

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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February 08, 2026

Volume 46, # 06

The Best Gift You Can Give to God

"For I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." (2 Corinthians 8:3-5).

Paul here describes the brethren in Macedonia as giving themselves first of all "to the Lord." To bring the point home, we each must ask ourselves how much we are willing to give to the Lord. Will this gift be our first priority, as it was theirs?

How much are we to give to Jesus? There are at least two occasions where Jesus taught that God does not desire any sacrifice at all! You'd better read that again! Yes. That's what I said. What's up with that?

The two times Jesus said this are found in Matthew 9:9-13 and 12:1-7. They have to do with proper motive. God does not desire sacrifices offered from those who are doing so in a boastful, prideful way, lacking compassion and good will. Or, we could say God does not desire our worship if it is lacking spirit and truth (John 4:23, 24), or if our hearts are far from Him (Matthew 15:8, 9).

The Greek word translated into our English word "sacrifice" means "offering" or "gift." Under the Old Testament Law, there were three main types of sacrifices, or gifts, made to God. There were: (1) sin offerings offered for atonement, (2) thank offerings offered in gratitude for blessings, and (3) consecratory offerings offered as a part of a sanctification or dedication process, such as when the newly built temple was dedicated.

Under the New Testament today, we can divide the sacrifices of our covenant into these same three categories. Our: (1) sin offering for our atonement has been offered by Jesus on the cross (Matthew 26:26-28; Hebrews 9:23), (2) Our daily discipleship becomes our consecratory offering as we dedicate our daily lives to God's glory and service (Luke 9:23; Romans 12:1, 2), and (3) our praise becomes our thank offering by which we express our heartfelt gratitude unto God (Hebrews 13:15; Ephesians 5:19, 20).

God, in some instances, does not want sacrifice to be offered. We saw that Jesus said that God does not want a sacrifice from someone without compassion. He said first go

and learn compassion. Under what other circumstances can our gifts to God be rejected today?

Willfully continuing in sin will cause our service to be rejected by God (Hebrews 10:26), or having no love for God or others (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). To give that which is without cost is not a sacrifice - we only give that which we know we will not miss (2 Samuel 24:24).

Jesus is our example. Think about what Jesus gave for us. Already, He has given far more for us than we could give for Him. He emptied Himself by looking out for our needs. He became a humble servant. He gave His life (John 3:16; Hebrews 2:14-18). He paid the price for our redemption that we could never hope to pay for ourselves. He paid the price; not in dollars and cents; not in silver and gold, but with His own innocent blood (1 Peter 1:18-21).

- Jon W. Quinn (slightly edited – GFS)

The Reaction of Evil People When Exposed

It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans." The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; (Acts 16:16-23).

The simple method of exorcism and completeness of the cure were impressive. A mere order, issued in the name of Jesus Christ, was the only ceremony, and the girl was immediately freed from the control of the evil spirit.

The masters of the maid became patriotic very suddenly when their means of gaining an easy living at the expense of the afflicted girl was lost. She probably had such power as is claimed by clairvoyants and spirit mediums. People have always been eager to learn

the secrets of the future, and will pay money to any one who pretends to reveal it. Those masters had a lucrative business in the capacity of "managers "of the demon-possessed girl. Such persons are not noted for their patriotic or religious zeal, usually, but let something arise that interferes with their unholy methods of money-getting, and they sometimes become very pious and patriotic. In this particular instance they began to accuse Paul and Silas of being disloyal to Rome. The charge would have both a religious and political aspect. The teaching of the preachers, that Jesus was "King of kings, and Lord of lords," was perverted so as to make them guilty of sedition. The accusers would point out the abandonment of idol temples by Christians, and prophesy the complete overthrow of Rome's national gods, thus endangering the authority of the state itself. It is easy to see how their charges would appeal to ignorant and prejudiced folk.

In our own time, we have seen similar conduct on the part of all wicked men against whose business restrictive, reform or prohibitive measures became necessary.

The saloon-keeper suddenly became zealous for the retention of "personal liberty" guaranteed by the Federal Constitution, felt a holy concern about the tax-payer whose burdens he so gladly bore, and pleaded for the privilege of paying extra license fees, when he saw the handwriting on the wall dooming his iniquitous business to extinction.

The dive-keeper becomes frantic in his fear for the safety of respectable women on the streets when his revenue-producing brothel is to be closed. His interest in virtuous women becomes pathetic.

Entrenched sin has always fought bitterly for its privileges, and wherever it has been overthrown, some leaders in the reform movements have been persecuted. This is a part of the price every true man must pay for his righteousness. Men of this heroic stamp are the sort God loves, and he will reward them hereafter.

Earth seldom does. Persecution, prison, death, marks the pathway of right's triumph over wrong in every age. How badly the world needs men willing to endure persecution, loss of property, failure in business, even death, that right may prevail.

- W.R. Walker (1869-1963), Studies in Acts, pt. 2, p. 35.

Clippings . . .

God's Plan

In the first century, God's plan for saving the lost and caring for the saved was made known through the apostles and put into practice by the disciples. God's plan was simplicity itself. And its success was the marvel of all the world. The gospel was sent to the lost. The poor and needy were cared for. And the church was edified.

How was the gospel sent to the lost? By congregations (1 Thessalonians 1:2-8) and individual Christians (Galatians 6:6) supporting evangelists to carry the gospel message all over the world, and by every faithful Christian "who (would) teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

How were the poor and needy cared for? By each congregation caring for its own needy (Acts 4:34-35, 1 Timothy 5:16) and receiving help from other congregations when needed (Romans 15:25-26), and by each individual Christian "doing good unto all men" as there was opportunity (Galatians 6:10).

How was the church edified? By the elders of each congregation "feeding the flock which is among them" (1 Peter 5:2), and by Christians "exhorting another" and "provoking one another unto love and good works" (Hebrews 10.24-25).

This plan is tried and proven. It worked in the first century, and it will work today. We do not need a new plan. We do not need an improved plan. But we do need a renewed zeal for executing God's plan.

- Bill Walton (1944-2017)

God Takes Care of His People!

We must be careful to learn a valuable life lesson from Solomon: The scriptures assure us of the "great love" God has for us (Ephesians 2:4). We must never limit the measurement of it based on events that happen in our lives. No matter what troubles and trials come to us, God loves us – greatly!

"I thought about something else and tried hard to understand it. I saw that God takes care of both good people and wise people and what they do. But no one knows if he will see good or bad times. Both good and bad things happen to everyone." (Ecclesiastes 9:1-2a, ICB).

Before Moses died, he gave his hearers security in stating that all holy ones are in God's hand (Deuteronomy 33:3). The ICB says it this way: "The Lord surely loves his people. He takes care of all those who belong to him. They bow down at his feet. And they are taught by him." Where else can the Christian flourish in confident safety? We may not be spared various trials of life, even severe troubles. Good and bad things come alike to everyone. And the bad things are painful. But never forget this: God loves us, and we are in God's hand!

As a matter of fact, experiencing various trials provides a great blessing for us that we are tempted to overlook: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James

1:2-4, NASB. See also Romans 5:1-5). Endurance is a key virtue that we must maintain, lest we diminish our confidence in and appreciation of the Lord God's love and care.

- Gary Smalley

- * "If Jesus is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all!"
 - * "Many a man waiting for a convenient time to obey the gospel to turn up, finds his toes do it first!"
 - * "Time cannot be expanded, accumulated, mortgaged, hastened, or retarded. Use it wisely!"
 - * "God knows all about us . . . and loves us in spite of it!"
 - * "Neither the authority of years, the weight of numbers, nor the intensity of sincerity can make a thing right if it is fundamentally wrong to begin with!"
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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)