



O worship the Lord in
the beauty of holiness.

—Psalms 96:9



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Bible Lens

Sacrament

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Sacrament

from **Section 2**

7 | **Psalms 51:15–17**

O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

In modern thought, *sacrifice* often depicts deprivation—the giving up of something in order to make requests of God or to atone for wrongdoing. Originally, though, the making of sacrifices portrayed joyful devotion to God. Its intent was to make one holy—the original meaning of the Latin word *sacrificium*.

Over time, the outward ritual of sacrificing often replaced emphasis on inward purification. Like the Psalmist, Hebrew prophets warned against this materialization of worship. Isaiah says, for instance, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord:... Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes” (Isaiah 1:11, 16). And Amos writes, “Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them:... But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream” (Amos 5:22, 24).

8 | **Romans 12:1**

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

“Living sacrifice” may sound contradictory. But Paul is advocating replacement of the tradition of sacrificing dead animals with the Christly practice of devoting one’s entire being to God. And “reasonable service” describes something more than just what is sensible or rational. Some sources translate this as *spiritual* rather than *reasonable*, referring to the transformation that is “holy, acceptable unto God.”

The Message offers this paraphrase: “Here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.”

from **Section 3**

9 | **Mark 1:4, 7, 8**

John did baptize in the wilderness,... and preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

Jesus later describes John as the greatest of prophets (see Matthew 11:11). Yet in contrast to the “one mightier than I,” John places himself below the lowest servants, whose menial task was to unfasten the sandals of their masters.

John’s prediction of Christ Jesus’ advent introduces the concept of spiritual baptism. While baptism by water would continue (see Acts 10:47, 48, for example), the hallmark of Christian service was to be inner

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spiritual purification by the Holy Ghost. The Epistle to Titus calls this “the washing of regeneration” (3:5) and Galatians 3:27 speaks of being “baptized into Christ.”

from Section 4

13 | Matthew 26:26

Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

After Christ Jesus’ ascension, breaking bread became a precious symbol of the Master’s fellowship with his followers. The two disciples who saw Jesus as they journeyed to Emmaus reported that “he was known of them in breaking of bread” (Luke 24:35). This simple act was a central element of early Christian ministry, serving to commemorate the Master’s last meal before the crucifixion and to forge bonds of brotherhood (see examples in Acts 2:46 and 20:7).

14 | I Corinthians 5:8

Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Passover is the feast mentioned here. This annual celebration required disposing of leaven in remembrance of the Exodus. At that time, the Hebrew people needed to be ready to leave Egypt quickly, and only unleavened bread could be made in a short amount of time.

Leaven was valued as a yeast-like substance, but here it becomes a metaphor for corruption. Paul identifies it with two strong words, *malice* (Greek, *kakia*) and *wickedness*

(Greek, *ponēria*)—together, a thorough description of iniquity and evil. It is this “leaven” that is to be replaced with “sincerity and truth.”

Although Christ Jesus warns about “the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1), he also uses the image of leaven in a positive sense in a parable about the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 13:33).

About the term *sacrament*

Though it doesn’t occur in the Bible, the word *sacrament* has scriptural significance. Its roots are found in the Latin word *sacramentum*, a vow taken by Roman soldiers as they entered military service. In this sense, *sacrament* conveys solemn commitment or engagement.

Early Christians celebrated Christ Jesus’ example of commitment to God by commemorating such events as his baptism and the last supper. But sacrament goes beyond ceremony. According to one scholar, it is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”

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Resources quoted in this issue

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Sidebar: Butler, Trent C., ed. *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991. Also available at studylight.org/dictionaries.

An offer He can't refuse

By Christine Irby Williams

From the March 2005 issue of *The Christian Science Journal*

It's a question as old as the ages: How do you please God? For centuries, the answer was simple: One demonstrates one's love for God by making a sacrifice—an offering of some kind. The Bible is filled with examples of people placing objects on altars as evidence of their devotion to God. The book of Exodus, for instance, includes detailed descriptions of the kind of burnt offerings, sin offerings, wave offerings, heave offerings, drink offerings, meat offerings, and peace offerings that the Israelites sacrificed during the forty years they spent journeying back to the land of their fathers.

Yet Moses, who established the guidelines for such sacrifices, didn't believe that God desires material gifts alone. The point, he and other leaders in the Bible explained, is as much the love for God that prompts the offering as it is the object itself. As Moses put it: "What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13). The action, Moses implied, should be a mere representation of the devotion to the Divine that fills one's heart.

Indeed, later prophets emphasized that going through the motions of sacrificing material possessions could actually mask spiritual barrenness. Micah, for example, emphatically repeated the spirit of Moses' words: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).

But it was Jesus who took the concept of offering to a whole new level, by redefining the kinds of actions that demonstrate a wholehearted love for God. As he put it, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). In other words, one demonstrates love for God best by expressing love for what He cares most about—His children.

This isn't an inert or passive sort of love, however. As practiced by Jesus, it was the kind of love that took form in acts of compassion, in comforting and consoling, helping and healing, the cherished offspring of his heavenly Father. Jesus expressed his love for God in active expressions of love for his fellow men and women—healing them, teaching them, even washing their feet. Ultimately, of course, he offered the greatest gift of all—the willing sacrifice of his own life in order to demonstrate the limitlessness of God's love for humanity.

Jesus left no doubt that it was this approach to offering that would mark a person as one of his followers. "Herein is my Father glorified," he said, "that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8). In other words, not love without action or actions without love, but a deep and heartfelt devotion to God made practical in acts of love for His creation. That's an offer God would never refuse—because He impels it.