
The sacrifice acceptable to God

(Highlighted sections added)

Psalm 51:16-17 (AMP)

16 For You delight not in sacrifice, or else would I give it; You find no pleasure in burnt offering.

17 **My sacrifice [the sacrifice acceptable] to God is** a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart [broken down with sorrow for sin and humbly and thoroughly penitent], such, O God, You will not despise.

Psalm 51:16-17 (TEV)

16 You do not want sacrifices, or I would offer them; you are not pleased with burnt offerings.

17 **My sacrifice is** a humble spirit, O God; you will not reject a humble and repentant heart.

Psalm 51:16-17 (MSG)

16 Going through the **motions** doesn't please you, a **flawless performance** is nothing to you.

17 I learned God-worship when my pride was shattered. Heart-shattered lives ready for love don't for a moment escape God's notice.

Commentaries

Psalm 51:16

For thou desirest not sacrifice... On the words rendered in this verse “sacrifice” and “burnt-offering,” see the notes at Isaiah 1:11. On the main sentiment here expressed—that God did not “desire” such sacrifices—see the notes at Psalm 40:6-8. The idea here is, that any mere external offering, however precious or costly it might be, was not what God required in such cases. **He demanded the expression of deep and sincere repentance; the sacrifices of a contrite heart and of a broken spirit: Psalm 51:17.** No offering without this could be acceptable; nothing without this could secure pardon. In mere outward sacrifices—in bloody offerings themselves, unaccompanied with the expression of genuine penitence, God could have no pleasure.

This is one of the numerous passages in the Old Testament which show that the external offerings of the law were valueless unless accompanied by **the religion of the heart**; or that the Jewish religion, much as it abounded in forms, yet required the offerings of pure hearts in order that man might be acceptable to God. Under all dispensations the real nature of religion is the same. Compare the notes at Hebrews 9:9,10. The phrase “else would I give it,” in the margin, “that I should give it,” expresses a willingness to make such an offering, if it was required, while, at the same time, there is the implied statement that it would be valueless without the heart.

Psalm 51:17

The sacrifices of God **The sacrifices which God desires and approves**; the sacrifices without which no other offering would be acceptable. David felt that that which he here specified was what was demanded in his case. He had grievously sinned; and the blood of animals offered in sacrifice could not put away his sin, nor could anything remove it unless **the heart were itself penitent and contrite**.

The same thing is true now. Though a most perfect sacrifice, every way acceptable to God, has been made for human guilt by the Redeemer, yet it is as true as it was under the old dispensation in regard to the sacrifices there required, that even that will not avail for us unless we are truly penitent; unless we come before God with a contrite and humble heart.

Are a broken spirit A mind broken or crushed under the weight of conscious guilt. The idea is that of a burden laid on the Soul until it is crushed and subdued.

A broken and a contrite heart The word rendered contrite means to be broken or crushed, as when the bones are broken, Psalm 44:19; 51:8; and then it is applied to the mind or heart as that which is crushed or broken by the weight of guilt. The word does not differ materially from the term “broken.” The two together constitute intensity of expression.

Thou wilt not despise Thou wilt not treat with contempt or disregard. That is, God would look upon them with favor, and to such a heart he would grant his blessing. See the notes at Isaiah 57:15; 66:2.

Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament.

Psalm 51:14-17

The third part now begins with a doubly urgent prayer. The invocation of God by the name Elohim is here made more urgent by the addition of אֱלֹהֵי יְשׁוּעָתִי; inasmuch as the prayers for justification and for renewing blend together in the "deliver me." David does not seek to lessen his guilt; he calls it in דָּמִים by its right name,—a word which signifies blood violently shed, and then also a deed of blood and blood-guiltiness (Ps 9:13; 106:38, and frequently). We have also met with הַצִּיל construed with מִן of the sin in 39:9. He had given Uriah over to death in order to possess himself of Bathsheba. And the accusation of his conscience spoke not merely of adultery, but also of murder.

Nevertheless the consciousness of sin no longer smites him to the earth, Mercy has lifted him up; he prays only that she would complete her work in him, then shall his tongue exultingly praise (רַנֵּן with an accusative of the object, as in Ps 59:17) God's righteousness, which, in accordance with the promise, takes the sinner under its protection. But in order to perform what he vowed he would do under such circumstances, he likewise needs grace, and prays, therefore, for a joyous opening of his mouth.

In sacrifices God delighteth not (Ps 40:7, cf. Isa 1:11), otherwise he would bring some (וְאֶתְנָה), darem, sc. si velles, vid., on Ps 40:6); whole-burnt-offerings God doth not desire: the sacrifices that are well-pleasing to Him and most beloved by Him, in comparison with which the flesh and the dead work of the עוֹלוֹת and the זִבְחִים (שְׁלָמִים) is altogether worthless, are thankfulness (Ps 50:23) out of the fulness of a penitent and lowly heart. There is here, directly at least, no reference to the spiritual antitype of the sin-offering, which is never called זִבְחָה. The inward part of a man is said to be broken and crushed when his sinful nature is broken, his ungodly self slain, his impenetrable hardness softened, his haughty vainglory brought low,—in fine, when he is in himself become as nothing, and when **God is everything to him. Of such a spirit and heart, panting after grace or favour, consist the sacrifices that are truly worthy God's acceptance and well-pleasing to Him** (cf. Isa 57:15, where such a spirit and such a heart are called God's earthly temple).

Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament - Commentary on the Old Testament – Volume 5: Psalms.