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## **Jesus, the Bible, and the Sacrifices**

Everything we do in our lives is hampered, to some extent, by the blindness of our fallen nature. Reading the Bible is no exception. We think it ought to be a simple exercise: just pick up the book, read it, and do what it says. But our sin means it will never be that simple.

Take our human fixation with the death penalty for example. In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve are hiding in the garden because they assume the Lord is going to execute them for their crimes. After all, didn't the Lord say "If you eat the fruit you will die"? We, like Adam and Eve, automatically assume that the Lord means "Eat the fruit and I will kill you." This way of reading continues in the story of Israel. When the Lord tells Israel to bring animal sacrifices in worship we assume that he is saying "I'd like to slit your throats and roast you on an altar, but if you'll slit a lamb's throat and roast him instead then I'll be able to stand to have you sinful people around me." Later, we read our death penalty fixation into Jesus as well. When John the Baptizer says "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" we assume he means "Behold the ultimate sacrifice, the one who will take the beating from God that God would really like to give to all of us." We think all this makes sense. We hate sinners, so the Trinity must hate them too. We want to execute law breakers, so the Father must want the same thing. Then the Holy Spirit says "Sorry to rain on your parade, but you're blind as bats and you're reading the Bible in your blindness not in the light of who Jesus is."

In the light of Jesus the warning in the garden of Eden is like the warning a loving Father gives to his children: "Don't play in the street or you'll get hit by a car and killed." A loving Father doesn't say "Do wrong and I'll kill you." The loving Father was saying to Adam and Eve "There is no life outside my life. If you eat the fruit and thus try to live without me then you will find only non-existence (death) on that path." In the light of Jesus the sacrificial system of Israel is not to meet the Father's need for blood but rather a condescension to Israel's need for blood. Steeped in the blinded, pagan world in which they lived, Israel could not imagine approaching their God without a sacrifice. So the Son tells them "Since you can't come to me without a sacrifice, bring a lamb, whose blood and gentleness will prophesy of me in the flesh as the man Jesus." The Word of God gives Israel the sacrificial system to help them, not to help himself. And therefore, when we call Jesus the lamb of God, we're not talking about the lamb who changes the Father but the lamb who changes us. The lamb whose blood is the sign to us that human nature has been received into the Holy of the Holies—the inner sanctum of the Triune Life. The blood that thus assures us that our Father in heaven is not a "hanging judge" (like we would be) but rather a loving Father who has embraced humanity in his Son Jesus.

It makes a difference to read the Bible in the light of Jesus doesn't it? And that is the theme of this month's issue: reading the Bible in the light of who Jesus is. May we read the words of Scripture and see nothing but Jesus there.

*~ Jonathan Stepp*