

What Sacrifice Means

by Gary Henry

“Then the king said to Araunah, ‘No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing.’ So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver” (2 Samuel 24:24).

FEW IDEAS ARE MORE IMPORTANT TO OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD THAN THE IDEA OF “SACRIFICE,” AND YET FEW IDEAS ARE MORE WIDELY MISUNDERSTOOD. The very word has been cheapened.

First, there is the false belief that the value of a sacrifice is determined by the intrinsic value of the thing given. According to this thinking, a person who gives a hundred dollars to God has always given a hundred times more than the person who gives only one dollar. But sacrifice is measured in terms of what it cost **US** -- not the degree to which **SOMEONE ELSE** might have been able to afford the same gift (Luke 21:1-4). Sacrifice involves the acceptance of some significant personal loss. Strictly speaking, a sacrifice is the relinquishing of something **WE** could hardly afford to do without. As an affluent people, we may do much external good by giving out of our surplus (whether of money, time, talent, or effort), but let us be careful before we speak of having made a “sacrifice.”

Second, there is the grasping, covetous view which turns a sacrifice into a grudge. “Our notion of sacrifice is the wringing out of us something we don’t want to give up, full of pain and agony and distress. The Bible idea of sacrifice is that I give as a love-gift the very best thing I have” (Oswald Chambers). “*God loves,*” wrote Paul, “*a cheerful giver*” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Third, and perhaps worst, is the constant search for a way to make everything easy. We have somehow acquired the opinion that getting to heaven with relative ease is simply a matter of being sufficiently devout. Whatever needs to be done in regard to God, we seem to think that if we can just figure out the right spiritual technique, the thing can be made easy, perhaps even automatic. And if a way can’t be found to make it easy, then we question whether it has to be done at all. But in our quest for convenience, where has the concept of **SACRIFICE** gone? The old-timers used to say, “There are no shortcuts to any place worth going to.” At some point, don’t we have to ask what a relationship with God would be worth if it were so easy as to cost us nothing?

“The service that counts is the service that costs” (Howard Hendricks).

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