

BaptistWay Bible Series for March 6: The Lord requires worship, not just ritual_30705

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The Lord requires worship, not just ritual

Leviticus 1:1-3; 2:1-3; 3:1; 4:1-3, 13, 22-23, 27-28; 5:1-6

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When Moses led the descendents of Abraham out of bondage in Egypt, they were not prepared for the demanding life facing them in the Sinai desert.

Moses himself had fled to the desert and had lived there 40 years before God spoke to him from a burning bush. God had called him to lead the Israelites back to Canaan, their homeland, promised to Abraham centuries before. The exodus from bondage in Egypt was entry into fulfillment of God's plan for his covenant nation.

God already had favored the Israelites while subjecting the Egyptians to 10 devastating plagues. The final plague—passage of the Death Angel—killed the firstborn in each household not protected by blood sprinkled on the doorposts.



At Mount Sinai, God reminded Moses of the divine protection he had provided Israel and promised him: “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 20:5-6). God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and instructions for building the tabernacle where God would dwell among his chosen people. God would offer redemption for the world through Israel just as he had redeemed the Israelites from slavery.

Leviticus is an instruction manual for the sacrificial system, a practice necessary to transform the nation of slaves into a holy nation, prepared to follow God's direction. Establishing and maintaining a system of ritualistic sacrificial offerings was the foundation for a permanent relationship.

The sacrificial practices of the Israelites were not to be confused with the pagan practices of the nations surrounding them. These foreign nations sought to appease an angry god or bribe a reluctant deity. God's instructions in Leviticus illustrate the holy, protective nature of his relationship with the Israelites. The attitude of sacrifice must never be overshadowed by ritualistic form.

This lesson presents five types of sacrificial offerings. While differing in form, the five acts of worship establish the necessity of an obedient faith-guided relationship with God. The following brief descriptions are gained

by reading the entire chapter in which the focal text appears.

The burnt offering (Leviticus 1:1-3)

The burnt offering was to be made by individuals who acknowledged sin by laying a hand on the animal, which was then completely consumed on the altar. The animal was without blemish and was presented in person at the tabernacle. There was to be no intermediary. The burnt offering was made as atonement for sin.

The grain offering (2:1-3)

The grain offering was presented as flour mixed with oil. A portion was combined with incense and burned by the priest. The remainder was designated as holy and belonged to Aaron and the priests.

Fellowship offerings (3:1)

The fellowship offering was an animal without defect presented “before the Lord” and slaughtered by the worshipper himself. The blood was sprinkled on the altar while the fat and kidneys were burned as offering to God. The remaining portions were eaten by the priests and the individuals making the offerings.

Sin offerings (4:1-3, 13, 22-23, 27-28)

Unintentional sin required a burnt offering to gain atonement. The community and the priests shared the responsibility of making an offering regardless of who had sinned. An animal was killed and blood was shed to gain atonement.

Guilt offerings (5:1-6)

The guilt implied here is the sin of not speaking up when one has knowledge of wrong being committed; contact with the ceremonially unclean; human uncleanness; or taking an oath. Confession of sin and making a sin offering are prescribed for making atonement.

The purpose of the offerings

These sacrificial offerings emphasize personal responsibility and the effect individual acts have upon the community. The ritualistic sacrificial system established the need for admission of sin—both personal and corporate—and the necessity of atonement or reconciliation with God.

Even though God dwelled among them, the Israelites often sinned, “missed the mark” of his will for them of becoming a “holy nation and a nation of priests.” Ritualistic sacrificial worship was God's way of disciplining the Israelites to become sensitive to his will and to be constantly and systematically reconciled to him by the acknowledgement and confession of sin. Observing the formalistic rituals must not be confused with grasping the substance of obedience to God.

Blind obedience to observing the “letter of the law” without an attitude of servitude and gratitude to a sovereign God will not make one “holy.” Observing the form without grasping the nature of repentance through the sacrificial system does not allow one to become “holy” and prepared to be effective and useful to God.

Sacrificial ritual was an act of faith by the nation of Israel. The Messiah sent to redeem the world would one day become the final sacrifice. In the meantime, faithful observance of the sacrificial requirements would lead them into becoming the holy nation God intended.

For Christians, a counterfeit relationship with God based on rituals such as prayer with no attitude of repentance and surrender to God's will is as insincere as an improper sacrifice by an ancient Israelite. Acknowledgement and confession of sin, along with surrender of self, are necessary. Paul told the Romans, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1).

Discussion question

How can acts of worship in the modern church be protected from becoming mere ritual?

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