

WORTH OUR WEIGHT IN GOLD?

LEVITICUS 27:1-34

GOD HAS GIVEN US VERY TANGIBLE WAYS TO EXPRESS OUR THANKFULNESS.

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Worth Our Weight in Gold?

Leviticus 27:1-34

As I finished reading chapter 26, I thought to myself, what could possibly come after this fantastic summary of rewards for obedience and punishments for disobedience? It seemed the perfect ending for the entire book of Leviticus.

Then I read through chapter 27 and found myself a little disappointed. At the very least, I felt let down, almost as if chapter 27 was anticlimactic. In fact, many commentators believe it was a later addition by other writers and redactors. Since I happen to believe the Bible was inspired by God, that answer doesn't quite do it for me. And so I thought about it a little more. If you go back to the beginning of the book of Leviticus, it starts with voluntary sacrifices on the part of individuals. Here we end the book with a description of individuals offering themselves and their possessions. That's a nice little tie.

But let's think a little further about this. This chapter is all about a personal response, about personal dedication, about personal integrity, and about genuine love and thankfulness. This is a perfect way to end this book.

In the book of Deuteronomy, after Moses gave the Israelites God's commands, and laid out the blessings and curses, Moses says this in summary to the Israelites:

¹¹"This command I am giving you today is not too difficult for you to understand or perform. ¹²It is not up in heaven, so distant that you must ask, 'Who will go to heaven and bring it down so we can hear and obey it?' ¹³It is not beyond the sea, so far away that you must ask, 'Who will cross the sea to bring it to us so we can hear and obey it?' ¹⁴The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart so that you can obey it" (Deuteronomy 30:11-14 / NLT).

And as Joshua dismissed the people after they conquered the Promised Land, he left them with this challenge:

¹⁴"So honor the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD alone. ¹⁵But if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:14-15 / NLT).

As we have said over and over again throughout our study through Leviticus, the Hebrews never seemed to live up to God's commands and His glorious plans for them. We Christians rarely, if ever, live up to our name Christian which means "little Christs."

The idea in this concluding text of Leviticus is all about a calculated thankfulness. What are we willing to give back to God as a sign of our thankfulness? When we are in trouble, we are always ready to bargain with God. But how often do we follow through with our vows? I think this describes how we approach God:

"Two men were adrift on a raft in the open sea, and it looked bad for them. Finally, one of the men became so frightened he began to pray:

O Lord, I've broken most of the commandments. I've got some pretty bad habits – I drink, I curse, I steal, I treat people like dirt.

But if You spare my life, I promise You that I'll change all that – I'll quit drinking, I'll quit cursing, I'll ...

Suddenly his friend cried out to him, "Wait a minute Jack. Don't go too far. I think I see a rescue ship approaching us."

I think that oftentimes when we are in a bind, we are in a mood to bargain with God. However, when we get what we want or need, how thankful are we really?

I titled this sermon, "Worth Our Weight in Gold?" because the passage starts out by people offering themselves up to God. And as we will see later, it would be very impractical to have so many people working at the tabernacle. God provided a way to substitute money for the person's life. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **GOD HAS GIVEN US VERY TANGIBLE WAYS TO EXPRESS OUR THANKFULNESS.** This passage is really a way for people to put their money where their mouth is.

I. DEDICATING OURSELVES TO GOD (VS 1-8)

The Most Powerful Expression Of Our Thankfulness To God Is By Offering Ourselves As Living Sacrifices.

Verses 1-8 describe an incredible description of people dedicating themselves to God. Let's see if what is described here describes what we mean by dedicating ourselves to God. The Bible is clear. **THE MOST POWERFUL EXPRESSION OF OUR THANKFULNESS TO GOD IS BY OFFERING OURSELVES AS LIVING SACRIFICES.**

A. SPECIAL OCCASIONS (1-2)

I'm not sure about all of you, but as I read through this section, I found it hard to identify with and therefore hard to understand. Let's start with the description of such a special occasion in verses 1-2. First of all, what is being described here is this. For some reason, a person dedicates his or her whole life to God by serving at the Temple. In other words, it seems as if the person would give up their jobs and dedicate themselves to God by serving at the Tabernacle or later at the Temple. Although they could not enter the Holy Place or the Holy of Holies, they could do things like clean up the Tabernacle area, they could take out the garbage, cut wood, and do all sorts of other labor. I'm sure since there were so few priests to serve so many people, these extra hands would be very welcomed and useful.

What would cause a person to dedicate him or herself in such a manner? Perhaps we can see a comparable act of lifetime dedication in the Roman Catholic Church. Men often dedicate themselves by becoming brothers or monks. They serve in all sorts of ways. Some teach, some clean, cook, and serve in other ministries. Women dedicate themselves by becoming nuns. These lay people serve humanity all over the world. They run schools all the way from pre-school to primary school, middle school, high school, and universities. They serve the poor where no one else wants to serve. In Protestantism, we have people who serve on the mission field in all sorts of capacities. What drives people to such service?

If you ask many of them, their answer is usually in one word, "thankfulness." I enjoy reading the biographies and testimonies of great Christians throughout the centuries. There is almost always a flash point in their lives when they come to truly realize in a very personal way, the wonder of the work of Jesus on the cross on their behalf. In other words, they come to a point where they finally grasp how sinful, how unworthy, how helpless, and how hopelessly lost they are. And then it finally hits them. The blood that Jesus shed on Calvary was shed for them personally. The grace and mercy and love of it all flood them. They become so thankful, they cannot think of any other possible response but to dedicate their entire lives to God. So truly understanding what God has done on our behalf can drive us to this type of dedication.

Another reason that often surfaces is thankfulness to God for delivering us from some impossible situation. Sometimes people have had a severe illness or perhaps one of their loved ones was seriously ill. Maybe someone experienced grave danger or a near-death experience. In the throes of these trials, men and women have vowed to God that if He delivered them, they would

give their lives to Him. Many people have made good on these vows and promises to God. Think about some of the people who have given their lives out of thankfulness to God: Mother Teresa who served the poor in India, John Newton a converted slave trader who wrote "Amazing Grace," and countless missionaries, brothers, nuns, monks, and all sorts of other people who give their lives to God out of thankfulness. We know that Hannah dedicated her son Samuel to God. Samuel became a great leader of Israel.

B. DETERMINING WORTH (3-7)

I don't think we see much of this kind of thankfulness today, although I'm sure it does exist. But it must have been a regular enough occurrence to warrant what is described next. Verses 3-7 lay out the criteria for determining worth. Perhaps there were so many people dedicating themselves, that there may not have been enough room or jobs to accommodate them all. Or perhaps there weren't enough priests to train and supervise them. At any rate, there was a value attached to each category of person who may have been dedicated or who dedicated themselves.

The value seems to be dictated according to the amount of physical labor each person could do. For examples, males were valued more than females according to this principle. People in their prime were worth more than the old or the young. That's pretty easy to understand. But in order to give you an idea of the value and how it was applied, let me describe a young man in his prime. In other words, this is a healthy male between the ages of 20 to 60. In order to fulfill his lifetime service vow to the temple, he can substitute a sum of money. The sum here is 50 Shekels. According to Warren Weirsbe and other commentators, one shekel was worth about one month's wages. Therefore 50 Shekels would be a little over 4 years' wages. Think about the magnitude of that.

Let's say a person makes \$50,000 a year. That would come out to be about \$208,000. That's quite a sum of money. My guess is that the person and his or her family could pay this on installments throughout their lifetime. That is quite a financial sacrifice and commitment.

Can you or I ever say that we have ever been so authentically overwhelmed by God's love that we became so extravagant in our thankfulness that we gave like this? I know I never have. Although I am a very thankful person, I don't think I have ever contemplated something of this magnitude ... but I want to start thinking in these terms.

C. EVERYONE CAN GIVE (8)

I love verse 8 because God makes it possible everyone can give. It didn't matter if you were poor. You could still dedicate yourself to God, and also pay the substitute price. The priest would look at the person's financial status and ability to earn money. Based on this, the priest would fix a price that would be acceptable. I don't think I've talked about tithing and money as much as I have through this series on Leviticus. I've preached more on this subject during the past 6 months than I have my entire 20 plus years of preaching combined. But here it is again. Let me make it clear. I'm not asking for your money. How and where you give is between you and God. But the point is this. Most Christians in the United States do not tithe. The average Christian gives just around 2% of their income to God. Listen to what Randy Alcorn's response to those who say that tithing is an Old Testament concept that no longer applies to Christians:

"Maybe you believe the tithe was an Old Testament standard, and we're no longer under the law but under grace, so tithing isn't a requirement for us. Okay. Let's say you're right. Now, do you really think God doesn't have a will for New Testament Christians when it comes to giving, or that He has lowered the bar of what He expects of us? Since studies show the average Christian gives just over 2% of his income to the Lord, does that mean that grace is only a fifth as effective as the law? Or is something fundamentally wrong with our approach to giving? Are we failing to

learn what real grace giving means because we children of grace are failing to start at the minimum level God started his children under the Old Covenant?"

Randy Alcorn's point is that if grace has abounded in the New Testament, then so should our response of thankful giving. God provided a system whereby people could offer up their entire being to Him for lifetime service. As we think about this section let's think a little more carefully before we quote Jesus as if we have accepted what He said and act as if we are really willing to obey:

"²⁹Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. ³⁰And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' ³¹The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31 / NLT).

Since Jesus talked a lot about money and He was the One Who said, "²¹Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be" (Matthew 6:21 / NLT),

Based on what we give, how much could we say we love God, and where is the location of our hearts? We can't even manage to give a tenth of our money without complaining. How about the total dedication of one's life described in this passage? Here is the truth of the Bible. **THE MOST POWERFUL EXPRESSION OF OUR THANKFULNESS TO GOD IS BY OFFERING OURSELVES AS LIVING SACRICES.**

II. DEDICATING OUR STUFF TO GOD (VS 9-25)

If We Are Truly Thankful, We Will Use All Our Possessions to Further God's Work.

If we are truly serious about dedicating our very lives to God, then the next section should logically follow. Verses 9-25 lay out what dedicating our stuff to God looks like. In other words, **IF WE ARE TRULY THANKFUL, WE WILL USE ALL OUR POSSESSIONS TO FURTHER GOD'S WORK.** I'm almost always surprised to hear non-Christians talk about Christianity as a "pie-in-the-sky" religion. Their view of Christianity is that it is something that doesn't have any consequences for the "real" world. If that's the case, then shame on us because our faith in God should affect every area of our lives.

A. OUR JOBS (9-13)

Our jobs, as described in verses 9-13 ought to be influenced by our faith. In this section, the grateful farmer dedicates an animal to the LORD as a sign of thankfulness. In other words, he or she has already given the firstborn of the flock and has already offered his or her tithe. Now a ceremonially clean animal is offered up out of thankfulness. In order to prevent people from making grand gestures in public, then having second thoughts while in private, or making some promise in a wave of emotion and then thinking about it more carefully later, and then having a change of heart, these laws were put in place by God. Since a clean animal could be sacrificed, once it was offered, it could not be taken back. If the owner came to the priest to try and substitute it with another animal, both animals became holy and both animals were offered up. I think this is a very good rule.

Oftentimes we say things in public so we can look good, or we say things because we get all excited and caught up in the excitement of our emotions. We make promises, many of which we never follow through on. God holds us accountable for the words we speak. I know that for me personally, I have been on this journey to watch my language. I take seriously the concept that both praise to God and coarse language ought not to come from the same mouth. In general, I think I have been doing much better, but I have a long way to go. Nevertheless, I need to

remember that what comes out of my mouth is important. Likewise, people who make promises or commitments in church ought to follow through with them.

On the other hand, if a ceremonially unclean animal was offered up, the owner could redeem the animal by paying for it and adding 20% as a penalty. Here is the interesting part. The owner had no say. The priest set the price and then added 20% on to the price to come up with the total buy back price.

Our jobs and all we do at work belong to God. The Bible tells us to work and do everything as an offering to God. It doesn't matter how we feel about our bosses, our co-workers, or any of the conditions at work. We are to do our jobs as if we were working for God. People at work ought to see a huge difference in the way we do our jobs and act in comparison to all the others around us. If they can't, then perhaps we are not what the Bible defines as authentic Christians. Christians are hardworking, genuine, humble, cooperative, honest, and pleasant. Does that describe you at work?

B. OUR HOMES (14-15)

Verses 14-15 remind us that our homes belong to God as well. In this section, the owners would give the house to the priests to use as they needed. Perhaps the houses could be used to study the Bible. Perhaps the houses could be used for storage or for putting up people who had experienced a financial setback. Perhaps someone's house developed a mold and needed a temporary place to stay. Perhaps someone's house burned down and needed a place to stay. Again, if the owners had a change of heart and wanted their house back, the priest would determine a fair price and add 20% to it. Then the owner could buy it back.

I have to say that I know most of you, and I have found all of you to be very generous in opening up your houses to the Lord's work. Let me just add this because I don't really know most of you in an intimate sense. But I do know this. Research and statistics show that many Christians act much differently at home than they do at church or at work. Some Christians act all kind and holy in public, but when they get home, abuse their spouses and children. We need to remember that our homes belong to God. Our actions in the privacy of our homes should reflect the fact that our homes are God's houses. God does not take kindly to hypocrites. If anything, we should treat our husbands, wives, parents, and children better than anyone else.

C. OUR POSSESSIONS (16-25)

Verses 16-25 go on to remind us that our possessions belong to God as well. Verses 16-20 describe family land dedicated to God. Again if the owner wants to buy it back, the priest determines the price and adds the 20% penalty to it. Verses 20-21 give the fate of land not redeemed or sold to a third party. That land is now permanently transferred to the priests and designated as the Lord's land. Verses 22-25 show the final outcome of land returned to its original owners in the Jubilee year.

For us, we need to start thinking in terms of everything we have belongs to God: from my car to my children, from my pension plans to my golf clubs, from my house to my life. Absolutely everything I am belongs to God. My name may appear on my birth certificate and my parents are listed as Mary and Joseph Carlini. But really my parent is God. I belong to Him. The title on my car and house read John Carlini, but in reality God is the owner. The true perspective is this. I simply am the "Care of" person listed on the account and I have "power of attorney" to make daily decisions concerning the house, money, possessions, etc. Think about life this way. If I were to use God's car to drive to a strip club, or use my money to get in, would God be pleased the way I was using His car or money? If you are having an affair or thinking about starting one, would God be pleased with the way you were using His car, His time, His money, and most of all, His child? Living in genuine love for God should have some very practical consequences. **IF WE ARE TRULY THANKFUL, WE WILL USE ALL OUR POSSESSIONS TO FURTHER GOD'S WORK.**

III. DEDICATING OUR INTEGRITY TO GOD (VS 26-34)

Genuine Thankfulness And Love For God Are Not Legalistic Nor Do They Look For Loopholes.

As we have already studied through the book of Leviticus, personal and community integrity is essential. Dedicating our integrity to God is spelled out in verses 26-34. **GENUINE THANKFULNESS AND LOVE FOR GOD ARE NOT LEGALISTIC NOR DO THEY LOOK FOR LOOPHOES.**

I taught Ethics and Business Ethics for several years at the college level. I would have to say that even though I used to teach lofty principles, most businesses and corporations substitute the question, "What is ethical?" with, "What is legal?" In other words, the American way of life has generated into an attitude of what can I get away with and still be considered legal? In my experience, the attitude of younger Christians is, "How far can I push the envelope without actually committing a sin?" No longer have I seen many people actually trying to become more pleasing to God. The attitude in churches today is, "How can I do what I want to do and still be okay with God?"

Western Christianity has evolved into mere fire insurance for when we die. Phil Yancey in his book [The Jesus I Never Knew](#) says that if we modern day church people had to identify ourselves with a group in the New Testament, we would clearly have to identify ourselves with the Pharisees of Jesus' day. That should horrify us since those are the primary group that Jesus confronted and disliked the most. Religious people always run the risk of being hypocrites.

A. NO DOUBLE DIPPING (26-28)

In verses 26-28, God demonstrates He truly knows the human heart when He forbids double dipping. In other words, someone may try and look good in front of his or her friends by publicly declaring that they were going to offer up an animal. Here is the scam. The person may choose an animal that was a firstborn and publicly dedicate it to God. The problem with that was that the firstborn already belonged to God. So the person was trying to look good when actually they were only fulfilling a religious obligation. Jesus criticized the Pharisees and other religious people for publicly throwing their tithe into the offering and making a big show of it. When we give 10% of our money to God, we are not doing anything exceptional. We are not demonstrating any particular thankfulness to God. The 10% is an obligation. Here has been my experience over the years. People who don't tithe, make a big deal about every penny they give to God's work. People who do tithe usually don't ever say anything about giving, but often are giving way above 10%.

Look, we may be able to fool one another into thinking that we are good, noble, and holy. Heck, we may even be able to fool ourselves into thinking we are good. But the fact is that God would know if a person was cheating Him by offering Him an already dedicated animal. And God certainly knows who we really are. We cannot fool God.

B. NO DENYING JUSTICE (29)

Verse 29 commands that justice is not denied. In other words, certain crimes demanded the death sentence. Adultery, false teaching, false prophecy, blasphemy, and other sins carried an automatic death sentence. The condemned person was considered to be holy. I know that sounds funny but the NIV captures the essence when they describe the person as "devoted to destruction." That person has been set apart for death. There can be no substitute. One of the

major themes of the prophets is that the rich and powerful cheat the poor while they themselves are committing sins that deserve death and they are not being punished. Justice is very important to God and unless we are people of integrity, then we cannot execute justice.

C. NO CHEATING HOLINESS (30-33)

Verses 30-33 forbid the cheating of holiness. Basically, the attitude described here is one of keeping the best for ourselves. When the farmer picked out the fruit or animal to give to God, it appears that some would simply pick out the worst crops or animals and give them to God. I know that many people in the United States simply attend church as if they were going to the shopping mall. They choose to go to a place that meets their needs. On the surface that seems okay, but in reality the attitude we should be coming to church with is what does God expect from me today and what is it that He wants me to hear.

D. NO DENYING WHO IS HOLY (34)

This last verse of Leviticus, verse 34 clearly reminds us of Who is truly holy and there is no denying it is the God of the Bible. All throughout the book of Leviticus the theme has been a command given to us by God, "Be holy for I the LORD your God is holy."

IV. EPILOGUE

If you have been reading this final chapter carefully, you will have noticed that the word "redeemed" has been used frequently. It is used in the sense of buying something back. The Jews were constantly reminded that it was Jehovah Who redeemed them from Egypt. He did it with a mighty hand. He redeemed them from their slavery, set them free, and gave them the promise of a glorious future. Jesus redeemed us from our slavery to fear, sin, Satan, and death. Through His very precious blood and horrific death, Jesus bought us back, set us free, and gave us the promise of a glorious future. Again, look at verse 34. These were commands that God gave the Israelites. They were not suggestions, principles for living, or good ideas. They were commands. They were meant to obey.

We Christians have taken the concept of grace to mean that we can choose which commands in the Bible to obey and choose which ones we don't like and therefore will not obey. God has not changed. What God says, He means. What He commands He expects us to obey. Authentic giving and obedience is prompted by genuine love and thankfulness. **GENUINE THANKFULNESS AND LOVE FOR GOD ARE NOT LEGALISTIC NOR DO THEY LOOK FOR LOOPHOLES.**

Life in Christ is not all that complicated. It is simple. It's simple, but it's not easy. It's not easy because by nature we are self-absorbed, proud, and rebellious. Because of all this we have developed attitudes of entitlement. We are not thankful at our cores because we have come to think that God owes us blessings. But for those who truly want to express thankfulness, **GOD HAS GIVEN US VERY TANGIBLE WAYS TO EXPRESS OUR THANKFULNESS.**

Warren Weirsbe titled his commentary on Leviticus Be Holy. That pretty much says it all so I would just like to finish the book of Leviticus by quoting from Paul's letter to the Romans:

"¹And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask? ²Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is" (Romans 12:1-2 / NLT).