

The Altar

by Phoebe Palmer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the altar as a symbol of God's presence and a place of sacrifice, and warns Christians not to set a lighter estimate upon the altar than upon the gifts they bring to it.

Scripture: Leviticus 6:13, Psalm 51:17, Malachi 1:7, Matthew 23:19, Mark 12:33, Romans 12:1, Hebrews 10:10, 1 Peter 2:5
Topics: "Sacrificial Living", "Christian Devotion"

Description

Phoebe Palmer emphasizes the significance of surrendering all aspects of our lives to God, drawing parallels between the Old Testament altar and sacrifices to the Christian's altar found in Christ. She challenges believers to prioritize the sanctity of the altar, representing Christ, over the gifts they bring, echoing the rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees who valued their offerings more than the altar itself. Palmer urges individuals to fully surrender their bodies, souls, time, talents, and influence to God, recognizing His infinite holiness and the need for complete devotion to Him.

Transcript

"Bound on the altar of Thy cross, Our old offending nature lies; Now for the honor of Thy cause, Come, and consume the sacrifice." -- Wesley

God has so constituted the human mind, that it seems to require that truth should be made obvious to its perception. The Old and New Testament Scriptures are strikingly adapted to meet this necessity. The types of the Old Testament prefigured the good things developed in the New. In proportion to the magnitude of the truth to be developed, is the type kept in imposing attitude before the mind. Hence the importance of the Divine admonition, "Comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Cor. xi. 13). The God of the Bible never gave one unmeaning type; and the pious Bible reader should not be satisfied, until all the great leading truths of the Bible are made tangible to his mind. No one subject was so prominently kept before the mind under the old dispensation, as the altar and its sacrifices. From this we may infer that some truth of remarkable magnitude is involved and prefigured. And now the question with every one earnestly desiring to know of the most important truths connected with his Salvation should be, "What great truth does God intend to illustrate by the altar and its sacrifices?"

Has a Christian an altar answerable to the type so continuously kept before the mind under the old dispensation? Let an inspired Apostle answer: "We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle." If the first was taken away in order that the second might be established where then may the Christian's altar be found? CHRIST says, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they may be

sanctified through the truth." "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me." "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Paul, immediately after declaring the fact, "We have an altar," directs the attention to Christ, and says, "Let us therefore go forth to Him," etc. Benson, in his Commentary, says, "CHRIST, who also is the only Christian altar, to which we bring all our sacrifices and our services." Dr. Clarke says, "The Christian's altar is the Christian's sacrifice, which is Christ Jesus, with all the benefits of His passion and death."

All true Christians belong to "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Dr. Clarke says, "In all metaphors there is something in the natural image that is illustrative of the chief moral property in the thing represented." And how strikingly and tangibly has the thing prefigured by the altar and its sacrifices been apprehended by Christians of all ages! Where is the earnest believer who has not, in the exercise of his holy vocation, exclaimed, "I lay all upon Thine altar, O Lord;" "I present myself to Thee a living sacrifice?" These utterances were not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; and were the spontaneous effusions of the gracious soul, in the legitimate language of the heart, accustomed to compare spiritual things with spiritual. After the comer unto the Christian's altar has been constrained by the mercies of God to present himself a living sacrifice, and from the fullness of his heart exclaims, "I now lay all upon Thine altar," where is the lover of Bible phraseology who would chide him, and have him substitute some other language? Where should a sinner present his sacrifice but upon the altar which God has erected, whereunto the polluted may come, and be made clean -- the unholy, and be made holy?

THE GIFT

"For whether is greater; the gift, or the altar?"

And in what was the foolishness and the blindness of the Scribes and Pharisees displayed, so justly calling down the denunciations and "woes" of the Son of God? They made far greater account of their poor puny offerings than they did of the sanctity and claims of the altar upon which their offerings were laid. The Jewish altar, after being subjected to various symbolical cleansings, the offering of a bullock upon it by way of atonement, etc. seven days in succession, was anointed and sanctified, and was ordained to be ever after "an altar most holy." "Whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy." This altar was now the Lord's altar in such a peculiar sense, that whatsoever touched the altar became holy by virtue of the touch. From the moment the gift touched the altar, it became virtually the Lord's property. These Scribes and Pharisees were comparatively unmindful of the great sanctity of the altar, thinking much more of the gifts which they brought to the altar than they did of the altar and its claims. The claims of God for the altar had been clearly described, which were to be the choicest of the kinds designated. When that which was blemished was offered in sacrifice to God -- the lame, torn, sick, or blind -- it was an abomination to Him, and, however earnest or tearful in importunity the offerer might be, his offering was not regarded, and those that attempted to present such were charged with the awful, sacrilegious act of polluting God's altar! But these Scribes and Pharisees were not here rebuked for sinning after this similitude. It was because they lightly regarded the sanctity of the altar upon which their offerings were laid, and said, "Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon the altar, he is guilty;" as though the gifts they brought to the altar were a matter of greater consideration than the altar upon which their gifts were laid, which God had ordained to be an altar most holy.

ESTIMATE TESTED

Do you regard the gift as greater than the altar?

Do you set a lighter estimate upon the altar than upon the gifts which you bring to the altar? Thousands sin after this similitude, and bring such woes upon themselves as those pronounced upon the Scribes and Pharisees. Christ, who has redeemed you wholly unto Himself, now has, and ever has had, an all-commanding claim upon all your ransomed powers. Body, soul, time, talents, influence, and reputation, already belong to Him. Have you rendered all up to Him? or are there points of reservation in relation to one or all of these gifts, with which God has intrusted you? God has given you that body which now enshrines your spirit. Do you think more about that gift than the claims which Christ has upon it? Have you said in your heart, "How can I give up my body as a whole burnt sacrifice, to be so laid upon God's altar as to preclude my ever again regarding it as at my own disposal?" or have you said, in relation to other gifts -- your time, reputation, or talents -- "How can I devote my every gift so exclusively to holy service?" To the degree you have been shrinking from the surrender of these gifts, and thinking more about them than about the altar upon which they ought long since to have been sacrificed, to that degree you have been sinning after the same similitude as the scribes and Pharisees. And yet more surely will you bring down the displeasure of God than they did; for the altar to which you come is infinitely holy, and its demands on all your redeemed powers are infinite.

"Thou God that answerest by fire,

On Thee in Jesus' name we call;

Fulfill our faithful heart's desire,

And let on us Thy Spirit fall.

"Bound on the altar of Thy cross,

Our old offending nature lies;

Now, for the honour of Thy cause,

Come, and consume the sacrifice!

"The power and life of sin destroy!

Thyself The Lord, The God approve!

And fill our hearts with holy Joy,

And fervent zeal, and perfect love.

"Oh, that the fire from heaven might fall,

Our sins its ready victims find,

Seize on our sins, and burn up all,

Nor leave the least remains behind!

"Then shall our prostrate souls adore,

The Lord, He is the God, confess:

He is the God of saving power!

He is the God of hallowing grace!"

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/phoebe-palmer/the-altar/>

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