

Fallen Into the Hands of a Loving Father

Bask in His Glory

Chapter 2

When we understand the making of a covenant and the physical requirements for the renewing of a covenant, then we recognize that the sin sacrifice is the instrument through which the covenant was renewed. It is not a reimbursement for damages or a bidding for forgiveness. The sin sacrifice only took care of unintentional sins. A sin that was willfully and knowingly committed could only be dealt with on the day of atonement, which only came once a year. These willful sins are referred to as sins of rebellion or iniquity. People committing them were fully aware they were against the commandments of God. Only those sins which we had done without the knowledge of them being sins were covered by a sin sacrifice. When looking from this perspective, yes, there is a request for forgiveness, yet we must understand that the sacrifice is incapable of being a payment to make amends. God does not require it for that reason. Consequently, the motive of God is seen to be gracious, always willing to forgive our inadequacies while showing a persistent determination to keep His promises in the covenant, even with people who are unworthy of receiving the blessings of the covenant.

From here we need to press onto another aspect of the sacrificial system. Contrary to popular Christian thought, not every sacrifice was for sin. This misapplication of sacrifice found in most Christian denominations causes us to misunderstand the reasoning behind the laws regulating other sacrifices. To reveal the problem that exists in our minds, please allow a divergence of thought to a story about my friend Don.

Don, one sunny afternoon walked into the local electric company wishing to pay his electric bill. After telling them his name and address, they brought up his invoice on their computer screen and told him his bill was \$149.00. He then reached into his pocket and pulled out two crisp \$100.00 bills and gave them to the receptionist. After he gave her the bills, he stated, "I want the company to keep both bills, no change is necessary." He then explained, "This is such a good company and I think the rates are too low. Make sure they keep the extra for expenses that come as a surprise. It would be bad for the electric company to not be able to provide services because we were paying too little."

Nobody reading this now thinks Don is fully with us. His body may be here, but his mind must have gone to be with the Lord. You might tip your waitress, or even tip the receptionist who gives good service in the electric company, but only Don would ever try to raise his electric bill. This is not natural to our American way of life. We try to cut back on bills not overpay them. With this thought in mind, let's consider the free will offering. To many of us, the concept seems really strange. Why would anyone volunteer to give an offering that he isn't required to give? Why would he raise the price he had to pay for his salvation?

The free will offering had no attachment to a payment of debt. It wasn't required because of a sin which meant we broke the covenant, nor was it for the pagan idea of appeasement for an angry god. It wasn't a bribe so that we could gain something from God. A free will offering was just a gift that was given without any strings attached, strictly voluntary, requiring no response. In a capitalistic society, this is almost incomprehensible. We purchase goods for a price and both the buyer and seller benefit physically from the exchange. One gains the goods, the other gains the finances to obtain goods he cannot provide for himself.

If we learn to disassociate the voluntary offering/sacrifice from our value system and properly align it with our spiritual experience the true nature of the free will offerings, including vows comes into view. A person, due to his sincere devotion and love for God, could present Him with a gift. It was not bidding God to do any particular act, but even if it were accompanied by a request, it was not related to forgiveness or appeasing His anger toward the giver. In many cases, it was to say thank you to God for deliverance from peril or for an immense blessing. Free will offerings are more closely related to the modern Christian practice of fasting. We fast to draw close to God. Sometimes we are doing so in hopes of gaining His attention for dealing with a particular problem we have, however it is not uncommon to fast just to become closer in fellowship with God.

The freewill offering is an offering for atonement. The word "atonement" was invented by an early English translator where he combined the words at and one making them into a state of being by adding *ment* as a suffix. In other words atonement means God and the offerer are at one, or are together. The sacrifice was what drew them near to one another. Our definition of atonement has evolved over the last 500 years of the term's use. It is often confused with covering over sin rather than bringing the two parties together.

We need to consider the context of the early Israelite world in order to make the proper mental connection concerning these sacrifices. An Israelite had the great honor of having several manifestations of the Almighty dwelling in a temple in his capital city. At that temple, there were 10 supernatural exhibitions of God's presence. Each Israelite had the honor of personally coming to the temple and standing within 100 feet of those supernatural manifestations of God. Today people travel all over the world to watch a statue or icon weep. During temple times there was much more than simply watching a statue or an art piece excrete salt water from a most appropriate location. The Israelites could possibly hear the breathing of God in the Holy of Holies. They could witness the smoke from the offering going straight up to heaven. They could detect that there were no flies in the temple and there were many more miraculous manifestations. The common Israelite was almost as close as Moses was to the burning bush on Mt. Sinai. I'm sure the experience was exhilarating. Can you imagine being so close to God that you can detect the light his holiness emits. One could never come this close to God without a gift.¹ If one did not bring a gift, it would evaluate the experience as being worth nothing. The gift was not to pay for the experience. If you look at the gifts that were required, they were directly related to an ability to pay. The price was not to make it exclusive, it was to declare a sufficient value according to God's standards. This value given by God opened the

¹ Exodus 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:16

experience up to all rather than making it exclusive.

How valuable would such an experience be for you? The gift kept the experience from becoming mundane. Even with the present indwelling of the Holy Spirit, such an experience today would be held in high regard by me. A mere lamb would **not** be adequate to express how much of an honor it would be to experience this. So for those of us that would hold this experience in high regard, there is a vow, which one could name to his own liking. Maybe one would choose to give all the produce from one of his fields, or one might choose a period of a month where he touches no fruit of the grape. Whatever one vowed, was an indication of how important this experience was in his life. The sacrifice requested by God as a voluntary offering wasn't an overpayment for forgiveness of sins, it was an understatement, allowing people to experience an awesome event. This was a declaration of how little was sufficient to obtain such a blessing from God. God was so merciful that He desired all to commune with Him in this manner. Now consider how you would price such an experience, and consider how merciful God was in designating such a simple list of acceptable gifts.

The free will offering was not the only offering that was not related to sin. There were devoted animals which supplied the priests and Levites with a livelihood. The tithe, and the firstborn male animals were to be given to the priests as their inheritance. They did not have any inheritance given to them when they entered the land. There was no tribal territory given to the tribe of Levi. Levites lived in every territory and served the people, hence they had no time to grow crops, nor to raise livestock. They still needed to eat. The tithe and devoted animals were to support the religious system, which often acted as a part of the judicial system. The Priesthood served as the supreme court of the land. At other times priests mediated between the people and God. Levites were holy, fulfilling a purpose different from that of the common Israelite. This purpose was not often perceived as necessary by the general public.

While the tithes supported the Levites, not all tithes were given to the Levites. One full tenth was required by God to support their needs, but there were two additional required offerings that were considered tithes. There was an additional tenth that was set aside each year for other things. The poor, widow and orphan needed to be supported, so a person was asked to set aside part of his harvest for them. Also, three times a year the Israelite men were required to go to Jerusalem for the feasts of the Lord. Without preparation it would be impossible for each male to appear before the Lord, so there was an additional tithe required by God to make sure everyone could participate in the feasts. In a three year cycle two yearly tithes were set aside for the enjoyment of the feast, while the third year the tithe was set aside for the poor, the widow, and the orphan. So the additional tithe served as a welfare system plus an assurance that all could keep the requirement concerning the festivals. God was throwing a party, he wanted everyone to show up.

The fact that God was throwing a party for His followers reveals another of His characteristics. He desires our company. All of the above mentioned sacrifices from the voluntary offering, which allowed a visit anytime during the year, to the support of the Levitical system which enabled people to visit God, to the festival tithes, which made sure everyone spent some time with

Him witnessing His glorious manifestations, show that God desires to spend time with His people. He wanted us to experience a small portion of His holiness, the beautiful existence of His nature displayed in the temple. Israel went to the temple to experience the awesome wonder of our Creator. God desired to show His nature as all Israel came to fellowship with one another and with Him. Even today while the temple does not exist, He has made provision for us to commune with Him directly. The benevolence toward His people is the same yesterday, today and forever. He has continually made it possible to bask in His glory.

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