

## **Sacrifice, I Beg Of You**

That doesn't sound very New Testament, now, does it? However, these are the words of Paul, the apostle.

Let's take a look at what could be behind his imploring.

God was explicit in his insistence of and instruction for sacrificing in the Old Testament. Sacrifice was, of sorts, an art form; gory though it may have been, and was precisely performed every time. God not only established the system of sacrifices; he established the Levitical priesthood to ensure that there would be excellence in the execution as well as a generation-to-generation continuum of each of the practices. God was serious about sacrifice. How could the Restoration Movement be so frivolous to arbitrarily delete it from worship?

The Tabernacle and Temple altars burned twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. There were sacrifices of live animals, grain, and wine, each designed either to address particular sins or to bring added personal significance to festivals and holidays. At the beginning and end of each day a lamb was sacrificed.

The altars were strategically located in the middle of the encampment. By their position the entire nation was constantly aware of the smell of the fires both with and without the burning animals. The smell was a constant reminder of their sinful condition, the need for atonement, and the death of innocence in their behalf. A vast parade of animals being led to their deaths was conducted almost endlessly throughout the encampment and around the tabernacle and temple.

Sacrificing was a very personal event. The celebrant had to give much daily thought to his sacrificial responsibilities, considering that the animals had to be between one and three years of age and virtually in perfect condition. In a day with limited agricultural prowess and animal husbandry resources, families of not only farmers but also merchants, craftsmen, and professionals alike had to make immense and timely provision for their sacrificial offerings. One does not create a sacrifice of this type overnight.

As for quantity of sacrifices, during feasts the blood ran in channels from the altar as Levitical assistants assisted celebrants with the personal hands-on slaying of their animals. The celebrants had raised these animals virtually as pets, knowing for their entire lives, they existed for the sole purpose of dying, all because of the celebrant's free-will choice to sin. The bleating of animals in various stages of life and death were heard along with the shouts of the throngs of the sacrificially atoned.

The sacrificial system was superceded by the Perfect Sacrifice, Christ, and The Lamb of God. While God dispensed with the Levitical system of sacrifices, think before you answer, did He really intend to entirely eliminate the concept of sacrifice from worship?

Just over fifty years after the Perfect Sacrifice was offered the former Pharisee, now inspired and communicating to the Lord's Church at Rome, establishes the continuity of the sacrificial mode of worship into the Christian expression of worship. As the apostle pleads in Romans 12: 1 in the NIV, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual (or reasonable) act of worship."

How can we Restorationists ignore sacrifice as a requirement of worship? Of course, we are not being begged by Paul to continue the sacrifice of the blood of animals or the flasks of wine or the baskets of meal. No, of course, not. This new sacrificial requirement is far dearer and of much greater worth, for it requires our very lives, not dead on an altar, but very much alive and atoned by the mercy of God. The duration of the sacrifice is not for a brief moment on a blazing altar, but rather for as long as we have life.

So, how would this living sacrifice be accomplished, you might ask. The remainder of Romans 12 provides the picture of the sacrificially lived life. To sum it up, it involves a life of generous use of your gifts to the benefit of others. In the authentic Church others will be sacrificially looking out for you as you are looking sacrificially to the needs of others so no one loses and everyone worships. Note that if each one is sacrificially looking to satisfy the needs of others, he will not have the inclination to dwell on his own needs and preferences. In the authentic Church Christians "sacrifice" their personal demands, preferences, time, energy, preferred events, finances, self-satisfying purchases, ego-charging activities all to the honor and pleasure of God and they do so intentionally without provocation in love of God and brother.

Embarking upon this New Year, we at Abbeyville Road Christian Church need to consider our authenticity in this matter. The authenticity is not in the leadership or the pastorate, but in the sacrifices offered by each of us. Each individual holds his own sacrificial blade. What preferences that you value will you sacrifice to your God?