

## A Better Sacrifice

---

The death of Jesus released the Jews from the need to offer animal sacrifices. But it also releases us from our own warped concept of how to get close to God.

---

*“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. . . . Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these” (Heb. 9:11-12, 23).*



The message of the book of Hebrews is the superiority of the religion of Christ over that of the Old Testament. There is a better Lawgiver than Moses; there is a better covenant, a better priesthood, a better hope. In comparing the two systems of salvation, there is no contest: the religion of Christ is far superior to that of Moses.

It's easy for us, two thousand years later, to belittle the Jewish Christians to whom this epistle was written. How could they have been so blind to the superiority of Christ? What was it about the old system they left that could possibly draw them away from the benefits they enjoyed in Jesus? The answer to that question is perfectly rational—and ought to shake us out of the lethargy that too often bogged down our own faith.

Consider the role that sacrifices played in the life of a typical Jewish family. They knew that God wanted the best of their flock or herd to offer as a burnt offering. When they harvested their crops, the first fruits—which was typically the best of the harvest—went to the Lord. Jews from urban areas who did not own flocks or cropland had to dig into their assets to purchase the sacrifices. Their firstborn son belonged to the Lord and had to be redeemed with another sacrificed animal. Then there were the tithes, the periodic feasts that required a trip to Jerusalem, and freewill offerings by which they sought God's blessings in their endeavors.

All of which is to say, Jews who took their religion seriously understood the meaning of *sacrifice*. Their relationship with God was defined by this elaborate ritualized system of giving themselves to God daily. Their sacrificial spirit was a major component of their identity, both individually and as a community.

In Christ, however, all these ritualistic sacrifices are gone. No more animal offerings, no more tithing, no more obligatory feast days. It was as though everything that had been the foundation of their lives had been ripped out from under them. They now sought a relationship with God based upon . . . what?

Ah, herein lies the dilemma with which they struggled. Christianity is founded on the premise that the Son of God sacrificed Himself for the sins of the world—one man, one sacrifice, for all time. Unlike the animal sacrifices, which had to be offered again and again and again, the sacrifice of Christ fully satisfied the justice of God. We are freed from the need to try to “buy” God's favor with an endless stream of cheap trinkets. Christ has paid it all.

The Jewish Christians, even though they understood this concept intellectually, struggled to accept it experientially. The old system was so tangible, so comfortable, so real. It just *felt* right, because they had been doing it all their lives.

Which is precisely why we struggle to maintain a meaningful faith. Like the Jews, we are accustomed to earning our way in life. We live in the expectation that our performance will merit God's approval. Our sacrifices for Him mean something, right?

The only sacrifice that matters is the one that Jesus made for us. Once we understand that, we are free to offer our lives to Him as a *living* sacrifice, not out of cold duty, but out of gratitude.

— David King