

## **SACRIFICE**

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What do you know about religious sacrifices? Every religion in the world's history has had some concept of sacrifice. Don't you think that is an interesting phenomenon?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Good morning and welcome to this program.

Pick any religion in the world and somewhere in its teaching you will find some rules for sacrifice. Sacrifice is as old as human beings, it goes back to the dawn of time, and it has always been connected with religion. I remember seeing the picture of an ancient sculpture that was found somewhere in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. There was a man leading an ox to an altar. The man wore the robes of a priest and the animal wore garlands around its neck. Behind the animal was a family of worshipers. No doubt, the ox was that family's animal sacrifice. Why is the idea of sacrifice buried so deeply in the human soul?

It may be that the rationale for sacrifice is rooted in our concept of guilt. You see, we all know that we are sinners. That's right! Deep down in our hearts we know that we have sinned against other people, and we have sinned against our Creator. We have not lived up to our highest potential. We have sinned. The only way that guilt can be relieved is to find justification. And so, we bring a gift. If we have sinned against another person, then we can pay them, or "make it right" in some way. It will require, of course, sacrifice on our part. We must give something up in order to make things right. That is sacrifice.

Whatever may be the psychological foundation of sacrifice we know that the God of the Bible demands it. It might be a gift of restitution, something we bring because of wrongdoing, or it may be a gift of thanksgiving, brought out of gratitude. For these reasons and more God has taught His human family about sacrifice.

The first sacrifice that we read about in the Bible happened after sin had entered the world. Adam and Eve had sinned before having children. They were driven out of the Garden of Eden. Cain and Abel, the first children of Adam and Eve, had been taught to sacrifice. Somehow God had taught the first family some things about sacrifice. We read that "...Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. (3) In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, (4) and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, (5) but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. (6) The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? (7) If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Let us notice some things about this sacrifice. These boys had been taught to worship in this way. They were offering sacrifices to God. Furthermore, God made himself known to the boys and the boys knew God's reaction to their sacrifices. The Lord accepted Abel's sacrifice, but He rejected Cain's sacrifice. In fact, after the sacrifice and after seeing Cain's angry reaction, God spoke directly to Cain about his attitude. However, from this text in Genesis, chapter 4, we do not know why God accepted one sacrifice and rejected the other. But in the New Testament book of Hebrews, this episode comes up again and we learn more about the situation. The inspired writer says that it was "By faith [that] Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through faith, though he died, he still speaks." (Hebrews 11:4 ESV.) Evidently Cain's offering was not by faith. To do something by faith is to do something as it was told you to do. Faith only comes by hearing the word of God. Either God spoke directly with Abel and Cain and told them what to sacrifice, or else God had told their parents what was acceptable. Abel believed and followed the instructions. Cain did not. God accepted Abel's offering because Abel brought gifts that matched God's Word. Furthermore, the New Testament writer tells us that God commended Abel and counted him "righteous." The word "righteous" suggests that Abel was "justified" in bringing the gifts that he brought. Abel's actions and his decision to offer those gifts were based upon God's instructions that he heard. God's Word on the subject was enough for Abel.

Cain was not righteous. Because he did not bring a sacrifice that God had commanded. Cain could not justify the gifts that he brought.

From the early dawn of human history, then, sacrifice was ingrained in the human experience. Psalm 4:5 says, "Offer the right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord." (ESV) God was teaching the human family the idea of substitution. That is, the death of an animal was a substitute for your own death. God had told Adam and Eve, the day you eat from the forbidden tree, you will die. (Genesis 2:7.) The penalty for **one** sin was death. Just one act of disobedience brought the death penalty. Is that too harsh you think? Humans have become so accustomed to sin that only the worst sins in our estimation cause us to rage. We take the rest of them in stride! The New Testament says that "the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23.) It does not say the "wages of sins" but the wages of "sin"(singular) is death. But kind of death did Adam experience that day that he sinned. The Bible tells us that he lived for 930 years on the earth. What did God mean when he said "the day you eat of it you will die"? The word "death" literally means "separation." The day Adam sinned there was a separation made between Adam and God. You can see this alienation when God came walking in Eden in the cool of the day. Adam and Eve hid themselves. They knew they had sinned and they felt alienated from God. They did not want to face Him. It is not the accumulation of sins that condemns us, but the fact of sin alienates us, separates us from our God. Yes, it took Adam 930 years to die physically, but he died spiritually the day he sinned. He became "dead in his trespass and sin." This is the condition in which we also find ourselves.

The Bible describes this sad state of sin. Speaking to Christians who had been saved, the apostle Paul described the condition from which they had been saved: He said, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." (Ephesians 2:1-3 ESV.) Instead of "walking" the course of this world, Paul urged those Christians to "...Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (3) But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. (4) Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of

place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. (5) For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” (Ephesians 5:2-5 ESV.) Notice that Paul says that Jesus “gave himself up for us”, and then Paul called that “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Jesus was a sacrifice for the sin of all the world’s people! That’s right! Since a sacrifice is a substitute then Jesus’ death was a substitute for the penalty of sin. Jesus did not die so that I could avoid physical death. No, Jesus died so that I could avoid an eternal spiritual death, a complete and a final spiritual separation from God.

When a person decides to follow Jesus he or she reenacts the sacrifice of Christ. Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24 ESV.) Denying ourselves is repentance. Paul reminded some Christians: “How can we who died to sin still live in it? (3) Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (4) We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (6) We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (7) For one who has died has been set free from sin. (8) Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” (Romans 6:2-8 ESV.)

Yes friends, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is the very thing that saves us from our sins. When we believe this and reenact his sacrifice for us through repentance and baptism we thus receive the great benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice. We receive the forgiveness of our sins, and we ourselves become a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God and that living sacrifice becomes our spiritual service, according to Romans 12:1.

God has taught the world about sacrifice so that He could teach us about the one sacrifice that can save our souls. Don’t you want to learn more about God’s sacrifice of His only Son? Visit a church of Christ near you.