

GOD REQUIRES
HEART
OBEDIENCE,
NOT OUTWARD
RELIGIOUS
OBSERVANCE

PENN FREE
METHODIST CHURCH

Bible Study
28th June 2017

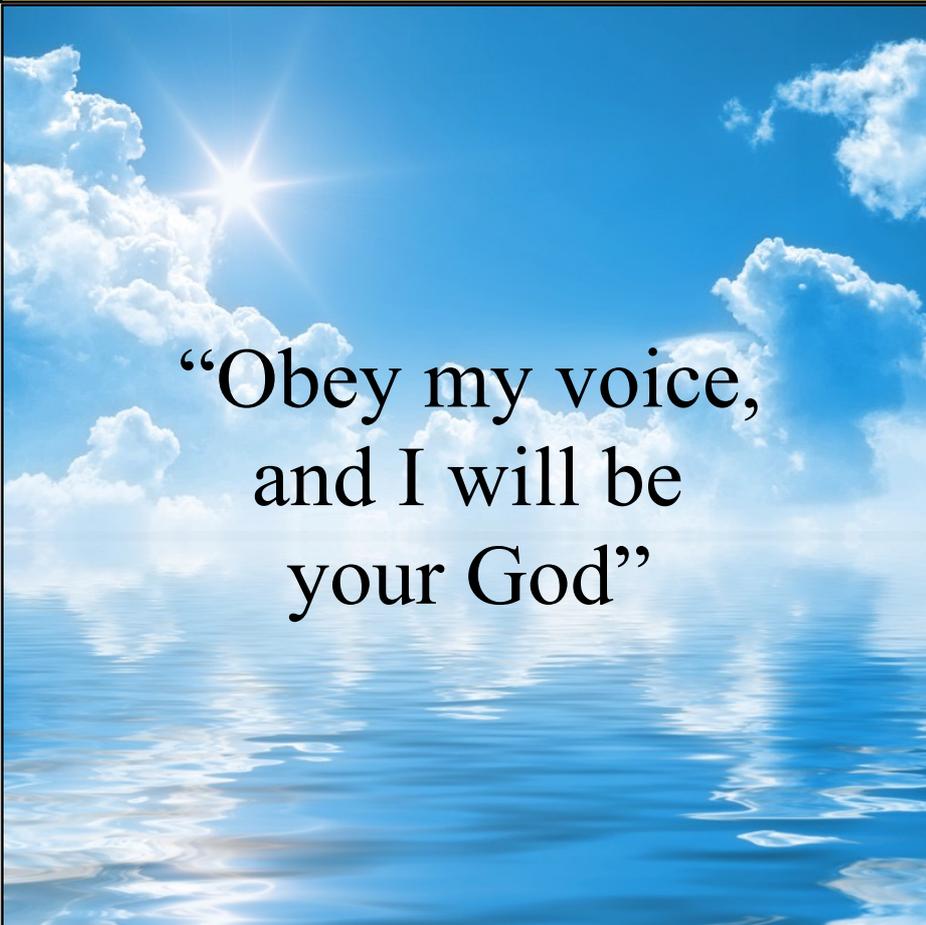
Jeremiah 7:21-23

KEY TO
THE LAYOUT
OF THIS STUDY

The verses being
studied are in
bold type

*Supporting and
illustrative Scripture
texts are in italics*

The explanation and
commentary on the
verses being studied
and of the
supporting texts
are in normal typeface



“Obey my voice,
and I will be
your God”

v21. “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh”. Under the law of Moses burnt offerings were totally consumed by fire upon the altar, and so were not eaten. There was no part of the flesh left for the priests and people to eat themselves, as was the case with the other offerings. God is here sternly rebuking disobedient Judah, and declares, You can start adding the flesh of your burnt offerings to the meat of the other sacrifices

which you do eat, and you can have yourselves a good meal, because that is the only practical use that there is to all the sacrifices which you offer. You have utterly abused my holy ordinance. In terms of the sacrifices' original purpose, as being a reflection of humbled and devoted hearts, genuinely contrite because of sin, your sacrifices are actually of no value to me whatsoever.

So here we learn that Judah was engaging in the outward forms of religion, but with no true love for God in their hearts at all. This teaches us that man is indeed a religious creature; he cannot help being religious. Sinful, fallen men actually like religion, for it often fosters in them a sense of pride in their own goodness. Needless to say, this is a false confidence. Men also like to use religion as a kind of insurance policy, as they see it, against the consequences of a far-from-holy life. Outward religion eases the consciences of those who have never truly abandoned sin in their hearts.

(Paul warns Timothy about) "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof : from such turn away" (2 Timothy 3:3-4). We thus see that it is perfectly possible to have a definite religious appearance, but still to remain unconverted, devoid of the Holy Spirit, and outside of the kingdom of God. Such people on the surface look like Christians, but their lives are in fact a denial of the power of the Gospel to change men.

What needs to be stressed here, and this is done only out of love for those in this condition, is that there is an enormous potential for self-deception as far as religious matters are concerned. Many people claim to be Christians, when they are nothing of the sort. The evidence of their lives makes them virtually indistinguishable from the unbelievers around them. Many claim to be Christians, but ignore the Lord's Day, and the principle that unnecessary work should not be carried out upon that day, either by themselves or by others for them. Many claim to be Christians, but never read the Bible and remain unmoved when false doctrine is preached. Many claim to be Christians, but their outlook on life is fashioned by the prevailing winds of political correctness. Many claim to be Christians, but have never experienced conviction of sin, nor felt the wretchedness of their own hearts, and have never confessed that they have no goodness of their own. They have never truly trusted in Christ as their only hope of salvation.

"Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matthew 23:27-28). A classic example of the false and empty religion of the deceived is to be found in the scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's day. They did good works, they gave money to charity, they attended worship, but the Lord Jesus Christ denounced them, because He knew their hearts.

"I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways" (Jeremiah 17:10).

The people of Judah in Jeremiah's day were living in a fools' paradise, if they thought that God would be pleased with any of their religious activity. We actually find the Lord being full of righteous anger towards them, and telling them in this v21 that all their worship, all their bringing of sacrifices was in fact useless. God *hated* their worship, and so He tells them, "Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh". In other words, add the flesh of your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices, although my law forbids it, and have a good feast, because all your worship is already invalid and contemptible in my sight. It matters little that you observe my ceremonial laws regarding the sacrifices, because you are ignoring my primary laws about how you should live.

Now that is the key to understanding this passage. The people of Judah were religiously offering their sacrifices at the Temple, whilst at the same time ignoring the Ten Commandments, the moral law, that which was the very basis of their covenant relationship with God.

v22. “For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: v23. But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people”. Here we see that the primary message to the Israelites as they were leaving Egypt was not, Offer up sacrifices, and I shall bless you, but keep my commandments, and I shall bless you. The condition for their being in covenant with God was not their bringing sacrifices, but their keeping God's law with humble and devoted hearts.

“If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people” (Exodus 19:5). So God put the emphasis on obedience, not on the sacrificial system.

“If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;... I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Leviticus 26:3,12). Whilst the sacrifices obviously had an important place as the means of reconciliation to God, when the law had been broken, they were definitely not the substance of Israel's religion. It was the Law itself, God's righteous requirements, which were the actual foundation of Israel's being in covenant with God. If the commandments themselves were being defiantly ignored, then the sacrifices were rendered null and void.

v22. “I spake not unto your fathers ... concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices”, that is, I never made the sacrifices the sole basis of your being in covenant with me. “The precepts of the moral law were given before the ceremonial institutions, and those came afterwards ... as (aids) to their repentance and faith” (Matthew Henry). The Lord once said to Samuel,

“The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

David says of God in Psalm 51 :

“Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:16-17). David knew that if he brought a thousand lambs to be offered up to God in fire upon the altar, that could never take away his sin, unless he first came with a broken heart and a fervent resolution to sin no more.

“Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). So the Lord is looking for obedience rather many sacrifices. This is brought home in Isaiah 1 :

“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me ... Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil” (Isaiah 1:11–13,16).

We therefore must be very wary today of any religious system in which the primary emphasis is the offering up of sacrifices. We love our Roman Catholic neighbour, but we do graciously note an over-emphasis on sacrifice within Romanist practice, which presents the mass most definitely as a sacrifice. Pope John Paul II wrote,

"The Eucharist is above all else a sacrifice" (McCarthy, p149).

The Second Vatican Council states, *"In the mystery of the eucharistic sacrifice, in which priests fulfil their principal function, the work of our redemption is continually carried out" (McCarthy, p168).*

The Council of Trent states,

"(The mass) is a truly propitiatory sacrifice ... for the Lord is appeased by this offering" (McCarthy, p166).

So every single time a mass takes place, Christ is himself being sacrificed, and God is being appeased. The mass, it is argued, is the *primary* means by which the benefits of Christ's death are received.

The 1994 Catholic Catechism states, *"The Eucharist is the heart and the summit of the Church's life" (para 1407).*

"The church strongly encourages the faithful to receive the holy Eucharist on Sundays and feast days, or more often still, even daily" (para 1389).

We see from these quotations the strong emphasis in Roman Catholic teaching upon the need for ongoing, frequent, and even daily, offering up of the sacrifice of Christ. Our Lord's sacrificial death, however, was a single event in history, never-to-be-repeated, effective for all time. The Lord's Supper is a memorial of His death, not a reenactment of it.

Here in Jeremiah, Judah's emphasis upon continual sacrifice as the core of her religion is rejected by God. He thus tells the nation in verse 22, I did not command sacrifices, when I brought you out of Egypt; what I commanded was obedience.

v23. "... and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you". In other words, all your sacrifices are no cover for all your present disobedience. (We do not suggest that the frequent masses in Roman Catholicism are a cover for disobedience, but we do argue that our Lord's death is a once and for all never-to-be-repeated sacrifice). Trusting in Christ's death to bring them forgiveness and access to God, believers must then pursue ongoing obedience throughout their Christian lives. Therefore, attendance at an altar is not at the heart of the Christian life, but obedience is. The Lord had a similar message for Judah in Jeremiah's day.

Christ's once and for all shedding of His blood on the Cross is the only sacrifice which effects reconciliation between sinful man and God, but this truth can be abused, just as Judah tried to abuse the sacrificial system in Jeremiah's day. Paul had to confront such a problem, even in New Testament times. The false teaching went like this : Because God is so merciful, and because we can never be saved through our own merits, but only by virtue of Christ's death, then any attempt to keep the commandments is legalism, and a resorting to our works to save us, rather than to God's grace. Therefore, we should stop trying to keep God's law, and simply rely upon grace. God loves us just as we are, despite our ongoing sin. The grace of Christ's sacrifice outweighs the need for obedience. Such an argument is dangerous indeed, and is purposefully rejected in the New Testament.

"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 6:1-2). All must be wary of the danger, under the cloak of glorifying God's grace, of a careless contempt for God's law and no concern about obedience. Holiness is never an option in the Christian life. The fact that the Lord bore our sins at the Cross is never a pretext to keep on sinning.

"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6:12). For those born again of God's Spirit there is no longer any inevitability that they sin. As long as they do not quench the indwelling Holy Spirit, the sin principle within them is destroyed. Sin is no longer that which believers are powerless to resist.

Conclusion

These verses 21-23 are teaching us that God requires obedience from the heart. Solomon tells us,

"Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?" (Proverbs 15:11).

"All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits" (Proverbs 16:2).

So nothing is hidden from the Lord; He knows men's inward motivations. Many think that their religious acts are pleasing to God, but how mistaken they can be.

- 1) JUDAH'S SACRIFICES WERE WORTHLESS
- 2) THEIR RELIGION WAS MERELY OUTWARD
- 3) THE PEOPLE DECEIVED THEMSELVES THAT THEY PLEASED GOD
- 4) THEY BROUGHT MANY SACRIFICES BUT DISOBEYED GOD'S LAW
- 5) THE LESSON FOR US ALL : TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN OFFERING SACRIFICES