

# Living, Spiritual Sacrifices

by G.W. North

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*G.W. North's sermon emphasizes the call for Christians to present their lives as living sacrifices to God, reflecting the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 51:17, Acts 7:59-60, Romans 12:1, Ephesians 5:2, Philippians 2:17, Colossians 3:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Hebrews 13:10, Hebrews 13:15, 1 Peter 2:5

**Topics:** "Devotion to God", "Spiritual Sacrifice"

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## Description

G.W. North emphasizes that while Jesus' sacrifice for sin is complete and eternal, believers are called to offer living spiritual sacrifices to God. He explains that under the New Covenant, these sacrifices are not for atonement but are expressions of our devotion and service, akin to the offerings made by the priests in the Old Testament. North highlights the importance of presenting our bodies as living sacrifices and offering praise, drawing parallels with the lives of early Christians like Paul and Stephen. He challenges the congregation to reflect on what they are sacrificing their lives for and to ensure they are wholly presented to God. Ultimately, he calls for a life of continuous sacrifice and praise as a reasonable service to God.

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## Transcript

Yet the writer to the Hebrews tells us that we have an altar and Peter tells us that we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices. We know therefore that, although we are to be sacrificing priests, we are not to attempt to offer to God any kind of sacrifices for sin, whether they be physical, material or spiritual. In any case we have not been given any physical equivalent to an altar upon which to offer any such sacrifice. The Lord Jesus offered one sacrifice for sin for ever and sat down, and we are told to enter into that rest.

Under the Old Testament constitution, annually on the day of atonement, the Lord accepted blood freshly sprinkled upon His throne from the hand of the High Priest. It was a token offering speaking of Christ's blood. The action signified the people's deep repentance and total renunciation and confession of sins. The result was the remission and riddance of twelve months of sins 'that were past through the forbearance of God'. Only under these conditions could He continue to sit there and reign over His people and be their God. Under the Old Covenant this had to be continuously repeated, because forgiveness then was only by an arrangement of repeated coverings or atonements. But now, reconciliation being brought in, we may enter through the rent veil and sit down with the Lord in perfect rest. Concerning this aspect of His sacrifice there is no more to do, it has been eternally accomplished by Jesus so we sit down

with Him. Never again is there to be any daily standing for ministry and offering by Him or anyone else along that line.

However, under the NEW COVENANT there is still desire and expectation in God's heart, as well as a place and need for gift and freewill offerings and sacrifices to be made. Unlike the one eternal sin-offering these must be made eternally, repetitiously. It is to this class of offering that the following verses refer:

(1) 'present your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto Him, which is your reasonable service';

(2) 'by Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips, offering praise unto His name'.

The former verse is statedly connected with service and has directly to do with the particular function of the Aaronic family. It was their duty-service in the age of law to present to God the bodies of the living animals which were brought by the children of Israel and were slaughtered beside the altar for sacrifice. The final act of presentation to God by fire upon the altar was the priests' reasonable service because that was their duty.

It would have been most iniquitous and utterly unreasonable of those priests if, after their brethren had bred and brought their sacrifices to the altar at God's command, they had refused to make the final act of presentation that made them acceptable in His sight. That age is now past but God is still calling for bodies to be presented sacrificially to Him. Not as formerly, dead upon an altar, but nevertheless as truly given over to do the will of God as were the bodies of Jesus in His day and Paul in his.

At the end of his life Paul could write, 'I am ready to be offered', or better 'I am already being poured out'. Once he wrote to the Philippians exhorting them to rejoice with him 'if I be poured out upon the sacrifice and service of your faith'. He lived a life of continuous sacrifice and so also did many in the early church, such as Epaphroditus of whom he wrote in high commendation. Likewise Luke tells us of Stephen who offered up his body first unto the Lord in selfless service as a deacon and then with equal devotion in final sacrifice as a martyr. Paul said that he himself sought only to fill up that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ in his body of flesh for the Church which (he recognised) is His body.

These are the kind of bodily offerings and sacrifices the Lord is expecting from His people today and if the altar principle be in their lives as it is in His He will not be disappointed. In view of these things we all ought to ask ourselves, and perhaps each other, to whom are we sacrificing ourselves? For what are we sacrificing our lives? Are we all now wholly presented to God? If so by whom and to what purpose?

The second verse quoted above is undoubtedly connected with the tabernacle-temple service of the Sons of Asaph. The book of Hebrews is largely linked with David; quotations from his psalms abound everywhere throughout the epistle. The writer was obviously very familiar with the ancient writings of Israel's poet-king; those sacred songs had been incorporated into the religious life of the people and had always held a place of honour in their worship. David had written many if not all his psalms with the direct purpose of training men to sing them accompanied by 'the players on instruments' in association with the functions of the priests. The two forms and means of service were combined by David and were each the respective duties of those appointed to participate in them.

A reading of the psalms, especially those that in the title are designated for singing, ought to give us instruction in the kind of things which are acceptable to God as sacrifices of praise. Perhaps we may find it instructive that they do not all consist of 'Hallelujah, Hallelujah, praise the Lord', but the greater number

are categorical statements of historic or devotional truth. Sometimes they are revelatory, sometimes prophetic, or they may be eulogistic, or hortatory, doctrinal, Messianic, explanatory, penitential, judgemental; they are variable in pattern and length, thoroughly reflective of the writer's character and all inspired of God. In the daily ritual of the temple service, as the bodily sacrifices were made so also were the verbal ones; in the temple sacrifice and offering was attended with song. People who dared not touch the altar could nevertheless engage in singing psalms.

So also it is with us today. We dare not touch the altar in relationship to the one full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice and oblation for sin, but we can stand and offer the accompanying sacrifice of praise, and because we can we must because we ought; it is all part of our reasonable service.

Beside this, let us remember that praise must not always be thought of in terms of singing. STEPHEN would hardly be thought of as a psalmist, but thinking comparatively about his great 'apologia' it would not be very difficult to liken it, at least in parts, to a psalm. In much the same way as David did at times, he makes a historical survey of God's covenant dealings with Israel, then with inspired power he applies a singular, unforgettable lesson to the hearts of his hearers. He paid for his boldness with his life; so we see that both kinds of sacrifice are offered by this great saint and martyr -- he offered his last great sacrifice with blood and praise and prayer.

The other principle was finely manifest in Stephen's life -- he was and still is a living sacrifice. When God receives into His hands our spirits, will He, as was the case with Jesus and Stephen, receive a living sacrifice as well as a living son? If the living God lives by the altar principle, ought we who are His people to think that we can live by any other?

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