



"They never fail who die in a great cause."
—George Gordon, Lord Byron

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This Life of Sacrifice

We live in a self-indulgent age. Advertisers tell us to pamper ourselves and get all that we can as soon as we can. Politicians promise high-cost "freebies" that only a few years ago required years of hard work and sacrifice to procure. Many people think nothing of going thousands of dollars in debt to get that certain car or house or vacation or ticket to the big game. If we want it, we will find a way to get it for ourselves.

Christians cannot be self-indulgent. Getting for ourselves is inimical to the way of [God](#). As Herbert Armstrong often said, God's way is the way of love, of give, of outgoing concern. Selfishness in any form turns Christianity on its head, making a mockery of the many sacrifices that form its foundation and the freely given grace of God that makes it possible.

It begins with God the Father. Perhaps the best-known verse in Scripture—posted in view of the cameras at televised sporting events—declares His sacrifice in initiating His plan of redemption: "For God so loved [the world](#) that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" ([John 3:16](#)). As the great and almighty Sovereign of the universe, the Father was positioned to dictate how He would work out the purpose He envisioned, bringing many sons and daughters into His Family. In His love for us, He chose to set the supreme example by sacrificing what He loved most "that the world through Him might be saved" (verse 17).

And His Son did the same. [Philippians 2:5-7](#) informs us that the One who became [Jesus](#)

[Christ](#) did not cling possessively to His power, glory, and equality with God, but readily consented to humble Himself to be incarnated as a lowly servant, a human being. Beyond that, "being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself [again] and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" ([Philippians 2:8](#)). As He told the Jews in Capernaum, He would sacrifice His flesh, His precious life, "for the life of the world" ([John 6:51](#)). To cover the sins of those who would believe in Him and provide access to the Father—and thus a relationship with Him—Christ, in [faith](#), was willing to give up everything.

The Father and the Son have not been the only ones to sacrifice. In the long history of God's people, sacrifice has been a constant. Abel and Enoch both gave their lives for God's way and truth. Noah sacrificed many years and his reputation to build the ark, not to mention all of his relationships with relatives and friends lost under the waters of the Flood. Abraham sacrificed his home in Ur to live in tents, and then God required him to slay his heir, [Isaac](#), the son of promise. In Abraham, we not only have a type of God the Father's own sacrifice, but we also have the supreme example of sacrifice among God's people. He is "the father of all those who believe" ([Romans 4:11](#)), whose faith we follow.

Consider what [Moses](#) sacrificed to obey God. In his speech to the Sanhedrin, Stephen recounts that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" ([Acts 7:22](#)). He had education, experience, position, wealth, and all the advantages of life in Pharaoh's court. [Hebrews 11:24](#) suggests that, more than these other things, he was in line to become the next King of Egypt, as the title "son of Pharaoh's daughter" indicates. But the verse asserts that he refused the title, "choosing rather to suffer [affliction](#) with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of [sin](#), esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward" ([Hebrews 11:25-26](#)).

The Bible is full of similar examples of men and women of God who were called on to sacrifice their ways of life and their desires to follow God. Judges, kings, prophets, apostles, and lay-members alike had to give up their carnal plans and aspirations in this world to walk a different path, one of the Spirit, following a purpose that others could not see. This life of sacrifice remains as the general course of Christian living.

As Paul teaches in [Romans 12:1](#), we have been asked to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Usually, we are not required to die as martyrs, as many who practiced this way in former times were. That time will come again, but it is not yet. Most of us now are required, rearranging Paul's words, to sacrifice ourselves while living. We do this by being holy and acceptable to God. In other words, our daily life as members of the Family of God will

involve intensive sacrifice to maintain [holiness](#) and acceptability before Him. To be even more plain, the Christian life is hard!

The apostle's next verse tells us where the struggle will lie: "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 12:2](#)). Our frequent, even constant, sacrifices will pivot around the clash-point between the way of this world and the way of God. Sometimes we will have to give up something we desire in the world because it aims to draw us back into its clutches, and at other times, we will be required to sacrifice something in ourselves to meet the high standards that God has set for His people.

Paul illustrates this struggle in several different ways throughout his epistles. Sometimes he writes of putting off the old man and putting on the new ([Ephesians 4:22-24](#)). In other places, we are to quit walking in the flesh and start walking in the Spirit ([Galatians 5:16-26](#)). In Colossians 3, he urges us to "put to death" our earthly ways (verse 5) and "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God" (verse 1). However it is described, he speaks of the same tension between sin and righteousness that exists in every Christian's life, and which intensifies rather than diminishes as a Christian grows in grace and knowledge.

Yet, it is sacrifice that is the key to overcoming sin and making progress toward the [Kingdom of God](#). The internal resistance we feel to giving up what we have come to claim as ours is proof of this. This resistance is our carnality demanding satisfaction—self-indulgence—by refusing to let go of even harmful things like anger, [offense](#), [gossip](#), lies, hatred, pride, greed, and other sins. "They are ours," our human natures say. "They are what make us what we are. We refuse to get rid of them!" And too often, instead of giving them up, we give in to them, and the sins remain.

As Passover approaches, and we perhaps are struggling with a particular sin, it may be helpful to consider what we are refusing to sacrifice. By doing so, we might discover a path that will finally enable us to put that sin behind us.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Narrow Is the Way](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh teaches that biblical liberty consists of choosing to whom we will submit and by whom we will be constrained. Making wrong choices, largely in ignorance, has placed us in bondage to sin and destruction. God's truth indeed limits our choices'largely in matters of right and wrong. A mind focused on too many choices becomes confused, so when God gives us liberty, He for our good takes away most of the choices we would have if we continued in our carnal pursuits. Paradoxically, then, becoming a slave of righteousness'maintaining the narrow way'actually leads to freedom, peace of mind, and ultimately, God's Kingdom.

From the Archives: Featured Article

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by Ronny H. Graham

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