

Numbers 28-30: Vows and Offerings

By

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“Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Command the children of Israel, and say to them, ‘My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time.’

-Numbers 28:1-2

As we spoke about in the previous paper, the “narrative” section of this book is essentially over. With Moses handing his authority over to Joshua in the previous chapter, the only significant events that will happen from this point forward are the destruction of Midian in chapter 31 and the tribes of Reuben and Gad settling in Gilead in chapter 32. Really the rest of this book, and the entirety of the following book, Deuteronomy, are reiterations of the law that was previously given on Mount Sinai and explained to the people of Israel in the back half of the book of Exodus, and the entire book of Leviticus.

This brings up an obvious point, if what we are reading in Numbers right now are merely reiterations of what was previously said, why is Moses seemingly “wasting time” to say all of this again? The reason for this is actually quite simple. When Moses gave the Law to his people in Exodus and Leviticus, that was actually given to the previous generation who died in the wilderness. This is all happening forty years after the events of Exodus and it is being told to a generation that wasn’t old enough to really understand the Law that God gave to His people.

So in essence, while this is redundant for us as the readers, for the people hearing these words, it would almost be new to them. The bigger question is actually not why does Moses give this last teaching before his death, but why is it recorded for us when we already have his initial teachings in Exodus and Leviticus? The easiest way I can explain the importance of these passages has something to do with wisdom and maturity. When Moses initially explained the Law to the Israelites, the nation had very little understanding of God and His desires, as proved through their constant failures in the wilderness. But more than this, the Law was “untested”, meaning that the nation had not yet even tried to be governed by this entirely new system of ethics and religious practice.

Now, forty years later, both Moses and the people have been living under the Law for an entire generation. This means that Moses, as an old seasoned saint, is giving to his people, and all those who would read this in the future, tried wisdom that has come through practicing these Laws for forty years. The other interesting thing about what we are about to read is that some of these sacrifices were not given in Exodus or Leviticus. This means that what we are about to read is also prophetic for what God intends for His people after they enter the land and establish their nation.

For our purposes, we will be moving through these sections relatively quickly. This is not because these chapters are unimportant, far from it, but when we went through the book of Exodus, I quoted heavily from this part of Numbers and Deuteronomy for the very reasons that I mentioned before. So for our study I wanted to zoom out and look at this section of Scripture, given over three chapters, and see what I believe are the main themes that Moses was trying to convey to the people of Israel through the Law.

Rituals and Memory

“The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, ‘and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. ‘It is a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD. ‘And its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in a holy place you shall pour out the drink to the LORD as an offering. ‘The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; as the morning grain offering and its drink offering, you shall offer it as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.”

-Numbers 28:4-8

For chapters 28 and 29, Moses gives instructions on the regular offerings that were to be made by the priests for the nation. So these aren't individual sacrifices, but regular offerings that were made specifically by the Levites and they were for the entire nation, with one possible exception that we will talk about later which may have been made for the whole world. This section begins with daily offerings, then continues to weekly offerings made on the Sabbath, then monthly offerings, and finally annual offerings that were to be made during particular Holy Days.

In doing this, I believe that Moses is trying to teach his people the important relationship between ritual and memory.

“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren...”

-Deuteronomy 4:9

This has been, and continues to be a major theme throughout the books of Moses. After all, the Exodus begins with a Pharaoh who did not remember Joseph, and therefore persecuted the Israelites. And in each of the Israelites rebellions, there is a principle forgetting that caused them to doubt the goodness of God. It is our memories that allow us to revisit the past and to incorporate its lessons into our present life. The major danger of everyday life is that it is so easy to lose the lessons of our past and to slip into a habit of ingratitude.

“When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger.”

-Judges 2:10-12

In order to be a genuinely thankful person, we need to be able to remember the blessings of the past and to meditate on them. Ritual is a key way that we can retain the memories of our past. For the nation of Israel they had to see, daily, the smoke of the altar ascending to the throne of God. In this they were given occasion to remember the faithfulness of God to dwell amongst them. They could also reflect on God's generosity to their nation, and most importantly, to always remember their devotion to God.

Dying Daily

“I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.”

-1 Corinthians 15:31

One of the greatest truths that is the easiest to forget is that our lives are created by God and that they are ultimately for Him. The default setting for us is to view our lives as our own. Belonging only to us and existing to satisfy our goals and desires. The daily sacrifice was a constant reminder that this isn't true. This is especially manifest in the types of offerings that were given. On top of these offerings being in the morning and at night, they have a drink offering incorporated into it.

The majority of offerings were either grain offerings or meat offerings before God. This makes sense to us because it established for the people a constant consciousness of God's worthiness and the nation's devotion to Him. Keep in mind that these offerings were not for sins, but they were burnt offerings which were signs of devotion and gratitude to God. A drink offering wasn't a distinct offering, but a "covering" for the other offerings given to God. In these offerings, the priest would pour upon the sacrifice a sign of luxury like oil, or most commonly, wine.

This makes sense when we think about it. The meat and grain offerings were a sign that from God and to God belong all things necessary for our life. The drink offering was different. Wine and oil are not necessary to life, they are luxuries that we enjoy, not necessarily things that we need. To pour out these elements was a picture that we don't just receive life from God, but as James tells us:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

-James 1:17

Every joy and every luxury descends from the fount of all pleasure and joy. This can be hard for many Christians to accept, who tend to see God as a picture of justice and discipline, but the reality of God is that He is the God of all joy and goodness:

"How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light."

-Psalm 36:7-9

This is one of the ways that God wants us to view Him. Not merely as the One who Creates and sustains life, or the Judge of the Earth, or the Redeemer of mankind, but as the One who presides over the river of His pleasures that satisfies His children abundantly. But what is it about God that satisfies His children? His lovingkindness. His very presence and goodness constitute the fullness of joy and the deepest source of pleasure and satisfaction. To give drink offerings to God morning and night was to keep this in mind. To fix their consciousness on every joy and pleasure, and to give God thanks for all these things.

But it is more than this. The drink offering was also a picture of self-sacrifice. To give one of your animals to sacrifice was difficult because it was showing God that He is greater than our physical needs. To offer up wine or oil was to show God that He was

more important than our deepest joys or pleasures. On the surface this seems to be a lesser sacrifice, but when we stop and think about it, it is actually more. What I learned as a young man in the military is that it is easy to prepare yourself to die for a cause, but to offer yourself to live daily in a sacrificial stance towards something is much more difficult, but this is exactly the stance that God calls His people to live in:

“Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

-Luke 9:23

The truth is that each and every day the believer in God must deny themselves certain pleasures and benefits in order to honor God. It is always easier to scream at our children than to learn to control ourselves and discipline them properly, it is easier to lie to get out of a problem than to face the consequences, it is more pleasurable to pursue a forbidden lust than to master our desires and resist temptation. This is just a small list of the daily sacrifices a Christian is asked to make in order to honor God but the implications spread to every facet of our lives. But this sacrifice has even deeper implications than this:

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

-2 Timothy 4:6-8

For Paul, facing his death in a Roman prison, the image of this sacrifice that really captured his imagination was the act of emptying out a vessel. Like a vessel being drained, so Paul saw his life being emptied out and discarded by the Romans. But instead of despairing about this, he found comfort in this sacrifice and chose to see his death as a drink offering to God. Paul even relates this to Christ Himself:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

-Philippians 2:5-7

Just as Paul faced an emptying of his own life, Christ was “poured out”, He was emptied of His glory and became a fragile human being, vulnerable to suffering and death. This

is another way to take this sacrifice. To daily empty ourselves of our egos and passions, even unto death, that we might live faithfully under the call of God, no matter the cost.

Dead Tradition

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. “Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

-Matthew 23:27-28

One thing I have to address before we move on is the danger of ritual becoming merely routine. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were faithful in keeping all the rituals prescribed for them. But, instead of these rituals filling their faith with incredible meaning, they became empty rituals that only puffed up their pride and made them judgemental hypocrites.

This charge of hypocrisy can be read in this light. It wasn't that every Pharisee did the opposite of their faith behind closed doors, though some did, but they had forgotten the *meaning* of these rituals and had therefore become hypocrites before God.

I believe that modern evangelical Christians are so nervous of repeating this mistake that we are critical of rituals. But this isn't right either. It is always a mistake to criticize an idea based on its abuses, though this is an easy mistake to make. Since the abuse of an ideal comes directly from the ideal, conflating the two is the simplest error to make. Obviously if we remove ritual from our lives, we have insulated ourselves from the abuse of ritual, which would be the same self-righteous routine that turned the Pharisees into hypocrites.

However, this action is an example of “throwing out the baby with the bath water”. The reason why God prescribes ritual to His people is because ritual is, innately, good, though it is not immune to corruption or misuse. Take our bodies for an example. When we are children our parents teach us various “routines” for caring for our bodies, and these routines are usually carried out in the morning and at night. We teach our kids that when they wake up, they should make their beds, get dressed, have breakfast, and brush their teeth, though not necessarily in that order.

And then before they go to bed we have another routine. This might be something like, eat dinner, take a shower, brush their teeth, read a story, and then go to bed. These routines are usually taught to children with a fairly high level of regularity, with most parents trying to keep these “rituals” to a pretty consistent time frame. But here's the obvious question, why do we do this? Why not allow our children to wake up and go to

bed in whatever order, and in whatever manner they decide, or in whatever manner that the parent decides in any given day?

While we may not realize it, rituals help us to embody ideals without consciously understanding that this is what we are doing. Beyond that, by turning it into a consistent ritual, it helps us habituate our mind to certain priorities throughout the day. Take the morning and evening routines for children. What lessons do we want our children to take from these rituals? When we ask them to make their beds in the morning, this is not merely to make the room look “nice” throughout the day, since almost no one else will see their room unless they have company over. It is to show them the importance of maintaining their room.

This is the same with their body. This small sacrifice of time is helping the child understand that they need to constantly maintain their bodily health and hygiene. To put this point another way, if our children only cared for their personal affects and bodies in the morning and at night, their lives would be in turmoil. They need to maintain their bodies throughout the day through eating lunch, snacks, washing their hands periodically throughout the day, and making sure to care for their clothes and personal items.

But this still needs special attention. So on top of the daily “maintenance” we also have things like, Saturday chores, “spring cleaning”, haircuts, dental appointments, and things like this. Special occasions that not only punctuate the beginning and endings of days, but things that happen weekly, monthly, and annually. The mind needs new and different ways to have things “re-presented” to it so that it can understand and embody it throughout the year. This too helps us fight against the powerful pull towards empty routine. Which is why God does the same thing for His people. They not only have daily sacrifices, but weekly, monthly, and annual ones that punctuate the end of certain seasons and even the end and beginning of new years.

Rituals also help us get into a particular frame of mind. I find it really interesting, but many younger people are actually wanting to resurrect a business that was popular when I was a kid, Blockbuster. But why on earth would anyone want to bring back these old video stores? As someone who used these pretty frequently growing up, I can tell you they are not as glamorous as people make them out to be today. They were a little dirty and grimy, the selection was not that great, the workers there were usually fairly unhelpful teenagers, the return policy was annoying, and so on and so forth. Obviously, it is much more convenient to simply sit at home with your family and order literally any movie that has ever been made on the internet, without leaving your home, and be able

to watch the movie at your convenience without fear of losing or damaging the tape, or the disc.

This is obviously and objectively true, so why would people demand these stores to come back? Without knowing it, what we are really wanting is a return to ritual. While it wasn't the most sacred ritual to get into your car, drive to the video store, rent the movie and return to watch it, it was a ritual nonetheless. It required effort, focus, and intentionality. All of these things built small bonding moments with the people that we were watching the movie with, and got us into the frame of mind to watch the movie and enjoy the experience. Without the ritual, the experience is actually less meaningful and less bonding. Which is why, even though it has never been easier to watch a movie with friends and family members, we have been doing this less and less.

This same principle is true for music, which is why the younger generation is going back to records, and dating, which is why the younger generation is being increasingly turned off to apps. The modern world has become, weirdly, too convenient. It is a world without any ritual and therefore it is a world without embodied meaning. This is why modern life can feel simultaneously too busy and full, and yet hollow and without meaning. Not to blame everything on technology, obviously these problems existed before the smart phone, but technology is a tool of amplification, and whatever issues that existed in the human spirit prior to these advancements have now been magnified to absurdity in our modern climate. I like how the Christian writer Martin Shaw put this point:

"I know from rueful experience that something is happening to my attention levels since having a smartphone. I know how flimsy my focus seems to ten years ago. I know that—if I don't measure it—these little machines pour endlessly into my retinas impulses and distractions that really don't have my best interests at heart. I know screens are corroding something in me. Something meant for something better. ... Don't be flailed alive daily by the news; pay attention to what's happening on your block or in your village. It's OK not to have an opinion on everything happening in far-off climes. It doesn't mean you're stupid. It means the opposite. It means you may have something approximating conventional blood pressure; it may mean there's a big old part of you that is simply not for sale. It's worth practicing a little unavailability to the world's carousel. Maybe we should have fewer friends and cherish the remaining more. Maybe we should read fewer books but linger longer with them. Maybe we should check our twitchiness for more.

-Martin Shaw - "Liturgies of the Wild"

Without directly saying it, the encouragement here is for more intentional types of ritual to reign in our lives. To actually make life "harder" for ourselves and learn to enjoy the

processes that make life matter. I think this all came to a head during Covid. All of a sudden the world was squeezed into a binary of “essential” and “non-essential” activities. And what most of us discovered is that the “non-essential” aspects of life were actually irreplaceable to making our life have meaning and purpose. This obviously included church. It is certainly “easier” to sit in our homes and digest a teaching from the comfort of our couches, but there is no ritual there, there is no communal experience.

This reduces our faith down to a bunch of things that we believe and not enough of our lives into what we practice. So on one end, we must be careful not to consider the ritual the source of our faith, but on the other not to believe that our faith can thrive apart from ritual. The two go hand in hand together just as Christ’s incarnation teaches us that they should:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

-John 1:14

In order to save us, the divine Word of God could not remain in the world of the Spirit, He had to come into our world and dwell among us. But it wasn’t merely His body that was sufficient, Christ was not some empty shell that came to die, it was the life of the Son of God made flesh that could take away our sins. This is why we must balance these two things if we want to have an active relationship with God. And the way we do this is by trying to always remember the *reason* behind our various rituals. When we combine the two, reason and practice, we have the building blocks for active and living faith.

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

-James 2:26

Sacrifice and Worship

“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. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

-Hebrews 13:16

We’ve already discussed this at some length, so I will try to make this point brief. There is a connection, Biblically, between sacrifice and worship. The modern word for worship comes from a conjunction of two old English words, “worth”, which is self explanatory, and “ship”, which referred more to something’s state or quality of being. To put this more simply, to offer worship to something was to show, or demonstrate the value of

something to you. It is true that one way we can do this is through the arts. When we spend time singing to God and meditating on His goodness through an act of artistic expression, namely music, this is a profound and inspiring act of worship.

But this happens all the time. As we talked about before. Our entire lives are supposed to be living sacrifices unto God. In everything we do, we are seeking to remind ourselves of this fact. When we wake up in the morning and pray we are reminding ourselves that the day belongs to God, it is a grace that comes from Him, and therefore it is right and proper that we seek to live that day in reverence to Him. It is also why we pray before we eat:

“For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

-1 Timothy 4:4-5

The Jewish sacrificial system was supposed to emphasize these truths to the Jewish people. Every day, every week, every month, every year, every season of prosperity, every season of adversity, every joy, every praise, every peace of food, and every little luxury came from God and therefore a portion of it should be sacrificed to God to remind them of this inescapable fact. Since Christ fulfilled the sacrificial law, the church does the same thing, but in a bloodless manner. So the writer of Hebrews tells us that we do this through prayer, praise, and charity. Through these three things, we sacrifice our time, our attention, and our goods to the benefit of others, and the glory of God to remind ourselves of these same beautiful truths.

Vows and Sacrifice

“Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: “If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.”

-Numbers 30:1-2

I believe that the reason why Moses ends this section with a chapter about vows is that he is trying to show his people the connection between vows and sacrifice. A vow is a pledge, a commitment to some future proposition. Even in the modern world, when we make a vow, or a pledge, we are asked to offer up some “skin in the game” to make our pledge solid. For instance, we may be asked to sign a contract, put down some earnest money, or simply put our reputation on the line in order to establish our personal fidelity to a given proposition.

A couple things that I want to point out about this passage though. This passage isn't really for or against the making of vows, it merely regulates how vows are to be made. In fact, there are passages that seem to indicate that this process of making vows in the ancient world had run amok and caused more harm than good:

“Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few.”

-Ecclesiastes 5:1-2

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ “But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; “nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. “Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

-Matthew 5:33-37

Like we talked about with ritual, it isn't the act itself that was deemed a problem, but the abuse of it. Flippant, or foolish vows can certainly cause more harm than good, but this doesn't mean that they are intrinsically bad. Building on that point, there is some controversy that the laws for men are different than the laws for women:

Men and Women

“Or if a woman makes a vow to the LORD, and binds herself by some agreement while in her father’s house in her youth, “and her father hears her vow and the agreement by which she has bound herself, and her father holds his peace, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement with which she has bound herself shall stand. “But if her father overrules her on the day that he hears, then none of her vows nor her agreements by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will release her, because her father overruled her. “If indeed she takes a husband, while bound by her vows or by a rash utterance from her lips by which she bound herself, “and her husband hears it, and makes no response to her on the day that he hears, then her vows shall stand, and her agreements by which she bound herself shall stand. “But if her husband overrules her on the day that he hears it, he shall make void her vow which she took and what she uttered with her lips, by which she bound herself, and the LORD will release her. “Also any vow of a widow or a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her. “If she vowed in her husband’s house, or bound herself

by an agreement with an oath, “and her husband heard it, and made no response to her and did not overrule her, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement by which she bound herself shall stand. “But if her husband truly made them void on the day he heard them, then whatever proceeded from her lips concerning her vows or concerning the agreement binding her, it shall not stand; her husband has made them void, and the LORD will release her. “Every vow and every binding oath to afflict her soul, her husband may confirm it, or her husband may make it void. “Now if her husband makes no response whatever to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all the agreements that bind her; he confirms them, because he made no response to her on the day that he heard them. “But if he does make them void after he has heard them, then he shall bear her guilt.” These are the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, and between a father and his daughter in her youth in her father’s house.”

-Numbers 30:3-16

Many modern Christians try to talk around passages like this, but I think we need to be honest about what we see here. We need to remember that the Law was given to a very specific people, at a very specific time in human history. The intent of the Law was not to create a perfect society, for such societies don't exist. The purpose of the moral law, these would be the portions of the Law like the Ten Commandments, were given to describe the Kingdom of Heaven and the morality of God. But these moral laws are very vague and need elaboration before they make practical sense. This is what the “human laws” do which comprise the majority of the Law.

This isn't a “moral command” it is a human Law that regulates the moral ideals of God for this particular people group. The fact is, that for the majority of human history, most ancient societies were organized in what we would call “patriarchal” cultures. This is where men held almost all of the political and social power within the culture and women had fewer rights. I do believe that in comparison to the other people groups alive at this time, the Law that God gave His people afforded women unprecedented rights, and I also believe that there is a very good reason why ancient, more brutal cultures were organized this way, but it isn't a reason to believe that this method would be good for our culture, or that modern laws that have given women more rights are bad things, I would actually argue the opposite.

But again, let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater:

“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

-1 Corinthians 11:3

God lays out His creation in accordance with His very nature. What we call the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is laid out in a hierarchical structure with the Father as the head, and the Son and the Spirit as those who are under His authority. This doesn't mean that they are not equal in power or dignity, but it does mean that they are not the same in role or responsibility. The modern movement towards feminism has unfortunately forgotten all of this. It either leans towards egalitarianism, meaning that men and women are completely the same, or towards matriarchy, in which women ought to have more authority and power within the culture because they are intrinsically "better" than men.

But as we have talked about before, if we truly want all things to be equal, it is always easier to lower something that is exalted, than to exalt something that is lower. It is always easier to take money from the wealthy, than it is to actually make impoverished people wealthy. It is easier to denigrate the strong, than it is to make the weak strong. In order to artificially close the gap between men and women, our society has been inundated by a constant deluge of movies and rhetoric that is designed to lower men and masculinity, in order to artificially elevate women and femininity. I think that C.S. Lewis actually predicted this point in his really interesting book "Perelandra" where he has Satan trying to corrupt an innocent "Eve" like figure into ignoring her need for an "Adam" figure:

"It appeared to be telling, with extreme beauty and pathos, a number of stories, and at first Ransom could not perceive any connecting link between them. They were all about women, but women who had apparently lived at different periods of the world's history and in quite different circumstances... The heroines of the stories seemed all to have suffered a great deal—they had been oppressed by fathers, cast off by husbands, deserted by lovers. Their children had risen up against them and society had driven them out. But the stories all ended, in a sense, happily: sometimes with honours and praises to a heroine still living, more often with tardy acknowledgment and unavailing tears after her death... At last it dawned upon him what all these stories were about. Each one of these women had stood forth alone and braved a terrible risk for her child, her lover, or her people. Each had been misunderstood, reviled, and persecuted: but each also magnificently vindicated by the event... What emerged from the stories was rather an image than an idea—the picture of the tall, slender form, unbowed though the world's weight rested upon its shoulders, stepping forth fearless and friendless into the dark to do for others what those others forbade it to do yet needed to have done. And all the time, as a sort of background to these goddess shapes, the speaker was building up a picture of the other sex. No word was directly spoken on the subject: but one felt them there as a huge, dim multitude of creatures pitifully childish and complacently arrogant;

timid, meticulous, unoriginating; sluggish and ox-like, rooted to the earth almost in their indolence, prepared to try nothing, to risk nothing, to make no exertion, and capable of being raised into full life only by the unthanked and rebellious virtue of their females.”

-C.S. Lewis - “Perelandra”

In this one section, written almost a hundred years ago, C.S. Lewis predicted the last fifty years of Hollywood. The only way to elevate women to be greater than men, or at least, equal in every way, was to denigrate men. It is this very ideal that we are currently rebelling against, but that is not really the subject of our paper so I will leave this point there.

The Purpose of Vows

The purpose of vows is actually fairly simple, though we have not really maintained its importance in the modern world. One of the most important, yet most illusive, virtues of the Scriptures is integrity. To be a person of integrity means that we maintain our identity through the shifting circumstances of everyday life. To put it another way, a person who lacks integrity is a person who lacks constancy. They are someone whose values and character shifts depending on the circumstances, and depending on what would benefit them in any given moment.

The reason why this virtue is so difficult to maintain is because the circumstances that we live in are constantly shifting beneath our feet. To be sure, it is much easier to vow to tell the truth when we have no temptation to lie, but the second that telling the truth has real and substantial consequences, maintaining that conviction becomes a very difficult action that requires real sacrifice. The same is true for romance. When we first fall in love, and we legitimately can't imagine being unfaithful to our romantic partner, vows are rather superfluous to our love. It is the times in which temptation arises and we find ourselves struggling with our spouse, or attracted to someone else, that this virtue becomes necessary.

This again is difficult for the modern mind. Because we value spontaneity and authenticity, we tend to think that what we want to do comprises who we really are. Therefore, maintaining loyalty to something, or someone, when we don't feel like it sounds like a form of bondage, and one that we don't desire. Instead we have this strange idea that if we really loved someone, we would never be tempted to stray. And actually if we are ever tempted, perhaps we chose wrongly and therefore we are entitled to change. It reminds me of the musical “Into the Woods”. Towards the end of the play the prince who married Cinderella cheats on her with another woman. When she asks him why he strayed he says:

“I thought that if I had you I would want nothing else.”

This is a profound statement. The modern world believes a strange myth that love dispenses with integrity, not understanding that the opposite is true. Love doesn't dispense with integrity, love is *maintained* by integrity. This is why the modern world doesn't understand the need to go through wedding ceremonies. They see them as a waste of time and effort. And even when we engage in them, we see them more as celebrations of the self than a somber time to make a serious vow in front of a group of witnesses. This mistake in our culture is why, though the cost of weddings has risen so high, with the average wedding costing around thirty grand, the rates of divorce have risen at a commensurate rate.

I just love this sequence from the novel Jane Eyre to illustrate this point. At a certain moment in the novel, Jane falls in love with a man that she learns is technically married, albeit to a literal crazy woman. She is sorely tempted to throw off societies norms, and in the name of love give herself to this man, but she resolves this internal conflict like this:

“I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad — as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth? They have a worth — so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane — quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs. Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations, are all I have at this hour to stand by: there I plant my foot.”

-Charlotte Bronte - “Jane Eyre”

This is a perfect depiction of the virtue of integrity. To hold to your convictions, especially when it costs you, is the definition of integrity and the way that we can hold ourselves together in a world that is falling apart. This is why God includes sacrifice as a part of all their days, both the Holy Days and the average ones. Each sacrifice constituted a sacred vow before the Lord to live for Him alone. And since these sacrifices were made in public, the intention was to show how vows are made publicly and held by communities. They are not meant to be made only to ourselves, but we require accountability to maintain our integrity.

This is also why we find it hard to maintain our faith in the modern Christian world. Without regular confession and accountability, our faith has become so personal, that it is almost entirely without vows or integrity. It is for this reason why our church tries to

focus on the sacraments of the church, like baptism and the Lord's Supper. As the theologian Matthew Henry articulated:

"The Lord's Supper is an oath. That is the ancient signification of the word sacrament. The Romans called the oath that soldiers took to be true to their general, sacramentum militare; and our law still uses it in this sense: dicunt super sacramentum suum, "they say upon their oath." So that to take the sacrament is to take an oath, a solemn oath, by which we bind our souls with a bond unto the Lord. It is an oath of allegiance to the Lord Jesus, by which we engage ourselves to be His dutiful and loyal subjects, acknowledging Him to be our rightful Lord and Sovereign."

-Matthew Henry - "The Lord's Supper"

This is why we are commanded to not take these sacraments lightly. Since they constitute a type of vow, to bring them into ourselves with an intent to hold to them will produce blessing, but to do this in an unworthy, or hypocritical, manner would produce a curse:

"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

-1 Corinthians 11:27-29

Vows and rituals are the essential basis for every community, especially the community of believers. When we understand these truths and hold fast to them, we can build a thriving community that establishes strength and community. To forget this is to make a superficial community that is devoid of integrity and real care.

God's Vow to His People

I wanted to end this study by showing a very interesting aspect of these sacrifices that would have been mostly unknown to Moses when he spoke this to his people. As with all vows, they go both ways. It was very common in the old world for deities to enter into relationships with nations in a one sided manner. In other words, while the people had to commit entirely to a particular god, this god could be capricious and even negligent towards their responsibility towards their people.

Our God is different. When Moses is describing the people's responsibility to God, woven throughout these passages are God's commitment to His people. God has promised His people that He would be with them and each sacrifice was a "down

payment” on God’s faithfulness. In other words, they sacrificed what they had, believing that God would be faithful to bless them with more.

This is a fairly amazing truth that is most present in the feast days. In Numbers 28 and 29 we see five major Holy Days that corresponded to different harvest seasons, (this section only leaves out one Holy Day and that is the Feast of Firstfruits, which is actually a part of the Feast of Passover). The first two mentioned in chapter 28 are the feasts of Passover and the feast of “weeks” or “Pentecost”, and “Pentecost” is named this because it happens 50 days after Passover. These are the spring festivals and they honor God before and during the harvest.

Once again, we see this interesting pattern of trust. They are to offer to God *before* the harvest really comes in. In fact, the feast of “Firstfruits” is just that. It shows that the first gleanings of the spring harvest are coming in, but the crop itself is not there yet. It would only come around fifty days later when the Israelites celebrated the Feast of Weeks. The end of the year has three more Holy Days. The Feast of Trumpets, Atonement, and finally Tabernacles. These Holy Days did much the same thing, and they were predicated on the Jewish people’s trust in the God of the harvest to make these times fruitful.

There is much I can say about these Holy Days, and have already said in previous teachings, but for the purpose of our study today, let’s end on an interesting prophetic note. As I said, these feasts are separated by the summer months and we can understand Jesus’ mission through these days. The spring holidays correspond to His first coming and what He accomplished, which is why He died during Passover, was raised during Firstfruits, and poured out His Spirit on the church during Pentecost. This means that the next three Holidays are God’s promise to His church about His second coming. I love how the theologian Dr. Michael Brown puts this point:

“The Word is wonderfully clear. First came the Passover (Yeshua’s death), Firstfruits (His resurrection), and Pentecost (the outpouring of the Spirit). Next will be Trumpets (the Second Coming), Atonement (national forgiveness), and then only one festival will remain: Tabernacles—celebrating the final ingathering of the harvest! After the Lord returns and Israel receives atonement, “the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem [in the final end-time war] will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16). All the nations will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem every year! At that time this Scripture will be fulfilled: In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, “Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you” (Zechariah 8:23).”

-Dr. Michael Brown - "Our Hands Are Stained With Blood"

The fascinating thing about the Feast of Tabernacles, which celebrates the wilderness wandering of the Israelites by having the nation of Israel dwell in "tents" for a week, is that more offerings are required for that day than any other Holy Day. The reason given is that these offerings are not just for the nation of Israel, but for all nations in preparation for God's final "ingathering" of all people. This is why the book of Zechariah ends with this interesting promise:

"And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—"The LORD is one," And His name one."

-Zechariah 14:9

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."

-Zechariah 14:16

After the world has come to accept God, this feast is still maintained by the people, no longer to remember the Jewish wandering, but the wandering of all nations before God called them home. As the church we sit in wait for God's wonderful work. We have seen Him be faithful in the first three Holy Days of Israel, and we sit in anticipation of His fulfillment of the last three. We wait for the final ingathering in which the world, that is so broken, will be made right again, and we are told in that day:

"In that day "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the LORD of hosts. Everyone who sacrifices shall come and take them and cook in them. In that day there shall no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts."

-Zechariah 14:20-21