

Sacrifices cost money; why bother? (21:27)

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with evil intent.

THE TEXT (NASB)

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with evil intent.

The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination; how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind. KJV - Proverbs 21:27

INTRODUCTION



The only logical reason to sacrifice something good is to get something better. The “good” is the enemy of the “better,” and the “better,” the enemy of the “best.” So sacrifice must be short-term loss for long-term gain, an investment in the future.

The classic sacrifice is an offering for a noble purpose—usually to gain favour with a spirit or deity. In ancient times (and some places even today) animal and even human sacrifices were central to their religious rituals, with the goal to bribe God somehow.

Many people try to gain God’s favour by giving money to religious or charitable institutions. Do our offerings win God’s favour? Is there any point in giving money at church?



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COMMENTARY

The message of this proverb seems doubly important, since its first phrase is repeated in Proverbs 15:8, which adds three more words. That reads, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD”—an important clarification. Everyone naturally believes that their offerings are pleasing to the deity. This proverb says, sometimes it’s precisely the opposite.

Troubling Message

This can be very disturbing. It implies that, even while a worshipper doing something he believes pleasing to God, in fact, God hates it. Some acts of worship make God want to “throw up,” as the word, “abomination,” suggests. Learn more about this word in Proverbs 20:10.

So what is sacrifice all about? Why do all religions world-wide involve some sort of sacrifice? Do they do any good? A mountain of gold has been spent over thousands of years, all in the name of religion. Yet this proverb warns that a lot has been wasted. Why? This is an urgent question for a financial planner (me), who counsels people on the wise and foolish uses of their money.

History of Sacrifices



When this text was first penned, about 3,000 years ago, the Hebrew religion called for the regular ritual sacrifices of domestic animals like birds, lambs, rams, and bulls. By then, sacrifices cost money, but the practice of sacrifice goes back right to the time of Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve’s first two children. Both Cain and Abel presented offerings to the LORD, and yet the LORD “had regard” for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, He had no regard (Genesis 4:4-5).

The Hebrew word for “sacrifice,” זָבַח (zě•băḥ, pronounced “ze-bakh”), indicates a living being, killed and presented as an act of expiation—covering sin, or propitiation—appeasing the anger of a god. Here we get a clue as to the “why” of sacrifice. The killing of the animal was meant to remind the worshiper that it was really he who deserved to die. The suppliant’s offering is a substitute for his own punishment, because God has a penalty for rebellion: Death.

Sacrifices Cross-Cultural



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We see a universal recognition of this natural expectation of divine retribution in the widespread practice of human sacrifice. Human beings have been slaughtered around the world to placate or please some false deity. When the Spaniards first arrived in Mexico in 1519, they witnessed a four-day festival in which 40,000 war captives had their hearts chopped out by knife-wielding priests. Archeologists working in the ruins of ancient Carthage, have found a furnace dedicated to their god Moloch, with the charred bones of thousands of infants. Warrior peoples like the Mongols sacrificed captives simply as a matter of course. And the unbending hatred of the faithful Israelites for the Canaanites arose partly from the Canaanite practice of child sacrifice (passed down to their Carthaginian descendants).

When Abraham first intends to obey God's command and sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, an angel interrupts the sacrifice and provides a ram as a substitute. This was taken to prove that the LORD never really wanted child sacrifice in the first place, that this could never be a real cure for human sinfulness and guilt. The LORD of Israel would permit only animal sacrifices.

These days, some have seen the widespread abortion of the last half-century as a return to pagan child-sacrifice, driven by the suppressed guilt of sexual sin.

Loss through Sacrifice

When the Israelites offered sacrifices at the Temple of Jerusalem, some parts of the animal were eaten by the priests and worshipers, while the rest was destroyed by fire. For some sin offerings, the entire animal was burned—a "holocaust." From a purely prudent or selfish perspective, it might have been best to keep all the animal for self and family. Why give any of it away? We see an example of goods being wasted in the book of Proverbs. The woman in Proverbs 7:20 had offered sacrifices (verse 14) and yet had extra roast lamb or beef at home, with which she intended to gratify her guest. Her sacrificial offering had nothing to do with the humble worship of God. She offered sacrifice with evil intent.

Useless Sacrifices



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Israel's King Saul provides another example of useless sacrifice, useless at least in the eyes of God. Read all about it in I Samuel 15:13-22. The prophet Samuel warned Saul always simply to obey God. Disobeying and then trying to make amends with a bribe is suicidal.

The only righteous sacrifice that God now asks of us is to turn back from our selfish ways and allow the spirit of Jesus Christ to direct our lives. That's the obedience God wants. It's the only religious "work" that God really wants of us (John 6:28-29).

Face it! The only sacrifice that God could really accept was the pure offering of a sinless man by a sinless man—Jesus Christ, offering himself to be tortured and executed on a Roman cross. Having no sin of his own, Jesus Christ could die for the sins of others, paying a debt he did not owe. Read about it in Romans 5:6-11. Since Jesus Christ was and is God, he could die for the sins of all.

Wealth Being Wasted

Here's the point: If you haven't surrendered your heart to Jesus, if you're not trusting in his sacrifice to cover your sins, then any donation you make to a church, trying to bribe God, is a complete waste. I'll say it again: Gifts from a heart not bowed down to the Head of the true Church, Jesus Christ, are wasted money. They may be welcomed by so-called "religious leaders," but they are loathed by God.

Should you give money to churches? It depends on your motive. Big donations impress people, but this proverb says God cares only about the motive behind the gift. He looks at the heart, not the balance sheet. It's utterly absurd to think the Creator of the Universe needs "gifts" from his creatures. God does not need our cash. Jesus never asked his followers for money, though they eagerly supported his ministry.



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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus was once asked how to worship God.

He replied that God is a spiritual being, who seeks those who worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). He never asked for money for Himself or His friends. He told them to pray for more workers, not more cash (Matthew 9:38). Jesus saw people give their wealth to God's work, and he was more impressed by the two cents from a poor widow, than the surplus of the wealthy (Luke 21:1-4).

Jesus gave Himself as the final and ultimate sacrifice. He said He came to give His life as a ransom in order to buy freedom for others (Mark 10:45).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Don't give money to "buy" favour with God.
- Do what you know God wants you to do. Obeying God and doing what He wants is better than giving Him "gifts" while ignoring His instructions.
- Check your motives when making any charitable donations, especially when they are "religious" ones.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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KEY WORDS

immorality, charity, deceit, honesty, less assets (quantity), LORD, motivation, sacrifice, wicked, bf sharing

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Generous Genevieve?



Generous Genevieve loves to give and has a big heart. Sometimes she chuckles to herself as she gives her gifts. Now here's a secret about her giving: She only gives to those who really need it—not just to anyone who asks for a handout. She gives because she thinks it's the right thing to do.

Strangely enough, the more she gave to those in genuine need, the more she got back. Some people give in order to get, but she considers that mere trading. Generous Genevieve gives for the sheer thrill of it. By giving she is keeping herself from emotional cancer. Emotional cancer, also known as greed, can take over one's heart and destroy their ability to enjoy even the simple things of life. Genevieve gives in order to increase her giving capacity.

Sometimes it hurts Genevieve to give. Sometimes she is short of cash because she has given to someone else, but that shortage doesn't last long.

Genevieve believes that there is always a reward for giving to those in need. She thinks that her generosity will come back to her benefit sooner or later. She coined the expression, "What goes



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around—comes around.”

