

The Sacrifice That Is an Abomination

Proverbs 15:8; 1 Samuel 15:22

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One of the biblical truths hated most by modern man is the natural corruption of all human beings—not only the natural corruption of adults, but even the natural corruption of infants. The heretic, Pelagius, argued against Augustine in the fourth century that every man is blameless from birth and those who are corrupt are so by virtue of their own personal choice. Pelagius argued that no one is born with a sinful, corrupt nature that makes him guilty before God. This view has become that of the general masses today. Even professing Christian Churches today speak of a mysterious “age of accountability” (which is never taught in the Scriptures) before which time a child stands guiltless before God, but after which time a child is a guilty sinner before God. Psychologists and sociologists blame the evil within man upon various causes: the social class into which one is born, or the negative influence of parents and other significant people in a child’s life, or the environment, or genetic disorders. Since it should be obvious to all men that none of us are perfect or sinless (even according to our own standards of right and wrong) whether in our thoughts, words, and actions, the question must be answered: what is the cause of the evil within man? For in finding the cause of evil within man, we will also find the cause of the salvation of man from this evil. From our text in Proverbs 15:8, let us consider the following two questions: (1) Why Is the Sacrifice of the Wicked an Abomination to the Lord? (2) Why Is the Prayer of the Righteous a Delight to the Lord?

I. Why Is the Sacrifice of the Wicked an Abomination to the Lord?

A. The word “sacrifice” that is used here in Proverbs 15:8 may refer to the offering of an animal, food, or drink as an act of worship to either Jehovah God or it may refer to sacrifices offered to false gods. It is important that we understand to whom the sacrifice of the wicked is made in our text so that we can understand why it is condemned by the Lord. There are two possibilities that present themselves to us at this point.

1. Is the sacrifice of the wicked in Proverbs 15:8 an act of worship offered to some creature or to some false god? Certainly, anytime worship is offered to a mere creature (whether to an image, to a cross, to a human being dead or alive, to an angel etc.) or to any god other than the one true living God revealed in the Scriptures, that sacrifice or act of worship is an abomination to the Lord. Such an act of false worship violates the very words of the Lord Jesus spoken to Satan when Satan bargained with Christ to worship him. Jesus said to Satan, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10). For only our Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is worthy of our religious worship. No doubt, it is an abomination to the Lord for any human being to offer worship to anyone or anything other than to the Lord God Himself or through any mediator other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. But I would submit that the intent of the Holy Spirit at this point is not simply to condemn the worship of creatures rather than that of the Creator, or the worship of false gods rather than the one true living God of the Bible.

2. Or is the sacrifice of the wicked a sacrifice or outward act of worship offered to the one true living God, but offered by one whose heart and life has not been cleansed by the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose life faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for eternal salvation is dead? This, I would submit, is the intent of the Holy Spirit. The abomination here spoken of is the outward show of worship found in religious hypocrites who go through the motions of sacrifice, but whose hearts are far from the Lord. They profess the Lord by the sacrifices they offer to Him, but they are yet dead in their trespasses and sins. They are yet under the guilt and condemnation of their sin. For they have not yet come to see their sin as deserving of eternal condemnation in hell. And since they do not see that they are dead in their trespasses and sins, they do not see that only Christ can save and rescue them by forgiving them all of their sin and by becoming their

righteousness before a holy God. So they continue to offer their sacrifices, believing that God will be pleased with them and accept them because of their many sacrifices of worship and good works.

a. This seems to be the intent of the Holy Spirit for the contrast that is made in Proverbs 15:8 is between outward, public acts of worship (i.e. the sacrifices offered to God on the part of the wicked), and inward, private acts of worship (i.e. the prayers offered to God on the part of those who are righteous). Dear ones, God abominates the sacrifice of those who profess faith in God like King Saul, but whose heart was bent on disobeying God. God told Saul to destroy all of the animals gathered from his conquest of the Amalekites (to leave none alive), but he kept back some of the animals for a sacrifice. You see, God did not abominate the sacrifice of Saul because he offered it to a creature or to another god, but because his sacrifice was an attempt to cover up his wicked heart of disobedience against God. You'll remember that God spoke to King Saul through Samuel with these sobering words: "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

b. Consider likewise the piercing words of the Lord through Isaiah the prophet found in Isaiah 1:11-15. Dear ones, there is nothing wrong with the sacrifices or the other acts of worship in themselves that are found in this passage. They are not condemned because they were offered to some creature or to some false god. God found no fault with what was brought to him, but rather with who brought the sacrifice to Him. For these religious hypocrites did not humble themselves before the Lord, confessing their sin to Him and trusting in the Lord alone as their righteousness and as their only hope of eternal salvation. Rather they looked to their acts of worship as their righteousness and hope of eternal salvation. This is what God abominates in the sacrifice of the wicked—the corruption of pride and self-righteousness in the religious hypocrite.

B. Why does God abominate the sacrifice of the wicked? Because all such sacrifices proceed from an evil heart which declares not the righteousness of God, but rather declares the righteousness of man. For if offering to God the outward acts of worship which He has commanded in His written Word meets with His abomination, it cannot be the act of worship itself that pollutes and corrupts the sacrifice. It must be the offerer and not that which is offered. It is the corruption of man, the self-glorying of man, and the self-righteousness of man that pollutes the sacrifice. And this corruption of man's nature is a part of every man, bar none (except the Lord Jesus Christ).

1. The one true living God has revealed the cause of the evil within man in Holy Scripture which clearly teaches that all descendants of Adam (by ordinary generation—the Lord Jesus Christ excepted) were bound up in the lot of Adam by way of a covenant God made with Adam in the Garden of Eden (the Covenant of Works). Had Adam kept that original covenant and not sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, he would have kept that covenant not only for himself, but would have secured righteousness and life for all of his descendants. But he did not keep it. He fell into sin, and all his descendants by ordinary generation sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. The consequence of that broken Covenant was the imputation (or crediting) of that sin to all of Adam's descendants, the loss of original righteousness to all of Adam's descendants, and the corruption of nature to all of Adam's descendants—the Lord Jesus Christ alone excepted. Death was the curse which the Most Holy God pronounced upon each and every corrupt descendant of Adam (physical, spiritual, and eternal).

2. Thus, if death is the wage of sin (as Romans 6:23 teaches), then why do infants die? Because of the sin that is theirs through Adam ("as in Adam all die" 1 Corinthians 15:22). The death of adults as well as infants proves the universality of sin.

3. But an objection is raised at this point to the effect that using the same argument we might also conclude that Christ was a sinner since He died. But dear ones, Christ died not for His own sin (for He was sinless), but for the sins of His people, whose sin was imputed to Him.

4. Let us heed the warning of God for us and our children as found in Jeremiah, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it” (Jeremiah 17:9). Let us hear God’s evaluation of man’s sinful condition. Can man do anything to save himself by his sacrifices or good works? “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). “There is none righteous, no not one... there is none that seeketh after God” (Romans 3:10,11). There is nothing that man can do to save himself for he is like a man drowning in the ocean hundreds of miles from land. He will perish if salvation depends upon himself. He cannot trust in his own works, in his own efforts, in his own sacrifices. He must look to a Savior to rescue him. Such is the condition of all human beings apart from Christ. And this is why the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.

II. Why Is the Prayer of the Righteous a Delight to the Lord?

A. The contrast is now complete between the wicked and the righteous. Just as it is not the sacrifice (in itself) that is offered to Him by the wicked that God abominates, so it is not the prayer (in itself) that is offered to Him by the righteous that God herein delights. It is the condition of the man concerning which God disapproves or approves in both cases: the wicked and the righteous. The most conspicuous and outward acts of worship will not please God if one is wicked; whereas the most simple and inward acts of worship will please God if one is righteous.

B. Since we have spent time already showing that all men are wicked by nature due to the sin of Adam, and therefore, under the wrath and condemnation of a holy God, how does one become righteous before God?

1. It is not by his baptism, efforts, good works, or sacrifices that one can make himself righteous before God. “Therefore by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” Romans 3:20.

2. It is not by his parents, church, minister, or priest that one can be made righteous before God. For Christ alone has died for sinners and offers Himself to even the chief of sinners. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).

3. It is not by his sincerity or good intentions that one can make himself righteous before a holy God. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

4. It is the free and sovereign work of God to make those who are dead in their trespasses and sins alive and to give to them faith in Jesus Christ and all other graces (Ephesians 2:4-5). We have no more to do with our spiritual resurrection from the grave of our sin and corruption than Lazarus had to do with his physical resurrection from the grave which bound him. Christ called to Lazarus, “Come forth”, and he was given life to come to Christ. Christ called to Greg Price, “Come forth” and I was given life and faith to come to Jesus Christ.

5. It is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone who fulfilled all the demands of the law which we could not keep and who suffered the infinite wrath of God upon the cross for the sins of His elect that one is declared by God to be righteous (Galatians 2:16). And all those who trust in Christ alone for their eternal salvation persevere in a living faith that is manifested by loving obedience to Christ in spite of their sins, weaknesses, and falling into sin (Proverbs 24:16).

C. Dear ones, the voice of the Lord has not gone out with this message merely to the Israelites living at the time of Solomon or of Isaiah. His voice goes out to you as well. Why do you offer to the Lord your sacrifices of worship? Is it to cover up your rebellion against the Lord? Is it to earn the favor and acceptance of God? Is it to salve a guilty conscience? Have your outward acts of worship become your boasting and pride in which you have put your faith? If so, God says He abominates your sacrifices.

1. Dear ones, outward acts of worship are not the object of your faith—God alone (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) is the object of your faith. Outward acts of worship cannot remove from you the guilt and power of sin. Only Jesus can do that. God has appointed such outward ordinances as baptism, the Lord's Supper, the reading of Scripture, fasting and prayer, the Sabbath day, secret worship and family worship, our solemn covenants, and giving to the poor and needy—but these are each one means by which your faith in Jesus Christ is strengthened. You are never to rest in them as your righteousness or as your hope of eternal salvation.

2. Yes, you are to offer your own life as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1), but not in order to atone for your sin. But rather as a thank offering and a love offering to God for His infinite mercy and free grace shown to you in Christ Jesus. Dear friends, it is so easy to pride yourself in your sacrifices of worship, but if you are looking for salvation in your sacrifices, then you cannot be looking for salvation in Jesus Christ who alone offered to God a perfect sacrifice for sin. If this is the case, all of your sacrifices are vain, and not only vain, but an abomination and a foul odor in God's nostrils. For God hates, despises, and abominates all such self-righteousness and looking to your sacrifices and to your works as meriting or earning His gracious and free salvation through Jesus Christ. I ask all of you within the sound of my voice, Is your faith in your sacrifices or in Christ's one sacrifice alone? Listen to the word of God, "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

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