

Elements Of A Thanksgiving Offering

Offeratory

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Given 23-Apr-03; Sermon #608As

The apostle Paul instructs us that it is God's will that we be thankful. That is no surprise to us. We have heard that many times.

I Thessalonians 5:18 In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Now out of this perspective, we can always discern a cause for thanks. In fact, failure to do this is a symptom of faithlessness. It is the will of God that we be thankful in every situation, both in adversity and prosperity. Life's aggravations are but a temporary part of the larger plan for our spiritual development, and it is not a reason to be thankless.

The Israelites would show their thankfulness in the way of providing a thanksgiving offering, we most commonly call it a peace offering, but sometimes it was referred to as a thank offering. In Leviticus 22:29 God explained through Moses the proper way to offer a peace offering. He explained which offerings are accepted, and which are not accepted. And several times he says, "When you offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, offer it of your own free will." So we realize this that offerings should be given of our own free will.

The thanksgiving offering was an animal sacrifice in ancient Israel, and its specific character was the praise that it embodied toward God. And that praise was not acceptable to God unless it was freely given.

This offering has been given a variety of names. Sometimes, as I mentioned, it is called the peace offering; other times the fellowship offering; other times the praise offering; the thanksgiving offering; and sometimes it is even called a vow offering, depending on its purpose.

Turn with me to Leviticus 3:1. Most of the time, we in the church have called it the peace offering, because that is the way it is translated in the King James and the New King James Bible.

Each one of these names, though, is not wrong, because we see this peace offering in different aspects. And, when it is named something different then the teaching contained within is different. We will read verses 1 through 5. And your Bible probably has there the caption, “The Peace Offering,” so this is the general idea of what it is speaking about. And it basically represents life given as a living sacrifice.

Leviticus 3:1-5 'When his offering is a sacrifice of a peace offering, if he offers it of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the LORD. [Key, it must be without blemish] And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it at the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. Then he shall offer from the sacrifice of the peace offering an offering made by fire to the LORD. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove; and Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the burnt sacrifice, which is on the wood that is on the fire, as an offering made by fire [and a very important aspect], a sweet aroma to the LORD.

So we see there in verse 5 that it is a sweet aroma indicating that there is no sin involved in giving it, and therefore it is an offering that is satisfying to God.

Now the thanksgiving offering was burnt on top of the burnt offering, which in turn had the meal offering on top of it. So they were layered from top to bottom: The burnt offering, and then on top of the burnt offering was the meal offering, and then, on top of the meal offering was the peace offering, or the thanksgiving offering.

As we heard in David's sermonette a few days ago, the burnt offering is on the bottom, and it represents devotion to God. The meal offering was usually offered as a gift of friendship; an act of reverence, or propitiation to a friend that was wronged, or to procure favor or assistance, just in general ways it was used for those purposes.

Now, as children of God, we have two overall responsibilities regarding offerings. The first responsibility is to be devoted to God the Father and Jesus Christ. And the second responsibility is to be devoted in giving offerings to God. And we know that our monetary offerings usually are given on holy days. But our other offerings are also manifested in service to other human beings, especially the brethren.

The giving of the thanksgiving offering has very much to do with our state of mind in being a Christian. Like all the other divisions of the peace offering, the thanksgiving offering was entirely voluntary, being placed in the light of a privilege rather than a duty. You know how we give tithes—that is a duty. But we give offerings as a privilege. It is an honor to be able to give offerings of our increase and our blessings.

The celebrative role of the thanksgiving offering was one of the most prominent features of it. Looking at the thanksgiving offering as a celebrative sacrifice not only explains its presence in the rituals of thanksgiving, but it also helps us to understand its role on feast days. The thanksgiving offerings were emblematic of moments of joy and celebration. And we certainly feel that way on the holy days of God, that they are a joyous occasion.

The sacrificial laws of the Old Covenant were strong on outward conformity but were helpless in dealing with human thoughts. They could not dictate an inner attitude even though it was an expression of God's will. They were something that the people were, in a sense, forced to do. But God wants the thanksgiving offering and our offerings on the holy days to be of our own free will and as a privilege.

Compliance with God's standards can extend a motive if a person is in union with Christ while having an inward transformation of his own character

through the Holy Spirit and the working of Jesus Christ and God the Father. If the attitude or motive is contaminated at all, proper fulfillment of God's will in outward matters is impossible. This is why the sacrifice had to be unblemished, and the offering today has to be given with pure motives, and it has to be given freely.

If we apply the spirit and intent of the thanksgiving offering to our giving of an offering today, we find that our giving thanks for God's grace is a refined way of begging for more. It is a privilege that allows us to express our inner attitude. So, by giving our attitudes, we are saying, "Please God, give us more of your grace."

This is similar to the way that our prayers are based on the divine promise of salvation. Our prayers are expressed in anticipated thanks. It is a way of giving thanks to God for His promise with the faith that it is so sure to happen that it is as if it has already happened.

Now this same attitude is necessary when we give monetary offerings on the seven holy days of God. God wills that we be thankful. We should be thankful for His mercy, and especially for our privileges and hopes as the elect of God.

Please turn to Colossians 3:12. In Colossians 3, Paul tells us how to put on the new man. These things are very important because they bear on the acceptability of our offerings.

Galatians 3:12-15 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

So we find the elements of the thanksgiving offering are necessary for our offerings today to be acceptable to God. Those elements are that they must be given freely, and they must be given without blemish. And as an example

of without blemish, it cannot be from lottery winnings, or usury, or borrowed. It must be something that we have accumulated ourselves through our efforts.

It must be a sweet aroma, for example, not given by a flagrant sinner. We are all sinners, but if a person is just flagrantly and knowingly sinning against God without any remorse, then it is not a sweet-smelling aroma when that person gives an offering.

It is to be given faithfully, and given thankfully.