

The End of Sacrifice

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

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This is a story about insiders and outsiders—those who know the rules and follow the rules and those who don't. It is a complicated, arcane system that doesn't always make sense. It's difficult to follow and to remember all the little rules, to do everything at the right time and in the right order. And there are severe consequences for violating one of these obscure rules or customs that only the insiders know.

That's right. I'm talking about ordering a cup of coffee at Starbucks.

How many of you are or have been at one time Starbucks regulars?

I'm not a Starbucks insider. We were in Dallas last weekend. I was performing my cousin's wedding there, so it was a fun family time. We were staying at my mom's house. She doesn't have a computer or internet connection at home, so one day I decided to take my laptop computer up to the local Starbucks and get a cup of coffee and use their wireless internet connection.

I always get nervous about ordering at Starbucks. So before I left, I went over with Heidi the names of the sizes of the drinks.

So that you will feel like a Starbucks insider next time you go and not an outcast like me, I have combed the internet and personal observation and experience and put together this guide for you for ordering a cup of coffee at Starbucks.

Step 1

Figure out what size you want. Starbucks' coffee is available in 12oz, 16oz and 20oz sizes. To you, these might translate to small, medium, large. At Starbucks, they are tall, grande and venti, respectively.

Step 2

Decide whether you want it black or with cream. Of course, if you want cream, you have to add it yourself, but this step is here for a reason. At Starbucks, they like to use the term "room" as in "room in the cup for you to add cream." So if you want cream you have to say "with room."

Step 3

Ok, you're ready. There's also some question about dark roast or mild roast or some kind of roast, but I don't really understand that. You can go up to the counter now.

Step 4

You must word your coffee order in the proper sequence: size, then type, then blackness or creaminess. But be sure to use the

correct lingo. For instance, if I wanted a large, hyper-caffeinated coffee with cream and sugar, I would ask for a “grande mild with room.”

If the order taker asks you any questions in Starbucks lingo, don’t try to fake it. Just admit that you don’t know what he’s talking about and accept your humiliation

Step 5

After your order is taken, listen carefully to what the order taker yells at the other employees (called baristas). Remember this phrase, whatever it is. This is probably what the barista will yell at you when your coffee is ready.

Step 6

Brace yourself, because your total charge is forthcoming. What’s important at this point is that you get your coffee. Give them whatever they ask for.

Step 7

Step aside, because you’re not getting your coffee yet. Look for the person who was in line ahead of you. He’s probably standing over at the coffee drop-off spot. Wait over there, and listen for the magic words that your order taker shouted a minute ago. When you hear them, go for the coffee cup that accompanied the call. Grab it, make for the door, and remember what you learned should you ever need to rely on this experience in the future.

[Adapted from the article, “How to Order a Regular Coffee at Starbucks” on www.ehow.com]

The Pharisees are to religion what Starbucks is to coffee.

Over time, the simple thing of loving God and loving your neighbor became a complicated system with insiders and outsiders. There were those who knew the rules and followed the rules and those who didn’t. They created a complicated, arcane system that didn’t always make sense.

It was difficult to follow and to remember all the little rules, to do everything at the right time and in the right order. And there were severe consequences for violating one of these obscure rules or customs that only the insiders knew.

And Jesus refused to play along.

Jesus was in the habit of calling disciples to follow him, as we know. Peter and Andrew, James and John, fishermen who left their nets and followed him. Here, Jesus calls Matthew, the tax-collector, and we get the impression that he left behind his tax-collector booth just as the others left behind their fishing nets.

Not only does Jesus call Matthew to be his disciple, but then the scripture says many tax collectors and sinners come and have dinner with Jesus. By associating with these impure, un-

clean people in such an intimate way, Jesus is violating all sorts of purity laws and customs.

The Pharisees are of course very upset, and they question Jesus' followers: *Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?*

This is the question of someone whose world is neatly organized into religious and irreligious, clean and unclean. Many of the Pharisees held that ritual purity should not just be practiced by the Temple priests but by all Jews. The effect of this, of course, was to separate the good guys from the bad guys. The boundary lines become very distinct. It becomes very clear, who is an outsider and who is not.

And Jesus' behavior, his refusal to play along, messes up and threatens the whole system.

So the Pharisees say to Jesus' followers: *Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?*

When Jesus hears about this here is his response: *Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners.*

Jesus was calling the Pharisees and the rest of us to look at the true meaning of religion. Jesus is saying, this is the end of sacrifice. It's mercy that God wants, not sacrifice.

I desire mercy, not sacrifice is actually a quote from the prophet Hosea (6:6).

It's also similar to Amos when he said, *I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like the waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.* (Amos 5:21-24)

It's similar to the prophet Micah who said, *With what shall I come before YHWH and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before God with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" God has told you, O mortal, what is good; What does YHWH require of you, but to do justice, and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God.* (Micah 6:6-8)

Go and learn what this means: *I desire mercy, not sacrifice.* It's so important that Jesus repeats it to the Pharisees again in Matthew 12:7. Jesus cites this important scripture to his critics, a well known scripture—I desire mercy, not sacrifice—and tells them to go and learn what it means.

What it means is that God is rejecting a religious system that is based on purity and sacrifice. Purity and sacrifice always go together, because if your religion is based on purity, there are always going to be times when that purity is defiled. So there has to be sacrifice.

Sacrifice is something done to appease an angry God so that you can be pure and acceptable to God again. In a sacrificial system, you offer sacrifices to God to atone for some impurity. You give God a sacrifice so that God will be pleased with you again. If your religion is based on purity, you've got to have sacrifice to atone for those lapses in purity that are bound to happen from time to time.

So God is rejecting this purity/sacrifice cycle—a system where you have to keep yourself separate from other people to maintain purity and continually offer sacrifices when that purity is breached.

I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Jesus says to learn what this means—to replace this legalistic system with mercy. Here's the question, I think, as we learn what this means: Living in this world, does God want from us a response of distancing ourselves from all those whose lives are tainted with sin and compromise, or does God call for the opposite response of drawing near in love and forgiveness?

When Tony Campolo was to speak in chapel at Duke University a few years ago, a young Duke student appeared in the of-

fice of the Dean of the Chapel and asked if he could introduce Dr. Campolo before he spoke.

He said he wanted to share something of what Campolo had meant to him—especially when he worked for him that previous summer in Philadelphia.

This is what the student said, in his own words.

I got converted my senior year of high school. I was a fresh, eager Christian so, when Dr. Campolo came to our town to speak, I went to hear him. He was great. After he spoke, he asked us to sign up for his program of inner-city ministry in Philadelphia. So I did.

Well, in mid-June, I met about a hundred other kids in a Baptist church in Philadelphia. We had about an hour of singing before Dr. Campolo arrived. When he got to the church, we were really worked up, all enthusiastic and ready to go. Dr. Campolo then preached for about an hour, and when he finished, people were shouting, standing on the pews clapping. It was great.

Okay gang, are you ready to go out there and tell 'em about Jesus? he shouted.

Yea, let's go, we shouted back.

Get on the bus, Campolo shouted. So we spilled out of the church and onto the bus. We were singing, clapping. But then

we began to drive deeper into the depths of the city. We weren't in a great neighborhood when we started riding, but it got worse. Gradually, we stopped singing, and everybody, all of us college kids, was just staring out the windows. We were scared.

Then the bus pulled up between one of the worst looking housing projects in Philadelphia. Campolo jumped on the bus, opened the door, and said, *Alright gang, get out there and tell 'em about Jesus. I'll be back at 5:00.*

We made our hesitant way off the bus. Stood there on the corner and had prayer, then we spread out. I walked down the sidewalk and stopped before a huge tenement house. I gulped, said a prayer, and ventured inside. There was a terrible odor. Windows were out. No lights in the hall.

I walked up one flight of stairs toward the door where I heard a baby crying. I knocked on the door.

Who is it? said a loud voice inside. Then the door was cracked open and a woman, a woman holding a naked baby, peered out at me. *What do you want?* she asked in a harsh, mean voice. I told her that I wanted to tell her about Jesus.

With that, she swung the door open and began cussing me. She cussed me all the way down the hall, down the flight of steps, out to the sidewalk.

I felt terrible. *Look at me,* I said to myself. *Some Mr. Christian I am. How in the world could somebody like me think that I could tell about Jesus.*

I sat down on the curb and cried. Then I looked up and noticed a store on the corner, windows all boarded up, bars over the door. I went to that store, walked in, looked around. Then I remembered. The baby had no diapers. The mother was smoking. I bought a box of disposable diapers and a pack of cigarettes.

I walked back to the tenement house, said a prayer, walked in, walked up the flight of stairs, gulped, stood before the door, and knocked.

Who is it? said the voice inside. When she opened the door I slid that box of diapers and those cigarettes in. She looked at them, looked at me, and said, *Come in.* I stepped into that dingy apartment. *Sit down,* she commanded. I sat down on the old sofa and began to play with the baby.

I put a diaper on the baby, even though I have never put one on before. When the woman offered me a cigarette, even though I don't smoke, I smoked. I stayed there all afternoon, talking, playing with the baby, listening to the woman.

About 4:00, the woman looked at me and said, *Let me ask you something. What's a nice college boy like you doing in a place like this?*

So I told her everything I knew about Jesus. It took me about five minutes. Then she said, *Pray for me and my baby that we can make it out of here alive.* And I prayed.

That evening, after we were all back on the bus, Campolo asked, *Well gang, did any of you get to tell 'em about Jesus?*

And this young college student said, *I not only got to tell 'em about Jesus, I met Jesus. I went out to save somebody, and I ended up getting saved. I became a disciple.*

What does God want from us? What is the fundamental thing God wants? Does God want from us a response of distancing ourselves from all those whose lives are tainted with sin and compromise out of a concern for maintaining our purity, or does God call for the opposite response of drawing near in love and forgiveness?

The purity/sacrifice cycle is over. We don't have to appease an angry God. Jesus was the end of sacrifice.

The heart of true religion is mercy.