

To Obey Is Better Than Sacrifice

I would love to completely deconstruct some of the myths that have made their way into evangelical tradition, then become unquestionable, but which have no Scriptural or historical support. Then afterwards, I would love to retell the story of Christianity the way the early churches said they received it from the apostles.

We would be so blessed; it would honor God, and the Scriptures would fall into place, all saying one thing, rather than our beating each other over the head with competing verses.

But those traditions are so ingrained, it's hard to do.

As an example, all early Christians knew about Christ's "new law" (Heb. 7:12), which was not a new law, but the fullness of the old Law of Moses that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:17. That teaching answers all the fuss about the Sabbath, the ten commandments, why Paul says the Law came to an end (Rom. 10:4), yet appealed to the law (1 Cor. 9:8). Their teaching is clear, and it pulls the Old and New Testaments together in a way we can all understand.

Amazingly, despite the fact that at one time all Christians knew the teaching, no one does now. It's astounding. You can read the teaching at Christian-history.org.

I have no idea how to do such a reconstruction. Who's going to believe me?

So, let's keep picking away at it.

Today, I want to talk one more time about the role of sacrifices.

Yesterday, I went to a National Bible Bee contest. It was a Scripture memory contest for kids with some large cash prizes. The kids were impressive. It seemed like they had the entire Bible memorized.

Anyway, one of the passages was Hosea 6:1-3. This is typing, not talking, so I'll just quote part of the passage, though the rest is amazing and worth reading, too:

Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. ... So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. (vv. 1,3, NASB)

I've been somewhat immersed in the writings of second-century Christianity for about twenty years now. When I read an Old Testament passage about returning to the Lord, I know what it's going to talk about. It's going to talk about repentance, and it's going to emphasize that Israel will be wasting its time if they try to sacrifice their way back to fellowship with God.

This is not a concept most modern Christians have.

Sure enough, by v. 6, God says:

For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (NASB)

At the start of chapter 7, God tells them that they forget that he remembers all their wickedness (7:2). Towards the end of the chapter, God complains, not that they don't offer sacrifices, but that "they do not cry out to Me from their heart" (7:14, NASB).

By chapter 8, he specifically mentions their sacrifices, saying:

As for My sacrificial gifts, they sacrifice the flesh and eat it, but the LORD has taken no

delight in them. Now He will remember their iniquity and punish them for their sins. (8:13, NASB)

Notice, as I said, that he consistently calls for their behavior to change, their repentance, and he says sacrifices will be a waste of time until they do.

Hosea is an amazingly consistent book, staying on the same subject for chapters, outlining the sins of Israel and Judah before drawing to a conclusion in ch. 14, at the end of the book. By the time Hosea reaches that conclusion, it is surprising what he tells Israel to bring with them when they return to the Lord ...

Take words with you and return to LORD. Say to him, "Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, that we may present the fruit of our lips." (14:2)

One more thing we have forgotten that the early Christians knew is that sacrifices don't purify the heart. If the heart is wrong, the sacrifice is rejected, and that is consistent throughout Scripture, not just here in Hosea. *It is the heart that purifies the sacrifice.* That is why King David writes:

For you do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. (Ps. 51:16-17, NASB)

This is as true of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as it is of the sacrifice of animals. Paul tells us, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7, NASB). He then goes on to say that sowing to the flesh will produce corruption for us, while sowing to the Spirit will produce eternal life.

We are those who have nothing good in us, who rely on Jesus Christ to deliver us from this body of death (Rom. 7:24 w/ 8:3-4). We depend daily on the mercy of God, but we need to know that mercy is poured out on those who confess their sins and repent. Then we can enter boldly into the throne of grace, seeking mercy and grace to help in time of need. God will always forgive the repentant, but if we come boldly into the throne of grace, holding sin in our heart, without crying out for deliverance, we may find ourselves recipients of the mercy of God in a form far different than we expected.

It is possible to trample the Son of God underfoot, to count the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing, and to insult the Spirit of Grace (Heb. 10:29). The writer of Hebrews tells us that if we do so, there is only a fearful expectation of judgment.

Even such judgment is the kindness of God, for we cannot be allowed to continue to believe that grace is a license to sin. If you care to enter the presence of Almighty God by the blood of Jesus, then take words with you and repent before the Lord. He is well able to cleanse you, but not if you have no care to walk in the Spirit and live pleasing to his will.