by the Melchizedek priesthood with Jesus Christ as the High Priest. Likewise, all animal sacrifices have been replaced in the New Covenant with a different type of sacrifice: "I exhort you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy *and* well pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service." (Romans 12:1).

What kind of sacrifice is a living sacrifice? "And walk in love, even as Christ also loved us, and **gave Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice** to God for a sweet-smelling savor." (Ephesians 5:2). Jesus Christ presented His whole body a sacrifice unto God and it was completely accepted. The term "sweet-smelling savour" was always used in the Old Testament in conjunction with an "offering made by fire". As a sweet-smelling savor, the sacrifice of Jesus was both through "fire" and accepted by God. In fact, the offering of Jesus Christ was a total sacrifice through His death: "For this reason, when He comes into the world, He says, "For this reason, when He comes into the world, He says, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but You have prepared a body for Me. You did not delight in burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin. Then said I, 'Lo, I come (as it is written of Me in *the scroll of the book*) to do Your will, O God.' " In the saying above, *He said*, "Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin (which are offered according to the law) You did not desire nor delight in"; Then He said, "Lo, I come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first *covenant* in order that He may establish the second *covenant*, By Whose will **we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ** once for all." (Hebrews 10:5-10).

Because of this, there is no sacrifice greater or more acceptable to God than the death of His Son Jesus Christ; so how can we be a *living* sacrifice unto God? What can even remotely be acceptable or pleasing unto our Father? One that most have heard about is the sacrifice of *praise*; that is the words of praise we offer through prayer and hymns to God: "Accordingly, let us offer *the sacrifice of praise* continually to God through Him;

that is, *with the **fruit of our lips*** openly professing *our faith* in His name.” (Hebrews 13:15). (See also Jeremiah 17:26 and 33:11.)

However, just as there was more than one type of animal sacrifice, there are other sacrifices we can offer up. Closely resembling the sacrifice of praise is the sacrifice of thanksgiving: “And let them **sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving**, and declare his works with rejoicing.” (Psalms 107:22). How thankful are we for the total sacrifice of Jesus Christ which makes possible our eternal salvation? How thankful are we for God who has called us to be His children now and forever? Is this a daily sacrifice we ignore? Just as the Levites offered daily sacrifices, we should perform this sacrifice every day! Remember these are our *reasonable* service, something that is a minimal expectation of God.

What about a sacrifice of righteousness? Did you know that there is one? “Offer the **sacrifices of righteousness**, and put your trust in the LORD.” (Psalms 4:5). (See also Deuteronomy 33:19 and Psalms 51:19.) Righteousness is the keeping of God's commandments (Psalms 119:172). This is a daily offering because we cannot escape this incredibly sinful world nor are we ever clean before God for very long. Every time we *choose* to obey God in the face of evil or our own lusts, it is a sacrifice to Him.

Another sacrifice that God desires is joy: “And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle **sacrifices of joy**; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.” (Psalms 27:6). Interestingly, the word for joy is translated *jubilee* in Leviticus 25:9: “Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the **jubilee** to sound on the tenth *day* of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land.” (Leviticus 25:9). What does this mean? The Day of Atonement is a day of fasting from all food and drink whereby we suffer physically and are, in a sense, physically dying. But in this state we are closer to God and rejoice because of His promises of eternal life through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. While we physically suffer, we spiritually rejoice!

Finally, just as the Israelites had five animal sacrifices, there are five spiritual sacrifices mentioned in the Bible. The first four we have already mentioned (praise, thanksgiving, righteousness, and joy). The last one is humility: “The **sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart**, O God, thou wilt not despise.” (Psalms 51:17).

Knowing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and coming face-to-face with our own sins whereby we killed the Son of God, can we be anything other than humble? What did the people say at the preaching of Peter? “[**T**hey were cut to [**pierced in**] the heart; and they said to Peter and the other apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?”” (Acts 2:37). Their cry was one of desperation from those who are truly repentant and who know how hopeless their situation has become.

Over time, Israel lost the meaning of the animal sacrifices they were commanded to offer. Notice: **“They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it; but the LORD accepteth them not;** now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt.” (Hosea 8:13). The Israelites were sacrificing flesh (animals) for offerings unto God, forgetting the reason and purpose behind them as well as the *attitude* they should have. This is why God said: **“Sacrifice and offering thou [God] didst not desire;** mine ears hast thou opened: **burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.**” (Psalms 40:6).

It is not about the killing of an animal, it is what is in the *heart* of a person that makes a sacrifice a “sweetsmelling savour”. Knowing what Jesus Christ gave for us, can our sacrifices be anything less than offerings of praise, thanksgiving, righteousness, joy and humility?