

The Fragrance of True Religion

- ¹⁵ Then God said to Noah,
¹⁶ "Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you.
¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh-- birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth-- that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth."
¹⁸ So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him.
¹⁹ Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.
²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.
²¹ And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.
²² While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

Genesis 8:15-22

Religion or Relationship?

Relationship, not Religion. That is the mantra of our day. In a popular rap called, "Why I Hate Religion, but Love Jesus," **Jefferson Bethke** has now told nearly 27,000,000 YouTube viewers,

What if I told you Jesus came to abolish religion? ...
I mean if religion is so great, why has it started so many wars?
Why does it build huge churches, but fails to feed the poor? ...
Religion might preach grace, but another thing they practice.
Ten to ridicule God's people, they did it to John the Baptist.
They can't fix their problems, and so they just mask it.
Not realizing religion's like spraying perfume on a casket.
See the problem with religion, is it never gets to the core.
It's just behavior modification, like a long list of chores ...
See I spent my whole life building this facade of neatness.

But now that I know Jesus, I boast in my weakness.

Mr. Bethke is in good company in his insistence that “religion” is only bad. The Greek historian **Plutarch** (c. 46 – 120 AD) said the term only had a negative use in his day.¹ However, if we read the Bible, we find something different. James says, “**Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world**” (**James 1:27**). Since James was the half-brother of Jesus, one would think that his view should hold more weight than Plutarch or a modern day rap artist. James clearly believes that there is **a kind of religion that is good in God’s eyes**.

Where did James get this idea of taking care of orphans, widows, and other afflicted people? He got it from that “**long list of chores**” in the OT, “**You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child**” (**Ex 22:22**). “[God] executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (**Deut 10:17-19**). “**You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge**” (**Deut 24:17**). Of course, we could multiply this list a hundred-fold.

No, it is not “religion” that God hates, but *man-made* religion that obscures justice while acting pious, that elevates truth over love of neighbor, that abandons God’s means of salvation and appeasement for those that we make up ourselves. This rap, which expresses so well the new American religion of our day, exchanges one evil for another. It rightly notices the pride in hypocrisy, the error of having truth with no love, and the need to sincerely worship God. Yet, it seems more and more like the only way to be sincere is to get rid of all law. If it must be truth or love, then love is all we need. Sincerity and ritual cannot coexist. So I’ll take Jesus, not religion.

But these are not **either/or’s** that so many on both sides today make them out to be. They are **both/ands**. Today, I want us to see the vital necessity of practicing right religion through the actions of Noah as he came off the mountain with the animals and his family. I hope that in contrast to the false dichotomy presented in contemporary American spirituality that you will come to see the transcendent beauty of the **religion that God sees and savors**.

Noah’s Sacrifice

¹ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 156.

True religion always has **two dimensions**. It deals with human beings. This is **horizontal** in nature. But it is not just a horizontal thing, though it must be at least that. True religion is also **vertical**. That is, it deals with God as our superior. Sometimes I fear that the kind of buddy-buddy “relationship” that is so often talked about with regard to Jesus is merely horizontal. I think that it should be horizontal, because Jesus Christ became a human being, and in that sense he is our brother. But it is not only horizontal. Jesus is not *merely* human. Jesus is God, the Creator of the Universe, the King of the Flood, the being that covenanted with inferiors like Adam, Noah, and Moses requiring fealty from them. And so it is not enough to say that we have a personal relationship with him.

The primary way that we show our fealty to Christ is by **obeying his law**. True religion is guided by obedience to the Ten Commandments. But because we are sinners, **there has to be more to it than just obedience** to the Ten Commandments. There has to be a way of appeasing God, so that the works you perform in the flesh will be acceptable to him. Many people today do not understand this. Noah did. Let’s take a look at our passage and see how it relates to our opening discussion on religion.

A Command from God

The story today begins just as the flood waters have subsided enough for all the life on the ark to begin making its way back to land. It begins with a command. It is **a command from God**. It is a command from Noah’s superior, his Lord and Maker. “**Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you**” (**Gen 8:16**). Read through the lens of the **de-creation/re-creation** theme we saw last week, this is the creation side, the reversal of **Gen 7:1**, “**Then the LORD said to Noah, ‘Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation’**” (**Gen 7:1**). Also viewed from this theme, the language “**And God said (to Noah)**” becomes the first speech of God after the flood. It corresponds in some ways then to **Gen 1:3**, “**And God said, ‘Let there be light.’**” **A new day is dawning** for the world.

The theme of re-creation which parallels original creation comes out even more explicitly in the next verse (and even more in verses that we will not deal with today at the beginning of ch. 9). “**Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth**” (**8:17**). That language sounds familiar, doesn’t it? “**So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which**

the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth’” (Gen 1:21-22).

After God commands as he does, it gives the important words, “So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him” (18, 19). This also has a parallel earlier in the story when it tells us that in going into the ark with his family and the animals, “Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him” (Gen 7:5; cf. 6:22; 7:9, 16). When it tells us that Noah went out, this is in the context of the command of God, and so it is to be understood and Noah’s obedience and fealty, not merely as a man who hasn’t seen the sun for a year and can’t wait to get away from all those stinking animals. This phrase sets up what Noah now does, and it links us both backward to the Eden story and forward to the Moses story ... and beyond.

I would like you to go back to 6:22 for a moment and take note of how the chapter concludes with Noah, “Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.” Noah has just finished making the ark with its dimensions and storehouses and rooms and window. I put that more simply when we dealt with that passage: Noah had just finished creating God’s sanctuary. At that time, I pointed out how this is foreshadowing something that we won’t find in the story until we come to Exodus when Moses, the man of God, builds God’s tabernacle-sanctuary and concludes, “... as the LORD commanded Moses.” That story is itself a reflection upon the creation story and God’s finishing his work, as there are many series of sevens that parallel the seven days of creation.² We can very much say then that Moses was a new Noah.

Offering Sacrifices

One of the main features associated with Moses’ tabernacle was the institution of the Levitical covenant and the sacrifices that the priests and Levites would offer up for the people on behalf of God. This was public religion *par excellence*, religion that God commanded because he actually likes true religion and knows that we need it. There were many kinds of offerings and sacrifices, but the very first one discussed in the book of Leviticus is called the burnt offering. Leviticus 1:3 says, “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.”

² See my sermon on Exodus, “Building the Tabernacle of God: Exodus 35:1-40:33.”

The Hebrew word for a burnt offering is *olah*. This is not Spanish for “hello,” but rather “that which ascends” or that which is entirely consumed by fire on an altar.³ Anything that burns creates smoke, and smoke, whether it is the smoke of a match or of a forest fire, ascends. To ascend is to move in the direction of heaven in the Bible. So the burnt offering rises up to the place where God is. That is one of its chief purposes.

This is the context into which we should now read **Gen 8:20**, “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” Notice how foreshadows Moses. Noah is offering a burnt offering, an *olah*. This, along with the clean/unclean animal distinction that we find in the law of Moses (**Lev 11**; **Deut 14**) demonstrates that these things were not made up by Moses. A Thousand years before Moses was born we find Sabbath, sacrifice, cleanliness, civil law such as capital punishment, and other things that many people say began with Moses and ended with Jesus (though, of course, there were peculiarities given to the nation of Israel to set them apart from the nations they were to drive out of Canaan). According to the Flood story, that is simply nonsense.

Notice next how this relates backward to the Eden story. Do you remember how there was an offering made for Adam and Eve, an offering which covered them in the skins of an animal (**Gen 3:21**)? To help the reader see the connection back to that story, the Targum has a fanciful addition here, “Then Noah built an altar *before the Lord—it is the altar which Adam built at the time he was banished from the garden of Eden and on which he offered an offering, and upon which Cain and Abel offered their offerings. But when the waters of the flood came down it was destroyed. Noah rebuilt it*” (Pseudo-Jonathan **Gen 8:21**). I don’t really believe that Noah did that, of course, but neither do I think this was a tiny fire-pit where he is roasting marshmallows. He had to “build” it, the same word is used for building a city (*banah*; **Gen 4:17**; **10:11**) and the tower of Babel (**11:5**). Noah is offering a lot of animals here. This was a huge undertaking.

One more point of contact with Eden here is the sacrifice of Cain and Abel. You will remember that they offered their sacrifice at the door of Mt. Eden. Noah is offering his sacrifice here on the steps of the mountains of Ararat. And then there is that idea of the animal. Abel offered the firstborn of his flock. Noah is offering some of every clean animal and bird. Blood is being spilt.

³ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 59.

Gen 8:21 now says, “And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.’” Let me clarify two points and then we’ll begin to think about what this means. First, he speaks of the curse, another reference that takes us back to Eden; Gen 3:17). When he speaks of never again cursing the ground, this does not mean he is lifting the curse. Rather, he is promising not to add to it as he has just done with the flood.⁴

Second, this has a rather striking parallel in Gilgamesh. It says, “The gods smelled the savor, the gods smelled the sweet savor, the gods crowded like flies about the sacrificer” (Epic Gilg. 11.159-161). In the Epic, it is the gods who have sent the flood, because they grew tired of man’s constant whining. But after the flood, they have apparently neglected to realize that with all humans destroyed, no one will be left to give them sacrifices, and without sacrifices, they have no sustenance. *The Bible Backgrounds Commentary* says, “Both Gilgamesh and Genesis refer to the aroma/savor of the sacrifice, but the portrayal offered of deity is far different. In Gilgamesh this represents the gods’ needs and exposes their shortsightedness. It functions to appease their anger. In Genesis it represents God’s pleasure in the creatures he has made and his resulting commitment not to destroy them.”⁵

But is this entirely true? Of course, the deities in the two stories are very different. But what about this idea of appeasement? Here we need to think about the purpose of a burnt offering. Burnt offerings had a *two-fold* function. Yes, it acts as a way to express total dedication of the worshiper. It is through sacrificing one of your own spotless firstborn animals that you would show your devotion and love to God. I do not want you to miss this point, because we are dealing here with religion, not inner, private spirituality. This was a sacrifice of an animal, not singing a praise song in car on the way to work in your heart. Today, at best, many people think only the later is needed to show your true devotion to God, because only the heart matters. Noah seemed to think that an animal sacrifice was the best way that he could show his devotion to God. Calvin says, “Just as Noah’s obedience had been attested by many proofs, so he now presents an example of his gratitude. This

⁴ This rests on a point of grammar. Wenham says, “It is important to note the position of in this sentence, coming after to “curse,” not after “do again” as in the parallel clause “Never again shall I smite ... The flood was a punishment over and above that decreed in 3.17.” God is promising not to do that again. See Wenham, 190.

⁵ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 52.

passage teaches us that from the beginning, sacrifices were instituted with this goal in mind, that by such exercises we should cultivate the habit of celebrating God's goodness and giving thanks to him" (Commentary, Gen. 8:20).

Propitiation

The other purpose of the burnt offering was to **make atonement**. This is explicit in the Bible. "He shall lay his hand on the head of the **burnt offering**, and it shall be accepted for him to **make atonement** for him" (Lev 1:4). To say that Noah was not offering up an atoning sacrifice really misses the point of the story rather badly in my estimation. As we saw with American spirituality as well as with false religion, some people seem to have erected another either/or fallacy. This is a both/and.⁶ It is both devotion from the heart and atonement.

First, consider the context of this story again. This is the **flood**. God has just destroyed the entire world. **The whole world!** And why? Because it was completely and utterly sinful. Do you remember that verse in **Gen 6:5**? "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Notice how this is virtually repeated here, "... for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth" (**Gen 8:21**). Calvin says, "To be sure, if humans were treated according to their merits, there would need to be a flood every day!"⁷

Luther makes a vital observation about original sin here, "One cannot get around this passage with the claim that such people were the ones who perished in the Flood. God uses a generic term and says that the heart of man is of that kind. But in those days there were no other people than those who had been saved in the ark, and yet He says that the imagination of the human heart is evil. Hence not even the saints are excluded here" (Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* 8:21).⁸ If the essential situation has not changed, if Noah and his wife and his sons and their wives are still evil (much less anyone else), then sin has not been deal with fully, has it? The context begs for an *atoning* sacrifice. I believe Noah understood that, because he was a man justified by faith, and faith must have an object.

⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 189.

⁷ John L. Thompson, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *Genesis 1–11: Old Testament*, vol. 1, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 285.

⁸ John L. Thompson, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *Genesis 1–11: Old Testament*, vol. 1, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 286.

Second, what was the flood, theologically speaking? It was God's judgment on mankind for their sin. Because he was still a sinner, Noah was not just free to approach God on his own terms (even Jesus didn't do that). God is angry at sin and he must judge it. When he does, the only sentence this holy God carries out is death. Death is the punishment for sin. We saw this way back in Genesis 2-3.

Of all the people that have ever lived, who would have understood this better than Noah? This was a man who literally saw almost all life on earth obliterated before his eyes. As one of the ancient flood stories puts it, "The olden days are alas turned to clay ... And all of mankind had returned to clay" (*Epic of Gilgamesh* 11.118, 133). What a vivid picture that is. God has judged man and all his pots have been destroyed.

Third, look at what the sacrifice does. We have seen that it causes God to reflect upon the curse. It also brings to mind the covenant he made with Noah. Gen 8:21-22 must be viewed as the beginning of an entire group of verses that culminate in the renewal of the covenant (especially 9:11-17). God says that he will never again curse the ground like this, that he will never again strike down every living creature as he has done, and that until the end of the world, the earth will remain. It gives four opposites: seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. These are the most basic parts of life in the ancient world, the rhythms of agriculture (food), climate (living) and time.

What has happened here is that Noah's sacrifice has caused God's stance towards the world to change. We remember earlier in the story that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen 6:8). Yet, the world found wrath. But now, God's attitude towards mankind in general is assuaged in the sacrifice of Noah, his wrath is being placated.

There is a very interesting word play that explains this quite beautifully between Noah's name and the aroma of the sacrifice. Noah is pronounced *noach* in Hebrew. "Pleasing" is pronounced *nichoach*. Wenham puts it this way, "Soothing' () sacrifices have a restful (), soothing, pacifying effect on God. That God's anger at sin is appeased by sacrifice is the clear implication of this phrase. Here, however, it is also a deliberate pun on Noah's name. We might even paraphrase it, 'The Lord smelt the Noachic sacrifice.' Lamek called his son

‘Noah’ because he hoped he would bring him rest from the labor of his hands (5:29): here God implies that Noah’s sacrifice has soothed him.”⁹

Luther says, “Previously Moses stated that the Lord had regard for the offering. Here he states that the Lord smelled the delightful odor, and after this Moses frequently makes use of such an expression. Actually the word does not mean ‘odor of pleasantness’; it means ‘odor of rest.’ ... Moses used [this word] previously (Gen 8:4), when he stated that the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat. Hence it is the odor of rest, because at that time God rested from wrath in that He gave up His wrath, was appeased, and, as we ordinarily say, was well pleased.” (*Lectures on Genesis 8:21*).¹³¹⁰

That it is *Noah’s* sacrifice means something else. Noah, like Moses in his covenant and the Levitical priest in his covenant is acting as a mediator. Let’s return to the comparisons of the Noah and Moses stories for one last moment. Someone writes this,

The striking similarity between the flood and Sinai, between Noah and Moses, is of great theological significance for the interpretation of each story ... The world, while still in its infancy, has sinned and brought upon itself Yahweh’s wrath and judgment. Israel has only just been constituted a people, God’s chosen people, yet directly it has sinned and incurred Yahweh’s wrath and judgment. Each time the same question is raised. How, before God, can a sinful world (in general) or a sinful people, even God’s chosen people (in particular), exist without being destroyed? Each time the answer is given that if the sin is answered solely by the judgment it deserves, then there is no hope. But in addition to the judgment there is also mercy, a mercy which depends entirely on the character of God and is given to an unchangingly sinful people ... the role of the mediator is vital, whether it be Noah or Moses ... This mercy is shown through a man who is chosen by God and whose right response to God, whether through sacrifice or prayer, constitutes the necessary medium through which this mercy is shown.¹¹

⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 189.

¹³ LW 2:116–17 (WA 42:344).

¹⁰ John L. Thompson, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *Genesis 1–11: Old Testament*, vol. 1, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 284–285.

¹¹ R. W. L. Moberly (*At the Mountain of God*, JSOTSS 22 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983] 89–93, 113–15), in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 191.

And so, when we look at it like this, we can see Noah's offering of sacrifice as a [prototype of the work of later priests](#), those who made atonement for Israel.¹² In Noah's sacrifice, [God recovers from the stench of sin](#). Again, Martin Luther, "Thus it may be said that God, who was offended by the horrible stench of ungodliness, is now recovering. He sees this one priest [Noah] girding himself for sacrifice, in order to manifest some evidence of thankfulness and to indicate by a public act that he is not ungodly but has a God and fears Him; for it is with these matters that sacrifices are actually concerned. Just as God thus far took pleasure in destroying the human race, so now He takes pleasure and rejoices in increasing it once more. It is for our sake, therefore, that Moses uses such an expression, in order that we may gain an understanding of God's grace and learn that He is a God who rejoices in doing good to us" (*Lectures on Genesis* 8:21).⁹¹³

But unlike later priests who only made atonement for Israel, Noah's sacrifice is [effective for all mankind](#). Indeed, it even has effects upon the animals and the earth itself. We will see this more in Genesis 9. But understand clearly, it isn't that God will never send little floods again. It isn't that God will never punish any man again. That is to think too absolutely about its effects upon the world, and to go against what is written. It is that, as a whole, on the whole, the sacrifice is effectual for anyone whom God chooses to make it effectual for, because the death of these animals is bringing about [a general benevolence to humanity](#) that they do not deserve, one that allows the Lord to be patient with sinners, to not throw out the fullness of his wrath at all flesh again, all in accordance with his covenant, Word, and Name. If this does not manifestly display the grace of God, I do not know what does.

People usually talk about this grace as [common grace](#), in that it is [common for all humanity](#), and indeed it is, even though God can still, at any moment, bring any of us to heaven to face our final reckoning. But it most certainly is [not common in the sense of ordinary](#), as if we should just expect that God can or should divvy out such kindness just because he feels like it. Too many people think that is exactly what God does. No! At the end of the day, grace only comes about because of the mediatorial, priestly, sacrificial, bloody work of Noah—the man of obedience by faith. And God would just smell any old sacrifice, either.

¹² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 190.

⁹ LW 2:117 (WA 42:345).

¹³ John L. Thompson, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *Genesis 1–11: Old Testament*, vol. 1, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 283–284.

Did you know that in the law and the prophets it says very clearly that God will not “smell” the offerings of the disobedient? ([Lev 26:31](#); cf. [Amos 5:21–22](#)).

A Greater Noah; A Greater Sacrifice

In light of such things, how can we stay in the story of Noah, or even Moses? Does not the continuation of sin and the fact that these are mere animals beg us to read more, to go further, to find a greater solution? We soon read that Noah is not the perfect man of sinlessness that some make him out to be. And Moses isn't even allowed to enter the Promised Land because of his sin. The priests Nadab and Abihu get torched with fire from heaven and die. Sin undoes one and all.

That is why today you must give thanks for the fullness of biblical Revelation in the Greater Man of Rest, the Greater Prophet, the Greater High Priest. [Johannes Brenz](#) (1499-1570) was a German Protestant Reformer who asked,

What is fragrant in the combustion of a calf, or an ox, or a goat? Especially if, along with the flesh, the bones are also burned up, which certainly produce a displeasing odor when burned! Yet it's not what we think, that God is taken with the sweetness of an external smell. Rather, there are other things in Noah's sacrifice that move God with pleasure.

First, he is pleased with [Noah's gratitude](#), even as he is pleased with his care for spreading the teachings of true religion to his offspring. Finally—and this is best of all—he is pleased with [Noah's faith in the seed of the woman](#), in Jesus Christ, who is foreshadowed by the burnt offering.

In Noah's offering, God actually sees the sacrifice of his only-begotten Son, which would one day take place for the sins of the whole world. By this sacrifice he is so delighted that he rejoices not only to favor Noah but also to promise to preserve the earth. And by that promise, the Holy Spirit shows that the sacrifice of God's only-begotten Son would have so much efficacy that on its account the earth would be preserved and all who believe in it would be freed from death and given eternal life¹⁴

Many people do not understand that the death of the animals allowed God to show common grace. But many people further do not understand that the death of the animal was not really enough for God to do that. Brenz is correct. This sacrifice [foreshadowed the death of Christ](#) wherein the Father showed total

¹⁴ John L. Thompson, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *Genesis 1–11: Old Testament*, vol. 1, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 285.

devotion to the Son and the Son total devotion to the Father in this great religious work done at the cross.

This death allows God to show benevolence to the whole world even in the face of their sins, because the payment of sin—death has been paid. That sacrifice goes not only towards saving grace that God will give, but also common grace, for as we have seen, no one deserves even common grace. All men must die, and Jesus died as a man. So the death of Jesus is sufficient for God to show such grace to anyone or everyone if it so pleases him.

This does not mean that God is pleased to save every man, anymore than it means God is pleased not to still bring some to face judgment by bringing a flood upon them in our own day. It does mean that God is now free to extend the offer of the gospel to anyone that he is presently keeping alive through common grace. If the sacrifice of Noah and the covenantal promises given to him do not cause you to look to Christ for their completion, then you are not reading the Bible properly. And so I point you to the Son of Man, that you might see the grace God extends to you this very hour because of his sacrifice on your behalf. And I plead with you to repent of your sins, confess them to God, and know that he will forgive you. Do like Noah and recognize that you need a sacrifice to appease the wrath of God for you, not just the world. And know that this sacrifice has been offered and that God is well pleased in the aroma of that offering and of the saints who themselves become the fragrance of life to a world rotting in decay.

Brenz is not finished, and there is one more thing I would like to discuss. He notices that this sacrifice is the first post-flood act of public worship.

Notice what Noah undertook first of all after he left the ark with his family and animals. The animals, though they lacked reason, assigned themselves each to its own place, according to its nature: the birds to the air, the wild beasts to the wilderness, domestic animals to the company of humans. But Noah, having left the ark, does not proceed to build a tower or a house, or to plow the fields, but to build an altar on which he offers clean animals as a burnt offering. This is a description of **the restoration of religion**. To be sure, a burnt offering could not have been made in the ark, but there is no doubt but that Noah and his family would have prayed much in the midst of such great dangers. But because there was a good deal of confusion there, they could not have conducted public rites.

Now, however, after Noah and his family have left the ark, Noah's concern is first of all to **restore public rites and to establish the teaching of religion** once again. He makes a burnt offering of the clean animals for several reasons: First, to

attest his gratitude to God his savior, who had kept him safe with his family and animals through so many dangers in such a fragile craft. Next, to declare his faith that from then on God would also protect him from the dangers of death. Finally, so that by his example he might spread the teachings of true religion as far as he was able among his offspring. (Commentary on Genesis 8:20).⁵¹⁵

What a wonderful application this is to Christians, and do we need it more than ever in our day of spirituality with disdain for religion. It is in true religion that one shows their gratitude to God, that they declare their faith publicly, and that they provide an example to others (especially their children), and help to pass the Faith once for all entrusted to the saints down to the next generation. But it is in abandoning public religion, true religion, that all of these things find themselves falling upon deaf ears in heaven. Because true religion begin with sacrifice. Once it was the sacrifice of animals. Now, it is the sacrifice of Christ Jesus that takes away our sins. In coming together for worship, we publicly acknowledge this sacrifice through the means of grace that God has given his church to sanctify them.

That is why we have been summoned on this Lord's day, to perform the public worship of God together, as his assembled local church, along with other local assemblies around the world. That is why we have come, in obedience just like Noah, an obedience that comes from faith. We recognize that religion does not cease with Jesus anymore than it began with Moses. We recognize that his sacrifice is once for all, but that together we also offer up sacrifices of praise, incense of prayers, and the priestly ministry of the gospel of Christ. The world needs to see Christians that refuse to commit these kinds of either/or fallacies. It is not religion or the heart. It is both, because as far back as Noah, and moving on to Christ himself, this is what God has always required, so that we might show our devotion to him, and so that he might be placated in his wrath, for we continue to sin, and only in Christ can anyone find forgiveness.

⁵ *Opera* 1:105.,

¹⁵ John L. Thompson, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *Genesis 1–11: Old Testament*, vol. 1, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 282–283.