

## Incurred guilt & sins of ignorance or, How do we know if we can be forgiven?

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which will devour the adversaries. A man who disregards Moses' law dies without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think he will be judged worthy of who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

– HEBREWS 10:26-29 (WEB)

### Analysis

#### A. (6:8-7:38) The offerings from the priestly perspective

The first 5 chapters have given us the 5 offerings from the perspective of the offerer, dwelling upon his responsibility in the ritual. The rest of chapters 6 and 7 dwell on the role of the Aaronic priests – and, not to be forgotten – the role of God Himself, “the consuming fire”



W.H. GRIFFITH THOMAS

God the “infinitely High” – and “infinitely Nigh”

In 1:1-6:7, the ritual prescriptions are described from the standpoint of the person making the offering, whereas in 6:8-7:36 the narrative considers the various sacrifices as the priests have to deal with them. [Harrison 39]

Calvin notes that in both cases, the Tabernacle and the Temple, the very first burnt offerings were consumed not by human agency, but by divine fire. [Calvin ii 364]

[7:34] In the heave offering and the wave offering, Griffith Thomas finds the paradox of the true God – “God the Infinitely High” and “God the Infinitely Nigh”. [Thomas 116]

#### The cost of unbalanced teaching: God no longer “infinitely High”

The spirit of our age is much more inclined to magnify the greatness and majesty of man, than the infinite greatness and holy majesty of God. Hence many talk

lightly of atonement, and cannot admit its necessity to the pardon of sin. But can we doubt, with this narrative before us, that if men saw God more clearly as He is, there would be less talk of this kind? When Moses saw God on Mount Sinai, he came down to ordain a sin-offering even for sins of ignorance! And nothing is more certain, as a fact of human experience in all ages, than this, that the more clearly men have perceived the unapproachable holiness and righteousness of God, the more clearly

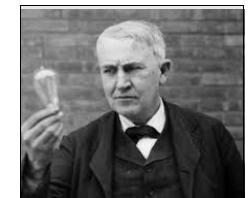
they have seen that expiation of our sins, even of our sins of ignorance, by atoning blood, is the most necessary and fundamental of all conditions, if we will have pardon of sin and peace with a Holy God. [Kellogg 118]

#### The role of ritual – and ‘spontaneous’ worship

Jesus said that God must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. And it has become commonplace to contrast spirit and form as if they were incompatible in worship. ‘The letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life’ is a text that out of context (2 Cor. 3:6) can be used to justify slapdash leading of services and other Christian activities. Spontaneity and lack of preparation is equated with spirituality. Lev. 6-7 denies this: care and attention to detail are indispensable to the conduct of divine worship<sup>1</sup>. God is more important, more distinguished, worthy of more respect than any man; therefore we should follow his injunctions to the letter, if we respect him. A glance at the performing arts dispels the illusion that a great and spirited performance can be achieved without practice and attention to detail. Indeed great actors and musicians spend hours studying and rehearsing the works they are to perform, so that they can recapture the spirit of the author and convey it in their performance. Audiences expect performers to aim at perfection in the concert hall. Worship is also a performance, a performance in honor of almighty God. As no orchestra can give of its best without a competent conductor and meticulous rehearsal, so no congregation is likely to worship our holy God in a worthy manner without careful direction by a well-instructed minister. [Wenham 128]

He more distinctly explains what might have appeared to be omitted; nor is it without reason that he carefully enters into these full details, for since God prefers obedience to all sacrifices, he was unwilling that anything should remain doubtful as to the external rites, which were not otherwise of great importance; that they might learn to observe precisely, and with the most exact care, whatever the Law commanded, and that they should not obtrude anything of themselves, inasmuch as the purity of the holy things was corrupted by the very smallest invention. He would, therefore, leave nothing to the people's judgment, but directed them by a fixed rule even in the most trifling matters. [Calvin ii 363]

[ch 1-7] The great importance of the sacrifices prescribed by the law may be inferred to a great extent, apart from the fact that sacrifice in general was founded upon the dependence of man upon God, and his desire for the restoration of that living fellowship with Him which had been disturbed by sin, from the circumstantiality and care with which both the choice of the sacrifices and the mode of presenting them are most minutely prescribed. But their special meaning and importance in relation to the economy of the Old Covenant are placed beyond all question by the position they



THOMAS EDISON

What was it the world's most famous inventor said about genius?

<sup>1</sup> "None of my inventions came by accident. I see a worthwhile need to be met and I make trial after trial until it comes. What it boils down to (Genius) is one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration." – Thomas Alva Edison

assumed in the ritual of the Israelites, forming as they did the centre of all their worship, so that scarcely any sacred action was performed without sacrifice, whilst they were also the medium through which forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with the Lord were obtained, either by each individual Israelite, or by the congregation as a whole. [Keil ii 274]

[7:14] Thus the grateful offerer presents to the Lord all he has, and spreads out his very corruptions to be dealt with as the Lord sees good. Was he not saying, while the priest thus waved the leavened cake to the four winds, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."? (Ps. 139:23,24) [Bonar 133]

[7:15] If the cause of this distinction is asked, it is no clearer to me than is the variety between the bread and wafers or cakes. It is certain, indeed, that God had a reason for dealing more strictly or more indulgently; but to inquire nowadays as to things unknown, and which conduce not at all to piety, is neither right nor expedient. [Calvin ii 371]

[7:17] There is one particular in which this offering is to be dealt with differently from the first kind. The time within which it must be eaten is never extended beyond the third day; and if any portion remained so long as the third day, that part is to be forthwith brought out and burnt. Every precaution is taken that none of the portions ever suffer the taint of corruption. The type refers to the incorruption of the Surety, after being offered as a sacrifice. When the third day came round, God completed His testimony to the acceptance of His Son's work, by forthwith raising him from the dead, ere corruption could begin. [Bonar 135]

#### B. *(Summarizing the offerings) Do we get it?*

##### **God teaching by analogy: personal, medical, commercial**

The sacrificial system therefore presents different models or analogies to describe the effects of sin and the way of remedying them. The burnt offering uses a personal picture: of man the guilty sinner who deserves to die for his sin and of the animal dying in his place. God accepts the animal as a ransom for man. The sin offering uses a medical model: sin makes the world so dirty that God can no longer dwell there. The blood of the animal disinfects the sanctuary in order that God may continue to be present with His people. The reparation offering presents a commercial picture of sin. Sin is a debt which man incurs against God. The debt is paid through the offered animal. [Wenham 111]

[7:2] Surely Israel must have felt that their souls were reckoned very guilty by their God, since he spoke to them so continually in the language of blood. [Bonar 128]

##### **The visceral (gut) response to continual blood for continual sin**

But to the thoughtful worshipper, one would think, it must sometimes have occurred that, after all, it was not himself or his gift that thus ascended in full consecration to God, but a victim appointed by God to represent him in death on the altar. And thus it was that, whether understood or not, the offering in its very nature pointed to a Victim of the future, in whose person and work, as the One only fully-consecrated

Man, the burnt-offering should receive its full explication. And this brings us to the question, What aspect of the person and work of our Lord was herein specially typified? It cannot be the resultant fellowship with God, as in the peace-offering; for the sacrificial feast which set this forth was in this case wanting. Neither can it be expiation for sin; for although this is expressly represented here, yet it is not the chief thing. The principal thing, in the burnt-offering, was the burning, the complete consumption of the victim in the sacrificial fire. Hence what is represented chiefly here, is not so much Christ representing His people in atoning death, as Christ representing His people in perfect consecration and entire self-surrender unto God; in a word, in perfect obedience. [Kellogg 54]

Just as the old covenant generally was not intended to secure redemption from sin, but the law was designed to produce the knowledge of sin; so the desire for reconciliation with God was not to be truly satisfied by its sacrificial ordinances, but a desire was to be awakened for that true sacrifice which cleanses from all sins, and the way to be prepared for the appearing of the Son of God, who would exalt the shadows of the Mosaic sacrifices into a substantial reality by giving up His own life as a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and thus through the one offering of His own holy body would perfect all the manifold sacrifices of the Old Testament economy. [Keil ii 333]

[7:32] The right shoulder, as well as the breast, is presented; for there must be hand and heart together in a full dedication to the Lord. It is the shoulder, as being that which bore the burden; and the right shoulder, as that had most strength to support a burden. A true Israelite, in the enjoyment of reconciliation, felt himself bound to help the priest with heart and hand, because he was the Lord's minister to him for good. He would daily make supplication for him, that his soul might be "satiated with fatness" as he handled the types, and might never grow weary in his work; that he might be able, also, to tell a waiting people somewhat of the wonders he saw. For, I suppose, the priest often spoke to the worshippers, and directed their eye to the person of Him who was to come – to Him whose glorious form was as yet hid amid the drapery of the earthly sanctuary. [Bonar 142]

Heart and hand  
– fully consecrated to God's service

##### **Maclaren on the prophetic value of the offerings**

The animal invested with this representative character is next to be slain by the offerer, not by the priest, who only performed that part of the ritual in the case of national or public sacrifices. That was distinctly a vicarious death; and, as inflicted by the hand of the person represented by the animal, he thereby acknowledged that its death was the wages of his sin, and allowed the justice of his condemnation, while he presented this innocent life – innocent because not that of a moral being – as his substitute. So far the worshipper's part goes. But now, when the act of expiation is to be symbolically represented, and, so far as outward sacrifice could, is to be accomplished, another actor appears. The priest comes forward as mediator between God and man, and applies the blood to the altar. The difference between the sprinkling of the blood, in the burnt offerings and in the other sacrifices, which had expiation for their principal object, in some of which it was smeared on the horns of the altar, and, in the most solemn of all, was carried into the holiest place, and sprinkled on the mercy-seat, suggests that the essential character of the burnt offering

was not expiatory, though expiation was the foundation on which alone the essential character could be reared. The application of the blood was the formal act by which atonement was made. The word rendered 'to make atonement' means 'to cover'; and the idea conveyed is that the blood, which is the life of the sacrifice, covers the sins of the offerer, so as to make them powerless to dam back the love or to precipitate the wrath of God.

With this act the expiatory portion of the ritual ends, and we may here pause to look back for a moment on it as a whole. We have pointed out the double bearings of the Mosaic ritual as symbolical and as typical or prophetic. In the former aspect, the

emphatic teaching of this rite is that the wages of sin is death, 'that without shedding of blood there is no remission,' that God has appointed sacrifice as the means of entering into fellowship with Him, and that substitution and vicarious penalty are facts in His government. We may like or dislike these thoughts; we may

call them gross, barbarous, immoral, and the like, but, at all events, we ought not to deny that they are ingrained in the Mosaic sacrificial system, which becomes unmeaning elaboration of empty and often repulsive ceremonies, if they are not recognised as its very centre. Of course, the meaning of the sacrifices was hidden from many a worshipper. They became opaque instead of transparent, and hid the great truth which they were meant to reveal. All forms labour under that disadvantage; but that they were significant in design, and largely so to devout hearts in effect, admits of no reasonable doubt. That which they signified was chiefly the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of innocent life, which stood in the place of the guilty. Of course, too, their benefit was symbolical, and the blood of bulls and goats could never put away sin; but, under the shelter of the outward forms, a more spiritual insight gradually grew up, such as breathes in many a psalm, and such as, we cannot doubt, filled the heart of many a worshipper, as he stood by the bleeding sacrifice on which his own hands had laid the burden that had weighed so heavy on himself. How far the prophetic aspect of the sacrifices was discerned, is a more difficult question. But this at least we know – that the highest level of evangelical prophecy, in Isaiah's wonderful fifty-third chapter, is reached from this vantage-ground. It is the flower of which these ordinances are the root. We need not enlarge upon the prophetic aspect of the sacrifice. The mere negative sinlessness of the victim points to the 'Lamb without blemish and without spot,' on whom, as Isaiah says, in language dyed through and through with sacrificial references, 'the Lord hath made to meet the iniquity of us all,' and who Himself makes 'His soul an offering for sin.' The modern tendency to bring down the sacrificial system to a late date surely sins against the sacred and all-explaining law of evolution, in the name of which it is attempted, inasmuch as it is an unheard-of thing for the earlier stages of a religion to be less clogged with ceremonial than the later. Psalmist and prophet first, and priest afterwards, is not the order of development. [Alexander Maclaren ii 238-239]

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– Alexander Maclaren