
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 11: SACRIFICES

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

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21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT · 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

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4. Noah
5. Abraham
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Lecture 11

SACRIFICES

Lecture Theme:

God's people forfeited by their sin all rights to approach God's Holy dwelling place, except through the blood of Christ's sacrifice.

Text:

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:13–14).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 11

We sometimes enhance our learning through employing our five senses, that is sight and sound and smell, touch, and taste. If a child is learning to prepare a new and unfamiliar meal for example, he could just read about it, but if someone takes him into the kitchen, and he sees what the ingredients look like, and he comes to see what they smell like when you combine them, and he learns to test taste the mixture and to listen for clues when it's done cooking, and then at the end feels the texture of the final product, he'll know far more than having just read about it. Well, God stooped to the Old Testament people as a church underage and provided them with graphic images to teach them about the Person and work of the coming Messiah. One of the chief modes He employed was through the ceremonial sacrificial system, vivid ordinances that engaged all five senses. So why does the Old Testament system of worship seem so bloodied? Why are there multiple types of sacrifices? And what is the theological significance of the difference between them? How do the sacrifices relate to Christ, and how does understanding the intricate details of the Old Testament ordinances deepen our understanding of New Testament gospel themes?

The psalmist asks a pressing question in Psalm 15:1: “Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?” The answer is found in part in God's provision of sacrifice. In the last lecture, we considered the place God chose to dwell among the people, that is the tabernacle. Now we must turn to consider the means of approaching the Lord through the ordinances He appointed, which are namely, the sacrifices to be performed at the tabernacle and then the priests who will offer them. In the following lecture, we'll explore the God-ordained personnel, these priests that He commissioned to carry out the service. All three lectures go together, demonstrating what God revealed about Himself and His redemption through this period.

Men have forfeited by their sin all right to communion with a holy God, except through sacrifice. Those sacrifices were offered at various times in the book of Genesis. In the days of Moses, we have a formal system of

sacrifice that is embedded into the life and worship of Israel. Sacrifice maintained a central place in the daily life and experience of Israel throughout the Old Testament, so we must understand the theology that God reveals through them. When combined, these sacrifices portray a complete picture of substitutionary atonement in all of its benefits provided in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, first of all, in this lecture we need to consider the need for sacrifices. And I want to draw your attention to an important turning point in the flow of redemptive history, an event that I think serves as a hinge in connecting the book of Exodus to the book of Leviticus.

In Exodus 29:45–46, we saw the promise that God would dwell in the midst of His people, but when we come to the end of Exodus, what do we discover? It ends with God’s glory filling the tabernacle, but (and this is an important “but”) there is no access for humanity to approach and to hold fellowship with God in that tabernacle. We read in Exodus 40:34–35, “Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” Well, if Moses was barred entry, then no one had access. This tension creates the context that ushers us immediately into the solution God provides in Leviticus, both the sacrifices and the priesthood. The climax of Leviticus chapters 1 to 10, is found in chapter 9:22–23, which says, “And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people.”

At this point, it may be helpful to introduce a few important points of theological vocabulary that are related to the biblical doctrine of atonement. We’ll be referring to them as we progress. Let me give you three words. The first is “vicarious,” a vicarious atonement; that means a legal substitute, so an atonement that is made on behalf of another: vicarious atonement. The second word is “expiation.” This is one part of the atonement; expiation, that means taking away guilt through the payment of a penalty. And then, thirdly, we have a word called “propitiation.” Propitiation means satisfying divine justice and appeasing the wrath of God. All of these are important for understanding, ultimately, Christ’s atonement. Sin, even sins of ignorance as Leviticus makes clear, require atonement. An atonement for sin was made through a substitutionary sacrifice. This is central to the concept of redemption, and thus to God’s history of redemption, which is what we’re studying in this course. Leviticus teaches us of so great a salvation.

Secondly, let’s consider the provision of sacrifices, and let me say [to begin], I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important it is to understand the sacrifices. First of all, you must note the theology that is taught through each specific sacrifice. You may ask the question, “Why?”. The answer is: because you will see references to particular sacrifices in various places throughout the rest of the Old Testament. You’ll see them in historic books. You’ll see them in the Psalms. You’ll see them in the prophets in their writings. And when the Old Testament believer thought about a particular sacrifice, he thought about the theological truths taught in it, and so we must do the same. It will really open up and clarify later passages in the Old Testament.

When you come across a specific sacrifice and are able to insert the theological meaning into that particular sacrifice, you’ll say to yourself, “Aha! I know why God speaks of that sacrifice in this place.” So, for example, in I Samuel 11:15, it says, “And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the LORD; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.” So, the question is: why a peace offering? Well, the answer will become clear when we discuss the peace offering below. Secondly, under this point, the vocabulary and the theological concepts that are contained in the sacrifices provide really the foundation for the New Testament exposition of the gospel. So, if you want to enrich your understanding of the New Testament, you need to comprehend the significance of these temporary ceremonial Old Testament sacrifices.

Thirdly, in addition to the place of blood, which is obvious in sacrifices, we must also understand the significance of fire in connection with the sacrifices. Sin brings death, and so the animals were killed, but they were also burned as a sacrifice. This shows us that God Himself in His holiness is a consuming fire. We continue to see this theme in the New Testament where we read in Hebrews 12:29, “For our God is a consuming fire.” His glory includes His fury, His wrath, and His vengeance against all sin. You’ll see God manifests this in the judgments that He brought on Sodom and on Nadab and Abihu, and Korah, and so on, but greatest of all, Christ bore the

full cup of God's wrath on behalf of His people on the cross. But before we turn to look at the individual sacrifices, we need to first consider the general procedures that were followed with the animal sacrifices.

So, let me highlight some of those components. When they came to offer sacrifice, first of all, they presented the animal, and this was important. The animal had to be presented for inspection by the priest, and he would be looking to see: Is it a clean animal? Is it without blemish? Is it blind, for example, or maimed? Or does it have scabs, or is it disfigured? Does it have disproportionate limbs? and so on. This was important because the Israelite was offering his best, and that meant that his sacrifice was costly. It literally cost him. It was one of his more valuable possessions. They were presenting what [were], if you will, expensive animals. And in that sense, it was a true sacrifice as we say, 'well, that men really made a sacrifice when he gave that to so-and-so,' but this points to the importance of heart religion because in this inspection the priest was asking: was the worshiper seeking to approach God without cost or to approach Him carelessly, forgetting the fact that God sees the heart? You'll see the Lord rebuke His priests during the period of the prophets. For example, notice the rebukes in Malachi chapter 1 in this regard. God requires perfection, and this already shows us that we need a blameless sacrifice, which will be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

After the inspection, after presenting the animal, secondly, they placed their hands on the head of the animal not merely touching it, mind you, actually pressing down and leaning one's hand on the head of the animal. It was to be an outward expression of inward faith. The worshiper identified himself with the animal. His sins, if you will, were symbolically credited to the animal. It showed that the animal stood as a vicarious substitute for the worshiper, making atonement on his behalf. Thirdly, they slaughtered the animal, so after being identified with the animal, the worshiper himself would cut the throat of the animal, acknowledging that sin requires death, that there is no remission without shedding of blood, the blood of a blameless substitute. After this action, the priests took over for the remainder of the service.

Fourthly, the priest then applied the blood. You'll notice the words in Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." The blood was the life, and life ransoms from death; and life wipes away, if you will, the stains of death. At various times, blood was smeared on the horns of the altar, sprinkled on the sides of the altar, poured at the base of the altar. Other times it was sprinkled on the altar of incense or the mercy seat. The purpose of applying the blood was atonement for sin, providing reconciliation with God and forgiveness of sin.

Fifthly, they burned the animal. Now, depending on the sacrifice, they either burned part of the animal, or the whole of the animal was burned up; but notice that in being burned up, it was transformed into smoke, what the Bible describes as a pleasing aroma that ascends from the altar toward God's heavenly abode. Perhaps you've smelled the fragrance of meat cooking outside on a grill. It often spreads to the surrounding homes, and people can smell it in their yards. The fat in particular, the sweetest and tastiest part of the animal, belonged to the Lord and was always to be burned on the altar, signifying of course that the best belongs to the Lord.

Sixthly, they would engage in communing and in eating. So lastly, the worshiper enjoys, if you will, the hospitality of God's house and fellowship with Him in, specifically, the peace offering. And this brings us really to the heart of the covenant promise: God dwelling in the midst of His people, God being the God of His people and they being His own, those who are brought to take pleasure in His presence. So, we will now consider the basic set of sacrifices found in Leviticus 1 to 6. Each sacrifice teaches a different aspect of Christ's work. In each case the Lord Himself spoke and commanded these ordinances.

So first of all, the burnt offering or the whole burnt offering: this was a voluntary sacrifice. It wasn't compulsory, and the Hebrew word actually means "one that rises or ascends," signifying Israel's assent to God. The burnt offering, what you could almost call the ascension offering, comes first in Leviticus chapter 1; but you should note, it is not first in the actual order of worship, but it is first described in Leviticus 1 because it represented the core, if you will, of the sacrificial system. It was the most costly of all the sacrifices. In fact, you'll remember the altar in the courtyard of the tabernacle takes its name from this offering, the altar of burnt offering. It was the daily morning and evening offering to which all the other sacrifices were added throughout the day, those brought by the people. You can see how their sacrifices are built, if you will, on the foundation of the burnt offering. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of the burnt offering in the Bible. It is first mentioned

with Noah after the flood, as you may recall. God called Abraham to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. David offers up a burnt offering to stay a plague, and that place, that very location, becomes the site of Solomon's Temple with all of its burnt offerings that would be offered over the years.

In the burnt offering, the whole animal, not just part, was burnt, demonstrating or symbolizing utter consecration, or full submission, to God and His law. It was a picture of total self-dedication. It is burned completely, transformed into smoke, a sweet-smelling savor before the Lord. It ascends to God in heaven. Note, at the announcement of Samson's birth, Manoah offers a burnt offering, and we read in Judges 13:20, "For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground." See, this symmetry fits with the picture of the offering itself.

Secondly, we have the meat offering. This could also be called a grain offering or a tribute offering. In this offering, there was no death and no blood involved. It was brought to the Lord and offered by the priest. Part of it was burned, and the remainder was eaten by the priests but not the people. God must accept our persons before our gifts; the burnt offering comes before the meat offering. This sacrifice signifies giving back to God a portion of what is produced through His strength and blessing. It entails thanksgiving for God's mercies. You'll note that frankincense was added to perfume the offering, a beautiful picture of Christ's mediation. Now, on the occasions when the priests themselves offered a meat offering for themselves, the entire offering is burned. Why is that? Well, in other words, the meat offering was never eaten by those who gave it. Sometimes it could be offered with the burnt offering or the peace offering or by itself, but the meat offering was often closely associated with the burnt offering. [Here is] brought together consecration to God and tribute.

Thirdly, we have the peace offering. This symbolized fellowship and communion with God. Part of it was burned, and part of it was eaten. It was the only offering of which the worshiper himself was permitted to eat and only able to eat it at the tabernacle in the presence of God. And so, you can see how reconciliation comes first. There is no peace with God without sacrificial atonement; and without the peace offering, there would have been no fellowship. Here we see that the fat is the Lord's, the richest, most flavorful part. God, of course, does not need, nor does He eat food (this is found in a number of places, but go look at Psalm 50 on this point). However, it symbolized these spiritual truths of fellowship and communion with the Lord. It exhibits close fellowship with the God [Who] dwells with His people. It constituted in some ways the highest privilege. You can see how the New Testament draws on this concept and vocabulary. So, for example, in Ephesians 2:13-18, we read, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace." It goes on a little later, "so making peace," and then again, "And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

Fourthly, we have the sin offering. This sacrifice related to the pardon of specific guilt for specific sins. It is connected to the idea of expiation, which we discussed earlier: taking away guilt through the payment of a penalty. It teaches that all sin is serious, including unintentional sins of ignorance, because all sin transgresses God's law and defies His holiness. Some parts were roasted for the priests as a provision for their full-time labor. There were four categories of sinners: you had the priests; you had the congregation; you had the rulers; and you had individual Israelites.

Fifthly, there was the trespass offering. This could also be called the guilt offering. It addressed reparation and restitution, or making amends or compensation for wrongs that were done. It is closely connected to the previous sacrifice. The sin offering atones for sins against God. The trespass offering addressed sins of defrauding God and one's neighbor, with an emphasis on sins of a more private and personal nature. Remember how Jesus summarizes the law. It's summarized under loving God and loving our neighbor. Both are found here. There was no leniency in bearing the guilt, even in sins of ignorance. What did this do? The sacrifice aimed at cultivating a tender conscience toward sin, seeing it as stealing from God and man. Man is not right with God as long as these trespasses remain without atonement.

Next, we need to consider the order in which these sacrifices were offered. Just as we saw with the procedures in the tabernacle, the sequence or order in which the priests offered these sacrifices also teaches us important theological truths. The first three were each voluntary, and in some ways represented an ideal worship scenario. The second two were expiatory, a remedy for particular sins. And so, ordinarily one or both of the last two, the sin

offering and the trespass offering, preceded the other three. So, for just a brief example, if you look at Leviticus 9, you have the sin offering that is presented for purification and/or the trespass [offering] which deals with restitution, reparation. Then following those, you have the burnt offering, this concept of ascension, and along with that came the tribute offering, the meat offering, and it concludes with the peace offering. And so, the application of blood underscores expiation, cleansing from sin. The burnt offering pictures ascension and full consecration. The peace offering, the only one eaten by the worshiper, is a meal of communion and fellowship with God in His presence. So, the pattern follows: justification, sanctification, and fellowship with God. The ultimate goal is fellowship and communion with God, but that requires cleansing and consecration. Atonement is a means to the end of fellowship with God in His presence.

Lastly then, let's bring all of these things together by focusing on Christ, the one final sacrifice. The blood of bulls and goats never atoned for sin in themselves. Hebrews 10:4 says, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." And the Old Testament saints knew this at the time. You'll see references again to this in the Psalms. They looked forward by faith through these ordinances to the coming Messiah, just as we look back by faith to Him. Christ's coming sits at the center of history, and the fact is we still mark time by it. We speak of the years before Christ (B.C.) and the years after Christ (A.D.). The tedious and monotonous details of sacrifice underscore their inadequacy. Every animal sacrifice, all of them, pointed forward to the one final and perfect sacrifice of Christ. You'll notice that the New Testament bursts open with John the Baptist's cry, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). The sacrifice of Christ lies at the very center of the gospel and the Bible.

As we saw previously, these temporary ceremonies of the Old Testament were put away entirely when they were fulfilled in the coming of Christ and the accomplishment of His work. The signs and shadows, types and pointers, no longer have a place in the New Testament, but we're able to study them with profit in light of the New Testament fulfillment. In doing so, they open up opportunities to see and preach beautiful portrayals of Christ and the gospel. The many continual Old Testament sacrifices are contrasted with Christ's one final sacrifice. Hebrews 9 the end of verse 26 says, "but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Hebrews 10:14, "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." Christ bore the sins of His people and the punishment for those sins. See this in I Peter 1 at the end, He is the sacrifice "without spot or blemish" (verse 19). He was well pleasing to the Father. God's most valuable sacrifice of all is found in Christ.

Jesus presented Himself voluntarily, without compulsion, as the Lamb adorned with meekness and submission to His Father. He served as the only and ultimate substitute standing in the place of God's elect people to atone for their sins. He fully satisfied and appeased God's wrath and reconciled His people, making peace with God for them. His blood was shed and sprinkled upon His people to cleanse them. We see this in many places. Revelation 1:5, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

The Christian exercises faith in Christ, leaning, as it were, all the weight of his soul upon God's Lamb, resting entirely in His person and His work. And we feed upon Christ by faith: John 6:51, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Christ enables us to hold communion and fellowship with God and His gracious presence now and into eternity. The Christian can thereby present his own body to God not as a bloody, but as a living, sacrifice wholly acceptable on to God, which is your reasonable service as we see in Romans 12:1. The law will constantly remind Israel of their inability to conform to God's standards of holiness and to love Him comprehensibly, and it is the law itself that teaches them to avail themselves of the sacrifices as they repent and cast themselves on God's mercy.

The sacrifices express the totality of reconciliation and restoration of fellowship with God through Christ. They move from the sinner's guilt before a holy God to the provision of a substitute in the place of the offender, the covering or atonement for sins and to restitution, dedication, and fellowship with God. Reading and preaching the Old Testament sacrificial system provides a wonderful opportunity for explaining their fulfillment in Christ and thereby presenting the glorious riches of His grace in the gospel. The sight of Christ's sacrifice continues even into heaven. In Revelation 5, we read, "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne." It goes on,

“stood a Lamb as it had been slain” (verse 6). “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood” (verse 9).

In conclusion, God’s people forfeited, by their sin, all rights to approach God’s dwelling place, except through the blood of Christ’s sacrifice. In the next lecture, we will go on to consider God’s ordained servants appointed to offer the sacrifices, namely the Old Testament priesthood.