

Acceptable Sacrifices

Have you ever wondered what an "acceptable sacrifice" to God is? The apostle Peter, in his first letter, refers to believers as a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), and that they should offer up spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:5). In the same verse, Peter refers to 'the saints' also as members of a "holy priesthood"... "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**"

Peter states, as members of a royal and holy priesthood, we should offer up **spiritual sacrifices** which are **acceptable** to God. Just what are spiritual sacrifices? I have found four such sacrifices which are acceptable to God:

1. **Generosity**
2. **Service**
3. **Praise**
4. **Love**

(1) GENEROSITY. **Hebrews 13:16** "But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such **sacrifices** God is **well pleased.**" **Philippians 4:18** "Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, a **sweet smelling aroma**, an **acceptable sacrifice**, **well pleasing to God.**" Therefore, spiritual sacrifices refer to doing good and sharing - the gift of **generosity**. This 'spiritual sacrifice' is said to be holy, acceptable and well pleasing to God. Therefore, according to this analogy, in God's nostrils generous people are a sweet smelling aroma but stingy people smell!

(2) SERVICE. **Romans 12:1** "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable **service.**" In his letter to the Romans, Paul directs believers to present their bodies to God as "a living sacrifice," which, he says, is their "reasonable service." This "reasonable (intelligent) **service**" is equivalent to the divine service that the priests of Israel performed.

Paul says he acts as a priest, offering the Gentile saints to God, as a spiritual sacrifice. **Romans 15:15-16** ... "And the more boldly I did write to you, brethren, in part, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me by God, for my being a servant of Jesus Christ to the nations, **acting as priest** in the good news of God, that the offering up of the nations may become **acceptable**, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." R.F. Weymouth (New Testament in Modern Speech) renders the same passage as follows: "But I write to you the more boldly - partly as reminding you of what you already know - because of the authority graciously entrusted to me by God, that I should be a minister of Christ Jesus among the Gentiles, doing **priestly duties** in connexion with God's Good News so that the sacrifice - namely the Gentiles - may be **acceptable** to Him."

Paul uses a different metaphor with regard to the *sweet aroma of sacrifice*. He speaks of believers as a sweet fragrance. **2 Corinthians 2:14-15** "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the **fragrance** (sweet fragrance) of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."

What an honour it is to be called and chosen to be the vessels through whom God distributes the fragrance of His knowledge. And this honour has been granted to us because Christ is our sacrifice. But note, this **sweet aroma** is only released when we are in service to God - performing our priestly duties.

Peter, in his first letter, speaks of believers as both a holy priesthood and a royal priesthood. As members of a holy priesthood, we offer up spiritual sacrifices which are **acceptable** to God. Paul, in his letters, defines spiritual sacrifice. He directs the saints to offer *spiritual sacrifices* which, he says, are holy, acceptable and well pleasing to God. This is our "**intelligent service**" to God - an analogy of the divine service of the priests of Israel. Also, Paul says he acts as a priest, performing his duties, offering the Gentile saints to God as a spiritual sacrifice. Therefore, our reasonable and intelligent **service** to God is an "acceptable" spiritual sacrifice - well pleasing to Him.

(3) PRAISE. **Hebrews 13:15** "...Let us continually offer the **sacrifice of praise** to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." Praise is incredible. Not only is it fully acceptable to God, but it causes God to inhabit the very atmosphere it creates. **Psalms 22:3** says, "God inhabits the praises of His people!"

- **What is Praise?** Praise is commending, by speaking or singing, the perfections of God. The writer of Hebrews explained that praise is a sacrifice as the "fruit of our lips."

- **What does praise do?** Some of the results of praising the Lord include: (a) It drives back the enemy in spiritual warfare (**Psalm 149:6,7**). (b) It releases God's abundant blessing (**Psalm 63:3-5**). (c) It invites the God into our lives (**Psalm 23:3**). (d) It brings victory and deliverance (**2 Chronicles 20:21-22**). (e) It counters the spirit of despair (**Isaiah 61:3**).

Praise is acceptable and pleasing to God, but it should also be acceptable and pleasing to us! Praise should be a lifestyle not merely an action.

(4) LOVE. The most acceptable and pleasing sacrifice we can give to God is love. It's a sweetest aroma we can release. **Deuteronomy 6:5** tells us to, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**" Love isn't love if you're not willing to sacrifice something for it. This applies to loving God but it also applies to loving others. We are commanded to first love the Lord our God, but then we are commanded to love our neighbour.

One of the most important aspects of the "God kind of love" is unselfishness, which is characterised in the Bible as a willingness to sacrifice one's own wishes for those of others. Agape will always adapt and adjust to the needs and desires of other people. It's impossible for people who've truly been reduced to love to be selfish. God has taught them how to be totally adaptable and adjustable to others. Selfish people, on the other hand, have hard hearts. It's very difficult for them to learn anything - especially if it involves self-sacrifice. They expect everyone else to adjust to them and their needs. They simply don't know how to adjust to others without becoming angry or upset. Once you've been **reduced to love**, you'll have no trouble establishing and maintaining a good, healthy relationship with God and with others. Your primary goal in life will be to put the wishes of God first, and then others, before your own. You'll learn that 'agape' is all about sacrifice and selfishness will be a thing of the past.