

# We Have an Altar

by James D. Bales

Hebrews 13:9,16,20-21

## Introduction:

1. There were many altars during the Old Testament period:
  - a. In the Patriarchal Period: Noah (Gen. 8:20), Abraham (Gen. 12:7), Isaac (Gen. 26:25).
  - b. In the Tabernacle and Temple during the time of Moses and David: Burnt Offerings (Exodus 27:1; 1 Kings 8:22); Incense (Exodus 30:1; 1 Kings 6:22).
2. Jews could point to the temple, to its elaborate ritual, to their city, and by contrast view with disdain the simplicity of the New Covenant. They failed to recognize that these things were temporary (Heb. 9:9-10), and that even Abraham realized that he no more had a continuing country here than we do. (11:13-16; 13:14).
3. We must not go back to the services of God's Old Testament house, or temple, or tabernacle. (2 Chron. 5:11-13; 29:25-35). There can be no more offering for sin. (Heb. 10: 1)

## I. WE HAVE AN ALTAR.

A. The apostle shows us that we have the one sufficient sin sacrifice.

1. In commenting on Heb. 13:10 Milligan wrote: "To me it seems evident that the altar is here used by metonymy for Christ himself, who was sacrificed for us; so that to partake of this altar is simply to partake of the sacrifice of Christ. So Paul reasons in reference to the sacrifices of the Old Economy. 'Behold Israel,' he says, 'after the flesh: are not they who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?' (1 Cor. x, 18) And again he says, 'Do ye not know that they who minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they who wait at the altar are partakers with the altar' (1 Cor. ix. 13). To eat of the altar is therefore manifestly to eat of the sacrifice which is offered on the altar. And that the sacrifice in this case was the sacrifice of Christ, is evident from the context, well as from many parallel passages." (Milligan, 377, 378)
2. "The Jews boasted of their exclusive right to partake of their own consecrated sacrifices. This doubtless made a strong and deep impression on the minds of some of the weaker brethren: and they were in this way in danger of being misled by the false teachings of the judaizing party. But

as an offset to all their vain speculations about meats, and drinks, and carnal ordinances, Paul here reminds his brethren, that we Christians have also our exclusive rights and privileges; that we too have a sacrifice of which to partake as well as the Jews; a sacrifice of infinite value, and which is quite sufficient to satisfy the desires of all who lawfully partake of it. From this, however, the unbelieving Jews were all debarred according to their own ritual, as our author now proceeds to show" (378).

- B. We have this sacrifice and through Jesus Christ we can have access to God. (13:15). Through Jesus Christ we offer our spiritual sacrifices.

## **II. OF WHICH THEY HAVE NO RIGHT TO PARTAKE (13:10)**

- A. Those who returned to Judaism, or simply abide in it, are disqualified from partaking of the benefits of our altar, i.e. of the benefits of the one sufficient sacrifice for sin.
1. They cannot participate of it, for they are continuing in the shadow after the substance has come. God's time of long-suffering with Israelitish Christians, as in evidence in Acts 21, was now over.
  2. Just as for a time the church had not understood the full truth about the Gentiles and the law (until Acts 10), just so Jewish Christians had not at first had revealed to them and had not fully understood that they must finally forsake the Old. God tolerated for a time their continuing in the law, as is clear from Acts 21, but that time was now over—just as after Acts 10 one could not go back to the previous attitude toward the Gentiles.
  3. Those who tried to serve the tabernacle cannot partake of our altar. (13:10). Soon God in His providence brought about the destruction of the temple, and even the Jew cannot serve that tabernacle.
- B. The Latter-day Saints claim to have the Levitical priesthood, which was of the tabernacle. What right do such have to our altar? This shows how confused they are, and yet they claim to have inspired men including apostles and prophets!
- C. There are those today who want to go back to the temple system and pattern their worship after it, but we must not go back to the shadow.
- D. Judaism had to be abandoned. Christ suffered without the gate, without the camp, and we must go forth there to Him bearing His reproach. (13:12-13) Judaism must be abandoned.
1. The one who burned the bodies outside the camp was rendered unclean; until he had purified himself. (Lev. 16:2-28) Judaism viewed Christ as unclean, but we realize that we are cleansed through Him and the entire Old Testament system has passed

away

2. As Dawson Walker said: "They must make their choice between Christianity and Judaism, for the two cannot be amalgamated. Christ's death 'without the gate' was the symbol of His being cast out of the community and religious life of the Old Testament Israel. To realize the full power of His redeeming work, His followers must aandon 'the camp—the sphere within which the religious life and ordinances of Israel prevail—and must go forth to Him. To be branded as a traitor and to be deprived of Jewish privileges was 'the reproach of the Christ.' This His followers must share." (Hastings, II, 318).
3. This had to be done not merely to realize the full power of His redeeming work, but to realize this power at all (13:10). We must go outside the gate for He suffered outside the camp, i.e. outside Judaism. Therefore, no one has the right to say that New Testament worshipers have the right to keep the ceremonies and worship system of the tabernacle.

### **III. HOWEVER, WE DO HAVE SACRIFICES WHICH WE OFFER.**

#### **A. Word-Sacrifice (13:15).**

1. A fundamental New Testament doctrine is the priesthood of believers. We do not make a sacrifice for sins, but all of us must make our offerings unto God. (1 Pet. 2:5, 9 ) Our sacrifices are offered in a spirit of thanksgiving for God's bestowal of "his good will upon us through Christ who sacrificed himself to save us. We may, however, meditate with profit on the ceremonial sacrifices, as they help us to understand the nature of the Christian duty of praise. As the sacrifices for sin prepared the way for thanks-offerings, so did the sacrifice of Christ prepare the way for our thanksgiving. Indeed, without his sacrifice ours would be impossible. When we come to God to give him thanks we must have the broken heart of penitence, else we shall have no gratitude." (Cameron, II, 565-566)
2. We can praise God in our talk and in our singing. (Eph. 5:19) Singing was and is a part of the worship which Christians offer to the Lord. When they came together (Acts 20:7), they did not have an elaborate ritual built on the traditions of men. Theirs was a simple service. Singing praised God and instructed men. (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)

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they were in Old Testament days, except the public service of the Sabbath (the Lord's day, not the Sabbath, J. D. B.), the daily family exercises, and private devotions. The great annual festivals, the news moons, and jubilee of years of Israel are not binding on us; neither has pope nor prince any right to impose feasts or fasts upon us. . . . The words of our text more directly mean that we should cultivate a thankful spirit so as to be able to praise God always. 'Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks.' (I Thes. v. 16-18) We should so cultivate a thankful disposition that we may praise God at all times. For this purpose we need to be always able to appreciate his goodness to us." (Cameron, 568, 569). We not only have word-sacrifice but also deed-sacrifices.

#### **IV. DEED SACRIFICES—FORGET NOT.**

A. We are apt to forget it. "There is a reason for the apostles caution, 'Forget not.' We are prone to forget duties which are not congenial to us, because they demand self-denial.

1. This forgetfulness is not innocent, because it wilfully arises from a selfish inclination. Some people, who are very devout in their way, may be so much engaged in religious duties that they hardly think of works of charity.

2. It is possible for people to be so absorbed in revivalism that they forget perishing heathens far off, and shivering poverty at their door, and thus fail to contribute anything to enlighten the one or relieve the other. Such religion does not appear to be much, notwithstanding its noisy demonstrations.

3. Men advance various pleas for their neglect of the duties of this practical department of religion, but this carelessness arises from the native unthankfulness of the heart through ignorance of the benevolent character of God. When we admire God's generosity to ourselves, kindness to others is awakened in our hearts." (Cameron, 569, 570)

B. We are to do good. All of our sacrifice to God is not fruit of our lips, but also the deeds of our body as we minister to others. We must go about doing good.

"Observe that the sacrifices demanded from us are the various forms of well-doing. 'But to do good, forget not.'

"We ought, with constant attention to the matter, study how we may promote the welfare of others. Instead of this, there is reason to fear that we (sometimes, J. D. B.) do them injury. Some who cherish malice are so ignorant that they do not know it. The devil dwells in the hearts of such people without their suspecting it. Others can clearly

see proofs of his presence in their affections in the contemptuous references to their neighbors which they freely make, and in the envy manifested at their superiority in business, learning, popularity, or personal appearance. To counteract these treacherous feelings let us cultivate a desire to promote the comfort of others." (Cameron, 570-571)

- C. Communicate: "That is, impart of one's substance, to minister to the necessities of those in want or in affliction. (Rom.. xv. 26; 2 Cor. ix, 13; compare Heb. vi. 10) These are the sacrifices well-pleasing to God, through Jesus Christ, the sin-offering and High Priest - towards God continual thankfulness, towards men active benevolence in all its forms." (Davidson, 257)
- D. Congregations offered a sacrifice when they made their contributions. (Phil. 4:10-18), and we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 6:12-13; 12:1-2). Christians do not have to wait for someone to tell them to offer their sacrifices to God. We can do so continually. So instead of criticizing the church for not doing more, each as a priest of God, as a member of His church, should start doing these things.

#### **IV. THE MEANING OF SACRIFICE**

- A. Some people think that a New Testament sacrifice is the doing of something which hurts you to do, or which it costs you more than you can "afford". Sacrifices may cost, but this is not the meaning of the sacrifices we offer. A sacrifice is something offered to God. Under the Old Testament they had animal sacrifices, and various other types. Under the New Testament the term has been spiritualized in that it includes whatever we offer to God. We are to offer our bodies (Rom. 12:1; 6:13), and the various acts of service to God and to humanity.
- B. All Christians minister as priests in that they make these spiritual sacrifices. (1 Pet. 2:5, 9) There is no other priesthood, except the priesthood of Christ. And it is through Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:15, 11, 12), and not through any human priesthood that we approach God. And the sacrifices of the type which have been mentioned are the sacrifices we ourselves offer to God. Christ offered His sacrifice once for all, and we avail ourselves of its benefits when we approach God through Him.

#### **Conclusion:**

1. To be a priest of God, and to make these sacrifices, you must become a part of His spiritual house. (1 Pet. 2:5, 9) You must come into Christ. (Gal. 3:26-27) The making of the sacrifices is a part of our lives as Christians, and to be faithful in His house we must hold fast unto the end. (Heb. 3:6)
2. If we reject His sacrifice, and His covenant, there is no other sacrifice for sins,

and there is no other covenant into which we can enter with God. (Heb. 10:1-21; 13:20)

3. Live for Him and know the meaning of Heb. 13:20-21.

Except for the first point in the Introduction, this lesson is outlined from *Studies In Hebrews*, by James D. Bales pp. 165-169