

# SACRIFICE

## Background

In Old Testament times sacrifice involved the slaying of an innocent animal for the guilt of the individual on whose behalf the animal was killed. Where this act of slaying (in the manner laid down in the Law) was accompanied by true repentance and faith, God looked upon the blood that had been shed, in anticipation of the cross of Christ, and granted atonement.

As we think about sacrifice of the innocent animal, we need to remember the high cost of sin, and be grateful that the need for physical sacrifice was removed once and for all (literally once and literally for all) by the Lord Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

## The Old Testament

### True sacrifice as ordained by God in the Old Testament

was the shadow, of which Christ's death was the reality. But Cain's unauthorised sacrifice, which God rejected, was the forerunner of the almost universal 'sacrifice' of humans to idolatry and immorality.

Genesis 4:3, 5; 8:20; 22:8, 13; 31:54; 46:1; Exodus 18:12; 12:3–13; Leviticus 1:2–4; ch. 16; Deuteronomy 32:16–17; 1 Samuel 15:22; Proverbs 17:1 (AV, UK); Hebrews 11:4; 10:1; 1 Corinthians 10:20

### Two things were necessary for Atonement under the Law:

1. Faith – in the offering of the blood sacrifice.
2. Repentance – Isaiah 1:13, 16, 18; Numbers 5:7 (confession and, where possible, restitution).

An important part of the sacrificial system was ceremonial washing. This requirement showed the necessity for cleansing from the impurity of sin. It was in a real sense the forerunner of Christian baptism which symbolizes the 'washing' away of sin. See, for example, Leviticus 14:8–9; Numbers 8:7; 19:13; also Acts 22:16.

## The New Testament

The lamb was quintessentially the animal of sacrifice. See e.g. Genesis 22:13, the lamb that God would provide was ultimately the Lord Jesus. The New Testament period opens with John the Baptist's triumphant cry *Behold the Lamb of God!* (John 1:36). The Holy Bible ends, in the book of Revelation, with a vision of the glory of the *Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world* (Revelation 13:8).

John 1:36; 3:16; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 9:13–14; Revelation 13:8

(Note: there is a compelling case that the Lamb of God should more correctly be translated the 'Ram' of God. The ram that would be sacrificed was a grown ram in the prime of its life, having lived a useful life. It was something of real value to its owner and involved a real cost to him to offer it in sacrifice. The shadow of Christ is seen in Genesis 22:13 – and here the animal to be sacrificed is described emphatically as a ram. The Lord Jesus, when he was sacrificed on the cross for our sins, was also in his prime of life (assumed age of about thirty-three years), having lived a truly sinless life.

### The sacrifice of Christ for the sin of the world was final

There is no other way, and no other true gospel. The veil in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem was torn from top to bottom, a vivid demonstration that the way to God is now open for all. Indeed, before Christians were known as 'Christians', they were known as the people of the Way. From the earliest times of the church, Christians have considered offerings of animals or incense as completely ineffective. They rightly accept only the 'sacrifice' of prayer, of praise and of thanksgiving, with a genuine, humble and contrite heart, as being acceptable acts of thanksgiving before a righteous, saving God. As there are no more atoning sacrifices, it follows that there can be no priests (*sacerdotes*). In any case, the Jewish temple was soon to be destroyed (by the Romans in AD 70) and the old priesthood no longer exists. Instead God has created in those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus a royal priesthood – the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9).

John 10:18; 12:32–33; 17:4; 19:30; Romans 3:25; 5:9; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:21–22; Hebrews 9:12; 10:10–18; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 2:24

**Two things are necessary for atonement under grace:**

1. **Faith** in the offering of the blood of Jesus (see Romans 3:24–25; Hebrews 10:12).
2. **Repentance** a conscious turning away from sin and a determination to live a life acceptable to God. Literally a change of mind, not so much about individual plans, intentions or beliefs, but rather a change in a personality until now oriented towards sin, but in future oriented towards God (Acts 20:21). Such penitence is not an isolated act but a disposition of mind, encouraging a change of behaviour and including where necessary, acts of reparation (See Luke 19:8).

**Christian baptism is a symbol of the cleansing of the heart from sin**

See again the note above on Old Testament ceremonial washing.

1 Peter 3:20–21 [See also Unit 31 on baptism.]

According to the Roman Catholic Church, the sacrament of penance includes the elements of contrition, confession and satisfaction. The priest is then empowered to pronounce absolution. However, in the New Testament there is no linkage between a 'sacramental framework' and absolution by a human priest. Indeed, this idea is inconsistent with the need for a sinner to turn personally to God in penitence, and receive absolution through Christ the only mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) who is the great High Priest of his people.