



Last Days Beacon

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WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE WE HERE FOR? PART ONE

The Role of Spiritual Sacrifices in the Life of the Believer-Priest

By David Schnittger



Perhaps the most persistent and troubling question in the world today is the question of PURPOSE. “What in the world am I here for?” “What is my purpose in living?” Have these questions ever crossed your mind or troubled your heart? They have mine.

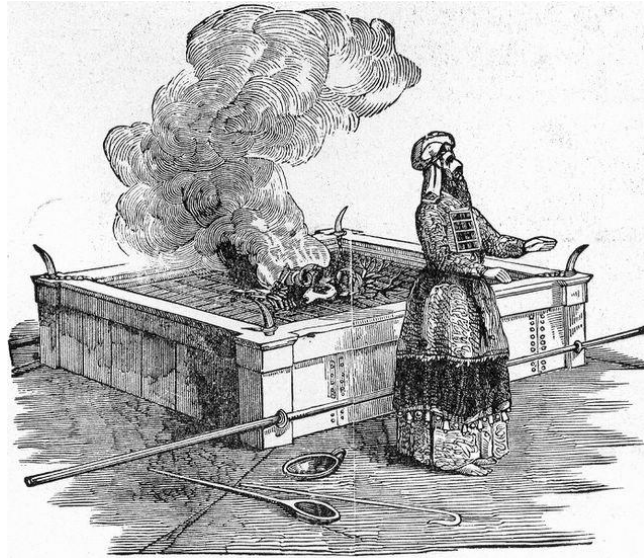
Ask the average man on the street what his purpose for living is, and you will receive a variety of responses. Many live to support their family, to be successful, or just to have a good time. I overheard one gentleman remark that his purpose in life was to pay taxes, and I’m sure many of us can relate to that!

Several leading philosophers in modernity have espoused a philosophy known as *existentialism*. This widespread view teaches that life is ultimately meaningless, since man is estranged from the world, himself, his neighbor, and, if there is one, his God. As Jean Paul Sarte, a leading existentialist thinker put it, “Human life begins on the far side of despair.”

Many today have no purpose in living or have no purpose that is adequate to motivate or comfort them. They have crossed, what Francis Schaeffer calls, “The line of despair.” Suicide often results. In fact, in America today, suicide has surpassed car accidents as the leading cause of “unnatural death.” It is at this very point of purpose or meaning in life that Christians have such a tremendous advantage over those who do not know Christ as Savior and Lord. There are many verses in Scripture which give us deep insight as to our purpose and function in life. For example, in Ecclesiastes 12:13 we read, “. . . Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” In Micah 6:8 we read, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”

Jesus summed up man’s purpose succinctly in Matthew 27:37-39: “. . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

Let me share with you another Scripture, which I trust will open up a whole new area of understanding as to what our purpose in life is to be. I Peter 2:5 states, “Ye also, as lively (or *living*) stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Believers are pictured in this verse as a holy priesthood, whose purpose is to offer up spiritual sacrifices to the Lord. A *sacrifice* is defined as “the act of offering something precious to deity.” What are these spiritual sacrifices and how do they relate to our purpose in life? The Bible mentions at least four sacrifices which we, as believer-priests, are expected to make.



THE SACRIFICE OF LIFE

The first, and foundational sacrifice we are called to make as Christians is the sacrifice of life. We find this in Romans 12:1-2 where Paul says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” There are several things about this sacrifice that I would like to discuss. The first is that this is a *living* sacrifice in contrast to the dead sacrifices of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the priest would bring birds or animals to be slain and then burnt as sacrifices to God.

The Old Testament draws to a close and history witnesses the first advent of Christ. He was also a sacrifice unto death. The crucifixion of Christ was the last dead sacrifice in the redemptive program. As Hebrews 10:26 says, “. . . there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins . . .” God is no longer interested in dead sacrifices. He desires a living sacrifice, and that is YOU! What does it mean to be a living sacrifice? Romans 6:12-13 tells us, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instrument of righteousness unto God.”

Being a living sacrifice means to yield all that you are - your body, your mind, your time, your activities - your all to the Lord and His will for your life. The problem with being a living sacrifice is that we have a tendency to keep crawling off the alter. I recognize that the tense of the Greek verb translated, “to present” in Romans 12:1 indicates a “once-and-for-all” dedication of the body, but because we are human and occasionally rebel against the Lord, there will be times when we will need to “re-present” some area of our

life to God. So, there needs to be not only a once-and-for-all surrender of life to the Lordship of Christ, but a repeated yielding of our lives to God.

The second thing I would like to point out about this sacrifice of life is that it is *foundational*. In other words, this is the starting point in our life of service and sacrifice for the Lord. Until the believer has presented HIMSELF, yielding his all to the Lord, any service to God is meaningless and abominable. I fear that many times all we offer to God are dead sacrifices. We offer to give Him *things*, such as money, or church attendance, or abstinence from some worldly activity, without really giving Him what He desires the most . . . ourselves! All service to God becomes meaningless and absurd if it is not prefaced by the *living* sacrifice of our entire being to the Lord.

The third thing I would like to point out about this sacrifice of life is that it is *total*. In its totality, three steps are involved. First, there is a *presentation*. Romans 12:1 begins by stating, “. . . present your bodies.” This is the attitude that all the great men of God have had through the centuries. The prophet Isaiah possessed this attitude. In Isaiah 6:8 we read, “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I HERE AM I; SEND ME.” The apostle Paul, after being blinded by the Lord of glory cried out, “Lord, what will thou have me to do?” D. L. Moody, the great evangelist of the 19th century, was deeply challenged by the statement, “The world has yet to see what God can do with one life totally yielded to Him.” Moody vowed that day that “by the grace of God, I will be that man.” As a result, he shook two continents for Christ, and his mighty influence is still felt today.

The men and women that God has used through the centuries have not necessarily been extraordinarily gifted or powerful people. They have come in every conceivable size, shape, background and personality. But the one thing they all had in common was an attitude of “HERE AM I! I PRESENT MYSELF TO YOU, ALL THAT I AM, BE IT LITTLE OR MUCH. Take me, make me and use me for your glory.” God is swift to hear and honor such an attitude of availability and abandonment. We read in II Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him . . .”

The next step is what I call an *abdication*. First, a *presentation*, then an *abdication*. To abdicate is to yield one’s rights or authority, to the authority of another. When we abdicate to God, we recognize that we no longer have the right to be conformed to the world. The Phillips translation renders the first clause of Romans 12:2 this way, “Don’t let the world press you into its mold.” In other words, do not allow yourself to be molded by the philosophies, priorities or perversions of this world system, which is under the control of Satan. We are to assume the attitude of the apostle John who wrote, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the

love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). God will not bless the Christian that is conforming to the world system. We must abdicate our right to be molded by the evil world system.

The third step in this living sacrifice, after the *presentation* and *abdication*, is what can be called *education*. “Be ye transformed, by the renewing of your mind . . .” (Ro 12:2a). The word “transformed” is from the Greek word “metamorphoo” which we transliterate “metamorphosis.” A beautiful illustration of a metamorphosis in nature is seen in the life of a caterpillar. Now most caterpillars are not known for the beauty or cuddliness. In fact, most people are rather repulsed by their sight. But, at a certain stage in their development, they undergo a very interesting and beautiful change. They enter into a cocoon which they have made for themselves, and when they emerge, they bear little resemblance to their former selves. The once ugly, clumsy, caterpillar has been metamorphized into a beautifully delicate and graceful butterfly. Likewise, we are to undergo a transformation or metamorphosis inwardly.



What brings about this change, whereby our thoughts are cleansed and transformed? It is by the renewing of the mind. The modern-day equivalent of this word “renew” is our word “brainwash.” This word is usually thought of negatively today, but it can have a positive usage, such as in this verse. How are we brainwashed? By the Word of God. We read in Ephesians 5:26, “That he (Christ) might sanctify and cleans it (the church) with the washing of water by THE WORD.” It is the Word of God which is the cleansing and sanctifying agent in our lives. Let me illustrate.

Have you ever gone wading in a fast-moving stream, and stopped to pick up a stone in the creek bed? If it has been in the water for any length of time you will notice how clean and smooth it has become. Then as you pick up a stone lying on the bank outside

the stream, most likely it will have an outer layer of dirt, covering a rough and jagged exterior. Why the difference between the two rocks? Simply because one was in the water and one was not. In the same way if we are in the Word of God regularly, reading it, studying it, memorizing and meditating on it, there will be a cleansing effect on our minds, temperaments and personalities. If we neglect the Word of God, then it won't be long until our minds become soiled and corrupted, and our personalities turn rough and jagged. So, there must be an education, a transforming of the mind by the Word of God.

First, we must make a *presentation*. "Lord, here I am. I might not be much, but at least I'm available. Whatever you want to do with me and through me, I'm willing to be an instrument in your hands." Then, there must be an *abdication*. You must surrender the right to follow the crowd, to blend in with the fads and fashions and fancies of the unregenerate world. You must be willing to stand firm with the unchanging Word of God even if it means standing alone. And finally, there must be an *education*. In this world that is constantly bombarding our minds with lies and perversion, from the television, radio, printed media, the internet and, sad to say, often from the pulpit, how desperately we need to be in God's Word to get the pure and sure truth from above. All of this is involved in the sacrifice of your life to the Lord.

Have you made this priestly sacrifice, Christian? Have you come to that place in your Christian experience where you have stopped trying to live your own life and started trusting Christ to live HIS life through you? God doesn't want you to try; He wants you to trust. He doesn't want you to struggle; He wants you to surrender. It is paradoxical but true that you will never be a conqueror for Christ until you are first a captive of Christ. You will never be a free man until you are first a servant. God does not want YOU to succeed in the Christian life. He wants you to recognize that you are an utter failure at righteousness, that it is completely foreign to your old sinful nature, so that you will surrender completely to the Lord and allow Him to live His righteous life through you.

As Philippians 2:13 states, "For it is GOD which worketh in you both to will and to do of HIS good pleasure." As an old hymn so beautifully puts it, "Make me a captive Lord, and then I shall be free; Force me to render up my sword and I shall conqueror be; I sink in life's alarms, when by myself I stand; Imprison me within thine arms, and strong shall be my hand." I trust that this is the condition of your life right now - totally surrendered as a living sacrifice to the Lord. Until you make this commitment, nothing else you try to do will be pleasing to God. He wants YOU, first and foremost.

THE SACRIFICE OF LIPS

The second sacrifice which we as believer-priests are called upon to make, is the sacrifice of praise, or for sake of alliteration, the sacrifice of our *lips*. We read about this

in Hebrews 13:15, “By him (Christ) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” Praise is a major theme of the Bible, and as this verse clearly states, it is one of the priestly sacrifices believers are called upon to make. There are two things about this sacrifice I would like for you to notice in this verse.

First, praise is to be *continual*. “. . . let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God CONTINUALLY.” That means ALL the time . . . the good times, the bad times and the in-between times. Vance Havner points out in his book, *Though I Walk Through The Valley*, that there are three levels of Christian experience. There is the mountaintop, there are the plains, and there is the valley. The mountaintop experience is that special time when everything seems to be going so well and your communion with the Lord is gloriously intimate and joyful. It’s like that first romance, or the first bloom of springtime. It is certainly not difficult to praise God in times like this. Then there are the plains. This is the more common experience of life, characterized by solid steady growth, with no tremendous upheavals, either positive or negative. Praise and thanksgiving come fairly easily during times like these as well. Then there is the valley. These are the dark times of sickness, tragedy, the loss of a job or loved one, or a seemingly overwhelming problem. These are times when God may seem far away, and answers are so few and slow in coming. Even in difficult times such as this we are to give thanks and praise to God. We read in I Thessalonians 5:18, “In EVERYTHING give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” God is good ALL THE TIME, and, therefore, we should praise Him continually.

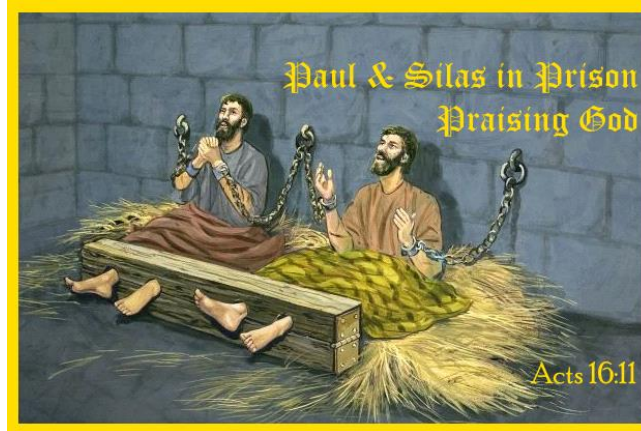


Consider what the Lord Jesus did when He went through the darkest valley of His life. We see Him kneeling in the garden of Gethsemane, just a few short hours before the cruel ordeal which He knew was swiftly approaching. Not only was the agony of torture and death facing Him, but the more awful prospect of being separated from fellowship with His Father. In this dark hour, He simply prayed, "Father, glorify thy name." This needs to be our prayer at such a time. Though we may not understand the particular trial or distress that we are going through, we can be sure of God's unchanging love and unalterable purpose to conform us to the image of His Son.

God does not expect us, as Christians, to be happy and light-hearted in every situation of life, but He does expect us to be thankful. There is a big difference between being happy and being thankful. Scripture acknowledges that there will be times in life when our spirits will be grieved and broken-hearted, but it also gives us reason for thanksgiving in such situations. In Hebrews 12:11 we read, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyful, but grievous: nevertheless, AFTERWARD it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." So, don't have a guilt complex because you do not always FEEL happy or FEEL thankful. Many times, God will put you in a situation where you have to thank Him *by faith*, not because you feel like it, or completely understand why this or that is happening to you.

The prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon, once said, "God is too good to be unkind, and too wise to be mistaken, so when we cannot trace God's hand, we can always trust God's heart." When you understand that ALL THINGS, not just the pleasant or happy things, but ALL THINGS are working together for your good, to the end that you may be conformed to the image of God's Son, this realization will enable you to give praise continually (cf. Ro 8:29). Let me also add that the more difficult the situation in which you are praising God, the more precious and pleasing that sacrifice of praise is in His sight.

The second aspect of the sacrifice of praise that we read about in Hebrews 13:15, is that it is to be *verbal*. The latter clause of the verse reads, ". . . that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." Not only is our praise to be continual, but it is to be verbal. Many times, I fear that we quench the Holy Spirit and rob others of a blessing when we fail to praise the Lord verbally. Just think of the wonderful difference it would make in our homes, churches and places of business, if we would praise God verbally as we ought.



We see an excellent example of verbal praise to God in times of difficulty in the life of Paul and Silas. In Acts 16, we find them ministering in the city of Philippi. While there, they are arrested, beaten, and cast into prison, where they were manacled at their feet. What a discouraging situation, humanly speaking, to be in. But what was their reaction? We read in Acts 16:25, “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.” They were in the dark valley of life, but yet they were praising God and doing it verbally. What an amazing expression of faith! Notice how the Lord honors this praise in the next verse: “And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed” (Acts 16:26).



We see how deliverance followed praise. Many times, the Lord is just waiting for us to thank and praise Him in the midst of our difficulties, before He will unleash His mighty power to deliver us. And just as the open praise by Paul and Silas was certainly a powerful testimony to their fellow prisoners, so our expressions of praise in difficult circumstances will have a powerful influence on those around us.

We need to recapture this spirit of praise in our lives. Are you offering the sacrifice of praise to God continually and verbally? If not, why not? This is part of your purpose in life. In Ephesians 1:12 we read, "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ." Are you able to praise God, even in the valleys of life? Do you share this praise with others? If not, determine anew that your life will be a life of praise, of blessing and adoring the Lord. I can promise you that this will have a transforming effect on your attitudes, and that God's power will be unleashed, in many cases, to deliver you from your problems. In our next Beacon article, we will deal with two more spiritual sacrifices in the life of the believer-priest.

Editor's Note: David Schnittger is the President of Southwest Prophecy Ministries. He has been a pastor for over 25 years and has served as an Adjunct Professor at both the college and seminary level.

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