



GIVING IS SACRIFICE

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “sacrifice?” Do your thoughts go to the parents who give up their time, energy, and money to give their children a better upbringing than they had? Do you think about the men and women who serve in our armed forces? Are you reminded of the Old Testament and the story of Abraham and Isaac? Or, does the image of Jesus Christ on the cross appear before you? *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this wine, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.*

Whether we recognize it or not, we’ve been introduced to sacrifice in one way or the other. But the real question is, are **you** willing to sacrifice?

WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

Simply stated, to sacrifice is to offer something as a gift to God. But to be more specific to the intention of the Greek word, *thysia*, it means a physical sacrifice of oneself, your person, your entire being, for the glory of God. God’s mercy urges everyone to devote all aspects of life to Him.

For Christians, it’s important for us to note that sacrifice meant something different and served a distinct purpose in the days of the Old Testament and at the time of Jesus’ birth, than it did after His death on the cross. In the Old Testament, the people of God would sacrifice cattle, lambs, goats, doves, or pigeons for the specific purpose of paying for their sins. But that all changed with the incarnation

of Jesus Christ, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. Because Jesus sacrificed His life as an atonement for sin, the need for God’s people to continually sacrifice animals was eradicated. The 10th chapter of Hebrews teaches us this. Consider the following verses: *For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins... By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified* (Hebrews 10:4, 10-14). Jesus’ sacrifice far surpasses all other sacrifices and serves as the source for every acceptable sacrifice today. His sacrifice fulfilled the promises made by God centuries before, and effectively restored the fellowship between the Creator and His people. Sin has been dealt with once and for all. The debt was paid. The power of sin, guilt, and shame was vanquished. The glory of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be praised forever.

That is why we should be continually thankful for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and realize that our sacrifices could never compare with His. Jesus’ sacrifice put the love of God on display for all to see. This is repeatedly made known to us in the Gospels and the epistles.

It is in recognition of and response to this great love that we find our willingness to sacrifice.

Jesus' sacrifice allows us the opportunity to surrender our lives to God in thanksgiving and recognition of His love. Our willingness to sacrifice is directly linked to the love we have for God and for people. Without that love, it's impossible for us to offer a sacrifice that will be acceptable to God.

Consider the following from our Catechism: *...a sacrifice in the Christian sense should not be considered an enforced obligation. Neither should it be made in expectation of reward, but rather freely out of faith, out of gratitude, and out of love.* (CNAC 13.2.3) If one sacrifices with such an attitude, it will never feel like a sacrifice, even if it requires great effort. Earnest believers do not think of it as a burden, but rather a joy, to engage their gifts and talents for the benefit of the congregation and their neighbor. If the *willingness to offer and sacrifice* is defined by love, the believer fulfills the will of God and acts in the mind of Jesus.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE?

First, it means that you are willing to actually give up your time, effort, and resources to serve God and your neighbor. For sure, giving is costly. But when the love of God energizes the willingness within us to sacrifice, then we will no longer hold firm to our own priorities and desires; they are what we sacrifice in order to serve others and glorify God. Are we willing to give up what we hold most valuable to help grow the kingdom of God?

Second, our willingness to sacrifice means that we are *truly committed* to serving and giving. The love of God impacts our entire lives. Should our commitment to Him be only part-time?

Third, in the Spirit of Christ, we should be willing to give and sacrifice without looking for any response or expecting to receive anything in return. We know that our heavenly Father witnesses all that we do and that He has blessed us and will continue to do so. We know this from Psalm 33:14-15: *The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.*

And finally, being willing to sacrifice means that we do not compare ourselves with anyone else and what they are perhaps willing or not willing to give up. We realize that we are all unique and have our own individual relationship with the Lord. We have been created and equipped to be an active participant in the body of Christ. Let's be willing to give of ourselves.

Our desire and willingness to sacrifice is rooted in God's love and mercy. It is because of His love and mercy that our lives are transformed and we can be made spiritually new. We respond to this mercy by sacrificing for His glory. Paul describes the response of this new life that flows out of God's mercy in Romans 12:1:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Because God has been merciful towards us, we in turn offer to Him our bodies as a living sacrifice. Our behavior is our opportunity to make visible the beauty of Christ. Let's allow our living to be an act of worship. Be ever mindful of your actions and your purpose and strive each day for every part of your body - your hands (what you do), feet (where you go), eyes (what you see), lips (what you say) – to display holiness (Hebrews 13:15-16). Even if this means giving up material things that we want or think we need. Continually allow the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit to transform you. Our body becomes a holy sacrifice of worship when it is devoted to God's purposes of righteousness and mercy. Our sacrifice is holy and acceptable to God when it's offered with a willing heart, filled with His love.

Are we willing to sacrifice and give of ourselves to glorify God and make known the name of Jesus? Allow the mercy and love of the Lord to saturate your heart, and you'll be amazed how willing you are to show your love for God and others.

- MJB / LRK