

# The Pattern of the House

by G.W. North

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of the altar as a symbol of God's basic principle of life, sacrifice, and self-offering, which is essential for true love and relationship with God.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 20:24, Jeremiah 31:3, Hosea 2:19-20, Matthew 5:23-24, John 1:1-2, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 8:9, Galatians 2:20, Hebrews 9:22, 1 Peter 2:5

**Topics:** "Covenant", "Sacrifice"

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## Description

G.W. North emphasizes the significance of the altar as a vital link between God and His people, illustrating that the altar represents the foundational principle of sacrifice and offering in their relationship with Him. He explains that the altar, made of earth and stone, symbolizes the duality of humanity and God's desire for a covenant relationship, which is rooted in love and self-giving. North draws parallels between the altar and the covenant established at Sinai, highlighting the importance of willing sacrifice and the heart's involvement in offerings to God. He warns against the spiritual failures of Israel, who failed to grasp the deeper meaning of the altar and thus broke their covenant with God. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a return to understanding the altar's significance as a symbol of God's love and the necessity of sacrificial giving in our relationship with Him.

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## Transcript

When saying these things the Lord was also intending to show Moses very shortly the pattern of the house and furniture which He wished His people to make for Him. As we have already seen, one of those pieces of furniture was a large brazen altar which was to be so positioned that it should be to man as the doorway through which the first step should be taken to approach God. But even before He stated His requirements for that, or time be found to make it, He wanted His people to know the importance of the altar to Him and to them. The order in this chapter is: God, the people, the altar, God's altar. The great link between God and His people was to be the altar.

The interim period between the giving of the law and the building of the tabernacle at Sinai was to be the altar period. The command was clear, 'an altar of earth thou shalt make unto me and thou shalt sacrifice ... in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee and bless thee'. The altar, the earth, the sacrifice, the name, the blessing. God left them no option, they were to make an altar. If they wished to continue and keep in touch with Him as He did with them, it could only be upon the condition that they made His altar.

The ten commandments were connected with the altar. To Him it was as important as the bow in the cloud at Ararat and the blood upon the houses in Egypt; the altar must be His symbol upon the earth. Even though the significance of it be not grasped nor the principle understood by those who obeyed Him, the wish must nevertheless be acknowledged and the symbol accepted. True to the original order of creation, God's first thought and instruction in giving command concerning the altar was that it was to be made of earth; only as of secondary importance was instruction given about building an alternative altar of stone. In doing this the Lord was following the principle of the plan He had employed when making man.

As Adam and Eve were one, yet two slightly though obviously different people, so the altar symbol was one, though obviously of two slightly different materials and erections. In Eden Adam was first made entirely of earth; some time after that Eve was made / builded from one of his ribs to be a help, meet for him. God in giving instructions about the altar carried through this method exactly; the altar of earth, made: the altar of stone, made/builded.

As we read the Book of God's words and works and ways, the basic simplicity of the Lord in all things utterly amazes us. His profound ethics, His undeviating laws, His methods of procedure, His unshakeable righteousness upon which all is founded, and the scrupulous care with which He fashions the whole, all flow together into the enlightened understanding as a mighty river; the heart thus filled expands into immensity like the sea which never overflows nor bursts the living spirit within, though it swell with unspeakable wonder and divine rapture. Without controversy surely meditation and understanding are the deepest fountains from which the river flows with grateful love in ceaseless praise.

This chapter of the covenant, which is the beginning of all scripture, holds the key to that which by rearrangement is now read as though it is the beginning of scripture. Logically Genesis takes its place at the beginning of the Book because it gives the narrative account of the commencement of creation. It records the beginning and therefore bears that name; but in keeping with the truth that God is the God of second things, that which is recorded in the second book was written first and holds the key to creation. God made man of earth first and next builded woman from a rib taken from man, as a stone taken from earth, and this He did to show us that man must be an altar of sacrifice and offering to his maker and God.

Something of the vastness of this unchangeable truth comes through to us from Abraham, of whom the writer to the Hebrews tells us that 'he looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. Like Man, the eternal city must be an altar; and so indeed it is; it is God's temple city, His tabernacle. For foundations it has the twelve apostles of the Lamb; men who in their lives were altars upon which the Lamb was offered to God. Upon their lives was built the Church, which upon inspection is found to be nothing but the altar of God.

Right there in the midst of all, eternally held in the heart of New Jerusalem, are God and the Lamb. New Jerusalem is the Eve of the heavenly Adam coming down out of heaven from God; she is the bride, His wife, a help meet for Him to show forth the secret of God and eternal life and pure everlasting love. She is one with Him, helping Him to reveal that God is Life and God is Love; by it and because of it she is pure, simple, transparent, glorious, eternal light.

The principal principle of God who is Life and Love and Light Eternal is sacrifice and offering; apart from it neither Man, nor the City, nor God Himself can possibly be. In God life and death are one. That is why Paul so emphatically says that neither life nor death shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. To be in His life we must be planted (eternally) in His death, for He is Resurrection. We, like

Him, must be crucified ones, lambs as they had been slain; called lions by angels, sons by the Father, bride and wife by the Spirit, body by Christ, house by God, Israel of God in scripture, inner heart-temple by insight of His lovers.

Concerning these things and in a way suited to their day and age God sought to bring Israel into covenant with Himself at Sinai. So writing down the terms of the covenant, Moses rose early in the morning to build an altar under the hill and set up twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel; having done so he sent twelve men to offer sacrifices to God. As yet the priesthood had not been elected, so in a manner Moses was putting Israel to their fundamental business of national priesthood unto and before the Lord unto whom they were gathered.

Following this he took basins (perhaps one each for a tribe) in which he put half the blood of the offerings, sprinkling the other half on the altar. Then he read the book of the covenant to them and, having received their affirmation, sprinkled both it and the people so that the blood was now on the altar -- first: the book -- second and the people last (see Hebrews 10 v.17-19). Proceeding to the actual marriage oath he pronounced these words, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words'. By the blood of the covenant the whole nation was joined as one with God.

The altar symbolised God's basic principle of life, the book symbolised God Himself -- John 1 v.1,2; the blood symbolised their incorporation into and union with God; the people represented God's house. By these things Israel should have seen God, how He lived and where He lived and why He lived. Only after this could men see God and live; not until the marriage vows were taken and the sacred covenant sealed did God give Israel His own writing in stone and ask them to make Him a tent to live in. He had no wish to live with and be as a spiritual husband to Israel unless they covenanted to belong solely to Him and to love Him as He loved them. He knew also that they could and would never do that unless they understood the principle of spiritual sacrifice and self-offering upon which all life is founded. So He tested them by asking of them the sacrifice of love, 'speak unto the children of Israel that they bring me an offering, of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering'. The heart must be in and with everything that is given.

The symbolic altar involving flesh and blood sacrifices, real though it was, is not in view here, but the actual altar is very much envisaged. God was calling for extremely sacrificial giving by asking such things of a nomadic race. He was taking from them the things by which they spoiled the Egyptians ere they left Goshen, probably the only valuables they had. Were they willing to give sacrificially to Him? Moses, speaking from behind the veil that covered his shining face, spoke unto all the congregation of the children of Israel saying, 'this is the thing that the Lord commanded, take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord, whosoever is of a willing heart let him bring it an offering of the Lord'.

'They came everyone whose heart stirred him up and everyone whom his spirit made him willing and they brought the Lord's offering'. So vast and spontaneous was the response that it was reported to Moses 'the people bring much more than enough'. They gave, and giving gave themselves, 'the depth of their poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality'; that is the principle of the altar in man and in God. In a way these words are as true of God as of men, for rich as He is, He only had one son. When giving Him He was impoverished in sonship, for there was not another to give: behold then His liberality in giving Him up for us all. What riches of love and grace!

The unvarying principle of life and love runs through all these sayings, 'we. through His poverty have been made rich'. Ancient Israel never heard or read them; Paul was not their apostle. What a wondrous insight he had into spiritual truth which they apparently did not see. Until Hosea and Jeremiah voiced it, Israel did not appear to understand their God to be a lover and a husband who had espoused the nation to Himself through the blood and the lamb in Egypt, and who had married them at Sinai. He said He was a husband to them, taking them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt; Israel were holiness unto the Lord then and went after Him in the wilderness, but they broke the husbandly covenant. Despite that, He loved them with an everlasting love, and at one time asked -- 'how can I give thee up?' At another He asked, 'where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, or to which of my creditors have I sold you?' But no bill of former legal divorcement could be found, nor was there any evidence of a present bill of sale into slavery.

God's love is based upon self-giving by sacrifice; so is all true love. He cannot deny Himself, so He caused Hosea to record His promises of future restoration. By their own wishes the people were now no longer to Him as a wife; they had estranged themselves from Him and He could no longer be to them as a husband. But in the justice that demanded they be punished He remembered mercy and graciously told them that there would come a day when He would betroth them unto Himself for ever. The basis of that betrothal will be righteousness, judgement, loving-kindness, mercies, faithfulness and knowledge of the Lord. They had been unrighteous, unjust, brutally unloving, unmerciful, unfaithful and ignorant; a shifty, shallow and transient people. God had 'desired mercy and not sacrifice and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings', He said, but they had other desires and preferred the outward show of ritualism. The real root of their terrible behaviour lay at the point God laid bare here, 'they like men (Adam) have transgressed the covenant, there have they dealt treacherously against me'.

Adam in the garden, Israel at Sinai, Ephraim and Judah in the land all broke covenant faith with God; the issue was the same every time. Old Adam always does this; in Eden Adam broke the covenant by failing to be a faithful husband to Eve; therefore he became as a faithless wife to God, his husband and maker. Israel did it at Sinai by failing to be as a true wife to God, making an idolatrous golden calf to replace Him; Ephraim and Judah also did it quite openly in Canaan by playing the harlot with other nations to go after their goods and gods and accept their standards of living. Multiplying altars, idols and temples with religious fervour, they finally succeeded in selling themselves into slavery in foreign lands as a result. Having first made themselves slaves estranged from God while yet in their own land, they were eventually cast out and carried away captive to serve the devil in another.

All this happened to them because they failed to recognise what the altar symbolised. They saw the outward altar, the blood and the bodily sacrifices, but they had no spiritual insight or heart-grasp of what these things represented. Israel were a complete spiritual failure, therefore they became a national failure and an international disgrace.

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