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THE REALITY OF GOD

Part Nine

By Rayola Kelley

We have been talking about the reality of God. It is vital that we possess the correct knowledge, understanding, and belief about God. If we don't possess the right God, we will miss the mark set for all mankind. That mark is not a certain theology, religion, or doctrine; rather, it is the person of Jesus Christ.



The Bible is clear that Jesus is the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form, and it is only through Jesus that we can know God in a vital relationship, approach Him in prayer, and come to Him as a child in need. It is only through Jesus that the reality of who God is and His heart towards us can be revealed to our spirits.

To ensure salvation according to theological understanding, Christians need to be able to answer some vital questions. For example, how is it that Jesus was able to bridge a gap between a Holy God and profane man? How is that man who was unable to make himself right before God in his own power, can now through Jesus have right standing in God, before Him, and with Him?

The reason that Jesus is the ladder that leads man upward towards God and the bridge that connects him to a relationship of reconciliation with God is because He is God who reflects the heart of the Father to man,

and He is also man who can stand before a holy God and intercede on man's behalf. Although Jesus' deity is the truth that many stumble over (and fall into hell on their way to secure heaven), understanding His humanity is just as important.

I think it was A.W. Tozer who stated that one of the teachings that is missing from the church is that of Jesus being man. Granted, Jesus' manhood is an accepted historical fact. The problem with historical facts is that people can operate in the arena of assumption. Granted, they assume Jesus was man, but they fail to understand the significance of His humanity. If Jesus was not human there would be one important aspect of His ministry completely missing from the equation. That aspect is what ensures the ongoing work of salvation.

There are extreme attitudes presented about Jesus' humanity. For example, people who deny Jesus' deity will never come to terms with His humanity. And, those who think of His deity without understanding the significance of His humanity will fail to understand the work He continues to do for us before the throne of God.

In order to understand the significance of Jesus' humanity, let us begin with an important event: that of Mount Sinai. It is important to understand that how God manifests Himself to man is determined by the attitude He is trying to instill into man so that he will be in the right frame to receive what God has for him. For example, God met Moses in a burning bush when he gave him his marching orders to go to Pharaoh and demand that he let God's people go. All Moses was required to do was take off his shoes for he was standing on holy ground.

Now fast forward to Mount Sinai. God was about to give Moses something of great value. What kind of attitude would the Lord instill in the people of Israel if they were going to properly receive what God was about to entrust

to Moses in the right way? In *Exodus 19:10-12*, the people of Israel are instructed to set themselves apart (sanctify) and wash their clothes and to be ready against the third day for the Lord will come down in the sight of the people upon mount Sinai, and He ends with this instruction, "*And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death.*"

What did the people see when it came to the presence of God in their midst? "*And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled*" (*Exodus 19:16*).

Exodus 19:18 tells us this all occurred because the LORD descended upon it in fire and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. What would Moses receive from God at Sinai? The holy, perfect Law of God. What was the purpose of the Law? To give a glimpse into the holiness of God by showing man that he is a transgressor against God's Law and to provide a schoolmaster that would point to the solution.

Man is declared a sinner by God's Law, condemned to die in his sins in order to pay the consequences for the debt that has been incurred by sin (*Romans 4:15; 3:23*). The wages of sin is death (separation from God) (*Romans 6:23*). It was clear that the children of Israel needed to understand the seriousness of being entrusted with the holy Law of God.

The holiness of God is once again brought out in *Exodus 33:18-20*. Moses had stood in God's presence on Mount Sinai and received the Law, but He wanted to look into the face of His glory. In verse 20, we read this,

“And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.”

God is that holy and man so unholy that God’s distinct holiness, which is a manifestation of His glory, would become a consuming fire. For man in his present state, God’s unveiled glory would become a point of great judgment that would completely purge the landscape of all that was profane and unsanctified. It is for this reason that God’s glory was hid in the darkness of Mount Sinai, and for those who did not show proper respect, their very existence was threatened. Only those who were called, prepared, and ordained could enter into the darkness of His presence and know in assurance that they would not be consumed in judgment by His glory.

There was clearly a separation between God and man. This brings us to a very important point, and that is God had to veil His glory in some way before He could interact with man. If He had not, His glory would manifest itself as a consuming fire. *Hebrews 12:26-29* reminds us of this very fact.

There was a problem, God wanted a relationship with man but man was separated from Him. God wanted to interact with man, but if the environment was not properly prepared it would end in judgment. It was obvious that man in his fallen state could not solve the problem; therefore, it became obvious that only God could solve the problem.

What would God have to do to once again reach man, close the gap, and establish man in a relationship with Him? How could God veil His glory to ensure personal interaction with man, while at the same time inviting him to touch Him and look into His very face and not die? It was also clear that somehow He had to satisfy the requirements of His own Law that required the death of an acceptable sacrifice, the shedding of blood to provide a pardon for mankind. Where would He find such a sacrifice, for the blood of animals was a temporary fix?

When the disciples were presented with the overwhelming reality of the impossibility of man being saved, it was then that Jesus reminded them that all things were possible with God. God was not broadsided by the prob-

lem plaguing man, nor was He unprepared to address it. In fact, before the foundation of the world was laid, a plan was already in place to redeem man back to Him.

It would be God who would prepare and provide a perfect sacrifice, a sacrifice that would suffice the Law, serve as a ladder that pointed man upward and become a bridge that closed the gap between God and man. God allowed man to see into His plan. It was prophesied that the solution would come by the seed of a virgin woman who was from the lineage of Judah and the royal line of David (*Genesis 3:15; 49:8-12; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7*). It was clear that this Promised One would have to be born a child, designated as a son, but this also meant that this man had to miraculously come into the midst of humanity, identified as being sent from above, but not born with the inherent condition passed down from Adam (*John 1:12-13; Romans 5:12-15*).

Once again we see a problem. God could not just create some special man outside of the human race. It was clear from prophecies that this man had to come from the human race. There was only one solution to bring the glory of God to profane, lost man, God must veil His glory in human form. There was only one means that would be sufficient to silence the Law of God, God would have to bring deity and humanity together. Deity clearly had to take on a human body to become an acceptable sacrifice, the Lamb of God (*John 1:29*). To fulfill prophecy the LORD would have to choose one from the tribe of Judah, associated with the royal lineage of David. In order to bypass man, there would have to be a miraculous conception in the womb of woman who fit the qualifications of inward purity towards God and was still physically chaste to ensure the sacrifice would be without sin, not subject to the claims of the world and left unblemished by the sinful inherent condition of Adam.

Once again we are reminded that all things are possible with God. From the beginning the mystery of this incredible union of God and man in human form was veiled in the Old Testament tabernacle. It was hidden in ordinances, sacrifices, and even the exam-

ple of the High Priest. It could be found in the manna, the budding rod of Aaron, and the rock that provided water for the children of Israel. The reality of God in human form and the work that He would do on behalf of all mankind was erected and stood in the midst for physical eyes to see, but it would take the eyes of faith to recognize that mystery.

The New Testament refers to this mystery as the mystery of godliness. We know this mystery points to the second person of the Godhead, the one who was the manifestation of deity in bodily form. Granted, *2 Thessalonians 2* speaks of a counterfeit mystery, the mystery of iniquity, an incarnation of pure evil, but the Apostle Paul clearly speaks of the mystery of godliness in *1 Timothy 3:16*. If you have not considered this mystery, I suggest you pray about it and ponder it so that your eyes of faith can be opened to the significance of it in greater ways. It will bless you and enlarge your faith and understanding towards God. Here is what Paul said about this mystery, *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believe on in the world, received up into glory.”*

Consider Paul’s first statement, *“And without controversy.”* You know what Paul was saying, the matter of Jesus being the God/Man is not a matter of controversy. It has been confessed as being so; therefore, it is not a matter of debate FOR IT IS SO. It will not be understood on the intellectual level, nor will it be substantiated on an emotional level by fanciful, unrealistic sentiment. It is a truth of God that can only be embraced by faith. After all, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (*Romans 10:17*). The Word of God plainly declares that Jesus is both God and Man. A person can deny it intellectually, reject it on an emotional level, and mock it with his or her mouth, but it still stands as being so and will either justify or condemn a person in the end.

Next we are told that *great* is this mystery that has been hidden in types, shadows, and patterns (*Hebrews 8:5*). Although hidden, it

was exceedingly loud and clear, but it required the eyes of faith to see it, ears to hear the revelation of it, and an open heart to receive it as so.

And what was this mystery? **GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.** I do not know how much clearer Paul could have been about this matter. There are those who said Jesus never admitted that He was who He was, and for this reason I guess they can ignore John's introduction in His Gospel of Jesus, and what Paul said about Him in this Scripture along with others. I do not know what Bible these people are reading, but in my Bible Jesus admitted this truth in ways that the Jews clearly understood. In fact in more than one incident they tried to stone Him because He was claiming to be equal with the Father. In other words, He was also deity and the Jews could not comprehend how the Father and Jesus could both be God since there was only one true God of Israel (*John 5:16-18; 8:54-59*). In the end, they crucified Him because He was who He said He was: God in the flesh.

Jesus not only stated who He was, but the Apostle Paul stated that it was confirmed or justified by the Spirit at the Jordan when He was baptized for the sake of righteousness, and His miraculous entrance into the world and ministry was seen by angels (*John 1:32-36*). We see that His birth was proclaimed by the angel Gabriel to Mary. Angels declared who He was to the shepherds the day He was born. They ministered to Him in the wilderness and in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Apostle Peter gives us this insight about angels in *1 Peter 1:12*, "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; **which things the angels desire to look into.**" (Emphasis added.)

We are told that the truth about Jesus being God/Man was also preached. It took the power of God to raise Him and we know according to *John 2:19-21*, Jesus had the power of deity within Him to do so. (Refer to *Romans 10:9, 10* about God raising Jesus from the dead. It lies at the

heart of the Gospel.)

The final part of *1 Timothy 3:16* is that He was raised up into glory. We serve a living Savior and Lord who was returned to His former glory as sovereign Yahweh as He requested in *John 17:5*. He ascended, and in like manner, He will also come back for His church. That is His promise and our blessed hope. What a glorious day that will be. His church will be taken back with Him, where He will rightfully be worshipped by those around His throne, honored by those who hold Him close to their hearts and have sincerely proclaimed Him with their lips.

Who do you say Jesus is? Do you know Him as God and understand Him as Man? There are many like the Jews of Jesus's time who refuse to see with the eyes of faith and believe with a child-like heart that He is **GOD IN THE FLESH.**

Next month we are going to see why it is that Jesus' position as the Man in heaven enables Him to save us to the uttermost. †

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Demonic Activity?

Q: *I read where Jesus encountered much demonic activity when He was on earth. I get the impression that in America we do not have as much demonic activity. Would you agree that we live in a more civilized time that would not prove favorable for demonic activity?*

A: I wish that was true, but it is not. The problem with what some consider being more civilized times is that regardless of whether paganism is wrapped in civilized garb or is made apparent by more decadent and demonic practices by those who are outright involved with the occult, it still remains the breeding ground for idolatry and demonic influences. Civilized paganism is more dangerous because its seduction is clever and its ways more covert.

First, let me explain what paganism is. Paganism has a couple of meanings. The first meaning of paganism points to religions that are based on fear and superstition. Those who operate in this arena are very fleshly (sensual) in their religious practices and often look to those who actually

operate in witchcraft for wisdom and guidance. The second type of paganism points to those who have little or no religion, but they delight in sensual pleasures and material goods. Sensual pleasure often produces whoremongers (spiritual fornicators) and sexual fornicators (practice any type of illicit sex). These individuals actually come into an unholy agreement with the wicked unseen world of Satan (*1 Corinthians 6:15-20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18*). And, for those who pursue material goods, they are often motivated by greed (lust, covetousness, or gluttony) which is considered idolatry (*Colossians 3:5*). Demonic influences can always be found at the core of any idolatry.

Even though demonic activity in civilized cultures is somewhat hidden, it will eventually manifest itself. As Jesus stated, you will know somebody by their fruits (*Matthew 7:16-20*). Fruits in a person's life will reveal the spirit (source) behind them (which can be the Holy Spirit, natural spirit, or the spirit of the world-Satan, refer to *1 Corinthians 2:10-14*). The fruits of Satan include extreme, obsessive, abnormal behavior. His greatest device is lies that will pervert reality. As people give way to his lies, he takes more and more territory, causing depression, inconsistent behavior, inward struggles, unrest, conflict, division, and isolation.

It is important to point out that Satan cannot take any ground (when it comes to man) until he gains access through sin and deception. There are unseen doors opened to him by such sins as pride, drugs (sorcery), and pornography, as well as unseen avenues such as claims, curses, fornication, and witchcraft in which he or his cohorts can cleverly seduce or entangle people into a false reality that will cause oppression or possession.

A Christian who is truly born again cannot be possessed (spirit, soul, & body), but he or she can find him or herself oppressed in the soul (will, mind, and emotions). This oppression will keep the believer from moving forward towards the overcoming life, usually causing personal condemnation. It is easy for people to be set free from the claims Satan may have on their lives, but they first have

to recognize the device he is using to entangle them (*2 Corinthians 2:11*). Once Satan's device is identified, a believer then must take up his or her sword (the Bible) and begin to stand against the enemy with the authority of truth (Jesus), in the power of the Spirit, and in confidence that the battle has already been won at Calvary (redemption). It is by believing that the Lord came to deliver each of us from the snares and entanglements of any unseen inroads created by past or present sins, and quickly humbling ourselves before God, truly repenting of what might be presently wrong and being completely cleansed from any past unresolved issues, and submitting to His truth, that we can be assured that the devil will have to flee (*James 4:6-10*). Once the devil has been made to vacate, then a person must fill those areas up with the things of God (*Luke 11:24-26*).

It is also important to know how to discern between the Holy Spirit, the natural spirit, and the spirit of the world. It is easy to discern if you know what you are looking for. If the natural spirit is present it will manifest itself in base ways such as through rebellious, selfish, prideful ways and demands. In rebellion the natural spirit will emotionally fluctuate, causing great frustration on the part of those who are contending with such an individual, while the spirit of the world serves as an immovable wall in front of a person, preventing him or her from hearing anything so that truth can set him or her free. When you encounter such a spirit, it sucks the life out of the environment.

The Holy Spirit will always lead you to all truths concerning Christ, the natural spirit will provide the means in which you justify the old man in all his fleshly, worldly pursuits, while the spirit of the world will always exalt the philosophies and ways of the world as a solution to the desires of the flesh, the sentiments of the soul, and the satisfaction of the spirit. The temptations of the natural spirit occur within as one toys with sins, stirring up the imagination, while the temptations of the spirit of the world come from the outside in the form of darts such as lies and perverted thoughts. You must always repent when giving way to the natural spirit, but one must refuse to accept Satan's darts as truth, take authority

over him and push him back with the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit will lead to true worship of God, while the natural spirit will encourage worship of the self-life in light of what it perceives it deserves and how it wants to feel in the end about self, and the spirit of the world causes one to actually worship the god of this world, Satan. It is important to point out the natural spirit may exalt the self-life, but its identity is tied into the world; therefore, a person is also basically bowing down to the god of this world, Satan.

Even though we would like to think that Satan does not have much power in civilized countries like America, the Bible tells us differently. It tells us that in the end days there will be seducing spirits, whether they are leading people astray in blatant error, cleverly neutralizing them in complacency and neglect towards the things of God as they succumb to a mediocre life that has no power or vision, or indoctrinating them into an insane world where there are no moral character or absolutes, it is clear that Satan is alive and well on planet earth (*2 Timothy 4:1*). In *Revelation 12:7*, we are told that in the final days, there will be a war in heaven and Satan and his hoards will be cast down to earth. We can debate as to whether it has already happened or whether it is in the future, but when we look at the world around us, everything wicked and evil seems to be escalating on a national and international level.

The problem today is that people operate in extremes when it comes to Satan. There are those who place Satan behind every problem, but on the other hand, there are those who deny he is involved with anything. My philosophy is that we must not give Satan undue credit but if he is present in a matter, we cannot afford to ignore him like Adam apparently did in the Garden when he had dominion; rather we must put on our armor and take up our weapon of truth, and stand against him in the authority of Jesus and withstand him in the power of God's Spirit. †

"Righteousness is not a convenience based on comfort—it is a choice when you don't feel like it. Character is the enduring quality of righteousness."
—Rayola Kelley

THE ESSENCE OF IDOLATRY

By A. W. Tozer

Among the sins to which the human heart is prone, hardly any other is more hateful to God than idolatry, for idolatry is at bottom a libel on His character. The idolatrous heart assumes God is other than He is—in itself a monstrous sin—and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness. Always this god will conform to the image of the one who created it and will be base or pure, cruel or kind, according to the moral state of the mind from which it emerges.

A god begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God. "Thou thoughtest," said the Lord to the wicked man in the psalm, "that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Surely this must be a serious affront to the Most High God before whom cherubim and seraphim continually do cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth."

Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It beings in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place. "When they knew God," wrote Paul, "they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

Then followed the worship of idols fashioned after the likeness of men and birds and beasts and creeping things. But this series of degrading acts began in the mind. Wrong ideas about God are only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous. The idolater simply imagines things about God and acts as if they were true. †

"Give me a hundred men who love God with all their hearts, and fear nothing but sin, and I will move the world." — John Wesley

A LIVING SACRIFICE

By Jeannette Haley

Every professing Christian has undoubtedly heard and read “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” (Romans 12:1, 2). The problem is that all too often people are left to define for themselves just what it means to be a “living sacrifice.” Although this verse specifies the need for holiness that is acceptable to God, the necessity of not being conformed to this world and the injunction to have a renewed mind, people usually have their own take on it. And, as with so many other doctrinal admonitions, after a while if we do not believe and obey by walking them out, we become so accustomed to them that they are subsequently ignored altogether.

One of the pitfalls undiscerning Christians face, especially in America (and other places as well) is the post-modern, seeker-friendly, liberal emergent movement. Churches who have subscribed to this deviant theology lean towards experience as being far more valuable than truth, and the Holy Scriptures fall into the dark vat of dissolution of “cold, hard fact” in favor of “warm, fuzzy subjectivity.” Thus, over the past few decades, the door has been thrown wide open for the father of lies to enter center stage, erect a “golden calf” of subtle idolatry (and occultism) while perverting the “biblical” world view of the unsuspecting and undiscerning multitudes of “churched” people into a tolerant, “feel good,” man-centered pseudo “Christianity.” *It’s all about little ole me, love, love, love, and my pal Jesus.* Thus, Scriptures such as Romans 12:1, 2 quoted above about presenting your body as a living sacrifice are often passed over, ignored or viewed as archaic and irrelevant to the contemporary church.

The enemy knows that all you have to do to change the intent (spirit), principle and truth of God’s Word is to water down, alter, redefine,

eliminate, over-emphasize, or manipulate isolated words, or entire portions of Scripture out of their contextual setting. What remains is a lifeless, perverted, string of words that are “up for grabs” as to their original meaning, intent, and application. Our experience through the years has also taught us that people who feed on watered down versions of God’s Word are “watered down,” shallow Christians who possess no authority or power, let alone an unbending understanding of who God is, what His Word and Christian living is about, or how to compare Scripture with Scripture, resist the devil, be overcomers, or rightly divide the Word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:13).

By contrast, the pilgrim church (early church and her “offspring” through the centuries) was a God-fearing, truth-loving, rugged triumphant Church of faith—a remnant Church of Spirit-filled believers who were soul winners, bravely standing as pillars of fiery light and salt in the face of torture and death. They were dead to the world, and the world to them. Sometimes Rayola and I stop and wonder what these selfless Christians, many of whom shed their blood for Christ, would think of the compromising, pleasure-seeking, money-loving, liberal, worldly churches of today that merely tack the name of Jesus onto their institutions, and meaningless, little man-centered social programs.

Nevertheless, God still has His people. They may be scattered among the nations like the stars are scattered throughout space, but He knows those who are His. He knows those who have not “bowed the knee to Baal,” or polluted themselves with the rise in cultural paganism, or compromised with the world, the flesh and the devil. God’s eye is upon His own who have counted the price and are paying it through daily surrender to His will. With the Apostle Paul, they declare, “*I die daily*” 1 Corinthians 15:31b. They know that it is their “reasonable service” to be a living sacrifice.

When you observe many professing Christians, however, you often wonder if they have ever read and understood Romans 12:1, 2. How many people assume that to be a living sacrifice, all they have to do is show up at church once or twice a week because that is the Christian thing to do that

makes God happy isn’t it? No, it isn’t. People go to a *meeting place* on Sunday for themselves. Nowhere in the Bible does it tell people that they have to “go to church on Sunday.” Why? Because if you are a born-again Christian you are *the Church*. You are part of the Body of Christ no matter where you are. We are so used to calling a certain building “the church” that we forget who we are. Jesus is not returning for certain select denominations, or a bunch of buildings where Christians meet, but for the redeemed who make up His Body. Jesus said, “*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” Matthew 18:19.

Some Christians credit themselves with being a living sacrifice because they pay “tithes.” Before they pat themselves on the back, however, the truth is that the tithe is strictly an Old Testament practice in accordance with the Levitical Law given to Moses. It was directed to Israel, not Gentile nations, nor to the New Testament Church. Ever since the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. there has been no Levitical priesthood to tithe (the fruit of the land) to. Quoted fact: “Jews do not tithe today. They are all well aware that only Levites have the right to receive tithes from the people. There is no temple in operation, furthermore, no Levites or priests to serve. If they were to tithe today, Jews would consider it a sin against God, because the tithe belonged to the Levitical priesthood. To pay a biblical tithe at this time, without Levites and priests in their regular ordained offices and doing service in the temple, would be a “sin” both to the giver and the receiver. As one rabbi stated, ‘If we are to obey the law, we cannot pay tithes unless we pay it to the ones ordained by God to accept that tithe. Neither Christ nor any of the apostles were Levites so they were all disqualified from receiving any part of the biblical tithe.’”

“The synagogues of today receive financial funding with which to operate their religious organizations through the adoption of the ‘patron system’ by its members. Families buy seats in the synagogue for various prices each year. To get a better seat, they often pay more money.” - *From*

Before jump up and down shouting “Goodie, goodie gumdrops,” you need to remember that everything a believer owns, including his or herself, belongs to God, and should be offered back to God as the Holy Spirit directs. The heart of God is giving. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” John 3:16. (Emphasis added.) Nothing in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth can out give God. If you are indeed a living sacrifice, then you will be faithful in giving and in practical service to God. Go ahead and give ten percent if that is what you believe God is requiring of you, but never call it a “tithe” in the Levitical sense of the word. We who are born again (whether Jews or Gentiles) make up the Body of Christ. None of us are Jews living in the days before Christ where the Levitical Law commanded tithing of firstfruits to the Levites. “The **first tithe** (Hebrew ma’aser rishon (ראשון) זומעשר a positive commandment in the Torah requiring the giving of one tenth of agricultural produce, after the giving of the standard terumah, to the Kohen (Jewish priest) (or Levite). This giving is required to be free of both monetary and servicial compensation.

“Historically, during the First Temple period, the first tithe was given to the Levite. Approximately at the beginning of the Second Temple construction, Ezra and his Beth din implemented its giving to the kohanim” (direct descendants of Aaron.)” - *Wikipedia*

Today we are living under a New Covenant with God through the blood of Jesus Christ. “*What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s*” 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. Did you get that? Both our body and our spirit belong to God. Concerning sacrificial giving, one of the strongest examples of sacrificial giving is found in *Mark 12:41-44*, “And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and

many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”

If we take a closer look at this story, we see that we can gain a great deal of insight into being a living sacrifice. What this poor widow gave was greater in the eyes of God than the sum total of all that the wealthy donated because it signified her heart of love for God to the exclusion of all else (the First Commandment), including her own well-being. What she did was not just her “reasonable service” but, because it went far beyond what she could afford, it became a true sacrifice. She also knew that God loved the poor, the widows, and the fatherless, and being a poor widow herself, she could relate to the struggles that others suffered. Secondly, her act demonstrated great faith. Jesus always took note of those with great faith. “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*” Hebrews 11:6. This woman trusted God with her life, knowing that He would somehow provide for her and meet her needs.

If we meditate for a moment on her example we begin to understand that to truly be a living sacrifice a person must love God more than self, possess unfeigned love for others, have genuine faith, and be genuinely humble. This also reveals how sinister and subtle idolatry can be in our hearts. Any hesitation on the part of a Christian to offer his or her body as a living sacrifice should cause one to ask— why? This is where idolatry comes in, for if God is indeed first in a person’s life—loved with all the heart, soul, mind and strength—why the hesitation to surrender everything to Him and become a living sacrifice? Who is loved the most, God or self? The idol of self must be brought down if God is to have His rightful place in our lives as King of kings, and Lord of lords. With some Christians this can be dramatic and happens instantly, (as with the

Apostle Paul) while with others it is a process that takes place through various trials and tribulations (such as the Apostle Peter and John Mark.)

Next on the list is love for others. How willing are we to sacrifice for the well-being of others in practical service? Doing right by others, taking care of widows, orphans, and strangers, going the “extra mile,” returning good for evil, obeying Jesus’ commandments and so forth is our “reasonable service.” In other words, there are no “Brownie points” handed out as none of these things are a sacrifice. It only becomes a sacrifice when we give out of our personal need, and pour out above and beyond what we can afford to give whether financially, physically, or personally for different reasons.

King David understood sacrifice that is acceptable to God. When the king offered to buy Araunah the Jebusite’s threshing floor upon which to build an altar unto the LORD so that a plague would be stayed from the people, and Araunah offered it to David free, David said, “*I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing*” 2 Samuel 24:24. The lesson is if we offer up to God that which costs us nothing, God does not consider it to be a sacrifice and neither should we. A study of the required sacrifices in the Books of the Law (first five books of the Bible) clearly reveals that every offering and sacrifice that God required had to be the very best.

Concerning the idolatry of self, fear is a big factor in a person who balks at surrendering everything to Jesus. Fear can be an idol itself when it comes between a person and God causing the person to bow down and give way to it. We all battle with fear at one time or another. Many years ago during one of my own struggles with fear the Lord spoke to me and said, “Fear is worship.” Those three words stunned me until He began to show me that Satan was behind the fear, and if I gave into it, it would be a form of worship to the devil instead of the Lord. This brings us back to love. “*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love*” 1 John 4:18. We

have this promise in *2 Timothy 1:7*, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

Obviously, if the poor widow who gave her mites joyfully (I believe she was joyful or it would not have been acceptable to God) gave all her living, it meant that she had overcome any fear that she may have had with both love and faith. "*Hebrews 10:38* says this about faith, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." With many people, the problem is they do draw back from God out of fear because they do not trust Him, and they do not trust Him because they do not know Him. Thus, their unbelief condenses into the belief that the only person they can trust is themselves. This is a subtle form of idolatry, and places dependency upon the god of self. A. W. Tozer gives us this invaluable insight: "Idolatry is the supreme sin and unbelief is the child of idolatry. Both are libels on the character of the Most High and the Most Holy. He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, wrote the apostle John. A God who lies is a God without character, and where there is no character there can be no confidence. This is the moral logic of unbelief. The unbeliever refuses to trust God because his conception of God is base and ignoble. That he does not burn incense to a graven image does not make him less an idolater, unless we want to make a distinction and say that the idolater worships his false god while the unbeliever refuses to do even that. The joyous message of Christianity is that there is a way back from this place of unbelief and alienation. He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. The gospel message declares that the wronged God took the wrong upon Himself in order that the one who committed the wrong might be saved. Repentance is among other things a sincere apology to God for distrusting Him so long, and faith is throwing oneself upon Christ in complete confidence. Thus by faith reconciliation is achieved between God and man." If you want to know God, ask Him to reveal Himself to you, draw near to Him in prayer, and seek to

know Him through His Word.

Another beautiful example of going beyond "reasonable service" to offer a sacrifice to the Lord can be found in *Matthew 26:6-13*. Verse 2 says, "There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat." Unlike the poor widow, this woman was a woman of means; however, her costly sacrifice that she poured out on the Lord would have been used for her own burial. She knew that Jesus was the Son of God and oh-so-worthy of the very best. She anointed Him with this precious ointment for His burial, exhibiting great love and faith, and in spite of the protests of Judas Iscariot and the men surrounding Jesus He received her sacrificial offering, and commended her for it. (Take note that after this act of extreme devotion and worship on the part of Mary, and Jesus' rebuke to His disciples, Judas Iscariot went out in anger and betrayed the Lord—see also *Mark 14; John 12*.)

This brings us to the big stumbling block of pride. When pride defiantly declares, "I want to be the one who calls the shots in my own life" it points not only to rebellion, but also to the fear of absolute surrender to God. Such love for the god of self trumps love for the Lord God. After all, no man "can serve two masters." A person is either going to serve self, sin, and Satan, or Jesus Christ. Pride is deceptive, and while we can usually detect it in others, it is almost impossible to see in ourselves. Thank God for the Holy Spirit who is faithful to reveal just how deep and insidious pride is if we ask Him to show us. The problem is those who maintain the right to keep their pride intact are often unpredictable and treacherous. Take note that the pride of such people can manifest itself outwardly in a religious cloak of self-righteousness, such as the Pharisees whom Jesus continually rebuked for their hypocrisy. Whether a person's pride is conceit, selfishness, arrogance or pride, in whom a person thinks he or she is, it will always be resisted by both God and others.

We can learn much in Jesus' parable as recorded in *Luke 18:10-14*, "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and

prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Which do you suppose would choose to obey Paul's strong mandate to be a living sacrifice?

Being outwardly self-righteous, and religious does not make a man (or woman) a living sacrifice and right with God. A person must first consecrate him or herself. That is, set him or herself apart for God. Consecration involves the whole person—body, soul and spirit. The Apostle Paul declared, "*I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*" *Galatians 2:20*. Concerning offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, Rayola said, "Righteousness is not a convenience based on comfort. It is a choice when you don't feel like it. Character is the enduring quality of righteousness."

Is it easy to be a living sacrifice? Not hardly! Where in the Bible does it say that believers are going to be delivered out of every conflict and tribulation? We are not here to float through life on a bed of ease, with no hardships, problems, or suffering. Who has not wanted to "crawl off the altar" from time to time surrender to God as a living sacrifice? This is what King David meant when he prayed, "*Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar*" *Psalms 118:27*.

Perhaps you have presented your body as a living sacrifice to God, knowing it is your reasonable service, but somewhere along the line you "crawled off the altar." Now is the time to rededicate your life to God as a living sacrifice. Won't you reach out now and take Jesus' hand, praying as He prayed, "*Not my will, but Thine be done*"? †

MEAT FOR MEDITATION

By Oswald Chambers

"And Abraham rose up early in the morning and went unto the place of which God had told him" (v. 3). The wonderful simplicity of Abraham! When God spoke, he did not confer with flesh and blood. Beware when you want to confer with flesh and blood, i.e., your own sympathies, your own insight, anything that is not based on your personal relationship to God. These are the things that compete with and hinder obedience to God.

"Abraham did not choose the sacrifice. Always guard against self-chosen service for God; self-sacrifice may be a disease. If God has made your cup sweet, drink it with grace; if He has made it bitter, drink it in communion with Him. If the providential order of God for you is a hard time of difficulty, go through with it, but never choose the scene of your martyrdom. God chose the crucible for Abraham, and Abraham made no demur; he went steadily through. If you are not living in touch with Him, it is easy to pass a crude verdict on God. You must go through the crucible before you have any right to pronounce a verdict, because in the crucible you learn to know God better. God is working for His highest ends until His purpose and man's purpose become one."

"False teachers of religion are deceiving thousands of people by bending the gospel to suit their own purposes. And in this regard, the human mind is ready to be deceived. If you can teach someone how to ignore sin, he will listen to you. If you can tell him how to ignore the possibility of judgment for his wrongdoing, he will listen to you. This is why the cults of deception are so popular—not because they are true, but because they alter the truth to suit the carnal desires of mankind."

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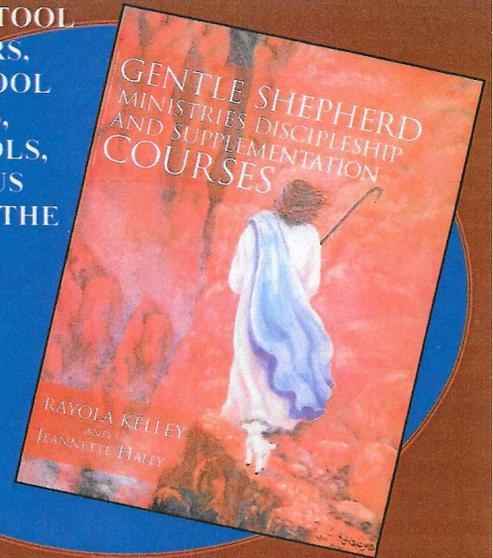
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