

98-03-01b

Right here, looking at the sacrifice that is detailed in Leviticus chapter 7 and verse 18. And the point with which we concluded our first session was that improper performance of this sacrifice indicates a bad attitude on the part of the person bringing it. Here, you're bringing a voluntary offering, but you're not willing to do it right.

You're more concerned about wasting the meat, or getting that last bite of steak, than you are of pleasing God. And this, it isn't the technical violation of the rules that God is concerned with. It is that that points to something wrong in the heart.

Why would you do this? Why would you violate the command and eat the meat on the third day, if it isn't that you're more concerned with selfish things than you are with the real purpose for which this sacrifice is to be brought. And that is, as an expression to God of faith and of obedience. And you're perverting the very purpose of the sacrifice, which is supposed to express faith and obedience, by being unfaithful and disobedient.

And this was the big problem in Israel. And you can see it. You can see the germ of it and the essence of it in Cain.

Cain, who brings this minkah, the voluntary offering, but his heart's not right before God. Israel is going to duplicate that act, thousands and thousands and thousands of times in their national history. And God is going to indict them for it.

You can see it in the first king of Israel. 1 Samuel chapter 13 and verse 9. You may remember the circumstances we've studied through 1 and 2 Samuel. Saul is about to fight the Philistines.

And he has assembled his armies. But Samuel said, wait till I get back, we'll offer the sacrifice of dedication, and then you can go fight the Philistines. Well, Samuel doesn't show up when Saul thought he was going to.

And the army is looking over the hill and hearing the noise of the Philistines, and they start to get afraid. And the army starts to desert. And every night when the sun goes down, the next morning the sun comes up and Saul's army has shrunk.

And people are leaving and fleeing. And he's down to just a few hundred men. And he's getting panicky.

Where is Samuel? I can go fight the Philistines if we could just get this sacrifice business out of the way. And get on to the business of hacking these Philistines to bits with our swords. So in verse 8 of 1 Samuel 13, Saul waited seven days according to the time set by Samuel.

But Samuel did not come to Gilgal. Remember I told you last week, if you want an

interesting study, go look at Gilgal in the Old Testament. Well, he's at Gilgal when this episode takes place.

Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattered from him. They deserted. So Saul said, bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.

Remember the peace offering? Voluntary offering? He offered the burnt offering. What tribe is Saul from? Do you remember? Who are all the lefties in Israel? Benjamin. Saul is a Benjamite.

Are Benjamites qualified to offer burnt offerings before the Lord? No. You've got to be a Levite. You've got to be Samuel.

So it happened as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering that Samuel came. That's always the way, isn't it? That's one of those unwritten laws of human life. Just as soon as he finished presenting the burnt offering, Samuel came.

And Saul went out to meet him that he might greet him. Samuel said, and do these words sound familiar? What have you done? What have you done? Saul said, when I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, the Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord, therefore I felt compelled, and I offered a burnt offering. It's more of that first person pronoun getting in there.

I saw the circumstances, and I thought we better do something, and so I went ahead and did it. Samuel said to Saul in verse 13, You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you.

Saul reasons this out in his mind, doesn't he? And he's honoring God. He could make the point, well, you know, I could have just gone off and fought the Philistines and not even made the offering, but I was giving my nod to God. I was offering the sacrifice.

And a little technicality here, I'm not qualified to offer it, but hey, I brought it. Why is God off with me? Why is my sacrifice being rejected? Why are you browbeating me here when I was just trying to honor God before we went into battle? This self-justification is what we do. This is what Israel did when they brought their sacrifices.

Hey, I brought the sacrifice. It was a pretty good lamb. It may not have been the absolute best, but my goodness, look at the future.

If I don't keep this particular lamb, this male lamb that's going to grow up to be a ram and sustain my flock, where am I going to be? I'll be wiped out. How can I support my family? God says, you've got to support your family. I've got my elderly parents here.

How can I honor my father and my mother if I don't maintain my flocks and herds? Rationalizing. What does rationalizing do? It says, I've got to make provision for myself, or bad things will happen. Instead of faith, which says, if I'm obedient to God, God will make sure things turn out okay.

In the ideal, what would Saul have done in this situation? I don't care if every last man flees. I'm going to be obedient to God. It's God's battle.

It's the armies of the Lord that fight for Israel. God can wipe them out with the breath of His mouth. God can speak and they will disappear.

It's God that counts. It's God's Word. It's God's plan.

It's the command of God and obedience to God that counts. But to be obedient, what do you have to have? To be obedient in the true sense, takes faith. Because a lot of times, obedience doesn't seem to make good sense.

It doesn't make sense to Saul to wait any longer and have his army disappear. Is this before or after the period of the judges in Israel? It's after, isn't it? Do you remember Gideon? The guy with the lamps and the bowls and the pitchers? Who starts out with an army of many thousands and God says, send all the ones that want to go home, home. And a lot of them leave.

He says, take them down to the water and have them drink. And all the ones who lay down on their belly and drink, send them home. All the ones who kneel and drink from their hand, keep them.

And by the time he gets through all this, he's only got 300 men left. And God says now, give each man a lamp, a bowl and a pitcher and go by night and surround the camp of the Philistines and smash the bowls and raise the lamps. What kind of a plan is this for victory? There are thousands of enemies down in the valley and you're going to go with 300 men with lamps and pitchers.

But the whole point of that is that in faith, when Gideon goes, those 300 men rout the enemy and they kill each other in their haste to escape because the battle is the Lord's. But it took faith for those 300 men to march down against an overwhelming number of enemy with clay pots and oil lamps in their hands. Obedience requires faith and real obedience is an expression of faith.

There is a pseudo-obedience, bringing the sacrifice when really your heart's not right. It's not an expression of faith, it's an expression of compliance. I'll comply, but I've really got my own agenda going here.

I'll bring a sacrifice. I don't want to appear to be disobedient or I don't want people looking at me finding out what I'm really like, so I'll put on a good front. But in my heart,

I've got a different agenda.

This is what God despises. This is what God rejects. And that false obedience is rejected.

Who commanded sacrifice? Who said you need to bring... This is a command of God, isn't it? People can easily justify saying, I'm obeying God. This is obedience. I don't have to bring a sacrifice, but I am.

I don't have to attend church, but I am. I don't have to give to ministries, but I do. I don't have to witness to the lost.

It makes me uncomfortable, but I do. I'm doing these obedience things, so surely God is pleased. And the problem is, if they're not springing from faith, they count for nothing.

In many ways, they are worse than doing nothing. And it would have been better for Cain had he brought no sacrifice at all than to bring what purported to be a voluntary offering as an expression of faith when it was not. This is basically coming before God and lying, which Cain ultimately does.

I don't know where my brother is. Am I his keeper, he says? Well, Saul, as the first king of Israel, the rejected king, by the way, you remember our elders shall serve the younger principle that we've seen time and again. The younger brother, Seth, is going to inherit the blessings.

He's going to be the child of promise, even though Cain is the firstborn. You have Jacob, who is the younger brother. Esau has the birthright, and yet it's Jacob who becomes Israel and is blessed.

And the principle of Israel and the church, Israel as God's firstborn, Israel had the chance as the people of God to inherit all the blessings, but this was the problem. Superficial obedience. Lack of genuine faith.

Lack of genuine obedience. And what happens? You're cut off from your people. You forfeit your inheritance.

You forfeit your land ownership. You forfeit your place and your future in Israel. And the nation itself suffered this fate, as we're going to see.

And now the church, as the younger offspring of God, has the chance to fulfill and to be the inheritors of the promise. Look at Psalm 50. God the mighty judge.

This is titled in the New Cain James. It's a psalm of Asaph. The mighty one, God the Lord, has spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun to its going down.

Psalm 50, verse 2, Through out of Zion the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth. Our God shall come and shall not keep silent. A fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be

very tempestuous all around Him.

This is the fire of judgment. He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth, that He may judge whom? His people. There is judgment for the people of God.

This is not judge those who are not His people, judge the rejecters and the faithless and the unbelievers and so on. He is going to judge His people. Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.

Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is judge. Selah. Hear, O My people, and I will speak.

O Israel, and I will testify against you. Now this is serious business. The people of God are going to be brought to court.

And this is a prosecution. This is what in Hebrew is called a R.I.B. or R.I.V. It's a case. It's an indictment.

I am God, your God. I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are continually before Me. I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your flocks.

Every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is Mine and all its fullness.

Will I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? What God is saying here is, your sacrifices to Me are meaningless. I'm not even going to dignify them with an accusation. They are so meaningless.

I'm not even going to rebuke you for your sacrifices. You are so far from actually fulfilling their purpose. He says, what do you think when you bring Me these empty sacrifices, that I'm hungry and I need to eat this flesh and drink this blood? Offer to God thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High.

Call upon Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. God is looking for the sacrifice of a contrite heart, ultimately.

And this is Asaph. This is under the law. This is probably 1000 B.C., 1000 years before Christ this is written.

But to the wicked, God says, what right have you to declare My statutes or take My covenant in your mouth? Now when He says wicked, who is He talking about? These are the people of Israel that He says He's talking to in verse 7 as well as verse 5. These are the wicked people of God. What right have you to declare My statutes or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing that you hate instruction and cast My words behind you?

When you saw a thief, you consented with him and have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit.

Reminds us of Proverbs that we read this morning. You sit and speak against your brother. You slander your own mother's son.

These things you have done, and I kept silent. You thought that I was altogether like you, but I will rebuke you and set them in order before your eyes. There's going to be an accounting and a judgment for these things.

Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver. Whoever offers praise glorifies Me. And to him who orders his conduct aright, I will show the salvation of God, the deliverance of God.

So, in this Psalm of Asaph, we see the emphasis on attitude of heart. It's not the fact that they're bringing sacrifices or failing to bring them. It is whether or not they're bringing the sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of prayer, the sacrifice of faith.

You see a similar idea in Proverbs 15, verse 8. This is a one verse emphasis from our reading this morning in Proverbs 15. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. You stop and think about this.

The sacrifice is something that God ordained, that God commanded, that God gave the details of. He said this is how to bring a sacrifice. And here are people obeying that command and fulfilling that function.

And God says your obedience here is an abomination. It reminds us of Genesis chapter 4, doesn't it? Cain's voluntary minkah offering of grain is not accepted by God. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.

Now, is the upright also going to obey and offer a sacrifice? He is. But notice the parallel here. He doesn't say the sacrifice of the upright.

He says the prayer of the upright because prayer is an expression of heart. And if your heart is right before God, everything you do is going to be an expression of that right motivation and right attitude. Our problem is not behavior.

Our problem is thinking. Our problem is not how to change our actions and how to change the way we speak or the way we act. We need rehabilitation in our thought life.

We need rehabilitation of our motives and our perspective of life. It is easy to go awry and do right things for wrong reasons when we are operating out of a corrupted point of view. That pre-Copernican universe where we judge the worth and the rightness of things by how it affects me.

Do I feel better? Am I getting my goals accomplished? Am I vindicated? Am I justified?

Have I defended myself successfully? Am I getting my just desserts? Am I getting what I want out of life? Am I being fulfilled and so forth? This is a dangerous attitude. For us as believers, we are not at the center of the universe. And whether we understand it or not, whether we like it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, there is a center of the universe.

I think it would be very interesting if physics ever confirms this. But there is an actual center of the universe and it is the throne of God Almighty. Everything revolves around Him.

And He is worthy of that because He is intrinsic good. He is the ultimate beauty. He is the ultimate glory.

He is not only perfect righteousness and perfect justice, but He is also infinite love, infinite compassion, infinite forgiveness. He cares about us personally. He desires a personal relationship with us.

I'm talking about God the Father. We tend to think of the Father as sort of the big hammer in the sky and Jesus as sort of a compassionate one. God the Father sent the Lord Jesus Christ who was the express image of His person.

He is a reflection in human form of God the Father's attitudes. God is not just this set of ten attributes in a box. We tend to think of sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability and veracity.

We say there is God on high on His throne. We've left some things out of that box. And in that way I would agree with the statement that you can't put God in a box.

You can't define God by His attributes. It's also His character. And He desires a relationship with us, but there are requirements on our part to enter into and to sustain that relationship.

And we have to acknowledge Him for who He is. We have to put Him in His place. What is commandment number one in the Ten Commandments? Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

God fills the top line on the priority list. He is the most important thing in our lives. Everything else in our life, our vocation, our domestic life, our social life, our inner life, our external life, everything is before God.

Everything counts as it bears on our relationship with God. This is what Israel forgot. This is what Cain forgot.

And in relocating the center of the universe to ourselves, we appropriate God's place. And we make ourselves God with a little g in a pseudo-universe with a pseudo-center

that revolves around us, and it's a lie. And it becomes a greater lie when we come before God or come before God's people and act as though we really have Him at the center when we don't.

Paul made an excellent point during the break that all of this kind of reminds us of a New Testament episode in Acts with Ananias and Sapphira. It seems like a fairly small thing. Lots of people were selling everything they had along the lines of our study of the parable of the pearl of great price or the treasure hidden in the field.

There were people literally doing this. They would sell everything they had, take all the proceeds, give it to the church, and they were living in sort of a communal relationship with each other. And people thought, boy, this is a wonderful thing.

These people really have put God first in their life. Well, here's Ananias and Sapphira, and they've got this big piece of land, and they sell it, and they get however many shekels for it, and they take most of that money and bring it down to the church, but they keep part of it back, keep a little for themselves. They think, well, you know, if this communal thing doesn't work out, we've got a little nest egg we can fall back on.

Who knows how this church thing is going to work out in the long run, so we'll set some aside. Actually, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with that. Is there anything in the Word of God that says thou shalt not have a savings account? The problem was when they came down to the church, they acted as though this was the whole thing, that they were doing just like everyone else and putting God and the things of God and the people of God and the church of God first.

They said, we've brought it all, and we're contributing it to the church, and they were waiting for the applause from the audience. And Peter says, you know, Ananias comes in first and says this, and Peter says, why are you lying to the Holy Spirit? They think, wait a minute, how can you lie to the Holy Spirit? He knows all. What did Cain do in Genesis 4? I don't know where my brother is.

Am I his keeper? Lie right in the face of God. Ananias comes down and purports to be bringing all of this money, and he's not. And he's making out like God is the focus when God is really not.

And for that voluntary act, another good point that Paul made, this is a voluntary act on their part. Nobody said, thou shalt go and sell all your goods and bring them down to the church. They volunteered for this in the same way that the mikvah was voluntary, in the same way that the peace offering for a vow and a thanksgiving was a voluntary offering.

When you spontaneously want to go and impress people and make out like God is the most important thing in your life when He's not, you're putting yourself, we are putting ourselves in a pretty precarious situation. So in Proverbs chapter 15, we have this

pointed out. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.

When our attitude is genuine, when we acknowledge the relative position of God and ourselves, by the way, inherent in recognizing God as the top priority is recognizing that we are not. It is two sides of the same coin. But when we realize that God is worthy, that Christ is worthy, and we are not, that is the attitude that makes it possible for us to receive forgiveness because it is a confession.

It is an acknowledgment of our unworthiness that we can't help ourselves, we can't organize our own lives, we can't produce good of intrinsic value that pleases God on our own. We can do nothing apart from Christ. We can do nothing apart from God.

Most people memorize that verse. Without me ye can do nothing, Jesus says. What does He mean? We tie our shoes, we conduct business, we run households.

What does He mean you can do nothing? Nothing of intrinsic value, nothing that lasts, nothing that has eternal ramifications. The way of the wicked in 15.9 of Proverbs is an abomination to the Lord. The way of the wicked, the life of the wicked, it doesn't say that only when he does wicked things, you can be doing good things.

You can be ministering. You can be being kind. You can be helping someone out.

And people around say, what a generous person. They just knock themselves out. They're so hospitable.

They're so caring. And they go down and sit by people's bedside and they do this and that and the other as a part of their lifestyle. They're just wonderful people.

They're good to know. Give you the shirt off their back. Salt of the earth.

The Bible says the way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. All of those good deeds can be abominable. You think about some of the prominent... I pointed this out last week.

Think about some of the prominent murders that have taken place recently. We had this thing. They were calling it a cadet murder.

It just grinds me because they have been calling this one gal a midshipman. She spent a total of like five and a half weeks at the Naval Academy. But they say, oh, midshipman so and so, as though the Naval Academy was a big part of her life and so on.

But this girl and her boyfriend who went to Air Force briefly as well, murdered a 16-year-old girl. Now, they can feel sorry. And they could go and try to do favors.

They could go to the Jones family and mow their lawn. They could bring over casseroles.

They could send cards.

They could come out and, you know, repot their flowers or give them tickets to a nice concert or do things that we would consider to be wonderful in other contexts. But those good deeds and those, in some cases, well-meaning acts of contrition are an abomination when the root problem has not been solved, aren't they? Those good acts are an affront. They're worse than if they had done nothing, aren't they? Because of the status of the relationship.

And that's the problem with Israel. By not acknowledging sin and by not acknowledging God's place, their acts of obedience to the law are a stench in God's nostrils because the root problem has not been solved. We can do the same thing.

And the church at large today is in this position. And we, as individual believers, do not want to fall into this cesspool of external conformity and external goodness to where others around us judge us and say, what a fine person when our heart is dead men's bones. It would be better to not do those things than to affront God by acting like someone who is giving all, and we're not.

It starts with attitude of heart. The wonderful thing is when we do have that attitude of heart, and it is a decision that we make, it's a priority that we set, there is infinite forgiveness because we're still going to fail. Just having that attitude of heart doesn't suddenly make us sinlessly perfect.

And we're going to fail. We're going to occasionally revert to self-centeredness. We're going to have things pop up that catch us off guard.

And we're going to mess up. But if the pattern of our life is acknowledgement, and we see that, and we go to God and say, experiencing the pain of it, this isn't what I wanted to do. This isn't my goal.

And I see it and I acknowledge it. I did not give God his proper place. I have been defending myself.

I've been pushing myself. I've been trying to get others to be impressed with me. Whatever it may be, whatever our area of failure is, this is what God is looking for.

God is looking for the contrite heart because that is the condition that allows Him to open the floodgates of blessing. To forgive, to cleanse, to restore, to build up, to transform, and to make us fruitful vines. Like Jesus said in John chapter 15, if you abide in Him as a branch in the vine, the Father is going to come and prune.

He doesn't even say we have to prune ourselves. He says the Father is going to prune. If we abide in Christ by continuing to seek that status, God will prune.

God will break up the hard lumps in our soil. God will crack those areas of our heart. God will change our motivation with divine power.

And our self-centeredness or our propensity to sin in certain areas, whatever it may be, now you have divine power going in and breaking those things up. It reminds me, we were talking about things that can happen inside your body where you end up with a growth or a tumor or a stone. And for many years, the only way to remove those is to get out the knife and chop into your body and get down in there and physically take that out.

But we have more powerful tools now and they can use ultrasound in some cases. And by adjusting the frequency and focusing it and so forth, they can shatter these things on the inside without even disturbing the flesh. And it's almost a supernatural form of treatment to be able to break this thing up without touching it.

And it reminds me of what God can do in our soul. He has an ability that we do not overcome weaknesses, to build up, to fill the cracks in our clay jar. But we have to want it.

You have to want it. We have to ask and seek and knock. And that's the only requirement, is to want it, to be willing to receive it and to be humble enough to acknowledge, like the alcoholic, I can't fix this myself.

And to recognize that the center of the universe is not with us. The problem in Israel is manifested. The whole book of Isaiah, if you turn a few pages over from Proverbs, you hit Isaiah, and it's easy to hit because there are 66 chapters.

This whole book, there's hardly a chapter that goes by that you can't find. I'm only going to give you a reference in chapter 1 and a reference in chapter 66 and let you fill in the other 64 chapters. Isaiah 1, verse 11.

I would love to study the book of Isaiah, but I suspect it would take me the rest of my life to get through all 66 chapters. Isaiah 1.10 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. Give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah.

Now, who's he really talking to here? This is Israel. He's speaking to them as though they are Sodom and Gomorrah. What an insult.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me, says the Lord? You're offering a multitude of sacrifices. What's the purpose? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of lambs or of goats.

When you come to appear before me, who has required this from your hand to trample my courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices. Don't even bother, God says. These are the sacrifices that God ordained and God commanded in the law.

He says, just stop it. Quit. Bring no more futile sacrifices.

Incense is an abomination to me. The new moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies, I cannot endure iniquity in the sacred meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates.

They are a trouble to me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, i.e., in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you.

Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. This is unacknowledged sin and is pictured as hands full of blood.

What is Cain's problem? He has shed blood. There's blood on his hands and he won't acknowledge it. What is the remedy? Look at verse 16.

Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes.

Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice.

Rebuke the oppressor. Defend the fatherless. Plead for the widow.

Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool, if you are willing and obedient.

You shall eat the good of the land, but if you refuse and rebel, notice that phrase, you will eat of the good of the land. What's a component of the curse on Cain? He's not going to be eating of the good of the land anymore, is he? God tells Cain, the ground is not going to yield its strength to you anymore. But if you refuse and rebel, verse 20, you shall be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

As I said, Isaiah is the book that has this as its theme. Just turn to the last chapter, Isaiah 66. Thus says the Lord, Heaven is my throne.

That's where the center of the universe is. The earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will build me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things my hand has made, and all those things exist, says the Lord.

But on this one I will look, on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word. He who kills a bull is as if he slays a lamb. These bull sacrifices you're making, you might as well be murdering people, for all the good it's doing you in my eyes.

He who sacrifices a lamb is as if he breaks a dog's neck. Dog was an unclean animal in Israel. And people bringing sacrifice of a lamb before God? God says with the attitude

you've got, you might as well be out taking an unclean dog and breaking its neck.

He who offers a grain offering is as if he offers swine's blood. You can't get any worse than that in Israel. He who burns incense is as if he blesses an idol.

Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their delusions and bring their fears on them. Because when I called, no one answered. How many times does God call to Cain? Over and over and over.

How many times does God call to Israel? Over and over and over. He says all day long, I have held out my hands to a disobedient and stiff-necked people. Well, here's the question.

How many times does God call to us? How many different areas of our life are yet unyielded in the sense of we don't dedicate them to the Lord, we don't consider them to be a part of our spiritual life. We have an overt obedience rather than acknowledging God's place in every part of our life, every relationship, every task, every duty, every calling, our vocation, the smallest activity. That's what God is looking for because he that is faithful in that which is least, the small things of life, will be faithful in that which is great.

When it is time to offer the sacrifice of obedience, it will count. It will be acceptable the way Abel's was. This is a great passage of Scripture to memorize, by the way, if you're looking for something to memorize this first part of Isaiah 66.

This is what life is all about. That's why we're in the book of Genesis at the beginning of human history and God is bringing these things to light. This is the whole ball game in human life.

Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word, in verse 5. Your brethren who hated you, who cast you out for my name's sake, let the Lord be glorified that we may see your joy, but they shall be ashamed. And this is the promise of vindication from God to those who put God first, even though their brethren may cast them out. They say, let the Lord be glorified that we may see your joy, O Lord.

We want to live in a way that pleases you. And these others that cast you out, they're going to be ashamed. This is all in the realm of the people of God.

Jeremiah 14. The very next book after Isaiah. Jeremiah 14.

Thus says the Lord to this people, thus they have loved to wander. They have not restrained their feet. Therefore, the Lord does not accept them.

He will remember their iniquity now and punish their sins because there's no acknowledgement. There's no confession. Then the Lord said, Do not pray for this people

for their good.

When they fast, I will not hear their cry. When they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.

And then in verses 13 and following, you have Jeremiah trying to plead for the people. And God says it's not going to happen. Look down at verse 20.

Jeremiah confesses on behalf of the people. We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against You. Do not abhor us for Your name's sake.

Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory. Remember and do not break Your covenant with us. But look at verse 15.

Then the Lord said to me, Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight and let them go forth. This is what happens to Cain, isn't it? It shall be if they say to you, Where should we go? Then you shall tell them, Thus says the Lord, Such as are for death to death, such as are for the sword to the sword, such as are for the famine to the famine, and such as for the captivity to the captivity.

And I will appoint over them four forms of destruction, says the Lord, the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. These are the people of God. The covenant redeemed people of God that God is talking about here because of failure to see the principle that we're looking at this morning.

We don't have time to look at them this morning, but you might make a note of Hosea chapter 8, verse 11 through 14. Hosea 8, 11 through 14. And Amos chapter 5, verses 18 through 27.

We have been bought with a price. We are believers. We belong to the Lord God.

And it is our calling to serve Him from the heart. Whatever we do, to do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. First and foremost, this is the way to please God.

It's the only way. It isn't what we do. It's why we do it.

It isn't what we say. It's what we think that counts. And God observes the heart.

We don't have the power to change our own hearts. We can't change our motivations. We can't change our priorities just by an act of will.

What we can do with our free will is choose the power of God and have God make those

changes for us. But we have to want it. And we have to acknowledge that He is the source and the only source ultimately of that beneficial rehabilitation in our souls.

He's made a way. It's through His Spirit and through His Word. And we make that decision daily, not just to listen to the teaching of the Word of God, but to meditate on it, to think about its bearing on our daily lives, from the smallest tasks to the greatest, from the most superficial relationships to the deepest.

Everything depends on our relationship with God. And the first and greatest benefit of that is that we have the possibility of living a life that pleases God. Secondly, when we have put God first, all of these other things are added to us.

And we find that our lives are filled with blessing and peace. And God makes a straight path for our feet. And things that we thought were insurmountable obstacles are suddenly behind us.

The mountains that we could not climb have been leveled. The valleys that caused depression and anguish have been leveled, have been filled in. And as a result of putting God first, God is free to forgive, to cleanse, to bless, to make us fruitful, and to give us lives that are not only great now, but have an eternal weight of glory attached to them.

It all depends on us. God is anxious. God is compassionate.

And there's nothing that God wants more than for us to succeed, for us to live a life that pleases Him and that is filled with blessing. But there's a requirement. We can't have ourselves on the throne.

We can't make ourselves the God with a little G at the center of a pseudo-universe. God has to have His place. And we have to honor the Lord God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength.

Let's close in prayer. We thank You, Father, for the privilege of studying Your Word. We thank You for the gift of Your Spirit that gives us comprehension and understanding and a remembrance of these things and enables us to see the application in our own lives.

We pray that He will do His work within us and that the Word of Truth that we have studied this morning will be that sword of the Spirit in our souls, piercing to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow, as a judge of the thoughts and intents of our hearts. And we ask that as a result we will be purified, we will be cleansed, and we'll be qualified to come before You and offer a sacrifice that is acceptable, the sacrifice of our lives. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.