

December 2025

Greetings Brethren:

We may be scattered, few in total number, and insignificant to the world at this present time, but to God, we are something different. We are members of His spiritual Body and adhering to the Truth revealed to an end-time servant. We are those to whom God has provided an understanding of the glory of His Kingdom and His Plan of Salvation for mankind. We know our purpose in life, understand that we are true Christians, and have an opportunity to live forever in love and happiness as members of the God Family. That is a miracle and a reason for us to be joyous.

For us to achieve this joyous outcome, we must continue to change our minds and hearts—consisting of the rotten, carnal natures we were created with—toward God's perfection. With the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God has provided a means by which this can be done. It takes physical and mental work and effort. It takes much sacrifice.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (Romans 12:1).

The Apostle Paul is reminding us that the temporary, physical sacrificial system Israel followed was done away with, but not sacrifices in general. The changes we make in our minds and actions through our conversion process are rooted in our many spiritual sacrifices to God. And we can better understand the breadth of, and reasons for, those required spiritual sacrifices when we understand the physical sacrificial system of Israel.

Sacrificial System

Because of Israel's failure to live up to the requirements of the Old Covenant, the sacrificial law was instituted and intended for a limited time. The purpose was to remind Israel of their failure to live up to the terms of the Old Covenant. The covenant was the agreement between God and the nation of Israel. He would be their God, and they would be His special people who would obey Him. The general terms of the Old Covenant included a summary of the Ten Commandments, as well as statutes and judgments that defined how those Commandments should be applied in specific circumstances.

The sacrificial system was more than just a set of rules to follow or a general reminder of people's failure to obey the Covenant; it involved procedures designed to help Israel recognize the seriousness of sin, atone for it, and show gratitude. Interestingly, a key aspect of the sacrificial system was its role in guiding the Israelites to maintain proper relationships both with God and one another. It was a physical system that provided guidance for behavior and relationships. This demonstrates that God has consistently expressed His expectations from the beginning.

Voluntary and Mandatory Offerings

There were five major types of offerings, grouped into two categories: mandatory and voluntary. Voluntary offerings were those that could be given at any time and were used to express devotion and gratitude to God. There were three main types of voluntary offerings: burnt offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings.

Burnt Offering

This offering was used as a general expression of worship, devotion to God, and atonement for unintentional sin. A male bull, ram, goat, turtledove, or pigeon without defect could be used. The entire animal was consumed by fire on the altar, which symbolized total surrender to God.

Grain Offering

This offering was given to show gratitude and to acknowledge God's blessing in providing one's needs. It could also be given simply as a gift to God. Grain offerings could be made from fine flour, baked bread, or roasted grain, mixed with oil and frankincense. A portion was burned on the altar, and the rest was given to the priests.

Peace Offering

This offering was used to show gratitude and fellowship with God, or when fulfilling a vow. It was not meant to atone for specific sins. For a peace offering, a male or female animal from the herd or flock could be used.

Peace Offering: A Unique Offering

There were three main kinds of peace offerings and three distinct reasons for bringing one:

1. Thanksgiving offering: Given with thankfulness and gratitude for God's blessings.
2. Vow offering: Offered upon fulfilling a vow made to God. For example, Hannah gave a vow offering after God granted her prayer for a son, Samuel.
3. Freewill offering: A spontaneous act of worship to show faith, gratitude, and dedication to God, reflecting the giver's heart and intentions.

The Shared Meal

The most distinctive aspect of the peace offering was that it culminated in the sacrifice being shared between the family and the priests. This is the process for this offering:

1. Selection of the animal: A flawless male or female animal from the herd or flock would be selected.
2. Laying on of hands: Hands would be placed on the animal's head, signifying its dedication for the purpose of the sacrifice.
3. Slaughter and blood sprinkling: The animal was slaughtered at the entrance of the Tabernacle. The priests then sprinkled its blood around the altar.
4. The sacrifice to God: The fat around the internal organs was removed and burned on the altar. As the best part of the animal, the fat symbolized God's share of the feast and was "a sweet savour unto the Lord" (Leviticus 3:5).
5. The priest's portion: The officiating priests received the breast and right thigh of the animal. This served as a form of financial support for their service.
6. The communal meal: The remaining meat was returned to the one offering and his family for a celebratory feast. The peace offering had to be eaten on the same day if it was a thanksgiving offering, or on the same or the next day if it was a vow or freewill offering. Any meat left until the third day had to be burned, as it would have become impure.

Mandatory Offerings

Mandatory offerings were required to atone for specific sins or instances of ritual impurity, and consisted of sin and trespass offerings.

Sin Offering

This offering atoned for unintentional sins and restored one to ceremonial purity. The type of animal required depended on the social status of the offender, which emphasized that all people were accountable for their actions. However, no one would be unfairly burdened. The requirements were:

- For the High Priest or the congregation: A young bull.
- For a leader: A male goat.
- For a common person: A female goat or lamb.
- For the poor: Two turtledoves or pigeons, or fine flour.

Trespass Offering

This offering was used to address offenses committed against another person. Unlike the sin offering, which focused on unintentional transgressions against God, this offering was used to atone for specific sins and restore relationships. The trespass offering had two parts: an animal sacrifice and restitution to the wronged person.

- Sacrifice: The offender had to bring a ram without defect to the priest as a guilt offering to the Lord.
- Restitution: The offender was required to return what was stolen or obtained through fraud, along with a twenty percent penalty to the wronged person. This addressed the harm caused on a personal level.

The purpose of the trespass offering and its two components highlights several important principles:

1. The seriousness of sin: This offering taught that offenses against another person were not just a personal matter, but also a violation of one's relationship with God. These offenses essentially had a double penalty.

2. Incentive not to sin: The requirement to give back the full amount of the trespass with a penalty, plus a ram sacrifice, was a significant consequence for sinning. For carnal people, the penalty should have been a deterrent, to make them think twice before engaging in bad behavior again.

3. Reconciliation: The offering provided the offender with a means to make amends and *restore a damaged relationship* with both their neighbor and God.

4. Justice and mercy: By requiring a sacrifice for atonement and a penalty for restitution, this offering balanced God's justice with mercy. It ensured that the victim was compensated, and the offender received forgiveness.

As we can see, the sacrificial system was complex and contained numerous rules and regulations. One aspect was designed to demonstrate gratitude, devotion to God, and faith, which are qualities of the mind. Another aspect was created to atone for sins against God and fellow Israelites, transgressions which could be either mental or physical. The essential point is that atonement with God alone was not sufficient; it also had to be directed toward one's neighbor.

Christ clarified that the need to reconcile with God and other people remains today, emphasizing that sin against a brother or sister in Christ is *a sin against God* as well.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift (Matthew 5:23–24).

Reminder of Sin, and What Else?

When we think about the purpose of the sacrificial system, we quickly recall that it served as a reminder of sin and pointed to the time when spiritual promises would be given—when individual sins could be forgiven through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. It pointed to Christ as the ultimate sacrifice. That is true, but usually it is the only aspect we think about. When one examines the reasons for each sacrifice or offering, a larger purpose for the system emerges. The sacrificial system should have shaped Israelite society by regulating behavior and guiding acceptable thought because it served as a framework for God's expectations of mankind's behavior.

Sacrifices Pointed Toward a Converted Mind

The sacrificial system *prefigured the work of the Holy Spirit* and illustrated important spiritual principles. It was a physical system designed to guide behavior and thought. Sacrifices regulated behavior by reminding people of their physical sins and the need to avoid them. Sacrifices were designed to foster a closer relationship with God and atone for sins against Him. Sacrifices were designed to help people build positive relationships with one another and to provide restitution when a breach occurred. Sacrifices were designed to help people honor God and be thankful to Him.

Our conversion process serves the same purpose: directing our behavior and thoughts toward ways acceptable to God. In our daily lives, we are to do the following as part of our character building, (conversion process): maintain a close relationship with God, acknowledge God's blessings, admit our sins against God, admit our sins against others, and offer forgiveness and restitution to others. These five things represent the foundation of a converted mind.

Sacrifices Can Provide Guidance for Prayer

A converted person prays to help develop a spiritual mind. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that they were to pray without ceasing. Not only is this a good principle to follow today, but it is also a requirement and the foundation to have a close relationship with God. This is important because having a close, personal relationship with God is necessary if we are to be born into the Family of God. Lack of prayer can make us strangers to God. Most likely, strangers will not be added to His Family.

If we do not have a good prayer life—not praying daily, and not being connected to God—we are in grave spiritual danger. God will not accept us if we follow doctrines solely in a physical sense but remain disconnected from Him through lack of prayer. He wants us to follow the physical commands with gladness of heart and, by doing so, understand how to grow closer to Him through prayer and fasting. Does it matter if we attend weekly and annual Sabbath services, but not with a spiritual perspective? Does it matter if we tithe all three tithes properly, refrain from eating unclean foods, let our land rest on the seventh year of a seven-year cycle, and avoid participating in worldly holidays, if our hearts are not into it? The answer, most likely, is no. If we do these things out of physical routine but do not couple them with a spiritual mindset, we will not be fulfilling God's will in our lives.

God's primary desire for us today is the same as it was for ancient Israel before, to love Him with all our hearts. While physical obedience to doctrines and sacrifices demonstrates this principle, their true purpose is to lead us toward spiritual growth and transformation of mind and heart.

And 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. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king (1 Samuel 15:22).

For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).

O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For 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 51:15–17) [emphasis mine].

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Matthew 23:23).

If our hearts are not aligned with God, and if we do not have effective prayer, we become an easy target for Satan's influence. He can very easily amplify chaos and frustration in our minds and retard spiritual thoughts. We may be called and have a knowledge of the Truth, but our minds may end up resembling Satan's. That is a wretched state of mind to which many of God's people have succumbed. Just knowing the doctrines and adhering to them in practice is not enough to prevent this. Many Israelites offered physical sacrifices as a routine, without self-reflection, and lost sight of the main purpose of sacrifices. We must not do the same by physical observance of doctrines without self-reflection. God wants us to have a relationship with Him, and we enhance that significantly through prayer. For many, however, difficulties with prayer persist in not knowing what to pray about and feeling stuck while praying to God. Many feel their prayers are pointless and abandon them, feeling disconnected from God.

We can counter these feelings by praying with purpose, and Jesus Christ succinctly outlined the format for doing so with this instruction:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (Matthew 6:9–13).

We know what this means, and by it God is speaking to us. The five foundations of a converted mind, as stated earlier, are addressed in this prayer: maintain a positive relationship with God by acknowledging His blessings and provisions, focus on our sins against God, ask for God's forgiveness, and offer forgiveness and restitution to others. But

does this format for prayer become vague and nebulous over time? We read the words, but when we pray, do we tend to skip acknowledging specific sins in our lives and instead generalize them and our obligations to God? If so, our prayers may be ineffective because we are not using this format to sufficiently address specific sins and devotion to God. We begin to generalize and may feel like we are wasting time.

Changing the format we use to approach God in prayer may increase its effectiveness. Instead of deciding what to pray about at that moment—getting stuck because we do not know what to say, or repeating the same things we have done in the past because we do not know how to start a different conversation with God—try this: Divide your prayer into three sections based on three offerings that were part of the sacrificial system that God instituted for Israel. This will provide structure and needed specificity for our prayers. If we do this, or even expand it by including other offerings, we will cover many of the points recommended in the Christ's sample prayer. This is because the purposes of the various offerings parallel those of following the format of His prayer!

For example, when we approach God in prayer, tell Him we are offering the spiritual equivalents of a burnt offering, a trespass offering, and a peace offering. A burnt offering was given to express devotion to God and atonement for unintentional sin. Begin our prayer by affirming our dedication to God, His will in our lives, and His Plan of Salvation for mankind. This reorients our minds away from ourselves and toward God's glory and perfection.

Then, reflect on our day, focusing on specific interactions with others and the resulting thoughts. Ask if anything came from a selfish or unkind place, or if it was uplifting and positive. We know what God expects of us, so did we accomplish it? This can be part of our prayer time dedicated to self-reflection, where we uncover things we have been blinded to or have been avoiding. Humbly ask God to show us if what we have said and done did not please Him. Be willing to hear the answer and admit any errors.

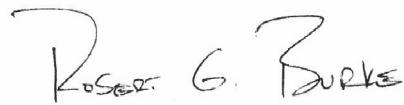
Continue the prayer with a trespass offering. This offering was given for known sins committed against another person. This should be an easy one for us because we know we make mistakes and have not always handled situations properly. Admit to God a specific sin against a particular person, ask for His forgiveness, and then ask Him for guidance on how to correct it, avoid repeating it, and aid in restoring the relationship. This is the specificity that will bring us closer to God and potentially strengthen our spiritual minds. Remember, if we are asking for God's forgiveness and mercy, we are required to give the same forgiveness and mercy to those who have committed sins against us. Doing this is one of the requirements for attaining salvation.

End the prayer with a peace offering by expressing our thankfulness to God for the many blessings in our lives. Do not be generic; name specific things that we recognize as blessings. List them, for there are many. We need constantly to be thankful to God to maintain a Christlike mind. If we do not constantly maintain thankfulness, our minds will, over time, probably reflect Satan's mind. Be sure to add our specific trials, challenges, and difficulties, because these are the tools God uses to develop our character. Conversion is all about character development. So, be thankful that God is refining us with the desire to add us to His Family.

By selecting specific offerings and providing precise details of ourselves for each one, we may be better positioned to be honest with God and ourselves, and at the same time, find that we have much more to talk about. These three things alone provide plenty of material for us to talk about with God. This is only a start, because we can expand our prayers to mirror other offerings, resulting in even more meaningful conversations with God.

We know we offer spiritual sacrifices through prayer, and by using the sacrificial system as a framework, we may be able to increase their effectiveness. The result may be a closer relationship with God. May He continue to give us the strength and wisdom to endure all challenges and continue on a path toward successful character development.

Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert G. Burke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "R" at the beginning.

Robert G. Burke

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" at the beginning.

Jon W. Brisby