

#154 “A Living and Holy Sacrifice”

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In Exodus 12:5, God commanded each household in Israel to take an unblemished lamb and slaughter it on the Passover. The blood of the Lamb was to be put on the doorposts of their homes so that God would pass over them and not strike down their firstborn as He would do to the Egyptians. The picture of blood being shed for saving their children was a clear foreshadowing of Christ who would shed His innocent blood for us as the perfect Lamb of God. Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 1:19 that we have not been bought with perishable things such as silver and gold “but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.” Our holy standing before God when judgment day comes is going to be because we have received Christ as the One Who alone could forgive us of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). It is His blood which can set us free, and nothing else, because only He was the unblemished and spotless Lamb of God.

But the imagery of unblemished sacrifices doesn't end here. Jesus refers to those who believe in Him as His sheep (John 10:27), and Paul says in Romans 12:1-2, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” There is a sense in which our lives are to resemble the unblemished lamb of the Passover and the holy, unblemished Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Just as Christ was holy and laid down His life, so, too, are we to grow in holiness and lay down our lives for others. We, the sheep of God, are to be holy sacrifices while we are yet living. This we can do each day as we present our bodies, hearts, and minds as clean and holy to God.

Paul speaks of dying daily (1 Corinthians 15:31, Galatians 2:20), and Jesus says that we must take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23). Each day, we must offer ourselves to God spiritually, reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:11). We are alive because Christ has given us new life. We are holy because Christ has made us righteous in His perfect blood. Yet we are also to be sacrifices, living daily in practical holiness as we let God accomplish His good and perfect will in and through us. Paul summarized this mindset in Galatians 2:20 when he said, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” Galatians 5:24 echoes this theme, saying, “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Being holy, living sacrifices means that we are to daily reckon ourselves dead to sin and free to let Christ live out His will in and through us. Being a sacrifice implies a willingness to die. We may never have to physically die for being a Christian, but daily we do need to die to the flesh as we remember by faith that we have been bought with the blood of the perfect Lamb Who is working to perfect us also. When we yield to God, we can see just how alive we really are.

Christ developed this Biblical theme of sacrificial living further when He said in John 12:24-25, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal." Part and parcel to being a follower of Christ is this concept of dying in order to live. When we first came to Christ, there was a dying in that we became new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Yet, even as believers, there is still a daily dying as we must choose by faith to serve Christ rather than our own selfish interests and fleshly lusts. We cannot love the approval of the world and the things of it more than Jesus. We cannot hold this life dear such that we forget to live with eternal priorities. The only way to bear abundant spiritual fruit is through sacrifice and surrender to Christ.

Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." Paul lived a life of sacrifice and surrender, pouring his life out like a drink offering. He fought to advance the gospel and to refuse temptation. He finished the course, having done what Christ had asked him to do, and he kept the faith, continuing to believe the truth about Jesus and the promise of eternal life. He had taken his own counsel, having demonstrated what it means to be a holy and living sacrifice. Our goal should be to be able to look back on our lives and say with Paul that we have finished well and stood for righteousness in Christ. As we daily yield to Christ, the Spirit will work through Scripture and through our conscience to transform us so that we are no longer conformed to the ways of this world. He will help us to live and stand for righteousness, working change in our patterns of thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

May we never forget that life in Christ is a life of sacrifice, surrender, service, and sanctification. May He enable us to be holy, living sacrifices, those who die daily so that we can truly live.