

To Live Set Free

How would God have us to live in this age of Grace? According to Romans, as living sacrifices.

Romans 12:1:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a [living sacrifice](#), holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Just what is a [living sacrifice](#)? Isn't a sacrifice by definition dead, having been slain? Just how does God want us to conduct ourselves to be pleasing to Him?

The concept of a [living sacrifice](#) is not unique to the New Testament. Several Old Testament sacrifices involved a living sacrifice. In each such instance there was a pair of sacrificial animals, one to be slain and the other (the *living sacrifice*) to be released. Let's take a look at these in the Book of Leviticus.

The first such sacrifice (for the cleansing of lepers) involved two birds.

Leviticus 14:4-7:

Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop:

And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running [living] water:

As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running [living] water:

And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.

The first bird was killed, the living bird was set free.

The second such sacrifice (for the cleansing of houses) also involved two birds.

Leviticus 14:49-53:

And he shall take to cleanse the house two birds, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop:

And he shall kill the one of the birds in an earthen vessel over running [living] water:

And he shall take the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain bird, and in the running [living] water, and sprinkle the house seven times:

And he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird, and with the running [living] water, and with the living bird, and with the cedar wood, and with the hyssop, and with the scarlet:

But he shall let go the living bird out of the city into the open fields, and make an atonement for the house: and it shall be clean.

The first bird was killed, the living bird was set free.

The third such sacrifice involved two goats, offered for the transgressions of Israel on the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16:7-10:

And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat.

And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD's lot fell, and offer him [as a slain sacrifice] for a sin offering.

But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive [presented alive!] before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.

The first goat was killed, the living goat was set free.

In each of the three preceding instances, the living sacrifice was released. The lesson in each case is the same: the living sacrifice was saved alive so that it could go free.

Which goat was the living sacrifice on the Day of Atonement? The scapegoat. The word "scapegoat" today carries negative connotations, being used to refer to a person blamed for the wrongdoings, mistakes or faults of others.

This modern notion of a scapegoat is completely at odds with God's heart when He instituted the sacrifices for the Day of Atonement.

A proper biblical understanding of the scapegoat is revealed when you break the word into its component parts: "escape" + "goat" — in other words, "escaped goat." The scapegoat was *not* the one punished or slaughtered; rather, the scapegoat was the "escaped goat," the one released and allowed to go free. How enlightening, and how revealing!

The perversion of the truth regarding the escaped goat started centuries ago. According to rabbinic tradition, the scapegoat was pursued rather than being truly set free, and ultimately pushed over a cliff to "finish him off"! As if God's work of redemption weren't complete enough, and that more punishment was required!

Man with his reliance on his own works is never satisfied with what God in His justice has done, but ever seeks to elevate himself and his own ability to prosecute offenses in the place of God.

God had a reason for requiring two sacrificial goats on the Day of Atonement.

- The slain sacrifice, or "goat for the Lord," was killed as a substitute, to atone for guilt, while;
- The living sacrifice, or "escaped goat," was released and sent away into the wilderness, being atoned for by the death of the first goat.

The living sacrifice would be meaningless if not preceded by the slain sacrifice. The slaying of the goat for the Lord secured atonement so that the escaped goat could enjoy freedom.

In legal terms, the slain and living sacrifices accomplished two things.

Propitiation

- Satisfaction was made for the offense. The price was paid in full.

Expiation

- The offense and its consequences were extinguished, never to revive.

The two sacrifices are one in their benefit and effect. The slain sacrifice is for propitiation, settling all accounts. The living sacrifice is for expiation, wiping the record clean.

Christ is our **propitiation**.

Romans 3:24,25:

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

Whom God hath set forth to be a **propitiation** through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

1 John 2:1,2:

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

And he is the **propitiation** for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 4:10:

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins.

Propitiation is something that God does for man, not something man does for God. There were consequences for man's opposition to God that only God could resolve. God took the initiative, and Christ willingly accepted the mission. What unspeakable mercy, grace, and love! Christ as our propitiation settled all accounts on our behalf, paying the price in full and making satisfaction for the offense.

Today we get to enjoy peace with God due to **expiation**, the banishment of sin and guilt. The picture of expiation is the escaped goat being sent away into the wilderness, bearing all transgressions and offenses away, never to return.

Psalms 103:12:

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Now that we've had a chance to see the significance of the Old Testament living sacrifice, let's return to Romans to see more about what it means for us.

Romans 12:1:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies [present yourselves] a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

God never asked us to pay the price that the slain sacrifice did. That was Christ's role, not ours. Rather, we are to emulate instead the living sacrifice: the escaped goat.

Why was the escaped goat sent forth? To bear all our sins away. Having been atoned for by the death of the first goat, the escaped goat went out in peace and at liberty into the wilderness — the land of forgetfulness, where sins and iniquities are remembered no more. He no longer stood judged or condemned, because all offenses had been removed, never to return. The escaped goat proclaims by its very life, "Who dares try to kill me now? *My release has been purchased, I am the one set free!*"

Walking in freedom is what God now expects from us. That is the acceptable service in our day, a living sacrifice offered on God's terms, not ours.

Listen to what the English Standard Version says in Galatians 5:1.

Galatians 5:1 [ESV]:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

"For freedom Christ has set us free." Just like the escaped goat, Christ set us free for one thing, and that is freedom! He is the one who bore our iniquities so we could be freed once and for all from sin and all its consequences. We should refuse to live in the shackles of condemnation any longer. We have been set free in Christ for freedom!

I vividly recall one instance from my youth when we had been out bird-banding on the shores of Lake Ontario. We had finished banding a captured blue jay and then set it on its back on the hood of the car. Curiously, at first it didn't realize that it had been released. It was only after about a half a minute that it actually rolled over and flew off!

Like a captured bird set free by the trapper, God's children simply need to realize that we've already been sprung loose, and take off! That is living set free.

We are the ones who have been saved alive and have now been released. Let's live unfettered in His presence. This is the service He desires of us as living sacrifices.