

This Ought Ye To Have Done

The 15th chapter of Numbers, like many we have been reading lately, contains instruction concerning the various sacrifices of the Law of Moses.

Our purpose in studying the Scriptures day after day is to extract strength and guidance for an acceptable walk before God that our course may finally terminate in life, and not death.

Let us, above all things, avoid the mistake of the Israelites who performed all these ordinances without any perception of their real meaning. God had, in the law of sacrifice, a reason and a purpose. He never acts arbitrarily, or without a definite end in view. The purpose of the Law is as living and active today as it was when first given through Moses over 3000 years ago. That purpose is to lead us to Christ.

The Jews, as a nation, failed to derive the benefits from the Law that were intended, because they attributed its virtue to its mechanical performance. They went by the letter of the Law, and not by the spirit. The spirit of the Law is not something contrary to the letter. The spirit is contained in the letter. But though performing the letter, Israel did not comprehend the spirit. As Jesus said to them, "*These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone*" (Matt. 23:23).

Both the letter and the spirit are necessary. It is by the medium of the letter that we are taught the spirit. As Paul says, "*I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet*" (Rom. 7:7).

But we cannot stop at the letter. We must get at the principle behind it, of which the letter is but the expression. We must, through the letter, make contact with the spirit. If we do not complete this circuit, no power comes to us. The Law, instead of being a conductor, becomes an insulator.

The Jews offered their sacrifices. They carefully measured out their tenth deal of flour, and their fourth part of an hin of oil. But still, in their case, the Law failed in its purpose through the weakness of the flesh.

We must not fail. In the slow cycle of events, it is we who now day after day and year after year read over and over the many ordinances of the Law. Do we do better than the Jews? "*Understandeth thou what thou readest?*" We have a much better opportunity. Much more has now been revealed to enable us to see the hidden meaning. Much is now clear history that was then but veiled prophecy. Much is now forced upon the eye of sight that was then only dimly visible to the straining eye of faith.

With all these advantages, and with the vastly enlarged scope made possible by printing and education, how do we stand in the matter of intelligent perception? For the past two months we have been each day reading from this Law. Have we done it mechanically, wondering why a record of all this meaningless monotonous rigmarole was preserved? Or have we done it eagerly and intelligently, engrossed in the ever-unfolding beauties of type and shadow—constantly impressed by countless evidences of unfathomable wisdom working out a symphony of perfection over the vast range of ages, every detail foreseen and prepared?

"*It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search it out*" (Prov. 25:2). The mind that is seeking closer contact with the Spirit will not be content with merely reading these things as a matter of duty.

Of one thing we may be sure—a spiritual perception will not just happen through the familiarity of repeated performance. The natural result is just the opposite. Each additional performance removes the act further away from conscious purpose into the realm of habit and adds one more layer to the veil that obscures the lesson hidden within.

The long history of the Jews is an outstanding proof that ordinances can be performed with scrupulous care by one generation after another for thousands of years without ever stumbling upon the secret concealed inside. Let us exert every effort to avoid a similar failure. Nothing is easier than to drift—and fail.

We must deliberately stop and ask, What is the meaning and purpose? And what is the bearing upon our lives and actions? This requires effort. The natural man does not think any more than he is compelled to. He prefers to live by feeling and sensation. And what thoughts he does have do not run to deep spiritual things. But we must deliberately force ourselves to—in the words of Paul—"*meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them.*" We must establish a strong mental connection with them through which we can derive power. It will never come naturally, but it will gradually come more easily, and gradually yield greater power and pleasure.

The ability to meditate is the key to life and power. It is quite easy to read without thinking about what is being read. Such reading is worse than useless. It is actually harmful because it is deceptive. Our natures are always fighting against the spirit; always devising ways of deceiving us into the belief that we are really accomplishing something when actually we are just going through the motions; always inventing for us motives and excuses to soothe our consciences and undermine our resistance.

Sacrifice: burnt offering, peace offering, trespass offering. Very early in the revelation of Scripture is sacrifice brought to our attention, and gradually the lesson is broadened until we are led to the conception expressed by Paul, "*Present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . which is your reasonable service*" (Romans 12:1). And by Jesus, "*He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*" (Matt. 10:39).

How would we define sacrifice? We would be inclined to say that it is the unpleasant process of having to give up something that we would like to keep. But this is a petty little self-centered definition. Sacrifice is a very satisfying process if it is properly comprehended.

It is often beneficial to get a careful, accurate definition of a common word and meditate upon it. Our thinking is usually so loose and our mental pictures so hazy. The dictionary defines sacrifice as, "The destruction or surrender of anything for the sake of something else, giving up of some desirable thing in behalf of a higher object." The whole secret is in the **purpose**.

Of Jesus we are told, "*For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame.*" **That was sacrifice**—giving up of some desirable thing **in behalf of a higher object**—even the "*bringing of many sons to glory.*"

Paul expresses the basic principle of sacrifice when he says, "*Yet show I unto you a more excellent way.*" Self-development consists of a continuous series of sacrifices—a long process of choices which ultimately determine where we shall finally be when the trumpet sounds. Some truly endeavor to train themselves in sacrificing the lower for the higher, sincerely seeking the better way. These, who appear to sacrifice much, actually sacrifice least. Some sacrifice the better way to the worse—the future to the present. Some, reluctant to sacrifice anything, attempt to hold both. Theirs is the most pitiful case—they, in the end, find they have sacrificed most.

The first step is to face the fact that we must, in the very nature of things, make sacrifices. Sacrifice is an integral part of living. It is axiomatic that many desirable things are incompatible and we cannot have everything.

Having thoroughly accepted this lesson—not just theoretically but practically, so that it is a guiding principle and not just a reluctantly conceded fact—the next step is to decide what is the main object to which all else must be sacrificed.

For those who are acquainted with the Truth of the Scriptures, this step is a comparatively easy one. Many less fortunate must still content themselves with a balancing of the values of lesser pearls, not yet having discovered the existence of the pearl of great price.

The next step is illustrated by this parable of the pearl—*"he went and sold all that he had, and bought it"* (Matt. 13:46). It was rather an extreme action—selling all that he had. Almost foolhardy, we would think. Only one thing would justify it—the incomparable value of the pearl.

What does this step mean, translated into our own lives? It means the gradual rounding up and sacrificing of all the expendable items in our life, steadily working up from the bottom and in from the edges making sure that in each case we are consciously taking advantage of a corresponding spiritual compensation in return. "The giving up of a desirable thing **for the sake of something better.**"

We cannot afford to leave little pockets of vacuum. That is fatal. Jesus taught us this when he spoke of the evil which—though once cast out—came back to find his house still empty, whereupon he brought seven more with him worse than himself.

Each lesser item sacrificed must be consciously replaced by a spiritual satisfaction which had been previously hindered by the thing cast out. In this way we fill in behind ourselves as we go along and leave no opportunity for the evil spirit to return. In this way, too, we avoid the foolishness of self-pity, and the wickedness of self-glorification. We are the gainers every step of the way. We can give nothing to God. We just choose the better way for ourselves as revealed by His beneficial light. The only possible reaction in the case is gratitude that we have been shown the better way in which our own greatest well-being lies.

Let us view sacrifice in its true and attractive light—a continually repeated process of giving up one thing **for the sake of a better one**—a gradual advancement toward the most glorious of all blessings and most intense of all pleasures, a full living sacrifice to the perfect will of God.

When a man, according to the Law, took the best of his possessions and laid it on God's altar, what did it signify? It was an intelligent, worshipful recognition that **what God had yet to give was vastly greater and more glorious than what He had already given.** That everything a man had, including his own life, he would gladly and eagerly lay upon the altar of his faith in God's plans for his future eternal blessing.

Sacrifice is the joyful recognition that the future is full of promise and the best is yet to come. Sacrifice frees a man from the petty limitations of the poor little present, and relates him to the boundless scope of eternity.

All this shines through the letter of the Law as we read the many divine ordinances which Moses penned so long ago. All this is still but a small fraction of what sacrifice signifies to the discerning heart.

Sacrifice, with all its little details deep with meaning, taught in picture-story the whole glorious message of the prophets and apostles—the whole history of the divine purpose. And overshadowing the whole picture is the one great sacrifice for sin, the crowning sacrifice—not a separate feature, but a gathering together of all others in one perfect representation of everything that was embodied in all the rest.

To what extent could the faithful Israelite discern significance in the flour and wine and oil which, in certain prescribed amounts, were associated with the sacrifices, as read this morning? We cannot tell, but for us they set in motion many trains of thought.

Nor is each item restricted to a single meaning. An interplay of many meanings gives depth to the picture. These common objects which the Spirit uses to construct its symbol-pictures gradually increase in interest as we study their varied significances.

We can neither strive after, nor be satisfied with, a flat, mathematical interpretation—this means this, and that means that. The spirit is always fuller than the letter by which it is expressed. A certain amount of inexpressible feeling must be communicated by, though not actually contained in, the letter. A mathematical interpretation is final and complete, and therefore it ceases to hold the interest.

Bread is the symbol of strength, both natural and spiritual. Bread is also the symbol of the body of Christ—many individual grains of seed sown in the act of baptism—springing up to newness of life—gathered into the Lord's harvest—threshed to remove the chaff—ground in the mill to a smooth, fine consistency in which each seed will merge with countless others to form the one body.

Bread again is that one individual body which is offered for us—the bread which came down from heaven—The Purpose manifest in flesh.

Flour is a certain step in the process of making bread. So we discover that the sacrificial ordinances include a chronological presentation of the Truth—an unfolding of the purpose. The seed; the sheaf; the flour; the baked bread.

Bread again is the fruit of labor; in the joint partaking of it, it is fellowship and covenant relation; it is doctrine; it is protection and security; it is the final basic necessities of life; it is the ministration of charity.

Then the oil with which the flour must be mingled. Even the idea that something must be mingled with the flour is a lesson in itself. It shows that exactly the same thing might be acceptable or not acceptable—**according to that which accompanies it** Oil is a symbol of spirit. Things must be done **in the right spirit**. Just the bare doing of it is not enough. The purpose and motive must be right.

In the act of anointing we see the spirit oil poured out upon a believer, sanctifying and consecrating him—setting him apart—devoting him to a purpose. In the lamp the spirit-oil is guidance and enlightenment and comfort and encouragement. Mingled with the flour the spirit-oil transforms a loose, powdery mixture, which a slight wind would scatter, into one homogenous mass that can be shaped to a desired form. When passed through the fire it will hold that shape and its natural heavy doughiness will be transformed into palatableness and flavor. Oil, again, is gladness and joy.

Wine, in the figures of Isaiah, is the gospel message, offered freely without price. Christ uses it in the same way, and he also employs the contrast between new and old wine to illustrate the relation of his teaching to the law. It was a new vintage of the same thing. The time had come for the new. Wine can also be a mocker and deceiver, false, as well as true. As such, it is the cup of false doctrine in the hand of the apostasy.

Again, wine is the blood shed for sin, the life obediently poured out unto death—the life is in the blood. And wine is well-being, prosperity, celebration of good. Wine is grapes trodden in wrath, bitter judgment poured out that the condemned must drink.

Bread and wine are body and soul; they are the necessities and pleasures of life; they are the physical and mental aspects of life. Wine and oil are a soothing and healing ointment. David says (Psalm 104:15), that God gives "*wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.*" The gladdening gospel wine, the enlightening spirit oil and the strengthening bread of life.

And behind the wine is the multitudinous imagery that surrounds the vine and its branches, "*I am the true vine and ye are the branches . . . without me ye can do nothing.*" Without him, what are we? What incentive would there be to carry on day after day in meaningless plodding toward oblivion? One long struggle, with its inevitable bitter twilight and final extinction? But the bread and the wine are here before us. Here is a point of contact with the eternal. The bread and the wine, each with the wide meaning and association which it has acquired through the long period of the Spirit's teaching and revelation.

There is a strange sense of familiarity when the mysterious figure of Melchizedek brings forth bread and wine in the presence of Abraham. In this gift of long ago by the King of Righteousness to the Father of the Faithful, all the history of God's loving purpose is condensed. The Jew today, as his fathers have done for ages, still brings forth his wine and unleavened bread at the solemn passover feast. But the Veil is still over their face.

"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." "Take, eat, this is my body." "This is the new covenant in my blood." Each thread we pick up in Scripture leads us to this point. Each thread is intended to lead us to this point and fails in its purpose if we do not follow it through. Let us not read these things with a veil of habit or preoccupation upon our minds, so that we cannot look to the end of what is signified. Let us not permit the law to fail in its purpose through the weakness of the flesh. The Law must lead us to Christ—the priest, the altar, the sacrifice, the bread, the wine, the oil—each presents some aspect of the great redemptive work of God through Christ. In this connection, let us read three verses from Luke. "*And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. . . And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?. . . And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*"

And let us, by a consistent course of enlightened sacrifice, gradually draw closer to that glorious eternal tabernacle, seeking the more excellent way.

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