



"Heaven created us to love, not to contend with one another."
—Alexandre Dumas

22-Apr-11

An Acceptable Gift

Through His sinless life and vicarious death, [Jesus Christ](#) perfectly fulfilled all of the instructions in the Old Covenant regarding sacrifices and offerings. These God-given rituals served a crucial purpose in teaching Israel about access to [God](#), worship of God, devotion, and [holiness](#). The sacrifices and associated ceremonies, though now infinitely overshadowed by Christ's redemptive work, instruct Christians in these same timeless principles. Even though animal sacrifices are no longer required, we still express our worship in such things as holy day offerings, freewill offerings, and even the gifts of praise and thanksgiving in [prayer](#). Thus, the instructions still have crucial application for those who have a relationship with God.

Though making a sacrifice or freewill offering always involves a cost, its physical value is only a token to represent that a price is being paid. While an offering must cost the offerer something in order to be accepted, God is not truly interested in its monetary value. He also gives strict requirements regarding the unblemished quality of the gift or sacrifice ([Leviticus 22:19](#); [Deuteronomy 15:21](#); [17:1](#); [Malachi 1:8](#), 14), as well as its source ([Deuteronomy 23:18](#)). A man could make an offering surpassing Solomon's in scope—22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep ([I Kings 8:62-64](#))—but if God's other requirements were not satisfied, it would signify nothing more than useless rivers of blood. The Bible shows that sacrifices and offerings miss the point entirely when not accompanied by [faithfulness](#) and obedience:

- Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in *obeying the voice of the LORD*? Behold, *to obey is better than sacrifice*, and *to heed* than the fat of rams. ([I Samuel 15:22](#); emphasis ours throughout)

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- To do *righteousness and justice* is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice. ([Proverbs 21:3](#))
- The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with wicked intent! ([Proverbs 21:27](#))

In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Jesus expounds on the letter of His law and shows the spiritual intent, giving specific instructions to ensure that any gifts we bring to Him are acceptable:

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ([Matthew 5:23-24](#))

If we know that a brother has a grievance or charge against us—right or wrong, valid or not—we are responsible to take the first step toward reconciliation. This requires courage, as it means being vulnerable, and a willingness to lay ourselves open to criticism. It requires seeking first to understand our brother's perspective and carefully weighing the matter. It requires being prepared to be shown our failings and to accept responsibility for them. Even though reconciliation is not always immediately possible, our willingness to humble ourselves and make the effort is worth far more to God than any monetary token of devotion. Reconciliation cannot be forced, but when the timing and circumstances are right, He will give peace.

These verses take on additional weight when seen in the larger context. [Matthew 5:23](#) begins with the word "therefore," meaning that it is directly tied to what is written before it:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment." But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Raca!" shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, "You fool!" shall be in danger of hell fire. ([Matthew 5:21-22](#))

Jesus teaches that murder is a matter of the heart, even if it does not break out in destruction of physical life. Unrighteous anger puts us in danger of the judgment. Regarding a brother with contempt—as being an empty, worthless fellow with shallow

brains ("Raca") —islikewise a transgression of the spirit of the law. The word translated "fool" does not refer to one simply devoid of [wisdom](#), but rather to a rebel against God—anapostate from all good! To condemn someone in such a way is to murder him in our hearts, putting us in danger of the [Lake of Fire](#) ([Matthew 7:2](#); [Galatians 5:21](#); [Revelation 21:8](#)).

If we know that someone is angry with us, it can be quite difficult not to respond in kind and begin finding reasons to be angry with him. Reconciling helps us to guard our hearts against the spirit of murder. The instruction to reconcile with a brother before making an offering is actually a means of safeguarding the sixth commandment.

This has another aspect: Reconciling also helps *our brother* not break the [sixth commandment](#)! Whether he actually transgresses in the letter or the spirit is ultimately up to him, but it is an act of love—ofsacrifice—to do what we can to keep him from stumbling on our account. Sure, we could brush off anger toward us as "his problem"—and in the end it is—but if we can reconcile, we may play a part in stopping a "murder" in its genesis. It is a way of truly being our "brother's keeper": by sacrificing our [pride](#) and self-image for the sake of [peace](#) toward us in his heart.

Human nature being what it is, the question sometimes arises as to who one's "brother" is, similar to the lawyer asking, "Who is my neighbor?" in order to justify himself ([Luke 10:25-37](#)). While the scope of one's brethren is much smaller than the scope of one's neighbors, Jesus defines our spiritual brethren fairly broadly: "For *whoever does the will of My Father* in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" ([Matthew 12:50](#)). Thus, if the overall trajectory of a man's life is that of "do[ing] the will of [the] Father"—albeit imperfectly, as every brother will—we are on dangerous ground if we arbitrarily judge him as not being a brother, especially if we do it to avoid having to humble ourselves. Writing someone off may enable us to stay comfortable, but such a hasty judgment carries an outstanding risk.

Christ instructs us to attempt reconciliation before making an offering because our part of reconciliation requires taking on the same attitude and intent toward our *brother* that God requires of us when making an offering to *Him*. Notice the attributes that God values:

- For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are *a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart*—these, O God, You will not despise. ([Psalm 51:16-17](#))
- With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my

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transgression, the fruit of my body for the [sin](#) of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to *do justly*, to [love](#) mercy, and to *walk humbly with your God*? ([Micah 6:6-8](#))

What God is most interested in is the heart behind the offering or gift, and what is in the heart will be seen in what we are willing to do for the sake of a brother.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Reconciliation and Unity](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh stresses that unless the splinters of the greater church of God repair their mangled relationships with the Almighty, recoupling will be impossible. A major contributory factor in the scattering is the deceitful heart of man (Jeremiah 17:9) and carnal nature (Romans 8:7) which attempts to substitute charm and social skills (passing it off as conversion) for sincerity and a contrite heart (Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 66:3). Because God's scrutiny penetrates right through to the inner heart (I Samuel 16:7), it is foolish and pointless to use the same duplicity toward Him as we use to deceive others and sadly, even ourselves.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Judging Our Brothers](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The subject of judging is a sensitive one in this age. Is it proper for Christians to judge matters? What does the Bible say on the matter?

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