

## The One Thing

**The Greatest Investment is Sacrifice**

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The one thing. The one thing. I am speaking about the one thing that God wants from us more than anything. Now, if you had to pick the one thing God wants more than anything else, what would you choose? Faith? Hope? Love? Obedience?

Turn with me to I Peter 1. I believe the one thing God wants more than anything from us is that which He first gave to us. We are picking up a scripture about God's planning and His earliest recorded decision regarding this one thing. Now, this plan was made before the Creation account in Genesis 1 and 2. So just think about that. Way before the Creation account of Genesis 1 or 2, this plan was made.

**I Peter 1:18-20** Knowing that you are not redeemed with corruptible things. . . [skipping to verse 19] but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot. [Verse 20, our cornerstone scripture] He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in these last times for you.

So before the world was created, God the Father and Jesus Christ made the plan of sacrifice. In Their infinite wisdom, They knew it was only a matter of time before human nature would sin, especially with Satan on the scene. And so one of Them, They concluded, would have to sacrifice and risk everything, risk eternal life together forever. That is what was at stake here when They were building this plan. Jesus would be born human. He would have to live a sinless life, and then He would have to sacrifice His life and pay the death penalty for mankind's sin.

Sacrifice is indeed the foundation for mankind's salvation. It is sacrifice that underpins faith, hope, love, obedience. I mean, think about it; none of these are even possible without God's sacrifice that had to come first. And likewise, none of these are possible without our daily sacrifice.

Now in both physical and spiritual life, nothing of value is obtained without sacrifice—no sports championship, no success of any kind, no good deed, no heroic act. None of these are possible without sacrifice. No deep and lasting relationship is possible without sacrifice. Now we have a newlywed couple here in amongst us, and I gotta tell you it was great to see their level of devotion as they completed their vows to sacrifice to each other until death do them part.

Many declare love as an enabler of successful marriage. But the reality is, successful marriage requires sacrifice, just talk to my wife. Godly love is not mere emotion, brethren. It takes sacrificial work. It takes the sacrifice of the self-will to put the other first.

Sacrifice is, I contend, the *one thing*. In fact, this entire Book, we could say, could be summarized as God's plan to expand the God Family through sacrifice. Right after sin occurred in Genesis 3:15, what do we find? It is a prophecy outlining God's planned sacrifice to defeat sin and Satan. One chapter over (Richard was here on opening day) in Genesis 4, Abel, in faith, offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.

Now when we go back, we add in Hebrews 11:4, we know it is clear. Right from the very beginning, God had instructed mankind on how to make a proper sacrifice. It is the only way Abel could have made a better sacrifice. He had to know what a sacrifice is, what it requires. Throughout Genesis, how many times do we see the sacrifices of Noah, Abraham, Jacob?

And then we have the books of Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, where God outlines the sacrificial requirements for the priesthood. (We can tie into Craig's message here a bit.) They foreshadow what was to come. Now, Richard touched on the significance of the sacrificial offerings whereby we learn about the character, the mind, the attitude of Jesus Christ.

Please turn with me to Numbers 29. Now I am going to spend just a minute here summarizing the offerings detailed in Leviticus, but I am going to point you to a Bible series that was way before I came into the church and many *Forerunner* articles by John Ritenbaugh that are available on the CGG website. They have much more detail on the richness here of these offerings and what they represent.

First, we have three offerings in Leviticus that are in devotion to God. These are called the sweet-smelling savor offerings: the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the peace offering. We find these respectively in Leviticus 1, 2, and 3. They were burned on the altar just outside the Tabernacle entrance.

The burnt offering always came first. This is where we had the complete life and blood of an animal that was consumed by fire on the altar, representing complete, whole devotion to God—right on top. After the burnt offering, we had the grain offering which came next. It required the fruit of the land: flour, oil, and frankincense, and it represented sacrifice and service to fellow man.

Now we know Jesus personified the intent of these sacrifices as He lived each day as a living sacrifice in total devotion to God. He was the perfect burnt, grain, and peace offering, which are a sweet-smelling savor to God. Now that is the first group.

The second group of offerings were the sin and trespass offerings. These are found in Leviticus 4 and 5, respectively. They were burned outside the camp, representing that sin separates us from God, and we will see that here in a minute. So you are in Numbers 29. I hope by now I gave you plenty of time to get there.

**Numbers 29:12-16** On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work, and you shall keep a feast to the Lord seven days. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to the Lord: thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs in their first year. They shall be without blemish. Their grain offering shall be fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, and one-

tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.

We are stopping there, but this is just the offerings for the first day, right? You could read on and read all the way through day eight here. The required burnt offerings for the Feast of Tabernacles were more than double any other time of year. God is trying to get us focused, brethren, on the one thing. That is why we are here.

We are here to learn how to sacrifice.

Now, the burnt offering of a life always came first. Jesus Christ was completely devoted in service to God, and likewise, we must sacrifice our complete life in service and devotion to God. This always has to come first. But right after that burnt offering, we see the instruction on the corresponding grain offering.

And if you notice the verbiage there in Numbers 29, it says with each burnt offering, *their* grain offering or *its* grain offering. It is saying the two had to be together to be complete. You could not just have the burnt offering, you had to have the burnt offering with its grain offering. The meal for God is what this represents, the meal for God was not complete with just meat. He was not on the Atkins Diet. God's sacrificial meal required meat, grain, and drink.

Immediately following the burnt offering was the grain offering, which demonstrated the two cannot be separated. They had to go hand-in-hand.

Over to Ephesians 5 now. Service and devotion to God always comes first. But we cannot separate it, right? We cannot separate our worship and devotion to God from our required service to man. Service to God, service to man, go hand in hand.

Let us see Paul tie this together for us.

**Ephesians 5:1-2** Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.  
And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

So we are called here to follow, to imitate, Paul says, Christ's example of daily sacrifice and service and devotion to God and devotion to man. These are the sweet-smelling aroma offerings to God.

Over to Hebrews 13 now. As you turn, I will note Paul adds in Romans 12, which is an entire chapter, by the way, on our required sacrifice. So jot that down in your notes. But he says, "I beseech you," I beg you, he is saying, "to present your bodies a living sacrifice, . . . acceptable to God." Become transformed by the renewing of your mind through your service of sacrifice is what he is telling us there.

Here in Hebrews 13, we are reminded of this covenant of sacrifice that we are in.

**Hebrews 13:12** Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

**Hebrews 13:15** Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

So we are to offer the sacrifice of praise continually to God. This is the burnt offering here that Paul is referring to. We offer praise continually for that unmerited sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who suffered outside the gate so that He could open the door to our relationship with God. We respond to God's sacrifice with our sacrifice of humble repentance. We acknowledge our sins, we ask for forgiveness, and we join a covenant of sacrifice with God as we obey His law, and we work to overcome that carnal human nature.

Our sacrifices and service to God, just like the burnt offering, must always come first, brethren. They represent the first great commandment to love

God with all our heart. Might I add, that is, to sacrifice to God with all our heart. That is really what that means when we boil it down.

Now these sacrifices and service to God include obedience to His law, right? That is the first response He is looking for from us. Obedience to His law, thankful praise, controlling our mind to remain focused on His will and not ours. Those are the key sacrifices that we make to God each day.

Have we ever wondered why God commands us to focus all our energy on Him? To pray and praise His name continually? Do we think it is because God has some sort of ego and needs to hear His name? No, brethren, all the sacrifices God commands, *all* His commandments are for our benefit. They are for our own good. These daily acts of sacrifice are how we overcome, how we transform this carnal mind to become more God-like.

When we sing praises to His name, when we get on our knees with earnest prayer, we are sacrificing our self-concern and replacing it with God concern, and little by little, with each and every sacrifice that we make, we are gradually putting to death our carnal nature. Sacrifice is how God creates us into His holy image.

**Hebrews 13:16** But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Now here we see our required sacrifices in service to man, just like the grain offering, which represent the second great commandment to love, that is, sacrifice for our neighbor. Now it took a lot of effort to harvest that wheat and grind it into a fine talcum powder-like substance. Likewise, it took a lot of effort to harvest the olives and to press them to create the pure oil. And this represents that our sacrifices and service to man will take a lot of time, energy, hard work. They are going to be tiring. It is not going to be easy.

What are our sacrifices of doing good for each other? What are they? First, I would say is, again, controlling our mind to not think badly about anyone. We heard about this earlier in Clyde's message.

Next, right with it, would be bridling our tongue to never speak badly about anyone. That is a sacrifice to our brethren. Service and the giving of our time

and resources. That is one that probably easily comes to mind. Readily forgiving and forgetting any wrongdoing. That is a sacrifice. Forbearance and sacrificing our ego, not complaining when something does not go as well as we would like.

And most importantly, and I say most importantly because I think this is the one that we all struggle with the most, accepting loss of self-esteem to always keep the peace.

Why is the sacrifice of doing good for others so important to God? Well, unmerited sacrifice is what God beings do by Their very nature, brethren. It is how we are being transformed into His holy image.

Everything starts and ends with sacrifice when we think about it. Sacrifice is not really just the one thing, it is *everything* in our transformation process. So what is holding us back? Seems pretty straightforward, right? What is holding us back? Turn to Psalm 50.

What is holding us back is sacrifice, by definition, requires cost, the giving up of something that is valuable to us for the benefit of someone else. Sacrifice requires a denial of something we want, a loss of something we value, and or a suffering we would rather avoid. Our carnal nature absolutely hates sacrifice. Our heart is evil. It will make us think that we like sacrifice, but we absolutely hate sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of our self-esteem.

We have the best of intentions. So why do we fail to take action? Well, the cost seems too high and the return too distant, too low. That is why we fail to sacrifice. We do not have the proper perspective and we have to overcome this fear of loss, and we have got to reframe sacrifice as the investment it is and focus on the spiritual outcome of sacrifice that produces lasting spiritual dividends of eternal life.

Over to Psalm 50. Hopefully you are there.

**Psalm 50:4-9** He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people: "Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge.

Selah. "Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I am God, your God! I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are continually before Me. I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds."

Now we see here the people were keeping the letter of the law in the burnt offerings. The charge, the reproof from God is they did not offer these sacrifices with the right proper humble thanks and proper humble hearts. We could tie in Isaiah 1:11, "I have had enough of your burnt offerings." God says, "I do not delight in the blood of bulls."

Here in Psalm 50, verses 10 to 13, God explains He does not really need our offerings. Everything already belongs to Him. All of our sacrifices and offerings are for our benefit, but we only get the benefit if we have the right attitude. Picking up verse 14.

**Psalm 50:14-17** Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you?"

**Psalm 50:19-21** "You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes."

God is saying here to these people—us—your sacrifice and worship are really worthless because you are acting like a hypocrite. Their lack of humility resulted in verses 19 and 20, the sin of speaking evil about other brethren, and still to this day, this is one of the most prevalent sins that we have in the greater church of God. When we open our mouth and we say anything negative about a brother or sister in God's church, we are a hypocrite. Our sacrifices are blemished. God does not want them.



The burnt offering is nothing to God without the right underlying attitude, and that right underlying attitude always drives the corresponding grain offering in service and sacrifice to fellow man. What sacrifice is there when someone speaks about a brother or sister's mistake or sin? Think about it. We are not sacrificing our pride. We are actually feeding it.

It is what Satan wants. We are saying, "Look at their sins, look at their mistakes! I'm pretty good. I'm righteous. I'm not like them." What we sacrifice when we speak anything bad about our brothers and sisters is actually that other person, we are killing them with our words and defiling anyone who will listen to it. Reading on in verses 22 and 23:

**Psalm 50:22-23** "Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God."

So Psalm 50 is a psalm of judgment to God's people under His covenant of sacrifice. The psalmist is connecting the burnt offering with the grain offering, which have to go together. They cannot be separated. They were outwardly praising God and with the same tongue, they were putting others down. We can tie into Clyde's message again.

In James 3, "Out of the same mouth proceed blessings and cursings. It ought not be so," he says. God says, consider this deeply. You who forget how sinful you are, lest I tear you in pieces. Wow, tear you in pieces.

Over to Ecclesiastes 7 now. There is an interesting scripture here that I want to tie into.

**Ecclesiastes 7:20-22** For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.

Solomon is telling us, a wise man remembers we are all sinners. They remember just how sinful they are. They do not let what others say really

bother them because they know deep down, yeah, they probably made the same mistake too.

Now we are going to tie Psalm 50 to another chapter of judgment, and I find this really interesting. This chapter of judgment is directed to the end time church as well. So please turn with me to Matthew 25. In Matthew 25, Jesus speaks through three parables that are all tied together with the end time judgment.

**Matthew 25:1** "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

The very definition of spiritual virgins here confirms these are called Christians in God's church, keeping at least the letter of the law. They are not spiritual virgins if they are not doing that. So this is written to us. This is written to the end time churches. All ten had oil in their lamp producing light. But five were wise with extra oil, five foolish, unprepared as the oil ran out.

Now, what could this oil represent? We have talked about this before, but as we reflected on the offerings in Leviticus, I find it pretty interesting.

So the burnt offering always came first, with the complete giving of a life. Our sacrifices and service to God always have to come first, but the instructions on the burnt offerings of Leviticus 1 do not use any oil. I thought that is pretty interesting. Whereas, if we read through Leviticus 2 and the requirements for the grain offering, we would see the requirement for oil within the grain offering is repeated at least nine times. We cannot separate our worship and devotion to God from our required service to man.

We are called to sacrifice ourselves in service to man as Jesus Christ did. Bruised, battered, finely ground up, if you will, into a powder mixed with pure oil, His Holy Spirit, that fuels our sacrificial good works to our fellow man. I believe the foundational criteria for the final judgment is God's foundational act of sacrifice foreordained before the foundation of the world.

These wise virgins have an abundance of oil through years of sacrificial good works that have built up strong relationships, first and foremost with

God the Father, but right there with it, with the Body of Christ. The two must go hand in hand.

And this ties perfectly to Jesus' other parables in Matthew 25, if we really think about it. The Parable of the Talents is about the judgment of our stewardship over all of our God-given talents. We must sacrifice and use all of those talents to bring glory to God and build up the Body of Christ. And in the final judgment, let us read that conclusion in verse 45 now.

**Matthew 25:45** "Then He will answer them saying, 'Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'"

So in this parable of the final judgment, both the sheep and the goats are judged not just according to the keeping of the letter of the law. No, here we see keeping of the letter of law is absolutely required. This chapter started with describing spiritual virgins, so this chapter is about those keeping the law. But the judgment of the sheep and the goats is solely based on what they did or did not do to each other, the Body of Christ.

Please turn, or flip, to Philippians as we start to wind down a bit. So we are called to a covenant of sacrifice with God that was foreordained before the foundation of the world. Herbert Armstrong once said ingratitude is likely the church's most common sin. And to be fair, knowledge of the truth and the keeping of the law can puff us up.

We can think that we have earned something. We could easily forget how sinful we are, how we are nothing without Christ's sacrifice first. Jesus actually warns in Luke 7, to whom little is forgiven—note, to whom little is forgiven, to those who forget how sinful they are, because we have all had a lot forgiven, that is what He is saying there—the same love, the same sacrifice, little.

So, we sacrifice little if we forget how sinful we are. It is very interesting. The sacrifice of service and obedience to God is in some ways a bit easier than the sacrifice and service to fellow man. How so? You might say it is not easy; it is a bit easier. I am comparing the two.

God is so perfect. He has given us so much. He has given us so many unmerited gifts. We know we owe Him. Right? He deserves all of our sacrifices of praise and obedience. But contrast that to the sacrifices to our brethren and fellow men. That is a little more difficult. Why? Well, because we are all so imperfect, and well, so undeserving at times.

But where else can we learn to be like God? Think of it this way. God beings, by definition, sacrifice in an unmerited way. There is no sacrifice we can give to God that is unmerited. The only sacrifices we can give that are unmerited are to us imperfect people. This is how we learn to become like God. Remember, unmerited sacrifice is what God beings do by Their very nature. He has us right where we need to be, together with a lot of imperfect people so that we can learn how to sacrifice, to sacrifice our ego, to forgive as He forgives.

The one thing God wants more than anything is the one thing we need the most: daily sacrifices that put to death our human nature and self-focus. Brethren, God never asks us to sacrifice anything that is not for our own good. Paul tells us in Philippians that we must reframe sacrifice as an investment. Paul tells us in Philippians 3:8-9 that he counted all things as loss. Not just as loss, actually as rubbish, he says, that he may gain Christ in the righteousness of God through faith.

**Philippians 3:10** That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.

Brethren, we too must reframe sacrifices as investments. We must count all things loss as Jesus commands in Luke 14:26 and Matthew 16:24-25, and as Paul exhorts right here in Philippians, we must be ready to sacrifice everything to follow and imitate Jesus Christ, so that we can have fellowship with His sufferings. Fellowship with His sacrifice is what Paul is saying, so that we then can be conformed to His death. Sacrifice is not just the one thing, *sacrifice is everything*.

It is how we are being transformed each and every day into God's image. Paul adds in Philippians 2:17 (you can turn there if you want), we should be glad and rejoice as we are poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of our brethren.

And Paul brings it all together for us here. It is a beautiful illustration. Remember, we have the burnt offering first. We have the meal offering right on top, and at the end, the way it was concluded was with a drink offering which was gradually poured out, wine gradually poured out, signifying the offerers' willingness to give their life poured out in complete service and dedication to God and His Family.