

Giving is An Expression of Love

Duane Warden, in his article *Such Sacrifices* (*Gospel Advocate*, Apr. 2001, p. 26) has said: "Perhaps there would be no church with a crimped budget if God's people were to understand that their giving is an expression of love, an act of praise, a sacrifice offered to God." Indeed, there is a correlation between one's giving and his love for God. In the Old Testament, God made it clear that before anything else, He wanted the love of His people. (*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might—Deut. 6:4-5*) Jesus repeated the words of Moses in Matthew 22:37 saying that this was the greatest commandment in the Law.

Christians are to serve the Lord because they love Him! Love for Christ and Almighty God is to be THE motivating factor behind everything we do—in our worship—as well as in our daily life. Giving is an act of worship! It is to be an expression of the love and closeness we feel to the God who has given us life. Giving is a sacrifice. In these present times, most people have a hard time understanding what a sacrifice is.

The word *sacrifice* is used throughout the Bible. We usually look back to the Old Testament and equate *sacrifice* to the shedding of blood of bulls and goats on an altar to appease the wrath of God. The books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are full of instructions on how the Israelites were to carry out sin and guilt offerings. Today, we often glory in the fact that animal sacrifices no longer have to be made because of the precious gift of Christ! (Heb. 10:1-10)

But, there is more to the word *sacrifice* than just offering up animal offerings to God. Over time the usage of *sacrifice* came to be associated with the act of giving. Psalm 50:14 says *offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving*. Warden says, "there is no slaughter in the word as used here." (p. 26) He continues, "it (sacrifice—MHA) means a sacred gift....it literally means a gift to God." Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament words describes *sacrifice* (The Greek word is *thusia*) as "an act of offering to God." Humans express their love through giving. It is because of this that God has made provision for us to give to Him.

We must guard against shifting the meaning of *sacrifice* from "a gift to God" to self denial. Many now associate *sacrifice* only with self denial. "We have taken the focus off the act of giving, taken the focus off the expression of love toward the Holy God who has redeemed us. Usage now places the focus of sacrifice on what the giver of the gift denies himself. **It's a meaning foreign to Biblical usage.**" (Warden, p. 26, emphasis mine, MHA) In Hebrews 13:15 the Hebrew writer states, *Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name..* Is "self denial" the thought in this passage? Certainly not! The author is writing about a gift, "a gift of praise offered from a heart of faith and love." Again, a *sacrifice* is a gift offered to God.

Not only are we to offer God gifts with our "spiritual" service but we should be willing to give of the material things we have been blessed with. We live in a world of material things. We should be willing to dedicate some of these things wholly to God. Some have expressed that the people of Israel might have had difficulty thinking of a gift to God in non-material terms. Think of the city of Jericho as Israel began conquering the land of Canaan. This city was devoted to God. All of its wealth, all of its living things (human and animal) were to be slaughtered and burned in fire. (Josh. 6:17-19) "It was a devoted thing, a gift to God." (Warden, p. 27) There would be other cities to conquest and profit from. The Israelites trusted in God to take care of them and supply their needs.

In the New Testament we read of the example of the churches of Macedonia in 2 Cor. 8:1-5. Here, the correlation between love for God and the quality of sacrifice/giving cannot be clearer. Verse 5 demonstrates their love for God in that *they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God*. Because of their great love for God verse 3 says *For*

*I testify that according to their ability, **and beyond their ability**, they gave **of their own accord**. Verse 2 tells us that the Macedonian brethren were in deep poverty. That meant nothing. They gave from the heart. Later in chapter 8 Paul expressed his wishes that the Corinthian brethren do the same....*not as a command, **but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also**. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might be come rich. (2 Cor. 8:8-9)* We too, must follow in the example of the Macedonians!*

God's people don't give because they have been "brow beaten" into it or that they have been taken on a guilt trip. **God's people understand that their giving is an expression of love—a sacrifice offered to God.** Warden concludes his article by saying, "it is not as if the church assembles for worship, and then, as an appendage to praise, passes the collection plate. Giving is integral to worship, not an appendage." (p. 27) **When we understand what it means to offer sacrifices to God—perhaps our giving will improve.** Notice Paul's words in 2 Cor. 9:6-7: *he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, **not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. How is your love for God?***

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