

## Christian Service and Reward

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I previously discussed the prophecy in Ezekiel about the new Temple to be built at Jerusalem in the World Tomorrow. The most important feature of the new Temple is the new sacrificial service to be instituted. This sacrificial service is NOT a return to the Old Testament sacrificial service – it is brand new. The sacrifices of animals to be performed will be a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ – looking back to the completed event. As such, there is no suggestion of efficacy in these sacrifices to forgive sin – only the blood of Jesus Christ can propitiate sin. The purpose of the new sacrificial system, and even the new Temple itself, is to teach the people of the world “holiness”.

**Holiness:** Only God is truly holy. As human beings we are inherently sinful deserving death (Rm3:23, 6:23), yet God commands us to be holy (**1Pt1:14-16** see Lv11:44,45, 19:2, 20:7,26, 21:8). The purpose of the Christian life is to “learn holiness” – what it means to be holy, so that at the resurrection God can grant the gift of eternal life and actually make us truly “holy” (**Eph4:22-24** see also Lk1:74-75, 2Cr7:1, 1Th3:11-13, 4:3-7, Hb12:9-10,14, 2Pt3:11). The Levitical Priesthood in the world tomorrow will teach “holiness” (**Ez44:23** quoted from Lv10:10-11). Before they can do this, they must be taught. Our job now is to prepare to teach the teachers.

**The Sacrificial Service:** How does animal sacrifice teach “holiness”? The two most important sacrifices are the “sin offering” and the “burnt offering”. The purpose of the “sin offering” under the Old Testament dispensation was to “cover sin”, attain “atonement” (כִּפָּר - kaphar, “cover”, “spread over”), have the sin “forgiven” (**Lv4:27-28,31b**). The purpose of the “burnt offering” is to express commitment to serving God (see Gn22:2,8,12, Ex29:1,10-18). A Psalmist expresses the right attitude to a “burnt offering” (**Ps66:13-16** see also Is56:1-8, especially verse 7). Jesus Christ has once for all paid the penalty for sin (see Hb9:11-14, 10:3-14). The sin offering for forgiveness is NOT required and is NOT specified in Ezekiel’s prophecy. Where the sin offering is prescribed it is purely ceremonial, to atone for physical uncleanness (see Ez43:19-26, 44:27, 45:17,18-20,21-25). The purpose of the “burnt offering” remains the same. There is no provision in Ezekiel’s prophecy for individuals to bring sacrifices. The “sin offering” is purely ceremonial and “burnt offerings” are provided by the “prince” on behalf of the people. The sacrifices are a demonstration for the purpose of teaching.

**Christian Calling and Service:** To be a member of God’s Family requires God’s calling. The called person must then respond which includes repentance. Once the called person understands the significance of the calling, has repented, and accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to propitiate sin, the person can be baptized and receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The called person is now a Christian. This process is symbolized by the sin offering. As a Christian, a person is a servant of God (**1Pt2:16** see also 1Cr4:1, 2Cr4:5, 6:4, Gl1:10, 1Tm4:6). Jesus own words are explicit about our status as servants (**Mt24:45-46** see also Mk9:35, 10:43-45, Lk17:10, Jh12:26, 15:15). As “servants”, we are required to provide service to God.

**To Be Blameless:** As a servant, a Christian must present “true sacrifices” to God (**Rm12:1, 1Pt2:4-5**). A Christian is to be “blameless” before God (**Eph1:3-4, Cl1:21-22** see also Pp1:9-11, 2:14-16, 1Th3:11-13, 5:23, Jude 24-25). Noah was affirmed to be “blameless” (Gn6:9). Abram was commanded to be “blameless” (Gn17:1). In the Plains of Moab, Moses enjoined the Israelites to be “blameless” (Dt18:13). What exactly does it mean to “be blameless”? The root Hebrew word, *tamam*, means to “be complete”. The various Greek words carry a range of meaning around “without defect”, “faultless”, “above reproach”. This is the exact meaning of the “burnt offering” – complete commitment to serve God: to be a living sacrifice.

**Christian Rewards:** Paul and James are explicit that Christian works are required (**Rm12:9-13** see also Rm15:1-7, Gl6:1-10; **Jm2:20-24** see also Mt25:31-40). Jesus is explicit that he will reward Christians for their good works (**Mt16:24-27**). What exactly is the reward Jesus has in mind? It is NOT eternal life. Eternal life is only available as the free gift of God. There is nothing any human being can do to put God in a position where God must give that person eternal life (see Rm6:22-23, 2:7, Jh10:28, 17:2, Titus 1:2, 3:7, 1Jh2:25). The parables of the “minas” and the “talents” make clear what is the reward that Jesus has in mind (**Lk19:12-13,15-17** see also Mt25:14-16,19-21). The reward for Christian service is the opportunity for greater service. Christian service is the ultimate expression of “holiness”. Jesus himself set the example of “service” (**Lk22:24-27** see also Mt10:24, 20:25-28, Pp2:5-8, 1 Pt4:10). As resurrected members of the God Family, we will have immeasurably more ability to serve – our most important service will be to teach the world “holiness”.

**The Plan of God is beautiful beyond description**. Looking back, we can see so much of the Plan unfolded before our eyes. Yet, what God reveals for the future is astonishing. We have the revelation of God teaching us what true sacrifice is all about – this is our Christian life. God’s Plan for the future includes a beautiful Temple in Jerusalem that will be used to teach the world. God has revealed to us the glorious purpose of our lives – to bring “holiness” and salvation to the whole world.