

Abomination OR Delight to the Lord

Proverbs 15:8

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“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is His delight.” - Proverbs 15:8 (21:27; 28:9).

For many the idea of the Lord being “pleased” or content is virtually a given in their thinking about humankind. After all, most think, God is a God of love and so, it would follow, in their minds, that He is happy with man ... UNLESS, that is, they do something that is generally thought of as a matter that is negative or hurtful to other men. After all, men are basically good and will do nothing or little that God would disapprove of.

How often do we hear this kind of thing about the various things that are embraced by humankind these days that would never have been THOUGHT OF even just a couple decades ago! From the way families are treated, to the various “forms” of Christianity that are now treated as absolutely valid and even desirable. The numerous kinds of familial or sexual relationships that are now regarded as completely normal and even desirable among people. It seems that whatever manner in which people want to relate to each other MUST be OK with or there will be consequences to be paid! For instance, I just read today of a blueberry farmer in Michigan who has been informed that he will no longer be “permitted” to sell his fruit to various vendors UNLESS he affirms that gay and transsexual relationships MUST be allowed and even promoted in his various business dealing. this not to mention that he would be required to use any and every one of the ones in view to have spots to work on his staff, even if he had to fire those already employed.

Not to point a finger at any particular group, though surely there are any number of specific groups who will fit the model we’ll think of, we want first to say that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is quite plain in the “who” to which God aimed it:

*¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
(John 3:16)*

There is no mistaking that God desires ALL men to receive the truth of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ as their mechanism to come and be His child. He wishes NONE to perish, that is to fall into judgment when their lives come to an end. BUT, the fact that God loves all men, does not for a moment that any man’s (not male, but human) actions are automatically either acceptable to Him, or a pleasure for Him to take into consideration.

Solomon actually tells us, here (among other places) that this is most definitely NOT the case.

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is His delight.” - Proverbs 15:8

The first phrase, “The sacrifice of the wicked” speaks clearly and directly of the way in which the “wicked” think or believe in an acceptable or pleasing way to offer sacrifices to God that earn His pleasure. Solomon says that it is essential for us to understand that even those things “sacrificed” by the unredeemed are far less than that which earns God pleasure and acceptance.

The “sacrifice” he speaks of is what was referred to as the live slaughter of an animal before the community to act as benefit from the god in view. What we need to remember here is that what is in view is NOT a sacrifice of a human’s behavior or actions. It specifically speaks of a known religious action; that which is offered because the one offering it believes it will gladden the god to whom it is offered. Solomon’s point is that the really does exactly the opposite - it does NOT gladden the god in view, largely because there is no God but our heavenly Father. The OT makes this VERY clear.

There is only ONE God and He is the God Whom Israel (and the believers in the New Covenant) worshipped (worship now). This explains why Solomon makes the statement that he makes. He says much the same thing elsewhere in the Book of Proverbs. It is not “OK” for those who are not redeemed, here called the “wicked”, to make whatever sacrifice they deem appropriate to God. Rather than pleasing Him and gaining favor in worshipping Him, it does, Solomon says, quite the opposite!!

Solomon says that this “sacrifice” or offering of worship is a thing that is abominable to the One true God. He does not view it as “their best” or as what they were “able” to do. It is not his response that He will take whatever they give because they meant well. “Abomination” is a fairly common word in the OT. It is used 117 times, particularly in parts of the OT that speak to the ideas of worship or offering. It is the Hebrew word “tō ābat” (pronounced *tow`ebah*) essentially meaning what it is translated here... or “abomination” 113x times. The other 4 uses speak of an “abominable thing” twice, and that which is “abominable” twice.

It basically speaks of a disgusting thing, that which is either an abomination, or is abominable. Though it is not the case in every appearance, it can be used in a ritual sense and then would speak of unclean food or of idols or even of mixed marriages of several sorts. It can also speak in an ethical sense and then would have the idea of wickedness etc. There is little doubt to the idea that this is what Solomon (and the Lord Himself as Solomon is speaking in Proverbs as a Prophet of God).

The King continues in the second phrase and says:

“...but the prayer of the upright is His delight.” - Proverbs 15:8

We’ll note first that this second phrase is set in contrast to the first phrase. “But” marks what is called a “contrastive” conjunction that does just this. What

Solomon has in view is the idea of a prayer, it seems sure, that is an act of worship or that marks ones' formal approach to his God. Interestingly, the word "upright" is an adjective that seems to speak of the "one" who IS upright or, in this context, who is approaching the Lord in an upright fashion or as one who belongs to God and offers his prayer "uprightly". We think it more likely that what is meant is to contrast it to the "wicked one" from the first phrase. That would lead us to understand it as speaking of the "upright one" who is offering the prayer.

The word used for "upright" is one of the common words that speaks of the righteousness of God and that is communicated to the believer as a part of the change that God works in his life and that one becomes God's child. And so we can see that this is speaking of this prayer, or worshipful offering/action on the part of this righteous one has the spoken effect of which Solomon will speak. The "righteous one" gives himself over to prayer as a part of the worship of God and as a part of that which he does regarding his service to his God.

The word that Solomon uses and which is translated as "delight" in many versions speaks of what gives pleasure or that which makes happy or content. The prayer or raising of words to God in worship is that which brings or gives God pleasure, so to speak. It is an action that gives the righteous one opportunity to bring God satisfaction and/or happiness.

Just to rehearse and further the interpretation we have here...Sacrifice is more than prayer, for it includes prayer along with a gift to God. But the prayer alone of the upright is infinitely more pleasing to God than the sacrifice of the wicked, because the heart goes along with it. Thus, a word from a poor man who walked uprightly would be more acceptable to Jehovah than holocausts of the rich. Specially displeasing to a pure and holy God must be an offering brought not only without true prayer, the soul of all sacrifice, but "with a wicked mind" (21:27), as though to purchase God's connivance with evil, to make Him "the minister of sin." Or, if prayer be offered while sins of *willful* ignorance are persisted in, that prayer is "an abomination to the Lord" (28:9), and will vitiate any sacrifice. The verse following our text goes to the root of the matter, for if the personal character of a man be displeasing to the Almighty, how can aught which he offers be acceptable?

As always, there are some illustrations that can help us to bring home what is meant here.

- The sacrifices of Cain, of Saul, of Balaam, were all an abomination, as "not being mixed with faith," or being mixed with disobedience.
- In the cases of Absalom, Jezebel, and too many of the Pharisees in our Lord's time, there was an actual prostitution of a religious rite to a pretext and cloak for sin.
- But of Eliezer, Elijah, Simeon, Anna, Cornelius, and a host of other worthies, the prayer, proceeding from an upright heart, was proved by its success to have been God's delight.

We ought, also, think in terms of application as well. Since God has always been a Spirit, it can be nothing new that He requires to be “*worshipped in spirit and in truth.*” Though more fully revealed, and more distinctly insisted upon under the Gospel, this primary lesson in religion was taught from the beginning, and learnt by every well-instructed Jew. And ought not I, as a Christian, still more to know and to act upon it? If so, I shall not delude myself with the vain idea that attendance upon ordinances (however sedulous) or performance of ceremonies (however correct) will serve in place of personal holiness. Nay, I shall know that all outward show of religion is simply offensive to God, and increases my guilt, unless there be a sincere effort running parallel with it to make the life consonant therewith. Shall I, then, give up prayer, forsake Church, neglect Holy Communion? By no means, for this would be disobedience, and also an abomination. I am not forbidden to pray, but commanded to pray *aright*. And so with all other religious duties. Man judges by acts; God by principles. Corrupt principles will spoil any acts, however good in themselves. Dissembled holiness is double iniquity. God stops His ears against their prayers who stop their ears against His law.