

BEING A HOLY SACRIFICE

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Good Morning & Welcome to CGC. There are lots of important announcements in your bulletin. I won't use the limited time we have to read them. You can do that later when you get home.

We'll be collecting the offering in just a few minutes. So this is a warning to prepare for that. This is the last Sunday of 2009, so I hope you'll take this final opportunity of the year to give generously.

But I hope today, you'll decide to give more than just money. I hope today you'll decide to give yourself. Totally and completely. This is the last Sunday of the year. The last Sunday of the decade. A time when people make new year's resolutions. Resolutions to change. My hope and prayer is that none of us will leave this place today unchanged. I don't want you to leave through those doors the same person you were when you walked in. That goes for every one of you. Every one of us... including me.

I'm not going to beat around the bush today. I will speak directly and plainly. I want to challenge you today to make a choice. To choose to be holy. To choose to make your life a holy sacrifice to God. To choose to truly surrender everything in your life to Him. Total Surrender. Nothing less. The choice will be yours.

Look at the words of Paul, the inspired Words of God, in Romans 12:1-2:

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Did you come to worship today? He doesn't want just your singing. He doesn't want just your offering. He wants everything. He wants YOU. He wants your heart. He wants you to choose to be holy. A holy and living sacrifice. Unlike the people you see all around you. Different. Set apart. Holy.

Let's pray.

Ushers, if you would, please come forward now and take the offering. While they are taking the offering, I would like to consider these Scriptures:

Psalms 51:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

He doesn't just want what you give... your offerings, your sacrifices, they mean nothing to him without the heart. What does he want? A broken spirit. A contrite heart. A humble and repentant heart. He wants total surrender to His will.

Most of us haven't been living that way. At least in some areas of our lives. That can change. Today. By your choice. How did you feel when the woman was left holding the stool? Some of you will leave here today, just like that woman did, saying "I can't decide." Saying "no". Unwilling to make the choice to totally surrender. If that's the case, you will never be what God wants you to be. You will never experience the full joy that He wants you to experience. You will never become that holy and living sacrifice that Scriptures speak of.

As we worship in song this morning, meditate on the words. Let the Holy Spirit begin to work in your heart. Ask him to reveal to you where you are holding back, where you are holding on. In what ways are you living an unholy life? How are you climbing back on to stool? Struggling for control over things that should be turned over to God?

Are you willing to choose to be holy? Are you willing to let Him take your life, totally and completely?

I made You promises a thousand times
I tried to hear from Heaven
But I talked the whole time
I think I made You too small
I never feared You at all, no
If You touched my face would I know You
Looked into my eyes could I behold You

What do I know of You
Who spoke me into motion
Where have I even stood
But the shore along Your ocean
Are You fire, are You fury
Are You sacred, are You beautiful
What do I know, what do I know of Holy

I guess I thought that I had figured You out
I knew all the stories and I learned to talk about
How You were mighty to save
Those were only empty words on a page
Then I caught a glimpse of who You might be
The slightest hint of You brought me down to my knees

What do I know of You
Who spoke me into motion
Where have I even stood
But the shore along Your ocean
Are You fire, are You fury
Are You sacred, are You beautiful
So what do I know, what do I know of Holy

What do I know of Holy
What do I know of wounds that will heal my shame
And a God who gave life it's name
What do I know of Holy
Of the One who the angels praise
All creation knows Your name
On earth and heaven above
What do I know of this love

What do I know of You
Who spoke me into motion
Where have I even stood
But the shore along Your ocean
Are You fire, are You fury
Are You sacred, are You beautiful
What do I know, what do I know of Holy
What do I know of Holy
What do I know of Holy

What do I know about being Holy? Very little. But what I do know is hard enough to comprehend.
Scripture commands us to be holy.

Leviticus 19:1-2 (NIV)

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’

You might say this is only in the Old Testament. It's also in the NT:

1 Peter 1:15–16 (NIV)

¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

Jesus says something very similar, on he uses the word “perfect” rather than “holy”:

Matthew 5:48 (NIV)

⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Greek *teleios* = perfect, complete, blameless [Hebrew **tamim**]

Hebrew **tamim** = complete, perfect, whole, unblemished, blameless

Genesis 6:9 Noah was tamim.

This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

Genesis 17:1 God tells Abraham to be tamim.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.

Deuteronomy 18:13 God's people are commanded to be tamim.

You must be blameless before the Lord your God.

We are commanded to blameless, without blemish!

Exodus 12:5 Passover lamb was tamim.

The animals you choose must be year-old males **without defect**, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.

We are commanded to blameless, without blemish! Just like the animals chosen for sacrifice were supposed to be without blemish. Anything sacrificed to God was to be the very best. Perfect. Spotless. Without blemish.

And we've already read Romans 12:

Romans 12:1 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

YOU are to be a holy living sacrifice. Just the lambs to be sacrificed were to unblemished, you too are to be unblemished. You, your body, your actions, your mind, your heart, YOU are to be blameless, without blemish, spotless.

Are you? Are you without blemish? What corner of your life are you holding onto? What do you struggle with? Anger? Discouragement? Insecurities? He wants you to give those to him! Some of you of love to gossip – can't wait to spread the juicy news about someone else. Some of you have marriages that don't reflect the intimacy of Jesus with his bride the Church. They don't come close. Some of you yell at your spouses. Or your kids. You lose your temper. But you think you're still pretty good compared to other people. Some of you actually have hit your spouse or your children in anger. Some of you lie... just once in a while. That's not too bad. Some of you cheat once in awhile. Or maybe even steal – even something small that will never be missed. Some of you continue to open yourselves up to pornography – visiting websites you never be on. For some it's alcohol. Relieving the stress, you think. Or just having fun with the other kids. For some it's drugs. Some of you have even had experiences in the powers of the occult. Some of you are holding a grudge against someone. Perhaps your parents. Perhaps your children. Someone at church. Someone at work. Someone at school.

I could go on and on and on. What are you holding on to?? What are you not giving up? You need to make a choice to be holy. You can't do it alone. God will have to do it. But he won't do it, without you first making the choice.

We don't know what it means to be holy! We compare ourselves to everybody else we see in church, and we think we're doing OK. Pretty good. But God wants blameless. He wants us spotless. Without blemish. Perfect and complete.

Romans 12:1–2 (NIV)

...offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Don't conform any longer to the pattern of the world. You know what? We look just like the rest of the world! We dress like the world. Some of you dress like your body is for sale. And I don't just mean young single women. I see it in married women. And some of you men as well. You don't have to follow the clothing fads of our sick culture. You want to have an impact in our world? Be different. Stand out for Christ. Don't be conformed to the world. What about the pictures or the writing on the t-shirts you wear? Are you promoting holiness, or something else?

1 Thessalonians 4:7–8 (NIV)

⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

What are you living for? It's not about money, responsibility, fame, education, prestige, sports, or anything else. God says it's about living for God. He says I want you to totally surrender everything to me. ALL your desires. All your wants. All your fears. All your apprehensions. All your insecurities. All the things you are holding on to. I want you to be holy, blameless, without blemish, set aside for me. To be used for my purpose.

Are you satisfied with your spiritual life? Our recent church survey says that most of us feel we are mature believers and are more or less satisfied with where we are spiritually. That's just where Satan wants us. Satisfied and largely apathetic. No desire to really change. No passion to be totally sold out to God! To give up everything. To be radical. To be set apart. To be Holy!

And each week all of us satisfied people meet together on Sunday morning, and smile and sing and give a few dollars, and encourage each other in our mediocrity. I am tired of being average. And I am tired of going to an average church. I am sick of mediocrity. I am not satisfied to keep on going this way... or see us at CGC keep on going this way.

I was here, as a young boy, back in 1967 when CGC first started. In the last 40 years, a lot of people have come and gone from CGC. Almost everybody in the entire community has come here for a while. If we were to take a survey in our community and ask them what they thought of our church, what would they say? Better yet, if we were to ask them what impact CGC has made in our community, what would they say? My guess is the answer most would give, is "none". No impact. or very little impact. The truth is that we have been here for 40 years, and it's hard to see much real impact that we've made in our community.

Why? Because we are living for ourselves! Because we haven't chosen to totally surrender. Because we are living according to the pattern of the rest of the world. Like everybody else. We're holding on to parts of our lives. We're holding to sinful thoughts or behaviors. And we remain largely impotent for God. What do we know of holy?

Our problem is not new. God has had this problem with his people before. Listen to what God says to his people, though the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 1:11–17 (NIV)

¹¹ "The multitude of your sacrifices— what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; ¹⁶ wash and make yourselves clean. Take your

evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong,¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

When our hearts are not right, he does not want our offerings. He does not want our sacrifices. He is tired of us gathering together to worship Him. He calls them evil assemblies. He won't even listen to our prayers. He says make yourselves clean. Cleanse your hearts. Surrender all. Make the choice. Stop doing wrong. Learn to do what is right. It's about others. What if we really lived that way? What if we got rid of the sin in our lives... ALL of it. And we started to live for others. What kind of an impact would we make in our community then?

God doesn't want us worshipping him with the stuff on the outside. He wants our inside! He wants our hearts.

Hosea 6:6 (ESV)

⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Jesus quotes this Scripture in Matthew, talking to some of the Pharisees, who were questioning him about his association with sinful people:

Matthew 9:13 (NIV)

¹³ But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

He didn't want the Pharisees' self-righteous external worship. He didn't want their sacrifices, even though they were commanded to make them. He wanted their hearts. He wanted them to love God with all their heart, and to love people in the very same way.

Let's look at one more passage. Malachi 1. The background of this passage is that the people, and specifically the priests, those who go to the temple the offer sacrifices, are not sacrificing the best animals. Remember, they were to sacrifice only unblemished animals, perfect animals, spotless animals. Only these unblemished animals could be brought into God's presence, offered to him as a holy sacrifice.

But they were bringing sacrifices to him that were less than perfect. That were not holy. And God was angry. And he spoke these words to them, through his prophet Isaiah:

Malachi 1:6-14 (NIV)

⁶ "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' ⁷ "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. ⁸ When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the Lord Almighty. ⁹ "Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"—says the Lord Almighty. ¹⁰ "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. ¹¹ My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the Lord Almighty. ¹² "But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' ¹³ And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the Lord Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the Lord. ¹⁴ "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the Lord Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.

You see how much God wants a holy sacrifice? What do we know of holy? He says I'd rather you shut the temple doors, than come to me with an unholy sacrifice! I'd rather you close the doors at CGC than come here week after week, bringing less than everything. I want you. Don't offer your prayers... I won't listen. Do you wonder if your prayers matter? Many don't make it through the ceiling. God doesn't hear them. He won't listen because of our sins. Don't sing your worship songs. I hate to hear those false words coming from your mouths. Stop doing wrong. Choose to do what is right. Choose to be holy.

Malachi 1:10 (NIV)

¹⁰ “Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the Lord Almighty, “and I will accept no offering from your hands.

Let’s read the next few verses in Malachi:

Malachi 2:1–3 (NIV)

¹ “And now this admonition is for you, O priests. ² If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor my name,” says the Lord Almighty, “I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor me. ³ “Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it.

spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it.

The blessings of the priests, their prayers for the people, will not be heard. Not only will God not honor them, he will turn them into curses! God doesn’t hear our prayers when come to him in sin. When we come to him bringing him less of ourselves than everything! He says I will spread dung on your faces and send you away.

I wonder if that maybe how he looks at us at CGC. Why do you come before me with unforgiven sin in your life? Why do you come before me when you are holding on to things should be giving to me? Why do you come before me trying to look holy when you are not? We are so far from holy. We are so filthy on the inside that God says he should smear manure all over our faces and send us away. Then our outside would look the same as our inside. He would rather we shut the doors of CGC than come before him that way. That’s how much God wants holiness.

There is only prayer that God hears when we come to him in sin. And that would be the prayer we pray when we repent and ask his forgiveness.

Jeremiah 8:6 (NIV)

⁶ I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, “What have I done?” Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle.

God says I’m listening, but no one is repenting.

You have a choice. You can leave this room the same as when you came in. And your life will continue as it has been. You can compare yourself to all the faithful church-goers in your community and continue to be generally satisfied with where you are spiritually. And you can expect the same results that you’ve always had. And ten or 20 years from now, if all goes well, things will be just the same. CGC will still be here, and for most of the community it won’t make any difference at all.

OR, you can make a choice. You can choose to give him control of everything. You can choose total surrender. You can “stop doing wrong, and learn to do right”. You can repent, you can ask forgiveness, and you can begin truly seeking Him with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

Do you want to make a new year’s resolution? A promise to God, not just for the new year, not just for the new decade, but for the rest of your life? God wants one thing. He wants your life... totally and completely. Total surrender. Everything. Nothing held back. He wants your time. All of it. He wants your desires, your love, your intimacy, your passion... he wants your heart.

Romans 12:1–2 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Then you will know God’s will. You will experience God’s will. His good, his pleasing, his perfect will. That’s the beginning of our lives making a real difference. That’s the foundation that needs to be in place before we begin any ministry. Before we’ll have any lasting impact in our community. God will never use

us in a mighty and powerful way, until we give him every part of our lives. Until he become the one we long for... are you willing?

I'd like the worship team to come up now, and provide some background music for us, while I invite you make a choice. If you are willing to commit your life to him totally and completely, I'd like to you come forward and kneel around the steps and pray to God. Cry to him. Sing to him. Talk to him. Or simply bask in his presence. In the joy of his grace.

1 John 1:8-9 (NIV)

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Please come forward, if you are willing to make the choice, right now, as I talk. For some this might be the first time you've ever been serious about giving your life to God. Come and pray. Repent. Choose to change the direction your life is headed. Confess your sins. And ask him to cleanse your heart and make you a new person. He promises to do that.

For others, you've been a believer for some time already, but today God has convicted you of an area of your life that needs attention. That you need to surrender to him. Come and commit everything to him.

Aren't you tired of just "doing church"? Give him the stool. Give him everything. Come before him, weeping, and asking forgiveness. Make a choice. Let Him make you a holy sacrifice. Let him make you holy and blameless before him. You know how he's convicting you.

Let's pray.

