

The Offerings Of Leviticus (Part Nine): Conclusion (Part Two)

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We saw in the previous article how our standing before God is established. God has given us incredible gifts in this regard because no single person in all the history of mankind apart from Jesus Christ has ever earned himself into right standing and thus access to God. Yet, I John 4:17 clearly says, "Love has been perfected among us in this: That we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He [Christ] is, so are we in this world."

Peter adds, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of Christ?" (I Peter 4:17). For those of us who are now part of the Body of Jesus Christ and therefore "in the church," our time of judgment is right now. Each day, then, means there remains less time for us to please God. As we come to greater knowledge of God and His way, we become ever more aware of how often we fall short of reaching His glory. Despite this, God amazingly shows us that, "as He is, so are we in this world." God accepts us—we stand before Him—and He looks upon us just as He would accept and look upon Christ! The word *as* means "equal to;" "to the same extent, quantity, way or degree."

Adding to our acceptance and standing is the additional fact that Jesus, in His prayer before the disciples the night before He was crucified, asks God to show the world that He had "loved them [meaning us too] as You have loved Me" (John 17:23). The Father loves us to the same degree He loves Jesus!

What we have seen in the sacrifices of Leviticus is that Jesus personified their intent. He lived each day as a living sacrifice, conforming Himself to their spiritual purpose. His life exemplified a perfect burnt, meal, and peace offering. As such, He qualified to be the sin and trespass offering. He loved God with all His heart, all His soul, all His mind, and His neighbor as Himself. Consequently, Jesus brought man and God together in fellowship as the peace offering depicts, and God accepted and implemented His offering for man's sins.

These factors have far-reaching benefits for us in that they provide us with union, identification, commonality, and standing before God with Christ. With Him before God as our High Priest, it is as though we are there (Ephesians 1:3). His labors have opened the door for an intimate relationship with both Father and Son. What remains to be seen is whether we will conform to Christ's life.

A Purpose for Our Standing

Our standing with God is for the purpose of living life as He did as closely as possible. I John 2:3-5 says:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

There must be something to prove we are one with Christ, engrafted as part of Him and in union with the Father and the Son. That something is the manner in which we conduct our life. It must be growing in the ever more-perfect keeping of the spirit of the Levitical sacrifices.

Paul writes in Galatians 3:26-29:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

After His final Passover with His disciples, Jesus adds in John 14:15, "If you love Me keep My commandments." Earlier, He had said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Putting on Christ is the process through which we become like Him, and we do this within the relationship established by His sacrifice. Keeping God's commandments is a vital part of this process.

Peoples' names are probably the most common of all identifiers. Language identifies people, as do their physical features and the clothes they wear. Yet, the sons of God, those in union with the Father and His Son, are chosen from all nations and languages. Regardless of the culture from which God calls them, commandment-keeping identifies them, verifying that they are united with Christ. Commandment-keeping is love. Biblical love is an action, not merely a feeling. It may contain a positive feeling, even outright affection and passion for those who receive the act of love, but its foundation lies in the act rather than the emotion.

Empty Words, Verification, and Conformation

Many claim they love Christ, but their manner of life contradicts what they say because they do not keep His commandments. Paul writes in Titus 1:15-16:

To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

Do these people have the faith of Jesus Christ, that is, do they believe in and practice the same things He did? Are they truly walking in His steps? Even to casual observance, it is obvious they are unwilling to make sacrifices to practice many of the things He did. Jesus kept the weekly Sabbath and annual holy days of Leviticus; they do not. Jesus kept Passover; they keep Easter, which Jesus never did. He never observed a single Halloween or Christmas, which are never commanded in the Bible and, in fact, are clearly pagan to the core.

This barely scratches the surface, involving only the more obvious pattern of works. However, it points to the fact that the verification that one loves God is moral. God determines the standards of morality, not men who say they love God yet often ignorantly go their own way in many areas of life. Without the keeping of the commandments, there is no other means acceptable to God to identify that we are in union with Him.

This does not mean that love ends with these works—in fact, just the opposite. Keeping His commands, which express godly love, only begins the process. It is by this means that we make our witness to the world. The apostle John writes, "But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him" (I John 2:5). Thus, this process also produces the boldness and confidence that enable us to overcome our anxious fears and conform our life to His.

We were created, called, and granted forgiveness upon confession of faith for this very purpose. In Romans 8:28-30, the apostle Paul confidently declares:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, and that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Romans 5:2 reminds us that we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Our goal is set, but now we learn it is conformity to Christ that leads to glorification. Justification by itself is wonderful, but it only begins the process.

Can we honestly say that our walk is every bit as pure as His walk? If we are honest, we freely admit that, in comparison, our walk is irregular, inconsistent, and sometimes thoroughly misguided. Our actions, reactions, words, and attitudes are all too often not in accordance with Christ. We take Him into situations He never would have gotten into Himself. It should be evident why we need Passover each year. It is comforting and encouraging to remember God's mercy—that because He sees us as Christ, He gives us time to recognize what we are, repent of it, yield, and progressively conform to His Son's image.

The days of sacrificing are most assuredly not over—only what is sacrificed has changed. No longer are blood or grain offerings given but things of immeasurably greater value. Our life given in total devotion to walking as our Creator and Elder Brother Jesus walked is the sacrifice that brings conformity to Him. Before our calling, our lives may have been filled to the brim with status, activities, and things we felt were important to our well being. However, in many cases, such things must be jettisoned to accomplish this.

The apostle Paul experienced this very test, recorded for us in Philippians 3:7: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." If we desire to walk as Christ walked, we have to strive with all our being to meet the requirements of the sacrifices that will arise in our lives. Christ personified the intent of the biblical sacrifices; they were an integral part of His life.

Did Paul follow Christ's example when sacrifice was required to confirm his devotion to Him? He says of himself that he was "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5), a man of proper pedigree. He was instructed at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), so he was likely a rabbi, an honorable and exalted position he had to jettison. He may have been a member of the Sanhedrin, and thus a man of eminent authority and respect. If so, he would have had to be married, yet Scripture makes no mention of a wife. Did she leave him or die? Perhaps he had to give her up too. Apparently, he left no children. II Corinthians 11:22-33 gives an overview of the many sacrifices he made to serve the church as an apostle.

Our Savior gave more of this kind of sacrifice than anybody did. He gave up many of His prerogatives as God to experience life as a human. Abraham had to leave his home country and wander as a nomad for the rest of his life. Moses had to give up any dreams he may have had to sit on the throne of Egypt. What have we had to sacrifice—anything comparable to what these men gave up? Have we sacrificed houses, lands, families, or jobs? Paul says he lost everything! Philippians 3:8 records, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ."

Many of us are similar to the rich young ruler of Matthew 19, who asks Jesus what he needs to do to be saved. When Jesus tells him to sell all he has and give to the poor, he cannot do it. We see that wealth was a major idol in his life, his high tower that he looked to for security. In like manner, we also consider wealth to provide security, and we try hard to keep it from slipping away. If this were not so, idolatry would not be such a major problem, but it is the most common and serious of all spiritual sins. It comes between God and us, greatly hindering us in conforming to His image.

Where the Real Battle to Conform Rages

When counseling a person for baptism, a minister almost invariably takes the candidate through Jesus' teaching in Luke 14:26-30:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish."

This discourse lists many possibilities that may require sacrifice, but none is so common or costly as "yes, and his own life also." Though it may be a heavy condition and require deep soul-searching, we may give up an inheritance, job, title, or status with little regret. One can regroup from these losses and life goes on, but a person can never get away from himself. A person takes human nature and its enmity against God with him everywhere he goes. At all times, he faces the challenges and demands of bad attitudes, tempers, weak resolve, and weak character engrained in the past.

This is where the real battles take place to offer one's life in loving obedience to God as a burnt, meal, and peace offering. Hebrews 5:7-8 says of Jesus:

. . . who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

Why was the apostle Paul willing to make whatever sacrifices were necessary, and what did he do about it?

. . . that I might gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:8-10)

At times, the Bible uses "to know" as a euphemism for sexual intimacy. Paul is not saying here that he desires sexual intimacy with Christ, but that he greatly desires *spiritual* intimacy with Him. He wants to be so close to Him that he experiences the same level of life as Jesus did—even to the point of suffering or dying as He died, if that is necessary to be made like Him in every possible way. He desires to glorify God in every aspect of his life just as Jesus did (John 17:4).

To achieve this requires a clear vision of where one wants his life to go; dogged, disciplined determination to work toward that end; rigid concentration to avoid becoming distracted; and an unflagging willingness to pay whatever price might be required. Paul says in Philippians 3:12-14:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Clearly, Paul was not perfected at the time he wrote this, and neither have we been perfected as we read it. But God in His merciful grace has judged and now "sees" us as He would see Jesus Christ in order to give us time to become perfected through being created in His image.

Paul expresses His determination to do whatever it takes to attain this glorious goal. It is interesting that "laid hold" (verse 12) more literally means "grabbed." It is almost as if Christ grabbed him by the scruff of the neck out of the herd of humanity, jerking him out to be perfected and become an apostle. At the very least, this suggests God will take determined, even stern measures to give us this wonderful opportunity. In no way is He passively just letting things happen as He observes His creation, and Paul reflects the same sense of strenuous action to fulfill his part.

The apostle goes on to exhort the Philippians to have this same approach, "Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you" (verse 15). This is further encouragement to those who have not yet reached the stage of maturity Paul describes, as he is explaining that God will faithfully bring our thinking into harmony with His as we continue to strive to be like Him.

Verse 16 adds an exhortation not to slip from what has already been attained: "Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind." Our aim in life is to so know Christ—to be so united with Him—that day by day we share the life He lived, walk as He walked, even suffer as He did. We grow in His faith and come to share His hopes, joys, sorrows, and disappointments. We bear the stake and perhaps, as some have, die the death He died. In this way, we are sharing life with Christ, and through this process, we are perfected.

We are not complete yet, so we must press on. God has grasped us as well, not in the same abrupt manner He demonstrated with Paul, but He undoubtedly has laid hold on us. It is comforting to know that in Philippians 1:6 He tells us He is able to finish what He has begun. He *will* finish His creative work if we give Him the chance.

Because of Jesus Christ, God accepts us, and we have access to Him. As we are being perfected, we should see ever more clearly the standard of conduct God requires of us. It is indeed a high standard, but at the same time, our acceptance should give us peace to live confidently. The death penalty is no longer hanging over us; we do not have to feel guilty. Since the standard is to come "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13), we are given goals that will always be higher than we can reach. We will always have something to strive for, so we cannot honestly say we are "rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," as the Laodicean so proudly proclaims (Revelation 3:17).

Consequences, Identification, and Sacrifices

Hebrews 10:11-14 states,

And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He had perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

We are those who are "perfected forever." However, "perfected forever" does not mean we are morally perfected. Rather, His one sacrifice is perfectly adequate to assure our standing before God. As we have seen, the sacrifices show Him proclaiming how He lived His life, but here we are seeing its impact, the consequences of what He did so well. We see man, sinning and imperfect, becoming at one with God through Christ.

By means of the burnt, meal, peace, sin, and trespass offerings, we see all of God's holy requirements met in Christ so that we might be quickened by His Holy Spirit, be in continual fellowship with Them, and grow to become fully at one with Them. Ephesians 1:3-6 adds Paul's thoughts on this:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

The consequences of Christ's sacrifices do not end with our acceptance before God. Acceptance creates the requirement of being conformed to the image of the Son; we are expected to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Peter frames his instruction on our responsibility once we accept Christ's sacrifice in our stead in this way: "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (I Peter 2:4-5).

This is in language any of God's children can understand. We are to offer up sacrifices in the way He did. There is not one record of Him ever making a sacrifice at the Temple. Rather, He lived their intent as a living sacrifice. This is why our identification with Him is so important. We are now part of His body; we represent Him. He lives in us, and we experience life with Him as part of us. Our conduct is open to the view of all who care to look. Are we glorifying Him?

Please understand that, though our offerings will be poor and weak in comparison to His, they are not worthless by any means. They are still acceptable to God because of Christ, and they are still a witness.

Consider these illustrations: If a couple have a small child of perhaps just a few years of age, do they expect him to run one hundred yards in nine seconds? Are they disappointed because he cannot drive a car nor understand Einstein's theory of relativity? Of course not! If their child is only one year old, he may just barely be able to toddle across a room! If he falls a couple of times, do they lose their temper and put him out of the house?

Of course, they are neither disappointed at his present inabilities nor do they even think of putting him out of the house. Why? Because they know he is just a baby, and they adjust their expectations and judgments accordingly. They are confident he will get better as he matures and gains experience. They know that someday he will stride confidently across the room and much more besides. Someday, he may run a hundred yards in under ten seconds and grasp the essentials of the theory of relativity.

In other words, growth is anticipated. God's judgment of us is much the same. When we are first in Christ, He considers us as babes (I Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:13). At this point, He very well may consider us as "perfect" for the time since our regeneration, and we are acceptable because of Jesus Christ. He allows us time to grow, even though we may make mistake after mistake because of our weakness and immaturity. Because of Christ, He keeps judging us as "perfect."

This is a wonderful gift! He is not overly concerned about our individual sins as long as He sees in us a steady, upward trajectory toward maturity in our conduct to reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. If a child falls as he toddles across the floor, will not his parents set him upright, dust him off, comfort him, and show him, "This is the way you do it"? Can we expect any less from God, in whose image we are? Therefore, our acceptance before Him gives us time to grow.

A Detail in the Entrails

Leviticus 1 contains instructions for the whole burnt offering. Verse 9 is particularly interesting: "But he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water. And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord." During the preparations for the burning, the entrails and legs—representing our innermost being: the heart from which conduct springs; the viscera, our emotions; and the legs, our walk—must be cleansed with water before all is burned on the fire. The burnt offering is cleaned on the inside and then completely consumed.

Here is pictured the standard of devotion to God; this is what God is aiming His children toward due to our access to Him through Christ. We are to be a cleansed, total sacrifice. We are to withhold nothing; we are to give our all. This is the hardest of all the offerings God calls upon us to perform because, like the rich young ruler, we want to reserve things for ourselves. Whatever it is, it is like a child's security blanket, and we love it and do not want to let it go.

David understood sacrificing, which II Samuel 24:24 reveals:

Then the king said to Araunah. "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

The burnt offering is painful because it is costly. It is so costly because it costs us our life. This is what we give in exchange for the forgiveness of our sins! Jesus Himself says this in Luke 14:26: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

Hebrews 5:7-8 informs us that Jesus Christ felt His sacrifices—not just His sacrifice on the stake, but also the multitude of sacrifices He made after emptying Himself of His godly prerogatives to live as a burnt offering for 33½ years.

Like the burnt offering, the meal offering was completely consumed (Leviticus 2:2-3). The priest placed a portion atop the burnt offering and kept the remainder for his consumption. Nothing remained for the offerer. The meal offering depicts that man has a claim on man. We are obligated to love our neighbor as ourselves; we are our brother's keeper. We owe these to fellow man, and therefore fellow man has a claim on our love, even as we have a claim on his love.

Paul writes in Philippians 2:17, "Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all." The drink offering was an adjunct to the meal offering. Clearly, Paul considered his life as an offering to the Philippians for the benefit of their faith in God and His purpose. Because of this, he was not able to live life as he might otherwise have chosen. He was always at their service; he sacrificed his life on their behalf.

Others are named for their service to the brethren. Phoebe refreshed the brethren. Philemon was hospitable, and Luke and Silas made arduous journeys with Paul in service to those in far-flung areas. They, like we, serve people who are carnal or leavened, as the Bible says, and thus their reactions are not always what we would like them to be.

A clear example of this occurred when Mary offered her perfume to anoint Jesus' feet. Judas reacted carnally, asking why this could not have been sold and given to the poor. This illustration shows that sacrifices made for another can be misunderstood, and people can become offended. When we serve, expectations are usually high, but realization sometimes falls short, causing pain even in attempting to do good. We must always remember that it is a sacrifice to be a meal offering. The possibility of pain is always present.

The peace offering reveals a sense of satisfaction, of well-being produced by sacrifice. Hebrews 13:16 declares that God is pleased with sacrifices in which we share or serve in fellowship with each other. Philippians 4:18 shows God well pleased with the Philippians' sacrifices following their offering to their brethren in Jerusalem. The peace offering even contains a sense of reward and prosperity for something well done, suggesting that the reward will be spiritual in nature. Paul says God loves a cheerful giver, so He must be pleased too (II Corinthians 9:6-7)!

The sin offering may be the ultimate in terms of sacrifice and the discomfort and pain of self-denial. Is it also applicable to us? Did Christ perform His mighty works in our behalf to spare us from suffering? We would be wrong to think that was His purpose. Notice I Peter 4:1-2:

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Christ has given us a reprieve from the death penalty but not from the suffering that results from the sacrifices needed to overcome sin. Resisting the flesh is painful. We are crucified with Christ; the flesh must be put to death, as it were. Paul asserts in Galatians 5:24, "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires," and in Romans 8:13, "But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Doing so makes us a sin offering of the first order with Christ.

In the trespass offering, the offerer is required to make restitution of one-fifth above the price of what was stolen. This is to teach us the practice of going beyond what the letter of the law ordinarily requires. For example, we must not only love our friends but our enemies also. We are to forgive even though one has not asked our forgiveness. We must suffer loss even though we might be in the right and could press our demand for full payment. We must go the extra mile. We must be generous, gracious, and kind, packed down full and running over. This is a major lesson of the trespass offering.

The lesson of the offerings is clear. Jesus says in Matthew 16:24, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Jesus' life exemplifies love, and the essence of love is sacrifice. We must walk the walk He walked to glorify and magnify God. However, it is a walk that greatly burdens human nature, producing suffering, which we must bear along the narrow way.

Christianity is not a mere crutch to make us feel good. It is a way of life that prepares us for living in God's everlasting Kingdom by engraving in our hearts the very way They live. Each offering represents a significant step in the service of God and His purpose. Jesus lived them, and He and His Father expect us to make every effort to follow in His steps.