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WHOLLY DEVOTED

MINI BOOK

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bibleTalk^{TV}

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LEVITICUS 27:1-34

Have you ever had the "urge" to do a good deed, or give to a special cause? For example, you see the faces of poor children in a war-torn country and are moved to send a donation to help them. Or you hear the story of a missionary going to preach the gospel in some far off land and feel the need to support their work somehow. This urge to help, to give, to sacrifice oneself is hard wired into our souls by God because

we are made in His image and the Bible tells us over and over again how God is moved by love and compassion to rescue and help His people (For God so loved the world...). It's no surprise then, that as His creation we are also subject to the same kind of benevolent and sacrificial urges.

As Christians we experience these same kinds of feelings (to help, or serve) with regards to others, but we also have an additional desire not shared by unbelievers and that is the urge to give to God. This is a very important facet of our spiritual nature and one which God uses in order to help us mature in Christ. An example of this was the set of rules used to guide God's people when they were "moved" to give something to God. These were given so that a person would not inadvertently:

- Insult God by giving the wrong thing or giving in a wrong way.
- Offend God by promising a gift or service that would have to be taken back because it was beyond a person's ability to actually give.

I'd like to review some of these rules in order to guide the giving urges we have today.

GIVING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT - LEVITICUS 27:1-34

In Leviticus, Moses outlines the various laws and regulations that guided a person when he chose to give something or devote something to the Lord. For example, there was:

1. The Tithe of Land and Animals

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

- Genesis 28:20-22

God required one tenth of the produce and animals as a first offering of the land. The idea was that if a person gave the first tenth then the ninety percent he kept would be blessed for his use. The first tenth

could not be dedicated or devoted to God because He already claimed it. It was man's duty to give it - it was not offered as a gift. In Israel, the first tenth was used to maintain the place of worship, support God's ministers, and care for the needs of the poor. These things could be given as they were or their cash value plus one fifth was given in their stead.

2. The Offering of the Firstborn

This was done in remembrance of the time when God spared the firstborn of the Jews but destroyed every Egyptian firstborn. This action finally moved the Pharaoh to release the Jews from Egyptian bondage. The Lord then required that each Jewish firstborn male be dedicated to Him thereafter. In other words, every firstborn male automatically belonged to God, and

could not be given or offered. In the same way that they tithed their land and animals, the Jews gave a cash gift as a way of redeeming each firstborn.

A third set of rules were given concerning...

3. The Votive Offerings

In Leviticus 27, Moses explains that there were times that the Jews wanted to give more than the tithes, more than God required as His. Their gratitude and joy moved them to offer something or someone to God for His use. This could be produce or animals. It could also be a child or a wife or a person's home.

In Leviticus 27, Moses established a monetary value for these so that a person, in a burst of spiritual enthusiasm, who had

devoted a child or his home to the Lord could substitute a cash gift in its stead.

Again, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, "When a man makes a difficult vow, he shall be valued according to your valuation of persons belonging to the Lord. If your valuation is of the male from twenty years even to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary.

- Leviticus 27:1-3

In this way a person could both experience the joy of giving something precious (or "difficult" as in NAS version) to the Lord and at the same time maintain the life and possession of his offering. By offering the

value of the thing vowed, you vicariously offered the thing or person itself. This provided guidelines and protection for the natural desire of believers to give something precious to the Lord, something beyond what was required. For the one who wanted to go the "second mile" in his giving, God showed him how to do this properly.

Now, there was another set of regulations that provided instructions for the most devoted level of giving...

4. The "Most Holy" Vow or Offering

The "cherem" were those things vowed or offered to God for which there remained no power of redemption, they were "most holy". In other words, things so absolutely devoted to God that they could neither be

changed nor substituted with money, or taken back (under penalty of death). When a person offered such a gift to the Lord it was:

- Destroyed on the altar of sacrifice if it was an animal or produce.
- Totally given up to the service of the Lord if it was a person. For example, Hannah devoted Samuel to the Lord and gave him up to the service to the priest Eli for life when he was just a little boy. In doing this she was giving up her future "security".

The "most holy" offering was the supreme act of the will in giving over to God the complete possession of something you owned - without a chance of redeeming it or using it again. Through these tithes, firstborn dedications, votive offerings, and

most holy offerings, the Jews progressed in their understanding of three very important ideas:

1. God created and owned all things.
2. Their closeness to God increased as they practiced the spiritual exercise of giving; there was a process to it:
 - First they gave Him what was commanded, tithes and firstborn - basic submission.
 - Then they gave a token amount based on what they had left - votive offerings - sacrifice.
 - Then they offered to reduce the portion they had left by totally giving up something they possessed. For example, by totally giving an animal for

destruction in sacrifice instead of a cash value, they lost the entire value and potential income from this possession. When they made something "Most Holy" to the Lord, they became poorer, they risked economic security to do it. They surrendered themselves to God. So their giving led them through three stages of spiritual growth: submission, sacrifice, and surrender.

3. There was a limit to the closeness, because there was a limit to the giving. If being one with God required giving all, how could one achieve it? No matter how much you wanted to give, to dedicate as "Most Holy", you still had to live, to eat, and to care for your family.

In the end, the person who thirsted for complete holiness and dedication through this method learned that it was always out of reach. Yes, God owned all; yes, man wanted to be wholly devoted to God, but it was in all practicality, impossible to achieve in this way. In essence, a person would have to give up his home, property, all his livestock, and turn over his family for service. And even then he himself had to eat and survive!

These rules and this system only whetted the appetite for personal devotion to God, but they didn't satisfy it. The ability to be wholly devoted to God in a physical and spiritual way only became possible with the coming of Jesus Christ in this world.

WHOLLY DEVOTED THROUGH CHRIST

Paul describes this process of complete dedication in his letter to the Romans. The Apostle not only says that it is possible, he actually urges his readers to make of their lives a sacrifice that is "wholly devoted" or most holy to God:

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

- Romans 12:1

Today, God goes beyond the rules and regulations of the Old Testament concerning tithes, firstborn, offerings, and most holy offerings. He states plainly that what He wants is not ten percent; or a

firstborn child; or even the complete sacrifice of a portion of your wealth. Today, God wants you - all of you! He is willing to offer you something not possible in Old Testament times - an intimate relationship with Himself - but He requires that you offer yourself as a "most holy" sacrifice to receive this privilege. The problem here is that even if you were willing to do this, you are an unworthy candidate. You see, sacrifices "totally devoted" to the Lord had to be without defect or blemish in order to be acceptable. A quick review of our lives and deeds will show that we are far from being pure and without defect.

Thankfully, God provides a worthy sacrifice in our place through Jesus Christ. Paul explains this in Romans 5:8 when he says,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

In offering His perfect life on the cross, Christ makes possible the thing that mankind has sought after for so long - oneness with God through a complete offering of self. By fulfilling the requirement for a perfect sacrifice, Christ has made it possible for us to come before God and make a "most holy" offering of ourselves. Now in the Old Testament, "most holy" offerings were completely destroyed or completely devoted to service of God. In the New Testament, when we present ourselves as a "most holy" offering to the Lord, we do both:

A. We are completely destroyed because the Bible says that through baptism we experience the death of our old man of sin.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death...

- Romans 6:3-4a

Not only are we completely destroyed,

B. We are also completely dedicated to a new life, a life united to God through Christ.

...so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly

we shall also be in the likeness of
His resurrection.

- Romans 6:4b-5

In addition to this, we have the privilege and joy to make a "most holy" offering of ourselves each and every day by renewing our faith in Christ through obedience and service in His name. This is something the Jews could not even imagine. The on-going presentation of ourselves as wholly devoted sacrifices to God each and every day, forever! What they couldn't accomplish, even one time, we, as Christians are able to do every single day of our lives through faith in Jesus Christ. Oh what joy, oh what grace, oh how blessed we are in Christ. Amen!

SUMMARY

I have given you some background information about the dedication of things we make to God because we are often required or moved to offer ourselves to the Lord through our service to His church. On this day, each of us has an opportunity to enter into a more intimate relationship with God through their tangible service to His church. Don't be left out, don't be held back for any reason. Today the Lord is calling you into a deeper and fuller commitment to following Him.

So I make several invitations in His name:

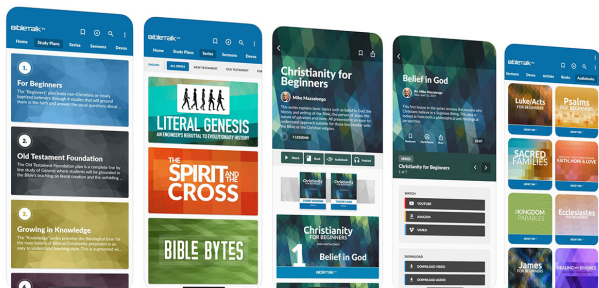
1. If you have not confessed your faith publicly, repented sincerely, been baptized properly (by immersion), please confess your faith in Him now, and be saved.

2. If you are a Christian but have neglected your faith, compromised your behavior, neglected the church and its work, and need to be restored, please do so as soon as possible.
3. If you are burdened by guilt, or fear, or worry, and need the prayers of the church, please allow the elders and ministers of the church to pray for you.
4. Finally, if you want to give God a more perfect and wholly devoted offering of yourself - and need help in knowing how to do that, please seek out one of the church's ministers who will counsel you in that effort.

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