**Sacrifice & Sacrament**

*“Receive this, our sacrifice, so that our sins may be forgiven.”*

*“Water is water and cannot do such great things.”*

*“It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified buried and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin the burial of the old life and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus.”*

The above remarks are the official positions and practices of three of the main denominations within Christianity. These positions are in regards to what is generally referred to in Christianity as the Sacraments. What concept do each of these statements have in common? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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***There is a general confusion among Christians as to the difference between a sacrifice and a sacrament, as the statements above reveal. Consider the following definitions to understand the differences between them.***

**Basic Meanings**

Sacrifice: *sacra,* something sacred or holy + *facere,* to do or perform; thus, to perform a sacred/holy act

Hebrew: *zebah*, literally, to slaughter an animal

Greek: *thusia,* the act of offering a gift

Sacrament: *sacra,* something sacred or holy + *ment,* to be in a state of; *thus, a thing that is sacred/holy.*

NOTE: Neither the Hebrew nor the Greek has a word that is literally translated *sacrament*, at least, not in the Bible. *Sacramentum* is the Latin translation of the word *“mysteries”* found in 1 Corinthians 4:1:

*This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*

The use of *sacramentum* is a bit of an interpretive translation for the Greek *musterion,* which means “a thing unknown unless revealed.” Luther chose to use the German *Geheimnisse,* secrets.

**Notice how the etymology distinguishes the terms. In *sacrifice* the emphasis is the action being performed (i.e. the action is holy); in *sacrament* the emphasis is on what the thing itself is (i.e. holiness is inherent in the thing apart from action on anyone’s part).**

**That *sacrament* isn’t a word found in the Bible should be no more unsettling than the word *triune.* It is still a suitable word for what the Bible teaches about these things we call *sacraments.* The chain of thought is this: we wouldn’t have known about the sacraments unless God revealed them to us; since God revealed them to us for our salvation they must be holy in themselves, apart from our works.**

**What We Do Vs. What God Does**

In the Old Testament, God gave specific commands concerning sacrifices that were to be offered for various situations. While each sacrifice was meant to remind the one offering the sacrifice that the shedding of blood was required to atone for sin, God never intended that he should think that what he did made such atonement for sin. Consider the following verses:

Leviticus 7:1-5 *"This is the law of the guilt offering. It is most holy. (2) In the place where they kill the burnt offering they shall kill the guilt offering, and its blood shall be thrown against the sides of the altar. (3) And all its fat shall be offered, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, (4) the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the long lobe of the liver that he shall remove with the kidneys. (5) The priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering to the LORD; it is a guilt offering.”*

But then in Psalm 51:16, King David writes: *For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.*

And in Isaiah 1:11, the Lord Himself says, *“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.”*

In the New Testament book of Hebrews 4:10 the issue is made abundantly clear: *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

The point stressed here is that nothing that man does or offers could ever bring him closer to God because nothing man does can ever get rid of the guilt of sin. Sacrifices, then, were mere reminders to the people of their dependency upon God, not just for the fruit of the earth, but especially for reconciliation to God.

It was mentioned earlier that *sacramentum* is the Latin translation of the Greek *musterion* in 1 Corinthians 4:1. The same Greek word is found another 20 times in the New Testament. Each time, the context indicates that thing being revealed is a work of God, sometimes in regard to God’s overthrow of His enemies, the rest in regard to God’s work of bringing sinners to salvation – by offering up Christ, by forgiving sins, by causing the Gospel to be preached, by working repentance and faith in the hearts of those who hear the Gospel. Since God is holy in all His works, and His works are therefore holy, every *musterion* is therefore a thing sacred of itself, apart from what man does or performs.

There is nothing inherently holy or sacred about a sacrifice, though God does regard our offerings as holy for the sake of Christ. The Gospel is holy of itself because it comes from God.

**How the Bible Describes the Sacraments**

In contrast to Hebrews 4:10 above, consider these passages which speak about the Sacraments:

Act 2:41 ESV So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

1Pe 3:21 ESV Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

1Co 11:26 ESV For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Notice how such things as forgiveness of sins, entrance into the Church, and the proclamation of the Gospel are the results of the Sacraments. Such things, of course, must be the work of God and not of man. This is the main distinction between a sacrifice and a sacrament.