

BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

*“The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin” (1 Jno. 1:7).
“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Jno. 1:29).*

The idea of sacrifice is found throughout the Bible from its beginning to its end. God clothed Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness with coats of skins (Gen. 3:21). This indicates animal sacrifice. In the Book of Revelation, the saints sing their grateful thanks for the sacrifice of Christ: “for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (5:9). In the Letter to the Hebrews we are told that the sacrifices offered before Christ came were foreshadowings of his perfect sacrifice. Those sacrifices were “a figure for the time then present”; “the patterns of things in the heavens”; “a shadow of good things to come” (9:9,23; 10:1).

All the acceptable sacrifices offered both before and during the time of the Mosaic (Old) Covenant pointed forwards to the Lord Jesus Christ’s offering.

The reason for sacrifice

The simple principle stated in Hebrews 9:22, “without shedding of blood is no remission”, tells us why sacrifice is necessary. Man has sinned, and the forfeiting of life shows man what sin deserves. In Leviticus 17:11, amply confirmed by biological science, we are told that “the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls”.

What was special about the shedding of the blood of Christ and the offering of his body? Two passages of Scripture answer this question:

“for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-26);

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (8:3).

The first passage brings to the fore the fact that Christ’s sacrifice declared *the righteousness of God*. This is repeated to underline its importance, along with the other feature, the grace and forbearance of God. The second passage tells us that Jesus “condemned sin in the flesh”, something that the sacrifices under the Law, and at other times, could not do.

These passages help us to understand how God could reconcile sinful man to Himself without jettisoning His principles of righteousness and justice.

God was able to raise Jesus from the dead because he did no sin. He did not earn sin’s wages, but only inherited the sin and death principle by his descent from Adam. Biological science again confirms that death is programmed into our human DNA.

Consider the Scriptures:

- “For He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21)
- “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1)

- “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14)
- “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (v. 9)
- “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him That was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared . . .” (5:7)
- “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned . . .” (Rom. 5:12).

God’s righteousness upheld in Jesus’s life

For the sacrifice of Christ to be acceptable, Jesus had to live a sinless life. This was shown, for example, in the following:

- His baptism “to fulfil all righteousness” (Mt. 3:13-17)
- His temptation, in which he repudiated the suggestions that appealed to the flesh (Lk. 4:1-13)
- His rejection of Peter’s suggestion that he should not go up to Jerusalem and be killed (Mt. 16:21-23)
- His anguish as he contemplated his “baptism” or approaching death (Lk. 12:50)
- His reply to the young ruler, in which he repulsed the suggestion that there was any good in the flesh and instead directed attention to his Father alone as the source of all good (Mt. 19:16,17).

God’s righteousness upheld in Jesus’s perfect sacrifice

“God’s method for the return of sinful man required the putting to death of man’s condemned and evil nature in a representative man of spotless character whom He would provide, to declare and uphold His righteousness, as the first condition of restoration, that He might be just while justifying the unjust, who should believingly approach Him in humility, repentance and confession (Rom. 3:24-6; 8:3; Heb. 2:14-15; Rom. 5:21)”.

This statement (by Brother Robert Roberts) is an excellent summary, and explains also why other sacrifices would be in vain. In the case of unblemished animals, physical perfection was a shadowy way of pointing to the sinlessness required in the ‘substance’ to come. In fact animals have nothing to do with man’s weakness and sin, cannot be tempted as we are, and so cannot take away sin. Hence Jesus’ sacrifice pleased God more than the sacrifice of oxen (Heb. 9:12-14; 10:4-9; Ps. 40:6-8; Isa. 53:10; Ps. 69:31). Angels cannot die so cannot be sacrificed. Though sinless, they could never satisfy God’s righteousness for the redemption of men because they could never represent man (Heb. 2:9; 10:14-17). Finally, the death of a mere man would in itself demonstrate and uphold God’s law of sin and death, but resurrection could not follow, and this was envisaged by God for the Saviour of men.

The sacrifice of Christ brings before us the great love of God, which was the motive that initiated His plan of redemption. It brings us also to the great love of Christ for his disciples, without which his sacrifice would not have been possible. Father and Son together, like Abraham and Isaac 2,000 years previously, walked to Calvary in an act of boundless mercy and love, to bring about reconciliation and forgiveness. The joy of the resurrection that followed was the consummation of it all, once again declaring the righteousness of God.

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