

Genesis 22 Part 1: The Greatest Sacrifice

By
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“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then He said, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.”

-Genesis 22:1-5

This passage is one of the most scandalizing chapters in the Bible for modern people, and is also one of the most well-known. In this chapter, Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac and he submits himself to this command. He takes Isaac up to Mount Moriah and ties him to an altar ready to sacrifice him, but at the last moment, God stops Abraham and points out a nearby ram that He asks Abraham to sacrifice instead of Isaac. For modern secular people, this passage represents all that's wrong with religion and why they believe secular rationalism is the best possible way that we can develop morality for our culture. They believe that this passage is teaching people that the God of the Old Testament is a bloodthirsty deity that demanded human sacrifice. And that anyone who bases their own morality around God, is vulnerable to committing heinous acts if they sincerely believe that God commanded them to do it.

This particular reading of this text has become ascendent in our culture and has even caused many modern Christians to be troubled by this text and not really discern what is importantly expressed for us here. Instead, they merely focus on the foreshadowing element of the text that predicts the sacrifice of Christ and miss the incredible truths that we are meant to discern about sacrifice and worship. To help us understand these points I'm going to split this chapter into two different papers. In this paper we will take a look at the ancient view of sacrifice in general, then we will see how this passage changed the Jewish perspective of human sacrifice and from there we will get a far more clear view of the foreshadowing of the cross and the effects of the crucifixion and the

resurrection of the Son of God. In the next paper we will look at how this principle of sacrifice applies to our lives today, especially in the realm of parenting.

Ending Human Sacrifice

“And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.”

-Jeremiah 32:35

One of the hardest elements of reading and understanding the text of Scripture is to keep in mind that modern man was not the intended recipient of this text. This is not to say that the Bible is not for us today, but it is to point out that each book of the Bible was written at a specific point in human history to a specific audience. This means that in order for us to understand the truths contained in these ancient books, we have to understand the mindset of the original recipients of the text. For us modern people, we are centuries removed from any form of ritualistic sacrifice, especially ritualistic human sacrifice. This fact makes us read this particular passage with a level of revulsion and disbelief that Abraham would even consider this commandment to be a rational one from God.

However, what historians like Mircea Eliade have found is that ritualistic human sacrifice was a universal practice in the ancient world. The only exception to this rule was Jewish culture, and only when they were actually living in obedience to their own Scriptures. The reason why Jews knew that God condemned human sacrifice was because of this very passage. To put it another way, when we as modern people, living in a world with no ritualized human sacrifice read this passage, the part that stands out to us is Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac and we can infer this as a soft condoning of human sacrifice. But, for an ancient person reading the same story, in a world in which human sacrifice to the gods was commonplace, the part that would stand out to them is God stopping Abraham from sacrificing Isaac and providing a ram instead. It was for this very reason why Jews believed that God did not accept human sacrifice, and why prophets like Jeremiah harshly condemned the Israelites when they disobeyed this passage and offered up human sacrifices anyway.

Sacrifice and Worship

And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.”

-Genesis 22:5

Which leads us to an obvious question, why did all of our ancestors practice ritualistic sacrifice? I believe that Abraham's comment here gives us a really good indication as to what sacrifice symbolized to ancient man, namely, the ultimate form of worship. In our modern day, we have reduced worship down to a particular genre of music, but its true meaning is far more complex. This literal translation of the Hebrew word here is to "bow down", which isn't a bad definition, though it is vague. The English word "worship" gives us a little more clarity. This modern word is actually an old English conjunction of the two words "worth" and "ship". To put it more simply, this word implies the act of honoring something in accordance with its worth. The Christian poet Thomas Traherne believed that worship was the summation of all Christian virtue and expressed this point this way:

"Can you then be Righteous, unless you be just in rendering to Things their due esteem? All things were made to be yours; and you were made to prize them according to their value: which is your office and duty, the end for which you were created, and the means whereby you enjoy. The end for which you were created, is that by prizing all that God hath done, you may enjoy yourself and Him in Blessedness."

-Thomas Traherne - "Centuries of Meditations"

To use a simple example to explain this, think about monetary value. If you wanted to sell your house, you would hire an appraiser to come by your property and "appraise" its value. It isn't a mistake that within that word is the word "praise", which is a synonym for "worship". What the appraiser is doing is giving the accurate valuation of your property in order to communicate its actual value or worth. So, any act of genuine praise or worship is simply an act that renders to something, or someone, what we consider their genuine worth to be. And the highest and most full expression of worship is always going to be a form of sacrifice.

Going back to the home analogy, once the appraiser sets the price, the way that someone shows respect for that value is by sacrificing their money in order to purchase it. When we spend money on someone, when we compliment them, when we give someone our time or attention, all of these are small acts of sacrifice intended to communicate how much we value someone. And the more we value something, the more we are willing to sacrifice for it. And this is all positive, unless I mis-value something.

Even though buying a home represents the largest singular monetary sacrifice that someone will make throughout the course of their life, it is usually considered to be a good move because we consider property to be a "worthy" investment. The only caveat is if someone mis-values a property. So if I buy a house for 400,000 dollars, and it turns

out that it was actually only worth 200,000 dollars, I have not rightly appraised the property and now my sacrifice was foolish and in vain. But, if I spend 400,000 dollars on a property and it was actually worth that much, or more, than this was a wise purchase, I have given the proper value to my purchase and I am benefited as a result.

This is a correct principle for all other acts of sacrifice. If I sacrifice years of my time in order to get a degree that turns out to be useless, this is considered a foolish waste of time. But, if I spend large amounts of money and time to become a doctor, then this sacrifice is generally considered worthwhile since I will make my money back through a lucrative and fulfilling career. What this means is that the true purpose of religion is to discover what is most valuable and offer the highest possible sacrifices to that thing, or person. This is why the word “worship” is most associated with God, since God is, by definition, the most valuable being in the universe.

So when ancient man was sacrificing their animals or their crops to their gods, these were all acts of worship, an offering up of value to that which was considered to be most valuable. There was also an idea of debt that was wrapped up in these offerings. It wasn't just a show of thanksgiving, there was an idea that the lives they were living were also unworthy of the lives that they ought to have been living. This knowledge is experienced as guilt and shame in the human conscience. Because of this, there are actual guilt offerings that are made in the Jewish society as well as the pagan societies surrounding them. Internally we know that we not only need to worship what is highest, but also that we are unworthy of what is highest. This then explains how these cultures began to consider human sacrifice a worthy offering to their gods.

Human Sacrifice

While pagan religions rejected the idea that human beings were universally made in the image of God, they still recognized the uniqueness of human existence and the value that human life possessed. So far from the modern conception that human sacrifice demonstrated a lack of respect for human life, it actually represented the opposite. Human sacrifice represented the offering of that which was most valuable in a material sense, to the supreme worth of the divine. And more than human life in general, for ancient man, there was no sacrifice greater than the sacrifice of the firstborn child. I think the late Timothy Keller made this point really well in his book “Counterfeit Gods”:

“In an individualistic culture like ours, an adult’s identity and sense of worth is often bound up in abilities and achievements, but in ancient times, all the hopes and dreams of a man and his family rested in the firstborn son. The call to give up the firstborn son would be analogous to a surgeon giving up the use of his hands, or of a visual artist losing the use of her eyes.”

-Timothy Keller - "Counterfeit Gods"

For ancient people groups, they did not enjoy the stability and the prosperity that we enjoy in our modern western world. For them, the prosperity of the tribe or the nation was bound up in the youth. They would be the ones who would fight their wars, the ones who would bring in food and the ones who would create innovation. Without them, the culture was doomed. In our modern world, we have so much prosperity that we don't have to value children. In fact, in our culture, having children is more of a sacrifice than a physical blessing. But for ancient man, the opposite was true.

The firstborn son represented the future prosperity of the family, to offer them up to the divine was seen as the ultimate sacrifice that someone could make. The infant also represented innocent life. Once again, our consciences condemn us before God, and therefore we intrinsically know that since our own lives are unworthy of God, we would need to offer up an innocent life in our place. This is why our ancestors universally practiced child sacrifice, and why Abraham was not surprised that God would ask him to offer up Isaac. If God really is the most valuable and righteous being, then why wouldn't we offer up to Him that which is most valuable and pure? This is also why God claims a right to the firstborn throughout the Scriptures. After God kills the firstborn child of each Egyptian home during the final plague upon Egypt, God says this to His people:

"...that you shall set apart to the LORD all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be the LORD's. "But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. "So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 'And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' "It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

-Exodus 13:12-16

Once again, God tells His people not to sacrifice their children to Him, but He simultaneously acknowledges that His worth is so high that the firstborn is due to Him. But since God's ultimate plan of redemption is for humanity, He gives an allowance for His people that they could "ransom" or buy back their firstborn children through an

animal sacrifice and forbids human sacrifice. This is the very sacrifice that Joseph and Mary offer for Jesus in the New Testament:

“Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD”), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

-Luke 2:22-24

Foreshadowing the Cross

“Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.’”

-Hebrews 10:5-7

This leads to the next logical question, if God is actually worthy of the sacrifice of the firstborn, why does He reject this as a genuine act of worship? This is not because God saw the sacrifice of the firstborn to be too high, but actually because it is too low for Him. The above passage is a clear reference to Christ and notice what He, Jesus, says about burnt offerings:

“In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure...”

As high as an offering of the firstborn would be, it was still not high enough. God was due much more, and our sins required much more to be forgiven. The whole sacrificial system of the Jews was a symbolic representation of what God actually demanded, none of it actually satisfied Him, as He repeatedly told His people:

“If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness.”

-Psalm 50:12

The world belongs to our God, nothing in it could be worthy of His glory or be sufficient to cover the sins of man. God allowed His people to sacrifice to Him in order to prepare them to receive the sacrifice that they could never give. His only Son.

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

-John 1:18

Since God could only be satisfied by a worthy sacrifice, He waited until a worthy sacrifice could be made. He forestalled His wrath on man, not because we could ever offer to God anything that was worthy of Him, but because He knew that He Himself would offer the most worthy sacrifice that could ever be made. And the people of God can now put our faith in this sacrifice and become worthy of God through His faithfulness and not our own. I love how the second century church theologian Melito of Sardis put this:

“He who hung the earth is hanging. He who fixed the heavens in place has been fixed in place. He who laid the foundations of the universe has been laid on a tree. The master has been profaned. God has been murdered. The King of Israel has been destroyed by an Israelite right hand. 97) O mystifying murder! O mystifying injustice! The master is obscured by his body exposed, and is not held worthy of a veil to shield him from view. For this reason the great lights turned away, and the day was turned to darkness; to hide the one denuded on the tree, obscuring not the body of the Lord but human eyes. 98) For when the people did not tremble, the earth shook. When the people did not fear, the heavens were afraid. When the people did not rend their garments, the angel rent his own. When the people did not lament, the Lord thundered from heaven, and the most high gave voice. 99) Therefore, Israel, you did not shudder at the presence of the Lord; so you have trembled, embattled by foes. You did not fear the Lord... You did not lament the Lord, so you lamented your firstborn. When the Lord was hung up you did not rend your clothing, so you tore them over the fallen.”

-Melito of Sardis - “On Pascha”

The ultimate sacrifice was given by God Himself, and so Abraham’s hand was stopped, not because God was not owed Isaac, but because God was owed more. This is why this passage ends in such a confusing way. If God was owed the life of Isaac, how could He be satisfied with a ram that didn’t even belong to Abraham? The answer is that He wasn’t. This passage doesn’t have a conclusion to it, only a promise of something in the future. This is why after the ram is provided Abraham responds like this:

“And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, “In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

-Genesis 22:14

Notice the future tense of this statement. It isn’t “the Lord *has* provided” but “The LORD *will* provide”. This is why the foreshadowing within this passage is so strong. Just to name some of the most clear foreshadowing elements of the passage to show this,

Genesis 22 is about Abraham offering up his own son, just as God the Father would offer up His own Son. It is also relevant to note, that while the main theme of the Bible is undoubtedly the love of God, this is the first time this word is used in Scripture. It might seem odd to us that the Bible would go 22 chapters without ever using this word, but it does. And when this word is used, it isn't to describe God's love for others, but Abraham's love for Isaac:

"Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."
-Genesis 22:2

The reason for this is because this passage is foreshadowing the ultimate expression of love, the love the Father had for His Son specifically expressed in the crucifixion. Also, the journey to Mount Moriah took three days, just as Jesus was in the tomb for three days. The sacrifice was to be made on Mount Moriah which is where the Temple of Solomon was built:

"Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah..."
-2 Chronicles 3:1

And there is some indication that Golgotha, the place where Jesus was crucified, would have been the same historic mountain top. There is even a foreshadowing of the resurrection here since Abraham says this to his men when he goes up to the mountain in order to sacrifice Isaac:

"Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."
-Genesis 22:5

Notice that he says "we will come back to you." The writer of Hebrews notices this statement and he says this about Abraham's faith:

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense."
-Hebrews 11:17-19

Abraham knew that God had made promises about Isaac, and since Isaac had not yet born children, he knew that Isaac's life would be preserved, even if it took God raising

him from the dead after he was sacrificed. This belief was ultimately fulfilled in Christ, who was offered up for our sins, but was then returned in the form of His resurrection.

The End of Ritual Sacrifice

All this foreshadowing is incredibly purposeful. This was not just to signify the end of all human sacrifice, but the end of sacrifice in general. The sacrifice of Jesus did not make worthless the sacrifices of Israel, it fulfilled them. By offering to God what He was actually owed, the Christians understood that no sacrifice could ever top what Jesus did. Our role is not to perpetuate the sacrifice of Jesus through more sacrifice, but to properly honor that sacrifice by ending all ritual sacrifice.

“And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”

-Hebrews 10:11-14

The reason why we live in a world with virtually no ritual sacrifice is because Christianity has been ascendent in the world over the last two millennia. But, Christians didn't stop sacrificing because it was a bad practice, but because the ultimate sacrifice was already offered and we must give that sacrifice its due by ending sacrifice in general. This doesn't mean that sacrifice as a concept is not practiced anymore, we will talk more about this later, only that ritual sacrifice is abolished since we now offer a very different sacrifice to God:

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”

-Hebrews 13:15

We can't add to what Christ did, but we are welcomed to participate in it, not through sacrifices of our own, but through praise and thanksgiving for the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. In a sense, this is what the sacrament of communion is all about. We sit and contemplate the sacrifice of Christ as a body of believers, and by eating it we symbolically take His sacrifice into ourselves and apply it to ourselves. This is a supreme act of worship and celebration for us as believers.

Christian Perversion

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went.”

-Ezekiel 36:22

As beautiful as this concept is, Satan is a master at corrupting that which is most beautiful. As bad as the pagan practices were, they were man grasping at the truth of God without knowing Him. Because of this, their practices were misguided and wicked, but they were at least acknowledging many of the truths that Christ taught. They acknowledged the value of human life, the worthiness of the divine, and the role of worship and ritual in our communities and our personal lives. The current belief that our culture holds is not a pre-Christian pagan idea, but a post-Christian perversion.

Remember that sacrifice is a symbol of offering up value to that which is more valuable. The significance of the cross was that God, as a man, offered up to God that which was most valuable, His own life, to that which is most valuable, God Himself . But this sacrifice was offered up *to* God *for* man, the perverse mistake that many have made is that God offered Himself up *to* us. In other words, many people started to get the false idea that God “owed” us redemption and died specifically for His valuation of us and not the value of God Himself. The life of humanity was not worth the life of the Son of God, but God’s own glory and God’s own purposes were worth such a sacrifice.

This concept disturbs us nowadays. We think that it is far more loving to say that God died primarily for us, and not that He died primarily for His own glory and secondarily for us, but this is exactly what we see in Scripture.

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

-Romans 3:21-26

Notice that Paul says that the *effect* of the cross was to justify sinners before God, but the *cause* of the cross was to vindicate God’s own righteousness and to glorify Himself

as being both “just and the justifier”. Jesus says much the same thing on the eve of His crucifixion.

“But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.”

-John 14:31

Notice that He claims His motive for going to the cross was for the love of the Father. This does not mean that Jesus did not die for us, other passages spell that out very clearly:

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”

-Isaiah 53:5

But in the context of sacrifice, remember, that true sacrifice is paying the greatest possible cost for the greatest possible value. God’s love for us has made us valuable and this is a beautiful truth, but human worth is contingent on the greater glory of God Himself. It may seem like a loving thought for God to place us above Himself, but this would actually have the effect of making us more valuable than Him. In order for God to love us in truth, He must place things in their proper order and live for His glory above ours. However, God is the only being in the universe who can seek His own glory without being selfish. Since God is triune, the members of the trinity seek the glory of the other members and not their own. When Jesus declares His actions to be for His Father, this is what He is doing. And later in Philippians 2 we see the Father’s heart was the glory of His Son:

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

-Philippians 2:5-11

While this concept is complex and difficult to understand, if we don’t accept its truth then we will fall prey to the current misconception that has bred a culture more depraved than the pagans who came before us. At least the pagans did believe in human worth

and they believed in something higher than themselves that they had to pay homage to. Through a perversion of this beautiful Christian doctrine, modern man has come to believe that there is nothing higher than ourselves that we need to sacrifice up to.

Man as Gods

“Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

-Genesis 3:4-5

The reason why the death toll of the last two centuries have far outpaced all other centuries of human existence combined is because we have finally raised ourselves to the taunt of Satan, we have become gods in our own eyes. So while we might think ourselves to be sophisticated in that we don't perform ritual sacrifice anymore, that doesn't mean we don't sacrifice other humans, only that we don't sacrifice them to anything higher than ourselves.

Even though the church as a whole hasn't fallen into all the perverse behavior that I have mentioned above, it is important to note that this misunderstanding has made its way into the church and has had some pretty serious consequences. Many Christians today believe that their primary responsibility on this earth is to be authentic to themselves and live a life that conforms to their own morality. Which means that the church has deemphasized a call to holiness and repentance from sin and instead elevated in its place a message of free grace and absolute acceptance no matter what.

We must always remember that the true doctrine of Christianity always sits on a knife's edge, a little too far in a single direction creates catastrophic results. We may have avoided the more negative effects of shame culture that color pagan nations from the past, but we have opened up a brand new Pandora's Box that carries with it more severe consequences than what came before us. Because as devastating as this doctrine has been for the church, it has made the culture surrounding the church Satanic in its most literal sense.

Remember that the spirit of Satan is the spirit of one who refused to bow to any authority higher than himself. To walk in the spirit of Satan is not necessarily to engage in satanic rituals, but it is someone who has set themselves up as a god in their own universe and does all things ultimately in service to themselves. This concept was seen as a good thing by one of the most prolific writers of the last two centuries, Friedrich Nietzsche.

The philosopher who did the best job of defending the Christian ideal of sacrifice was a French professor named René Girard. While it is slightly uncertain if Girard was an actual Christian, his ideas fit fairly neatly with Christian doctrine, and he uniquely pointed out the importance of sacrifice in the soul of man and how Christianity uniquely gave us a doctrine where we could do away with ritual sacrifice. To throw off Christianity was not to be done with religion, but instead it was to set up a new godless religion that made man his own ultimate end. Once again, secular thinkers like Nietzsche saw this as a good thing, but Girard brilliantly shows the terrible consequences of such ideas:

“To elude his own discovery and to defend mythological violence, Nietzsche is obliged to justify human sacrifice, and he doesn't hesitate to do so, resorting to horrifying arguments. He raises the stakes even on the worst social Darwinism. He suggests that to avoid degenerating, societies must get rid of humans who are waste, who hinder and weigh them down: Through Christianity, the individual was made so important, so absolute, that he could no longer be sacrificed: but the species endures only through human sacrifice.... Genuine charity demands sacrifice for the good of the species—it is hard, it is full of self-overcoming, because it needs human sacrifice. And this pseudo-humaneness called Christianity wants it established that no one should be sacrificed.”

-René Girard - “I See Satan Fall Like Lightning”

While many people today have never read anything written by Nietzsche or one of his contemporaries, these ideas have still affected the culture that we are now a part of. The concentration camps and the gulags can be seen as a modern secular version of sanitized human sacrifice for the betterment of the godless state. And while we might cringe at the barbaric actions of the pagan nations who would cut out the still beating hearts of their enemies, none of these pagan's killed people at the scale of the fascists or the communists who collectively exterminated over one hundred million men, women, and children.

Even closer to home for us, every time someone chants “my body my choice” in a defense of abortion, they are making this same basic claim. That since we are our own authority, the value of a child is contingent on the opinion of the child's mother. If she wants to bring that child into the world, her baby is considered valuable and worthy of protection. To such an extent that if someone were to abuse that woman in a way that causes a miscarriage, they could be tried for manslaughter. But, if a woman decides the baby that she is carrying is unwanted, then that separate human life is now considered a part of her body and can be killed and expelled from her with no more remorse than someone passing a kidney stone.

I don't say this to condemn any individual person, I know that since abortion is so ubiquitous in our culture, that many women in the church and outside of it have done this genuinely believing that they weren't doing anything wrong. For such women, I have a large amount of compassion and grace. I am instead condemning the idea itself that has led to the deaths of over 800,000 babies every year in this country alone. So when religious people say that abortion is modern day human sacrifice, this isn't totally wrong. It is not ritualized human sacrifice, but it is a sacrifice that the mother is making for her own goals and purposes. The reason why it isn't ritualized is because she isn't offering her child up to something higher than herself, she is sacrificing her child for herself.

All of this is merely the fruit of our failure to remember the importance of sacrifice. The Christian ethic is one that sees the end of sacrifice, not because it is primitive and unnecessary, but because God has provided the ultimate sacrifice in the person of Jesus Christ. But this sacrifice was not made to humanity. This was a sacrifice of God the Son to the glory of God the Father and the exaltation of Jesus Christ that has saved any and all who have put their faith in the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Son of God. In order to do this, we must have the humility to recognize that God is owed our lives. He is the highest possible good and therefore is worthy of the highest possible offering. We are only made right with Him, but believing that this ultimate offering was made on our behalf by Christ Himself. Believing this brings ultimate humility to the soul of man and ultimate assurance to the conscience of man. This combination does not remove responsibility from man, but it does provide us the motivation to pursue God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

"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. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

-Romans 12:1-2

