

The Altar of Selfishness and Greed

by: Justin Brewer

“Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel...Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom...” (see 2 Chronicles 33:1-9 for full passage).

The phrase “pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom” refers to sacrificing of children to false gods (2 Chronicles 28:1-4, 2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 7:31). Even to most non-Christians today, the thought of sacrificing our children in fire is an abysmal thought. It turns our stomach and it makes us angry, which is the reaction we should have to such sin (2 Peter 2:18-22). Who could do something so atrocious? Similarly, modern Americans would associate such sacrifices with the horrible nature of more recent events such

as the Holocaust. With both of these particular instances, we might ask “How could THEY have done such things?”

How could they have done such things? However, the more pertinent question is: do we do the same things today? Our natural reaction is complete denial because we have not built an altar, slaughtered our child, and burned them as sacrifices to false gods. Is there a spiritual application to be made?

There is no denying that America is a very materialistic society; we strive to have the most expensive houses and vehicles, and we strive for popularity. We work ourselves to death not to have enough, but to have excess. Television, billboard, and radio advertisements promote the idea that if you do not have the “latest and greatest,” then somehow you are of lesser value to society than those that do. Generally speaking, such ads insinuate that if you have this newest TV, tablet, phone, car, or house that you will instantly radiate financial

success and become instantly popular. All of these concepts have their root in selfishness and greed.

How do we cause our own children to “pass through the fire”? In Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, Solomon describes his endeavors; he built great buildings, acquired

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great wealth, acquired fame, and many additional things that appeal to the modern conceptualization of “success.” All that Solomon discusses in this passage appeals to our sense of materialism, but nothing speaks to our devotion to God or even to family. In Ecclesiastes 4:4-6, Solomon discusses at least two different men; one who is lazy and envious of the materialistic goods that his neighbor has obtained and the other is a man who strives to obtain such materialistic goods to his own detriment. Both men are equally guilty of selfishness and greed.

From Solomon’s analysis and conclusion, it seems that we could

make a logical comparison between physically sacrificing our children to false gods and sacrificing their souls to materialism. In Matthew 16:26, Jesus asks “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” What material gain or accomplishment on this earth is worth our souls? What is worth the souls of our children? Many parents ensure that their children make it to school, because education is important. Parents push athletics because there is a one-in-a-million chance that their child will make the pros. Parents leave their children in the hands of a stranger for a significant part of their childhood so that they (the parents) can feel “fulfilled” by the world’s standards. Are these things worth it?

Some, like Manasseh, learn better later in life. In 2 Chronicles 33:10-17, we are told that Manasseh was humbled by God and brought into submission. Following this, Manasseh sought to destroy the evilness that he had previously done, but it appears to have been too late for some. We are told that Amon, the son of

Manasseh, did “evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done; for Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made and served them” (2 Chronicles 33:22). Parents today often come to the same realization later in life and realize that they placed importance on the wrong things with their children; the sad reality is that children in such cases follow the example of Amon. Occasionally, however, they follow the example of Josiah, Amon’s son. In spite of Amon’s outright evilness, Josiah has a tender heart and seeks to follow God’s will (2 Chronicles 34-35). Do we want to take that bet?

In Proverbs 22:6, Solomon writes “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.” Often, Christians spend so much time discussing the exceptions to this Proverb that the fact that it is generally truth gets lost. Generally speaking, when we teach our kids that something is important to us it will become important to them.

For Manasseh and Amon, idolatry was their way of life. If Manasseh was willing to offer his children as burnt sacrifices to false gods, then it is logical to assume that he was fully vested in these pagan religions. In Deuteronomy 6, a principle is established for the Israelites that God and His will was to be all encompassing for them. Religion wasn’t just to be a passive activity to be taken up and put down at a whim, but rather it was to be the single most influential factor in their lives. Consider Deuteronomy 6:4-7. For the Israelites, their love of God was to be their lifeblood.

While we should not call all material possessions or personal accomplishments “idolatry,” it can easily be elevated to that status. Is it sinful to be rich? No, it is not, but it does make it difficult to reach heaven because those riches offer distractions from service to God and make it easier to fall prey to covetousness (Colossians 3:5; Matthew 19:23-24). Why do we desire to be rich? Why do we teach our children to seek to be rich?

Children are often encouraged to seek their fame and fortune in places such as Hollywood and through careers that too often claim the souls of those who have such aspirations. What is the record of actors and singers today? Do they show godliness? And yet, many parents claim that their son is such a great actor or that their daughter has such a great voice that such a vocation is their best option. “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” Are we not causing our children to “pass through the fire” when we encourage them to pursue activities and careers in which there is very small chance for spiritual

success?

On the other hand, the Apostle Paul offers a perspective that is more in line with the principle gleaned from Deuteronomy 6. In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” For Paul, service to God was all encompassing, just as it was supposed to be for the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6. If we take this principle from Galatians and apply it alongside Ephesians 6:1-4, we have children brought up “in the training and admonition of the Lord.” We have set them up for spiritual success, which is of the greatest importance.

Is having an education and a job important? Do athletics and other appropriate entertainments have their place? The answer is that yes, they do have their place; however, we must keep them in their place! Should we neglect spiritual teaching so that our children can have more time for athletics? Should worship and Bible study time be cut short, ignored, or skipped so that homework can be completed? The answer here is that no, these things should not take precedent over the Lord. When we allow such things to happen, they become our gods, thus making them idolatry.

Concerning Josiah, it is written that he “did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” and that he, at age 20, “he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images” (2 Chronicles 34:2-3). Let us be willing to show the same devotion to God; do not turn to the left or the right, and remove any materialism that is idolatry.

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM

Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Lane
Bozeman, MT 59715

For more information:

Phone: 304-690-0269

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Everyone Welcome!

Things Working For Our Good

by: Edward Bragwell, Sr.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28 KJV)

This verse has been a comfort to Christians throughout the present dispensation. Many take the “all things” in the verse to be unlimited i.e., that every single thing that happens to one will eventually be for his good. Others view the “all things” to be limited by the context, like many other passages where “all things” or “all men” are used to mean all within the context. As Vine puts it, “In the plural it signifies ‘the totality of the persons or things referred to’” While I lean toward the second view, the point of this article is not to defend that view. My purpose is to help us appreciate the “things” in the immediate context (chapter 8) that are working together for our good as a people who loves God.

Our Freedom in Christ

After describing the struggle of one under the domination of sin while under “the law,” meaning the law of Moses, in chapter seven, Paul now turns to the benefits of being in Christ chapter 8. In verses 1-4, he declares there is “now no condemnation” in Christ. Why. Because of what “the law of the Spirit of life” in Christ has done, namely, freed us from “the law of sin and death.” This was the law that he said was working in his body while he was under the law (of Moses). (7:23-24). There are three laws discussed in verses 1-4: 1) “The law” (of Moses), 2) “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ” and 3) “the law of sin and death.” What law number 1 could not do, free one from number 3, number 2 did. Hence, there is no condemnation because one is freed from the bondage of the law of sin and death. By this process we are able to enjoy the “righteousness of the law (of Moses)” (v. 4), without having kept it, but by the freedom (forgiveness) that came with “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ.” that provides for the taking away sin, thus making one righteous. What a blessing!

The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Beginning with verse 11, Paul declares that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Because of this we are no longer to live after the flesh but the Spirit (v. 12) and put to death the “deeds (sins) of the body” (v. 13). One of the great benefits of the indwelling of

the Spirit is the intercession that he makes to the Father for us when we are unable to put into words our groanings which we through our weakness cannot express (vv. 26-27).

Children of God

He defines sons of God as being those who are led by the Spirit of God (v. 14). From other passages, like 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we know that the Spirit leads through the God breathed written word of God. We are born again ... by the word of God (1 Pet. 2:23). But here we notice the things associated with being Sons of God. The privilege of calling God, "Abba, Father" (v. 15). As children we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ and as such we can know that if we suffer with Him that we will be glorified with him in the end (vv. 17-18). The award awaiting at the end is called the glorious liberty of the "children of God" – a reward that belongs only to those who are God's children.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Romans 8:28

Hope in Christ

Paul declares elsewhere that those without Christ are without God and without hope in the world. In this chapter 8, as children of God, we have hope in Christ that far out weighs any suffering that we are called on to suffer for Christ (v. 18). We live with the hope (or "earnest expectation" – v. 19) that after the suffering of this short life in Christ on earth, we will receive the "glorious liberty of the children of God" (v. 21) or "the redemption of our body" (v. 23). Living with knowledge that this life is not all there is for us keeps us pushing to do that which the Lord expects of us. Not only is the suffering of this present time not worthy of being compared to the life to come, even the joy and comfort of the fellowship that we have with members of the Godhead and each other is but a small foretaste of the everlasting life that we will enjoy with them in heaven. What a blessed hope!

Truly "what shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (v. 31). They all work together for our good.

Lessons from Zacchaeus

by: John R. Gibson

Zacchaeus climbing the sycamore tree is a favorite of young children, but adults would do well to pay careful attention to this story found in Luke 19:1-10. Consider a few lessons we might learn from the man who climbed a tree.

1) Don't let anything stop you from seeing Jesus. Too short of stature to see over the crowd, this wealthy man of influence reverted to his childhood and climbed a tree. While we are not going to see Jesus with our physical eyes, we should not allow anything to stop us from learning about Jesus. Friends, family, work, play, religious traditions, etc. may get in the way, but let's climb whatever tree we must in order to know the Savior.

2) We must not simply be curious about Jesus. When Jesus informed Zacchaeus that He would be going home with him, the tax collector received Him joyfully. As we come to know Jesus, it is imperative that we allow Him to "come to our house" and change our lives.

3) Jesus came to "seek and save that which was lost." If you have already been found by Jesus, serve Him with a joyous gratitude. If you are still lost, won't you allow Him to change that? He wants to save, but He will not save you against your will.

Zacchaeus and Jesus—it's not just a children's song.

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "

Matthew 4:4

Daily Bible Reading

October 2015

October 1 Deuteronomy 7-11
October 2 Deuteronomy 12-17
October 5 Deuteronomy 18-22
October 6 Deuteronomy 23-27
October 7 Deuteronomy 28-30
October 8 Deuteronomy 31-34
October 9 Joshua 1-5
October 12 Joshua 6-9
October 13 Joshua 10-14
October 14 Joshua 15-18
October 15 Joshua 19-22

October 16 Joshua 23-24, Judges 1-2
October 19 Judges 3-6
October 20 Judges 7-9
October 21 Judges 10-15
October 22 Judges 16-21
October 23 Ruth 1-4
October 26 1 Samuel 1-4
October 27 1 Samuel 5-10
October 28 1 Samuel 11-14
October 29 1 Samuel 15-17
October 30 1 Samuel 18-21

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