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Modern-day Sacrifices

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MODERN-DAY SACRIFICES

The believers in the Old Testament showed their worship to God by offering sacrifices, but what kinds of acts do the believers in the New Testament do to show their love, worship, and devotion to God? The apostle Paul identifies three spiritual sacrifices that bless us and the people around us: (1) the sacrifices or offerings¹ of praise, (2) doing good, and (3) sharing with others. "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:15-16).² When we do these things, not only is God pleased, but people are blessed.

Paul is describing to us what the Lord requires from us. The rest of this article will expand on the three sacrifices that God requires of us as part of our worship.

WE ARE TO OFFER THE LORD OUR PRAISES

First, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us to "... let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Heb. 13:15). This does not mean that the mere singing of songs or the recitation of prayers with our lips in our worship constitutes acceptable sacrifice. The "fruit of the lips" must be the response of the heart to the incomprehensible grace of God in Jesus Christ. As we sing and praise God, let us remember that our songs are to be sung to the Lord, to His glory and honor, even though they also serve to edify and admonish other believers as well as ourselves. "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (Col. 3:16).

Margaret Phippen writes about her father, a British minister, who was suffering from muscular atrophy. When his voice gave out, he took to writing. As he continued to deteriorate, his passion did not. Through his articles, books, and groups, he worshipped. On Easter morning, a few weeks before he died, he wrote a letter to his daughter, saying, "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, 'He is risen!' But it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout."³

WE ARE TO OFFER THE LORD OUR GOOD WORK

A second spiritual sacrifice the Christian is urged to offer is the doing of good works. "And do not forget to do good and

to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:16). Not all the good deeds of men are acceptable to God. The man who presumes to offer to God his own good works to earn his own salvation instead of placing his full trust and confidence in the sacrifice of Christ is offering contempt to God. The apostle Paul spoke of the sad condition of the Jews, saying that because "they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:3). He warned such men that "the wrath of God has come upon them at last" (1 Thess. 2:16).

However, true believers were reminded by the same apostle that they were to "be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good" (Titus 3:8). These are the works that are a spiritual sacrifice. What is included? Any deed which is done because of the love of God and the desire to honor Him is a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God.

The first priority of God's people is to worship Him, build His kingdom, serve Him, pursue His purpose, glorify His name, and honor Him in everything they do. They do these things by offering Him their good work. The faithful Christian focuses on the Master. The goal of the faithful Christian is to bring glory to the Master. This is done by acts of mercy, love without boundaries, and giving without limits.

Often I hear people say, "But I do not have talent to serve the Lord. I can't sing. I can't preach or witness. I don't have money to give." It's not the gifts we have but how we allow God to use them for His glory.

One of Ripley's "Believe It or Not" items is a plain bar of iron worth \$5. If made into horseshoes, the bar of iron would be worth \$50. If made into needles, it would be worth \$5,000. If made into balance springs for fine Swiss watches, it would be worth \$500,000. The raw material is not as important as how it is developed. God says that we have spiritual gifts, but their worth to Him will be dependent on how we develop them.⁴ As believers in Jesus Christ, we need to offer ourselves, in our entirety, to Him.

WE ARE TO OFFER THE LORD OUR POSSESSIONS

The third spiritual sacrifice mentioned in Hebrews is sharing. "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb. 13:16). Whenever the believer, in thanksgiving to God, shares his material substance with those in need or those who are engaged in the

ministry of the Word, or when he cheerfully places a generous check in the offering plate to support the work of God and His church, he is making an acceptable offering to the Lord.

Sharing is an act of worship. The genuine sharing of our possessions and money with God is our worship to Him. The presentation of our sharing should be a sincere act of worship. It should be clearly evident that this is a response of the entire heart to the goodness of God.

TRUE GIVING

An excellent model of true giving that involves the offering of our praise, good work, possessions, and lives is demonstrated in the experience of the Magi. Giving is something these men came a long way to do, and it was a demonstration of their worship. Offering is always an indication of our true worship.

In Matthew 2:16, we learn that Jesus may have been two years old by the time the Wise Men showed up. They must have considered the worship of Jesus a high priority to spend two years of their lives, time, and possessions to find the newborn King and worship Him.

Their worship was accompanied by gift-giving. It is worth noting that these gifts were substantial. The Wise Men didn't run out to Wal-Mart and get a blanket or something on sale. They gave expensive presents of gold, frankincense, and

myrrh. In addition to the honor and value of these gifts, they were chosen for their special symbolism of Jesus Himself. The gold represented Jesus' kingship, frankincense was a symbol of His priestly role, and myrrh prefigured Jesus' death and embalming.⁵ For the Wise Men, Jesus was King, Priest, and Savior. In our offerings to Jesus, we also acknowledge Him as our King, Priest, and Savior.

We give of our praise, good works, and possessions as stewards to support others and the church, but there is a much higher reason for giving. We give to acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior and our special connection with Him. ED

¹ <http://biblehub.com/greek/2378.htm>, accessed March 23, 2018.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the NIV.

³ S. Joseph Kidder, *Majesty: Experiencing Authentic Worship* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2009), 37-38.

⁴ James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), 232.

⁵ Biblical Archaeology, Why Did the Magi Bring Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh? <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/why-did-the-magi-bring-gold-frankincense-and-myrrh/>, accessed December 3, 2017.

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