

“Your Reasonable Service”

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”
—Micah 6:8

OUR TITLE IS TAKEN FROM the words of Paul in which, when referring to the presenting of ourselves as a “living sacrifice,” he refers to it as our “reasonable service” unto God. (Rom. 12:1) By contrast, our opening text says nothing about sacrifice as being a requirement in order to serve

God acceptably. In fact, the context of this verse seems to give the thought that God desires no sacrifices or offerings at all from his people. (Mic. 6:6,7) In this study, we will consider both aspects of our relationship with God, and seek to understand that, in reality, there is no conflict between these two viewpoints.

The opening verse of Micah’s prophecy states that he served as a prophet of the Lord in Israel during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and that he had a message concerning “Samaria,” the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, and for

“Jerusalem,” which represented the two-tribe kingdom. (Mic. 1:1) Little else is known about Micah.

A significant portion of Micah’s prophecy reveals Israel as being unfaithful to God. Through Micah, the Lord asks his disobedient people, “What have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.” Then the Lord reminds his people of some of the ways in which he had shown his care over them. He had brought them out of bondage in Egypt and had raised up Moses, Aaron and Miriam to lead and instruct them.—Mic. 6:3,4

God then refers, as recorded in verse 5, to the time when Balak, king of Moab, requested Balaam to place a curse upon Israel. He reminds them of the way he overruled in this experience, and they received a blessing instead. (Num. chapters 22-24; Josh. 24:9,10) The people of Israel, however, had not profited from these many gracious acts of Jehovah on their behalf, but continued in their sinful and idolatrous ways.

In Micah, 6:6,7, the Israelites are represented as asking how they might please God, as though he had never given them any instructions concerning this. “Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?” they inquired. They knew that the Lord had called for the sacrifices of animals, so they asked, “Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams?” Here we find an example of an extreme exaggeration of the Lord’s requirements concerning them.

Another question was asked: “Will the Lord be pleased ... with ten thousands of rivers of oil?” Oil was required in connection with some of the religious observances enjoined upon Israel by the Lord,

but a very small quantity, comparatively, would be adequate. Now the people were wondering if it might be possible to please God if they brought him “rivers” of oil. The very nature of these questions called for a negative answer.

Then came a question based on their worship of false, heathen gods, which called for human sacrifices to appease them. “Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” Here was something the God of Israel had not requested at all, yet these people in their confusion were asking if he might be pleased with such a detestable offering.

The Prophet Micah answers these questions, as shown in our opening scripture. He states that the Lord requires his people to “do justly,” “love mercy,” and “walk humbly,” but makes no mention of sacrifice. The point seems to be that these three requirements must have a significant place in the character of a follower of God before sacrifice can be acceptable. Furthermore, to the extent that these requirements are being met, it will tend to lead one to a proper sacrifice and service on behalf of others. Sacrifice is a privilege, but it must be based on loyalty and obedience.

Although Micah’s words were addressed to the Jews, and his message was given in the context of the Mosaic Law, the requirements he lists apply to all who desire to know God and lead a life of willing obedience to him. We recall the Apostle Paul’s statement that those things which happened to Israel are provided as examples and lessons for the Christian, and are written for our admonition and benefit. (I Cor. 10:11) Let us, then, as followers of

Christ, examine these vitally important principles as they should be manifest in our characters, and as they lead us to a life of “reasonable service” and sacrifice, “acceptable unto God.”—Rom. 12:1

DO JUSTLY

To do justly means to do what is right in the sight of God. In applying this principle to our relationship with others, it denotes the practice of following the statement of the Master: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31, *New International Version*) Amplifying on this Golden Rule standard, we are to deal justly, righteously, with others if we would expect them to deal similarly with us. The results of applying this principle will be evidenced by acting kindly, speaking gently, and being patient toward the weaknesses of others, and by not expecting more of them than we would expect of ourselves.

As stated in our opening text, doing justly is a requirement for the follower of God. Meeting this standard comes gradually and by its practical application in the daily affairs of life. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, “Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” (Isa. 1:17) How much our lives will be positively impacted if each day we seek to apply these just and righteous principles in our treatment of others with whom we come in contact. To do justly signifies righteousness not only in word and conduct, but also in thought and in the motives of our heart. We recall the words of the psalmist, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” (Ps. 19:14) This prayer is appropriate

to all the Lord's people. Even the most advanced Christian is liable at times to err with his lips, and, therefore, must diligently examine his heart to be sure it does not contain any seeds of injustice or unrighteousness.

The close examination of our hearts is to be a continual work. We are told, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23) The natural heart is at the center of human life, and in the spiritual sense the heart is a symbol of the center of our affections, motives and innermost desires. As a follower of Christ, our heart is to be kept loyal to God, to his principles of righteousness, and to our covenant with him. We are to examine ourselves continually by these divine standards, though realizing that we cannot measure up fully to every requirement. However, nothing short of purity of heart, will and intention, is acceptable to God. Later in the Book of Proverbs, God beseeches us, saying, "My son, give me thine heart and let thine eyes observe my ways." (Prov. 23:26) It is only by observing God's ways of righteousness, as exemplified in the life of his Son, Christ Jesus, that our heart can be fully given to him—in worship, reverence, praise, and in the use of our time, talents, and influence in joyful service.

LOVE MERCY

The expression "to love mercy" in our text is rendered "to delight in lovingkindness" in the *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*. Our Heavenly Father is just and righteous, but he is also merciful and kind, and he wants his people to likewise "delight" in exercising the divine principle of loving-kindness toward others.

Speaking through the Prophet Jeremiah, God said, "I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight." (Jer. 9:24) The Apostle Paul tells us that God's law is "holy, ... and just, and good." He adds, however, that "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Rom. 7:12; Gal. 5:14) The psalmist aptly describes the close relationship between justice and mercy using these words: "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face."—Ps. 89:14

The proper exercise of mercy, or loving-kindness, requires that we deal justly and righteously with all. Beyond this, however, it also necessitates that we seek to cultivate an appreciation of the rights and preferences of others where fundamental principles of truth are not involved. Furthermore, we are to have the spirit of sacrifice which gladly lays down life itself in service for our brethren. In this, we again see the vital connection between our theme scripture and our "reasonable service" of sacrifice.

We realize that, as fallen human beings, we have received much in the way of God's mercy and loving-kindness. Even with difficulty, stumbling, and times of displeasure with self, our Lord is always there and has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb. 13:5) Appreciating God's loving-kindness towards us, and his promises of continual guidance in our lives, we are enabled to rejoice under all circumstances, and to give thanks to God for all of his overruling providences. Jesus laid out a very important principle in this regard, when he stated that our continued receipt of God's mercy will depend

on our expression of it towards others. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) To this Paul added that we are to show mercy “with cheerfulness.”—Rom. 12:8

To both properly receive of God’s mercy and benefit thereby, and then to exercise it toward others, is not always easy due to our fallen flesh and its tendencies toward self-will. We must, therefore, continually rely upon God’s promised grace to help, and develop the necessary faith and courage suggested by Paul’s words, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” (II Cor. 3:5) We also must daily look to Jesus as our example, remembering his words, “Without me ye can do nothing.”—John 15:5

Having the principles of justice and righteousness as a foundation, we should thus cultivate more and more the quality of mercy. Only those who show mercy and loving-kindness towards others will themselves receive mercy at the Lord’s hands. We should remember well these words of the psalmist, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”—Ps. 85:10

WALK HUMBLY

The third requirement cited by Micah in our text is “to walk humbly with thy God.” This describes a condition of mind and conduct in which one can be “taught of God.” (John 6:45; Isa. 54:13) To the Jews at that ancient time this meant attentiveness to the learning of God’s Law given to them at Sinai, and then following its requirements to the best of their ability, putting aside self-will and sinful desires.

Only Jesus was able to fulfill both the letter and spirit of that Law perfectly. As Paul later wrote concerning the Master, “For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” (Heb. 7:26) We read further concerning Jesus’ example of humility, and its glorious results, that he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—Phil. 2:7-11

Jesus’ humility in laying down his life as a ransom sacrifice opened up “a new and living way” for those who would desire to similarly walk in his footsteps of service towards others. (Heb. 10:20) This invitation was given to us by the Master himself: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23) We cannot read this verse without realizing the essential requirement of humility that is associated with our calling of God through Christ Jesus. Indeed, by his own life he has given us a perfect example of what it means to “walk humbly” with God.

The will of God for his people during the present age is that they walk in the “narrow” way of humble sacrifice and service. *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) (Matt. 7:14) Our dedication to walk thus should cause us not to seek what we can get out of life, but to seek that which we can put into our service for the Lord and for his people. Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, ... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." (Matt. 6:19,20) Whatever our treasure may be in life will dictate in large measure our inspiration, incentive, energy, perseverance and endurance toward its attainment. As Christians we must, in humility, come to the realization that earthly possessions and fleshly gains can no longer be our treasures, nor in any sense stand in competition with the heavenly riches the Lord has provided for us now, and has promised to confer in the future.

Paul states, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4) The humility required to be "buried" into Christ's baptism is great, yet the resulting privilege to "walk in newness of life" is a blessing beyond human understanding. As a consecrated believer, we are then viewed by God not according to our sinful flesh, but as "a new creature" in Christ. This "inward man," the apostle further says, is "renewed day by day," and is termed "the hidden man of the heart" by the Apostle Peter. —II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; II Cor. 4:16; I Pet. 3:4

SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

While praise is not mentioned in Micah 6:8, it has much to do with our reasonable service, as well as our faithfulness in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. David, when praying to

God in the wilderness of Judah, said, “I have seen thee in the sanctuary,” a reference to the Tabernacle, in which sacrifices and offerings were made to God. The psalmist then associates what he observed in the sanctuary with God’s great loving-kindness, stating, “Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.” (Ps. 63:2,3) David’s point seems to be that although the literal sacrifices of the sanctuary were sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the Mosaic Law, Jehovah’s mercy and loving-kindness were so great that he was motivated to give praise to God in a very personal and outward way—“my lips shall praise thee.” In another place, David similarly showed his burning desire to glorify the Heavenly Father: “He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.” (Ps. 40:3) This song is identified in the New Testament as “the song of Moses ... and the song of the Lamb.” As followers of the Lamb, we are privileged to sing its refrain, “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.”—Rev. 15:3

The Apostle Paul expresses this thought, saying, “Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Heb. 13:15) Here the apostle may have had in mind the statement of Hosea 14:2, where the prophet speaks of rendering to God the “calves of our lips.” In both verses, the evident thought is that praise to God is an important aspect of acceptable sacrifice.

There are various ways whereby we can offer the sacrifice of praise to God. We can sing hymns of praise which is pleasing to him, as David so often

did. Although not much in the way of sacrifice is involved in this form of worship, nevertheless, it is a delight to raise our voices in songs of praise to the giver of “every good gift and every perfect gift.” (James 1:17) We are encouraged to “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.”—Ps. 98:4

We can also offer the sacrifice of praise to God by means of prayer. It is a blessed privilege to pour out our hearts to the Almighty Creator in praise and adoration, and to tell him how much we love and appreciate him. The prayers of the consecrated footstep followers of the Lord are referred to as, “golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.” (Rev. 5:8) The incense offered under Israel’s Tabernacle arrangement, which pointed forward to the prayers of the saints, was composed of a rare mixture of spices, giving forth a peculiarly sweet odor. Such incense of praise, offered symbolically through prayer, is a sweet-smelling savor to our Heavenly Father.

We should remember that the coals of fire that burned the incense at the golden altar of the Tabernacle were brought by the priest from the brazen altar out in the court. If the fires of sacrifice were not burning profusely on this altar there would not be sufficient heat generated from the coals brought to the golden altar to cause the incense to give forth its sweet odor. Thus, although prayers, adorations and praises are shown to be symbolic offerings of incense to the Lord, they will not generate a sweet savor to God unless our daily efforts of sacrifice and service are fervently rendered, as pictured in the brazen altar offerings of the Tabernacle.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

More than anything else, it is the principle of faith that brings together in full harmony the importance of our reasonable service of sacrifice, combined with the requirements of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. The Apostle Paul tells us that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” and “without faith it is impossible to please” God. (Heb. 11:1,6) It is faith which enables us to engage in sacrifice and service even when it involves suffering or the bending of our time and energies toward the interests of others. Likewise, it is only by faith that we can, in this present world of sin, do justly and righteously towards all, show mercy and loving-kindness even when unappreciated, and walk in humility with God, which is in such opposition to the spirit of pride we presently see all around us.

In II Peter 1:4-10 we are given a revealing outline of qualities which we must add to our faith in order to secure the full benefit from God’s “exceeding great and precious promises,” which is that we might be “partakers of the divine nature.” We are to add to our faith fortitude, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, reverence, brotherly kindness, and love. If these things are added to our foundation of faith, and done so in abundance, we will not be “barren nor unfruitful” as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus. “If ye do these things,” Peter adds, “ye shall never fall.”

A half-hearted effort in developing these qualities is not enough. We will not be able to divide our interests between the things of God and the things of the world, nor between the interests of the new creature and the interests of the flesh. Paul wrote,

“This one thing I do.” (Phil. 3:13) This is the only approach to the Christian life which will result in victory, and the only attitude of heart that we should have, if the Lord is to fulfill his promises to us. The Lord knows about our temporal needs, and has promised: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”—Matt. 6:33

Being coworkers with the Lord now is a great honor, and those who are faithful experience an inner peace and joy which the world can neither give nor take away. However, there is a still greater work and purpose awaiting those who continue faithful, even unto death, in carrying out their present “reasonable service” unto God. That future work will also be in association with Christ, reigning with him as kings and priests to bless all the families of the earth. (Rev. 20:6; Acts 3:25) Then, all mankind will have the opportunity to do justly and righteously, to delight in loving-kindness, and to walk humbly with their God. ■