Union with Christ Language in Paul from the Levitical Sacrifices

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Abstract - This paper will explore the Pauline identification language of union with Christ, e.g., “in Christ” (in Christo), baptized into Christ, dying with Christ, crucified with Christ, rising with Christ, seated with Christ, et al. Does this language arise from new covenant revelation to the apostle or is it derivable from old covenant Scripture, properly interpreted in light of the ministry of Christ. I will argue that the Levitical sacrifices provide some of the basis for Paul’s conceptions of union with Christ.

Introduction
Throughout the last century and especially in the last 30 years, Pauline studies have proliferated. The result yields impressively novel readings of the themes of justification, imputation, union, identification, participation, incorporation . . . “with, in and under” Christ. Lutheran (primacy of forensic justification) vs Reformed (primacy of union) distinctions, which were both arrayed against Roman Catholic views (of infusion) from the 16th Century have, in the last century, multiplied into variegated Paulisms. In the late 19th century the debate formed on lines of “juridical-forensic” vs “incorporate-participationist” views on Pauline themes. Recent controversy is due to new documentary discoveries, namely Qumran and its revelations of Second Temple Judaism, leading to the “New Perspective on Paul.” The responses to the New Perspective on Paul from some quarters make just as much over recovered ancient Near Eastern (ANE) documents. For example, Michael Horton argues against both NT Wright (New Perspective) and John Piper (Traditional Views of Imputation). Had they better understood ANE treaty formulations, Wright and Piper would have avoided no small error in their views of “covenant,” and would have happily embraced the covenant theology of Meredith Kline. Like Christian Platonists and Aristoteleans before, it seems that Christian theology always faces warring interpretations from without, painting in the lines of biblical content with hues from foreign ideologies, plundering the Egyptians gold, only to make a golden calf with it.
On the other hand, what if we gave (actually, rather than formally) primacy to the canon of Scripture in all matters of interpretation. This would mean, I think, only Scriptural sources form the foreground of interpretation. When we read Paul in light of Qumran or Moses in the light of Hittite Suzerain-Vassal Treaties, inevitably another interpreter points out the discontinuity between the non-biblical and biblical sources and arguments are arrayed; hence, the last few decades of Pauline studies. From this vantage point, it would appear that there are much richer sources for Pauline theological themes from the Old Testament canon, than Hittites and Essenes.  

Union with Christ
The importance of the theme of union with Christ can hardly be overstated. Some form of “in Christ” occurs over 200 times in Paul’s writings and over 25 times in John. Calvin said, “Therefore, to that union of the head and members, the residence of Christ in our hearts, in fine, the mystical union, we assign the highest rank, Christ when he becomes ours making us partners with him in the gifts with which he was endued.”  


Jonathan Edwards said, “The justification of the believer is no other than his being admitted to communion in or participation of this head and surety of all believers.”  

Schweitzer said it is “the prime enigma of the Pauline teaching: once grasped it gives the clue to the whole.”  

John Murray noted that union with Christ is “the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation”; without it not only would any consideration of redemption be “defective,” any view of the Christian life would be “gravely distorted.”

Robert Reymond says, “Union with Christ is the fountainhead from which flows the Christian’s every spiritual blessing - repentance and faith, pardon, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.”

John Frame’s new systematics says, “So union with Christ is an exceedingly broad topic. We will see that it underlies all the worlds of God in our lives: election, calling, regeneration, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. All of these blessings are ‘in Christ.’”

In my own naive experience, I considered the the Pauline theme of union with Christ to have been a fresh revelation. It seemed to first take hold in a Navigator Summer Training program while reading Ephesians 1:3-4, “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”

Being “in Christ Jesus” seemed a strikingly NT concept which was taught essentially in the Epistles of St. Paul. But more reflection and study demonstrates there may have been a great deal more OT substance to this.

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6 Of course you can profitably study such sources. My point is the “foreground” of interpretation, especially when canonical sources are largely ignored.


12 Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed), 914.

13 I wrote a song about it called, “In Him.”
Union with Christ Pictured in the Sacrificial System
Though all Scripture refers to sacrificial concepts, the longest exposition of sacrifices is in the Torah, Leviticus 1-9. Then Leviticus 10 is the story of bad sacrifices using the strange fire of Nadab and Abihu. This instruction forms the foundation of Tabernacle-Temple sacrificial worship.

James Denney’s (1911) widely cited work, The Death of Christ: Its Place and Interpretation in the New Testament, observes “the New Testament, while it abstains from interpreting Christ's death by any special prescriptions of the Levitical law, constantly uses sacrificial language to describe that death.”\(^{14}\) Given the foundational discussion of sacrifice in Leviticus, it is notable that Denney only cites one verse from the book (Lev. 5:17). However, Murray observes that Christ’s sacrifice is “most particularly under the form or pattern supplied by the sin-offering of the Levitical economy.”\(^{15}\) In Paul’s exposition of fulfillment to the fathers in Christ, aka Romans (1:2, 15:8), one of the climaxes of redemptive theology highlights the Levitical term for a sacrifice, “sin offering” (Rom. 8:3). Romans 8:3 says, “For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering, condemned sin in the flesh.”\(^{16}\) Dunn says, “The former is frequently used in the LXX in reference to the sin offering, the sacrifice whereby God dealt with sin on a day-to-day basis and which together with the scapegoat provided the centerpiece of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16). Since it is God’s dealing with sin which Paul also has in view, he must have intended his readers to recognize the OT terminology (he assumes such a familiarity with the Jewish scriptures throughout the letter). That is to say, it was almost certainly his intention to describe Christ—more specifically, his death—as a sin offering.”\(^{17}\) Mounce agrees, “But not only did Christ come ‘in appearance as a man’ (Phil 2:8) but also that he might be ‘a sin offering.’”\(^{18}\) Likewise Bruce says, the “Greek peri hamartias, which is the regular LXX rendering of Hebrew chattat ‘sin-offering’.”\(^{19}\) “What the law could not do, God did: he broke sin’s power—condemned sin —by sending his Son to identify with us and to give himself as a sin offering (so the NIV properly renders peri hamartias, in accordance with the use of the phrase in the LXX).”\(^{20}\)


\(^{15}\) Denney is referenced in Murray and interpreted as “a literal fulfillment of all the prescriptions of the Levitical law” (Murray, 26). But Murray seems to argue Christ’s death not only as specifically Levitical offering (chattat), but that all the Levitical offerings were designed to imitate Christ based on Heb. 9:23 (Murray, 15).


Kinds and Nature of Sacrifices (Leviticus)

Our English term, “sacrifice” is from the Latin, *sacrificium*, “to render something sacred,” or “to make something holy.” The Jewish Study Bible (Rabbinic Judaism) says, “An offering, Heb *korban*, a term expressing the notion of something presented (from Heb ‘k–r–b,’ ‘near) in homage. It does not mean ‘sacrifice’ in the sense of ‘giving something up.’” In Leviticus an offering is literally a “near-bringing,” which is “something brought near to the altar or presence of God.” The ordinary English emphasis in the term sacrifice is misplaced; a *korban* is a “thing brought near” (Lev. 1:2; 2:1; 3:1-2; 4:23; 5:11; 7:38). This is because Man has lost the Edenic presence of God through sin and now a new way must be constructed back into His presence.

Most summaries of “offering” (*korban*) state there are “five kinds of sacrifices in Leviticus,” but there are more. The Burnt offering (*olah* chap. 1), the Grain offering (*mincha* chap. 2), Peace offerings (*shalom*, chap. 3), Sin or Purification offerings (4:1–5:13), Trespass or Reparation offering (5:14–6:7). Actually, one of these is always plural: “peace offerings” is a category which included the thank offering (*todah* 7:12), the “‘neder’ [7:16-18] or votive offering, obligatory in that it is made in fulfillment of a vow, though the vow itself was undertaken freely, and the ‘nedavah’ or freewill [7:16] offering, entirely an act of spontaneous devotion,” Thus, there were seven specific offerings in all.

Sacrificial Actions and Union

The venerable Matthew Henry summarized Levitical offerings saying, “the mysteries of the spiritual world are represented by corresponding natural objects.” Perhaps the best way to get at the relation of Levitical sacrifice and its import into union with Christ is to simply walk through a sacrifice: the “burnt offering.”

_Leviticus 1:3–9_ - “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. 4 ‘He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. 5 ‘He shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron’s sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 6 ‘He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. 7 ‘The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8 ‘Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the altar. 9

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23 Walter C. Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible*.
24 Lev. 7:16, *The Jewish Study Bible* (Accordance electronic ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Further explained in Leviticus 22:21, “When a man offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or for a freewill offering, of the herd or of the flock, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it.”
26 While we will look at only one example, a “young bull” (son of the herd), although Ascension offerings may be from herd, 1:3-9; from flock, 1:10-13; or birds, 1:14-17.
‘Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD.”

Seven Aspects of Offering (in the Example of the Ascension Offering)

1) The animal described (Lev 1:5) as a “young bull” is literally “son of the herd” (ben baqar). This introduces the theme of sonship, just as the Levites themselves are substitutes for the first-born of Israel (Num. 8:10-16). This son becomes a substitute for the worshiper. Remember the offering of Isaac. God said of Abraham, “You have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me…. Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son” (Gen. 22:13). That Sonship is a rich biblical conception, surely no proofs are needed, even less proof of the NT thematic emphasis on Christ as the unique Son, the monogenes or “only begotten son.”

2) The worshiper shall lay his hand or “lean” (samakh, lit. lean/support) his hand on the head of the animal. There is some controversy about the meaning of this, so I will elaborate on this in the discussion that follows. It is one hand, over against two hands in the scape goat example. Some only take this to be a transfer of ownership or the benefits of the sacrifice to the worshiper. One authority on Leviticus, Jacob Milgrom says, “There are two leading explanations for this hand-leaning: transference of sin to the animal or of possession to God and ownership, signifying that the animal belongs to the offerer. The key to understanding this rite is that only one hand is employed. So Ibn Ezra, who reasons as follows: ‘That two hands are explicitly stipulated for the scapegoat (16:21), a transference rite, clearly implies that the scapegoat differs from all other hand-leanings on animals which, therefore, must only involve one hand.’ This insight automatically eliminates the transference theory which invariably requires two hands. The one-handed hand-leaning signifies that the benefits of the sacrifice redound to the offerer.” Harrison merges this idea with substitution. “He lays his hand upon the animal’s head, indicating that it is his substitute as well as his own property, and that he is giving of himself symbolically in the ritual.” In some ways these two ideas converge, since, “The moment ownership of the animal is transferred to the deity, it is accepted as payment, i.e., as a substitute for the worshipper himself. The lay person’s private burnt offering would then be one way of symbolically offering oneself

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27 I am indebted to the Biblical Horizons (www.biblicalhorizons.com) ministry of James B. Jordan for much of the conception which follows on sacrificial rites, temple/tabernacle, and worship, while acknowledging all errors in my work are entirely mine. Of particular use is the “Biblical Horizons 1992 Conference” - Worship and Sacrifice, featuring the lectures and notes of Peter J. Leithart on various sacrifices, available at: http://www.wordmp3.com/product-group.aspx?id=89.


29 Leviticus 16:21: “Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness.”


to God.”

It seems clear that, “Through this act the worshiper identified himself with the animal as his substitute.”

Wenham says, “Leviticus only mentions the act, but it is very unlikely that it was all done in silence. Most probably at this point the worshipper explained at this point why he was bringing the sacrifice …” Hartley agrees, “It is highly probable that while the offerer lays his hand on the head of a whole offering, he makes a confession of his unworthiness and his sinfulness as a frail human being and states his trust in God, either by reciting a prayer or by quoting from a psalm.” “Nothing is said about verbal utterances by the worshipper or the priest, but no doubt the sacrificial offering would be accompanied by some statement of purpose as a preliminary.”

Older commentators say, “he confessed his consciousness of sinning and prayed that his guilt and its punishment might be transferred to the victim.”

Other texts use the action of “hand-leaning” to mean representation or replacement. “Present the Levites before the LORD; and the sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites. . . the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls; then offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. . . I have taken them for Myself instead of every first issue of the womb, the firstborn of all the sons of Israel” (Num. 8:10-16). In this case the Levites represent the first-born of Israel and the bulls represent the Levites. “This is a double substitution. The Levites substitute for the people, the bulls substitute for the Levites.” In both cases the “hand-leaning” seems to mean “representatives of the people” or “investing them with their authority to represent them.” “The basic meaning of laying on of hands seems to be ‘transferring’ a right or status to a substitute: transferring blessing to a successor (Gn. 48:14); transferring authority in ordination (Num. 27:23); transferring guilt to a sacrificial victim.”

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33 In Loc, The Jewish Study Bible.


35 Gordon J. Wenham, The Book of Leviticus in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 53. Wenham says, “Leviticus used to be the first book that Jewish children studied in the synagogue. In the modern church it tends to be the last part of the Bible that anyone looks at seriously. Because Leviticus is largely concerned with subjects that seem incomprehensible and irrelevant today -- rituals for sacrifice and regulations concerning uncleanness -- it appears to have nothing to say to twenty-first-century Christians.” I found Dr. Wenham’s lectures useful here: http://searchthescripture.wordpress.com/2010/06/15/audio-lectures-gordon-wenham-on-leviticus-in-the-21st-century/


Finally, the justification for this part of the rite is stated in the text as, “that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf” (1:4 NASB). The Jewish Publication Society translates it as, “He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in his behalf, in expiation for him.” NSRV, HSCB, NASB, NIV, NKJV, et al says, “in your behalf.” KJV, RV, ASV, ESV says, “for him.” Both of these mean substitution. Thus, this part of the rite establishes union between the sacrifice and the worshiper. The exact nature of that union is not established, but that there is a union, cannot be denied. The animal is, by covenant operation under Moses, bound to the worshiper. Perhaps most important in this particular sacrifice (Ascension), instead of simply substituting for the death of the worshiper, the sacrifice dies and rises in a transformed form (smoke) and is acceptable to Yahweh. Hence, the worshiper (faithfully performing the rite in faith) is now acceptable to Yahweh.43

3) The worshiper shall slaughter the “son of the herd.” The worshiper takes the knife and cuts the throat of the animal. This outrageous slaughter of a “young bull” (perhaps not much larger than the size of large dog) was shocking in the blood shed. Sin is serious. Death is required to enter into God’s presence, to be brought near. The use of the blood (caught in a pan) was so that the priests can offer up the blood appropriate to the sacrifice. The references to blood as atonement cannot be minimized. “Blood serves as the mechanism for ritual cleansing in Israel.”44 The way to God is the way of blood (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22). Blood is a vivid certification of death (Gen. 37:31-34; Ex. 22:13). It is (somehow) the blood that cleanses (Lev. 16:19; Dt. 21:1-9). In these rites, the blood must also be displayed (Ex. 12:21-23). “The blood was to be sprinkled on the altar (v.5) to emphasize the fact of substitution by death (for the blood is the life, 17:14).”45 The blood is displayed by being “dashed” (zarag) on the bronze altar.

The lack of complete description leads to varying conceptions of the altar. Regarding the later temple altar, it seems clear to have been shaped as a stylized mountain with terrace-like steps since it was fifteen feet high (2 Chr. 4:1). “The dimensions favor a step-altar similar to that described by Ezekiel (Ez. 43:13–17); the base would then be a square twenty cubits on each side, topped by several smaller platforms or terraces attaining a height of ten cubits above the base.”46 The blood on the “wall” of the “bronze mountain” altar (Zech. 6:1) makes a pathway to ascend to

43 Of course we must take into account these sacrifices along with the Tabernacle/Temple are preparatory, “until a time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10). And they were performed in an earthly “copy” of the heavenly temple. But it “cleansed” in that time in some sense, but “how much more will the blood of Christ” cleanse (Heb. 9:14). Whatever cleansing/consecration took place in the OT was temporary and hence the need for repeated sacrifices. That is why, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). We tend to read that ontologically (e.g., the substance of animal blood did not atone) (which I concede), but in the argument of Hebrews it is the repeatable sacrifices which are contrasted with the once for all work of Christ (Heb. 10:10). Hebrews 10:3–4: “But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”


45 R. Laird Harris, Leviticus (EBC 2; ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), n.p.

God’s presence. Blood forms a path of entrance. “He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:11-12).

4) The worshiper shall then skin the “son of the herd.” Why remove the skin of an animal to be basically burned up? Why not burn up the skin along with everything else. Practically, the hide was to become a gift to the priest. But other significance to this part of the rite may also be ascribed. Skin and clothing are parallel in Leviticus (13:22, 47-51).

The first “sons of God” (Adam and Eve) covered their own skin with fig leaf clothing which was unacceptable (Gen. 3:7). “Yahweh God made tunics of skins for the man and his wife and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21, NJB). The term usually translated “garments” (ketonet) is the term for tunic for the priesthood (Ex. 28:4, 39, 40, et al). The priesthood is a kind of new Adamic humanity that, after they are properly clothed, symbolically enter back into Eden through proper korban (near bringings) (e.g., the Tabernacle is an architectural Eden). Wenham says, “Indeed, there are many other features of the garden that suggest it is seen as an archetypal sanctuary, prefiguring the later tabernacle and temples.”

This first sacrifice was God providing skin-tunics which pictured a needed new covering for sinners, requiring the shedding of blood. This takes on more significance when we realize that the basic terms (kafar/kippur) for atonement means “covering.” Keil and Delitzsch say, “By selecting the skins of beasts for the clothing of the first men, and therefore causing the death or slaughter of beasts for that purpose . . . so that this act of God laid the foundation for the sacrifices, even if the first clothing did not prefigure our ultimate ‘clothing upon’ (2 Cor. 5:4), nor the coats of skins the robe of righteousness.” It appears that Ascension to Yahweh requires a more radical change of “skin.” The old skin in contact with the cursed ground must be cut off (1 Cor. 15:50-53). In Christ we must be “re-clothed” in Him (1 Cor. 5:2). Galatians 3:27 connects this to new covenant baptism. “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed

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48 Leviticus 7:8 makes clear that the skin belonged to the priest, “Also the priest who presents any man’s burnt offering, that priest shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering which he has presented.”

49 New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1990)

50 That Eden provides the symbolic foundation of Scripture is being argued by many, though it does not seem like a consensus at this point. Some examples include Gregory K. Beale in his Revelation commentary who frequently makes use of the Garden’s prototypical foundation for the meaning of the language in Revelation. The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). Also see Alan P. Ross, Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 83.


yourselves with Christ.” In Paul there are frequent exhortations to reclothe oneself, “put on (enduo - “wear”) “the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:24, also Col. 3:10ff).

5) The worshiper shall then dismember the “son of the herd” into “its pieces” (NASB). The JPS says it is “cut up into sections” and the NJB says, “quarter it.” The LXX says, “divide it by its limbs (melos).” Each “member” (melos) of the animal must be individually arranged on the altar. Once again, this ritual action for an animal to be wholly burned up seems unnecessary. Yet this dismembering and arranging, like each of the other aspects, is symbolic and reflected in passages such as Heb. 4:12. To get back to the holy Garden Sanctuary of Eden, one must pass through sword and fire. “Sanctuaries are all architectural recapitulations of the garden of Eden.” The flaming sword of the guardian cherubim must cut up the worshiper so that his members may be acceptably presented to Yahweh (Gen. 3:24). “In Israel pictures of cherubim adorned the walls of the tabernacle and temple (Exod 26:31; 1 Kgs 6:29), a pair of solid cherubim formed the throne of God on the ark (Exod 25:18–22), and a very large pair guarded the inner sanctuary of the temple (1 Kgs 6:23–28).” Paul often draws on the sacrificial dismembering. “Do not go on presenting the members (melos) of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness” (Rom. 6:13, see also 6:19, 7:5, 7:23, Col. 3:5).

6) He shall wash the entrails and legs. Some commentators see only a functional purpose in this, e.g., “The entrails and legs were washed so as to cleanse them from excreta,” since “dirt and excrement defile the altar,” “so that no dung is present on the altar.” However, why a specific command to wash something prior to burning it? Assuming that each part of the rite is Torah (instruction), is there further meaning? Older commentators thought so: “This part of the ceremony was symbolical of the inward purity…” Calvin notes a relationship between the entire rite of sacrifice and baptism. “Thus the ancients were reconciled to God in a sacramental manner by the victims, just as we are now cleansed through baptism.”

Washing and cleansing rites are everywhere in both the OT and the NT. It seems there are two components. One is is cleansing, the other is crossing. From Eden flowed rivers. There are oasis Edenic springs in the patriarch narratives, the passing of Israel through the Red Sea, the laver in

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53 Hebrews 4:12: For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

54 Peter J. Leithart, 1 & 2 Kings, a Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Brazos/Baker, 2006), 56.


56 R. K. Harrison, Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary (TOTC 3; IVP), 50.

57 John E. Hartley, Leviticus (WBC 4), 22.


the synagogue, the ocean and basins on chariots in the temple, \(^{61}\) and finally the rivers of water in the new covenant (Zech. 14:8). “In Ezekiel’s temple vision the brazen Sea has been replaced by a life-giving river (Ezek 47:1–12; cf. Rev 22:1–2).” \(^{62}\)

Following the Fall, the pure waters of rivers flowing out, become rivers of purification which one must cross in order to come back to Eden. In every garden of Eden sanctuary, such as the tabernacle or temple, the water cleanses those who enter, just as in Great Commission baptism (Matt. 28:19-20). It may be significant to note here that the NT says Israel was “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:2). The Red Sea was a baptism, the crossing of the Jordan was also a baptism. Colin Brown wrote of baptism, “John [the ‘Baptist’] was organizing a symbolic exodus from Jerusalem and Judea as a preliminary to recrossing the Jordan as a penitent, consecrated Israel in order to reclaim the land in a quasi-reenactment of the return from the Babylonian exile . . . . the purity and quantity of the water were of less significance than the historic, symbolic significance of the Jordan itself as the boundary and point of entry.” \(^{63}\) Deuteronomy looks to a time when Israel will “cross the Jordan,” being led by Joshua (Deut. 4:21). The rest of the NT draws upon various threads of this crossing into Christ and by crossing through baptism into Christ we are united with His death and resurrection on the other side (Rom. 6:3-4, Col. 2:11-12). In the temple, an array of water chariots adorned the temple. These architecturally represent a river to be crossed, prior to entering the temple structure, like a mote. \(^{64}\) In the tabernacle the priests needed to be washed (ritually) in order to serve. And it appears the sacrifice had its entrails and feet washed. Symbolically this signify the need for cleansing the interior, as well as the feet that walked on the cursed ground, before ascending to Yahweh.

7) The priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange the pieces. The fire transforms the sacrifice into smoke, described as “an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD” (Lev. 1:9). The altar fire of God’s presence transforms the sacrifice into that which is acceptable. “It seems probable that the additional meaning of the burnt offering was worship, symbolized by the ascending smoke.” \(^{65}\) Sacrifices may be called the “bread of God,” “food offerings,” or a “food gift,” \(^{66}\) which explain a wider sense of “offerings by fire” (Lev. 3:11, 16; 21:6; Num. 28:2). Also note that Lev. 6:10 states “the fire reduces the burnt offering on the altar,” which literally says the fire “eats” the sacrifice (\(\text{akhal}\)). \(^{67}\) We often only think of the negative component of the

\(^{61}\) 2 Chronicles 4:6 - “He also made ten basins in which to wash, and he set five on the right side and five on the left to rinse things for the burnt offering; but the sea was for the priests to wash in.” Essentially, to enter the temple, one must cross the symbolic river of basins on chariots.


\(^{64}\) The location and function of these basins on wheels is not immediately clear. Does water come from the ocean to the basins? How so? How are these refilled? We do have the statement, “He also made ten basins in which to wash, and he set five on the right side and five on the left [c]to rinse things for the burnt offering; but the sea was for the priests to wash in” (2Chr. 4:6ff).

\(^{65}\) In Loc. R. Laird Harris, Leviticus (EBG 2).


\(^{67}\) It is “eat, consume, devour, burn up, feed” in Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, R. Laird Harris, Editor; Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Associate Editor; Bruce K. Waltke, Associate Editor, Electronic text used by permission.
animal being punished for us. But there is also the “acceptable” near-bringing dimension. The offering is the means of Ascension into the presence of the Covenant Lord.

**Conclusion**

From the forgoing study I have interpreted the Ascension Offering to comport with and correspond to union with Christ. I believe that the language of Paul (and other NT writers) draw on those actions and OT texts (Lev. 1-9). For a fuller explication, certainly more work should be done on these themes and similar studies should be done of the other sacrificial kinds (sin offering, peace offerings, tribute offering, etc.). Too often Christians only see the “death” aspect of the sacrificial death of the animal, forgetting the radical transformation and rising as acceptable, as well as many more components in the rites.

We are identified “with Christ” in baptism. We “lay our sins on Jesus.” We are “in Christ” covenantally, which includes representation, substitution, transformation, and incorporation. I have addressed only one of these *korban*, the Ascension offering (Burnt or holocaust Offering). In this we see the following:

1) The animal described (Lev 1:5) as a “young bull” is literally “son of the herd.” We are identified with “the Son.”
2) The worshiper shall lay his hand on the head. The Sacrifice is identified with the worshiper, including representation, substitution, and incorporation.
3) The worshiper shall slaughter the son of the herd and the blood is offered. The worshiper slays the Sacrifice, showing the severity of sin. The Blood cleanses and makes a path to enter the Lord’s presence. Our sin is transferred/imputed and our place is taken.
4) The worshiper shall then skin the son of the herd. We are clothed with Christ (1 Cor. 15:50-53; Gal. 3:27) and thus incorporated into His body.
5) The worshiper shall then dismember the son of the herd into “its pieces.” We must offer our members unto God (Rom. 6:19, 7:5, 7:23), now transformed for proper service.
6) He shall wash the entrails and legs. We are washed initially in baptism into Christ and repeatedly in our confession of sin.
7) The priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange the pieces. We are to be living sacrifices which have been transformed by the Spirit for service (Rom.12:1, Lev. 1:9).

How may we respond to the the introductory Pauline questions: imputation or incorporation? forensic or participationist? Because it is part of the fullness of biblical covenantal realities, the union is both legal/forensic and incorporate/participationist. The sacrificial rite presents a “both/and” approach to this question. What is it not, then? It is not merely legal. It is not merely forensic. It is not altogether incorporationist or participationists in the sense of *infusion*. Let now one claim they are righteous by their own because they have become completely holy. The best term for the arrangement is “covenantal”: bound the by the terms revealed in the covenant which require both objective and subjective dimensions; both legal and participationist.

If we think of a believing and faithful worshiper in the OT, after the rite, he would admit in humility his own failings, while then placing his trust in Yahweh who receives his substitute. He would not claim that his own righteousness was the basis of his acceptance. He would hope on
the basis of the offering to have been brought near and received acceptance. His hope in God’s covenant mercy would not have been misplaced even though, in the fulness of time, He sent a Son who displaced all these rites.

*I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all, and frees us from the accursed load;
I bring my guilt to Jesus, to wash my crimson stains
White in His blood most precious, till not a stain remains.*68

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68 Horatius Bonar, *Songs for the Wilderness*, 1843. My version of this is available here:
Appendix: The Sequence of the Sacrifices

The main purpose of this paper is to show correspondence between the sacrificial rite(s) and NT language about begin “in Christ.” However, I think another quite important purpose of the sacrificial rites is to note the order as a model of worship. The basic order of sacrifice is emphasized in Lev. 9:22:69 “And having sacrificed the sin offering (chat), the burnt offering (olah) and the fellowship offering (shelamim), he stepped down.” Better translations would have it: Purification Offering, Presence Offering, then Peace Offering. “The order of the last group was significant in pointing to the right priorities in worship: cleansing, atonement, consecration and fellowship.”70 Hartely notes, “the order in chap. 9 is based on the liturgical order. The similar order of sacrifices for the Day of Atonement (16:11, 16) supports this view.”71 “The order of sacrifices described in the ritual prescriptions constitutes an important guide for Christians with regard to the principles of spirituality underlying divine worship. Of the three concepts enunciated, the one that had priority concerned cleansing from sin, denoted by the sin offering. When proper atonement had been made, the worshipper was to surrender his life and labour to God, as indicated by the burnt and cereal offerings. Finally, he was to enjoy fellowship with God within the context of a communion meal, which the peace offering furnished.”72 “The people’s sacrifices are offered, again following the logical sequence: purification, then the burnt offering and grain offering (since it too is in the ‘most–holy’ category; see 6:10), and finally the well–being offering which is to constitute the sacred feast of celebration.”73

Michael Farley addresses the interpretive principles of Christian worship.74 He argues against a New Testament-only approach (which he calls a “praxis-oriented regulative principle”). Neither should it be a patristic-ecumenical model (e.g., the Road to Rome [Catholicism], the Canterbury Trail [High Anglicanism] or the Boat to Byzantium [Orthodoxy]).75 He urges a biblical-typological approach which incorporates fully OT and NT material. Farley’s article addresses the way the sacrificial actions of the OT relate to the NT and Christian worship, advocating that “a

[69 “Aaron then brought the offering (gorban, “near bringing”) that was for the people. He took the goat for the people’s sin offering (chattat - “hiding”) and slaughtered it and offered it for a sin offering (yechatte - “hiding/offering”) as he did with the first one. He brought the burnt offering (olah, “ascension” Gr. holocaust) and offered it in the prescribed way. He also brought the grain offering (mincha, “gift”) took a handful of it and burned it on the altar in addition to the morning’s burnt offering (olah, “ascension”). He slaughtered the ox and the ram as the fellowship (shelamim root is shalom) offering (zevach, “offering/feasting”) for the people...Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. (Lev 9:15-23 NIV)


[71 John E. Hartley, Leviticus (WBC 4), 120.


[75 He cites Robert Webber as an evangelical who has been prominent to draw attention to patristic-ecumenical sources for liturgical renewal within evangelicalism.
biblical-typological approach, has the greatest merit and potential for developing an evangelical biblical theology of worship.”

The NT describes what new covenant believers do in their assembly as the “liturgy” (leitourgeo/latreia) of “near-bringing” in terms of the tabernacle/temple “service” (Heb. 10:11/Rom. 9:4-Acts 13:2, Rom. 12:1). We do this now by grasping the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus by faith and by renewing covenant through these same steps on the Lord’s Day.

We are Called into His presence to Confess sin (Sin offering, 1 John 1:9) so that we Consecrate ourselves (Burnt/Ascension offering, Rom. 12:1) by committing to be obedient to the Word of God read and preached; We bring Gifts of tithes and offerings (Tribute offering); and have Communion (Peace offering, 1 Cor. 5:7). Finally, we are dismissed with a blessing wherein we are named as God’s people to live out the liturgy. This pattern of actions we may summarize as: Call, Confession, Consecration, Communion, & Commission.

The striking difference between the OT and NT is not that we use a “liturgy” or that we move through steps to ascend into God’s presence, but that the new covenant approach to God is the heavenly reality of Zion, not the “doll house” copy (“tupos” Heb. 9:24). “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant . . .” (Heb. 12:22-24).

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