

The Offerings Of Leviticus (Part Four): The Peace Offering

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Of all the offerings, the sin and trespass offerings are the best known and understood because of their clear association with Christ's crucifixion for the sins of the world. At the other end of the spectrum, the peace offering is the least understood because its symbolism, while easy to grasp, is perhaps the most difficult to experience in actual practice. It is introduced in Leviticus 3:1-5:

When his offering is a sacrifice of peace offering, if he offers it of the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish before the Lord. 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, a sweet aroma to the Lord.

Biblical commentators have given this offering a variety of titles. "Peace," "fellowship," "praise," and "thanksgiving" are the most common. However, the *Keil-Delitzsch Commentary* states that the most correct is "saving offering" (vol. 1, p. 298). Each title shows a somewhat different aspect of the teaching contained in it. Verse 5 informs us that this too is a sweet-savor offering, indicating that no sin is involved in it, and thus it is most *satisfying* to God. The word "satisfying" is important to understanding this offering.

Verse 5 also shows us an aspect of the ritual that teaches us about this offering's purpose. It is burnt upon, that is, on top of, the burnt sacrifice, which in turn had the meal offering on top of it. They were not necessarily layered like a sandwich and then all burned at the same time. However, the daily burnt offering was always made first, and it was followed by the meal offering and the peace offering on the same fire (*Keil-Delitzsch*, vol. 1, p. 300).

The peace offering, then, had to be offered after the other two were already burning. How long after is lost to history, but it could not have been a long time if the same fire was used.

Peaceful Communion

Leviticus 7:11-18, 29-32 provides more information regarding the specific distribution of the various parts of this animal sacrifice:

This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which he shall offer to the Lord: If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer, with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, or cakes of finely blended flour mixed with oil. Besides the cakes, as his offering he shall offer leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offering. And from it he shall offer one cake from each offering as a heave offering to the Lord. It shall belong to the priest

who sprinkles the blood of the peace offering. The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten the same day it is offered. He shall not leave any of it until morning. But if the sacrifice of this offering is a vow or a voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offers his sacrifice; but on the next day the remainder of it also may be eaten; the remainder of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day must be burned with fire. And if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted, nor shall it be imputed to him; whoever offers it shall be an abomination, and the person who eats of it shall bear guilt.

. . . He who offers the sacrifice of his peace offering to the Lord shall bring his offering to the Lord from the sacrifice of his peace offering. His own hands shall bring the offerings made by fire to the Lord. The fat with the breast he shall bring, that the breast may be waved as a wave offering before the Lord. And the priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons'. Also the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a heave offering from the sacrifices of your peace offerings.

We need to understand the order followed here: The offerer brought his offering to the altar, laid his hand on it, and slew it. The priest sprinkled the blood upon the altar and around it. The animal was then cut up, and God's portion—almost entirely fat, besides the two kidneys—was placed on top of the already burning burnt and meal offerings.

Then the priest received the breast and right shoulder for himself and his children, and the offerer received the remainder of the animal to eat. However, it had to be eaten within one day if it was a thank offering or within two days if it was a vow or voluntary offering. If any remained on the third day, it had to be burned. In this process, the major teaching of the peace offering is revealed.

Recall that the burning on the altar of the sweet-savor offerings pictures God consuming a meal and being satisfied. Likewise, the priest receiving his portion shows him being satisfied, and the offerer with his portion is also satisfied. "Filled," "gratified," "contented," "accepted," "convinced," "supplied," "persuaded," "pleased," and "assured" all capture the intent of the symbolism.

In addition, since all parties—God, priest, and man—share the same meal and satisfaction, it shows all in peaceful communion or fellowship. Because it was placed in sequence on top of the other two offerings, the peace offering is directly connected to them, and thus it depicts the *effect* of perfect devotion to God and man: peaceful satisfaction and fellowship, the fruit of devotedly keeping the two great commandments of the law.

In this sacrifice Christ symbolically plays all three parts: He is the offering, sacrificing His life in service; He is the priest, serving mankind at the altar as Mediator; and He is the offerer, bringing His sacrifice to the altar. The altar, the place of meeting for all three, represents sacrificial services and devotion to God that give Him satisfaction and result in our acceptance.

The peace offering shows man, as Christ, accepted, fed, strengthened, and satisfied by sacrifice, teaching that sacrifice is indeed the essence, the heart and core, the essential element, of love whether to God or man. More specifically, it shows us that sacrifice plays a major role in acceptance before God, spiritual feeding and therefore spiritual strength, and spiritual satisfaction. Devoted people sacrifice for those they love. Thus, sacrifice indicates devotion to God (burnt offering) and devotion in service to man (meal offering).

A Sense of Satisfaction

Everyone desires to feel a sense of satisfaction, that all is well. This is largely what we all strive for in life. But how are we trying to achieve it? If we grasp the general instruction contained within the sacrifices, we ought to be able to understand how spiritually damaging self-centeredness and striving for the wrong goals in life are. Self-centeredness produces the opposite fruit of self-sacrifice.

Self-centeredness does not feed and strengthen a sense of satisfaction and contentment. It destroys through spiritual malnutrition, producing a hunger or craving for more of what never satisfies. John simply and practically lays down this principle in I John 3:16-24:

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us.

In verse 16, John teaches that we can know love by observing the way Jesus lived His life. He sacrificed His life for us by laying it down each day, as well as in death, setting us an example to follow in our relations with the brethren. In verse 17, he provides a practical illustration of a way we can lay down our life in love. Then, in verse 18, he encourages us not merely to agree with truth but to take action to meet a brother's need.

Verse 19 begins to show the effect of devoted sacrifice to this way of life. The persuasive power of knowing we are doing the right things inspires assurance, confidence, and satisfaction; we feel a positive sense that we are right with God. He then explains that, when these are not produced—but instead we feel guilt and condemnation because we know we are not doing well, and our concern for not being perfect overwhelms us—we need to go to God for forgiveness because He will forgive.

Verse 21 is a subtle encouragement to repent, to turn from our self-centeredness so we can be at peace with God and within ourselves. Verse 22 discloses the positive effect of laying down our lives in sacrifice for our brethren by devotedly keeping the commandments: answered prayers. Living by faith and displaying it through a life of sacrificial love is the theme of verse 23, and finally, in verse 24, he reveals another positive effect: to know absolutely that He lives in us and we in Him. Our lives revolve around faith in this knowledge.

The question at this point is still, "How are *we* trying to find satisfaction in life?" We could reword it, "How are we trying to find love, joy, and peace?" The Parable of the Prodigal Son touches on this issue:

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent

all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15:13-17)

Like the young man, we yearn for a feeling of well-being, peace, security, fun, and happiness. Also like him, we pursue after them, attempting to produce them in virtually every way but the Father's way. We, like him, experience the same empty, hollow, something-is-missing feelings.

Some may remember a popular song of a few decades ago sung by Peggy Lee titled "Is That All There Is?" The lyrics dealt with this very subject. The singer recounts having tried so many supposedly exciting and fulfilling things in life yet having found no lasting satisfaction in any of them. Following each experience, she concludes by asking the question, "Is that all there is?" The song clearly expresses that such a life is not truly fulfilling.

What is missing from such a life is the true purpose of life combined with the effort of fulfilling it by living the required way. These three offerings in Leviticus 1-3 broadly define God's way of life: doing all things within the context of His purpose in love. As we have seen, I John 5:3 defines love as keeping the commandments, and the essence of love is sacrificial giving.

Though without the Spirit of God, some people (psychologists, for instance) have figured out much of this. The part they have not determined through observing humanity is the true purpose of life because God has not revealed it to them. They have, however, found that the essence of love is sacrifice and that doing the right things produces a sense of well-being.

Give of Your Best

How does God react to those who should know better but live before Him a poor-quality life? Malachi 1:6-10 pictures God's reaction—He is not pleased:

"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' You offer defiled food on My altar. But you say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the Lord is contemptible.' And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" says the Lord of hosts. "But now entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?" says the Lord of hosts. "Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," says the Lord of hosts.

Here God indicts the people of Malachi's day for offering inferior, sometimes even deformed animals on His altar! The spiritual parallel concerns the offering of our lives in service to Him and fellowman. Are we, out of love for God and His people, giving the best we have to offer in life's circumstances? Solomon admonishes in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are

going." A Protestant hymn, "Give of Your Best to the Master," expresses this requirement well. Though God accepts us because of Jesus Christ, He expects us to give the very best we can in return.

Luke 22:15-16 specifically concerns Jesus' Passover offering, but we need to consider its effects in light of the peace offering rather than the sin offering: "Then He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'" First, God is satisfied because man is in communion with Him through Christ, the offering. Second, man is satisfied because he knows he is accepted by God and in fellowship with Him. Third, the priest is satisfied because, as the common friend of formerly estranged parties, He is happy to see them in fellowship. No wonder Christ desired this particular Passover! It produced the very purpose for which He came.

The medium that brings this all about is sacrifice. It is not just Christ's sacrifice on the stake, for it just culminated a whole series of sacrifices that began in heaven when He sacrificed His glory as God, became a man, and subjected Himself to the Father's will perfectly. Christ's stated desire here is looking forward to God and mankind being in fellowship with each other in His Kingdom—the ultimate effect of giving the best of ourselves to God following Jesus' example.

Recall the thought expressed in I John 3:20: "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." This is vitally important to us because we of all people are subject to intense feelings of self-condemnation and guilt from knowing that we are not living up to God's standard. We truly care about what God thinks of us because we know more than most about Him.

Our faith is not to be blind and unthinking but based on truth. Our application of faith in light of this verse necessitates a fascinating balance between two extremes that arise from our more precise knowledge of God's way. Both extremes are wrong. The first extreme, already noted, is that we live life in constant guilt and fear that God's hammer will fall and smash us to smithereens at any moment due to our imperfections.

The second is a laissez-faire, God-is-very-merciful-and-tolerant, He-understands-my-weaknesses attitude. In this extreme, sins are accepted as part of the normal course of life, and no determined effort is made to overcome them. Some have given in to a particular sin, exclaiming, "God understands my needs." God also understands rebellion.

But whatever happened to Jesus' strong admonition, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out" or "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off" (Matthew 5:29-30)? Certainly, He does not mean this literally, but it illustrates the serious determination, vigor, and strength we are to employ in overcoming sin. Those who minimize sin come close to trampling the Son of God underfoot and putting His sacrifice to an open shame (see Hebrews 6:6; 10:29).

How good is the sacrifice of such a person's life? He is guilty of practicing sin. John writes, "Whoever is born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (I John 3:9). Later, in Revelation 22:15, he adds, "But outside [the New Jerusalem] are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie." Such people will not be in God's Kingdom.

Their consciences have adjusted in a similar way to the situation in Malachi 1. Sin, a defiled life, is acceptable, and their attitude seems to be that God will just have to be satisfied with children who will not strive to overcome. This is dangerous business indeed because God says only those who

overcome will inherit all things (Revelation 21:7). Is God satisfied with such a situation? Does He not desire a better offering from His children for their welfare and His glory? If He is not content, the fellowship is either already broken or is breaking down.

Acceptable to God

Our concern, however, is for those who *are* striving to overcome but still failing from time to time—those who *know* they are not living up to the standard and struggle with a guilty conscience and feel their fellowship with God is cut off because of occasional sin. The majority of us probably fall into this category.

When we commit the occasional sin, are we no longer acceptable to God? Is our fellowship truly cut off? While it is true that sin separates us from Him, do we remain unsatisfied because we feel there is no communion? Once again, God's grace rescues us from what would otherwise be an impossible situation.

Amidst the first-century church's rather passionate discussions over the applicability of certain portions of the law, Peter says in Acts 15:10-11: "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." Peter is acknowledging this very situation, except his reference is to the Old Covenant. He recognizes that, if we try to be as holy as God is holy in this life through obedience alone, we put ourselves into an impossible situation. It is this fact, in part, that Israel's experiences under the Old Covenant were designed to reveal.

Undoubtedly, most Pharisees were sincere in their misguided devotion to God. Paul writes in Romans 10:2 that Israel has "a zeal for God but not according to knowledge," that is, true knowledge. In their efforts to be pure, they added law upon law to try to keep from sinning—and perhaps even add a measure of absolution—but they made matters only more difficult with each new law.

The answer to this confounding situation lies in a change of our natures arising from repentance, receipt of God's Holy Spirit, and—perhaps above all—access to God through Jesus Christ. Through these come fellowship and experience with Them throughout the remainder of life and access to God's merciful grace when we fall short. There can be no doubt we are saved by grace through faith. Our depression and extreme self-condemnation reveals a lack of faith in God's willingness to forgive upon repentance. Though works are required of us, we cannot earn our way into the Kingdom through them because they will forever fall short in providing payment for sin.

Paul confirms, however, that love requires works: "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:2). Notice that Paul says Christ has given Himself for us and that the offering he refers to is a sweet savor. Paul's reference, therefore, is not that Christ gave Himself for us as a sin offering but as one not involving sin: He was a burnt, meal, and peace offering. He gave Himself for us in the manner in which He lived His life.

Even as Christ's sin offering is for us, and we find acceptance before God, satisfaction, and peace when we understand and believe that our sins are forgiven, so also is His life, as He lived it, for us. It

is as though when God looks at us, He sees Christ! This is an incredibly wondrous aspect of His grace and part of the doctrine of our being "in Christ," that is, part of the spiritual body of which He is the Head.

I Corinthians 12:12 says, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." Ephesians 1:21-23 repeats this concept:

[The Father has raised Christ] far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Even though the human body consists of many parts, it is also an integrated whole. So also is Christ, and thus God "sees" Christ as an integrated whole.

Paul uses this same idea in a somewhat different context in Galatians 3:16, 28-29:

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is 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.

It is clear, especially in verse 29, that, concerning the promises, the entire church with all its integrated parts is perceived as being Christ. This is the source of much of our spiritual strength. It shows us, as "cells" of Christ's body, spiritually nurtured by the food of the altar while in communion with our spiritual Father and His Son, our Savior. This is the food that comes down from heaven (John 6:33, 41, 50-51, 58).

It is from certain knowledge of these spiritual truths that we are moved to take advantage of our acceptance into Their presence. The fruit of this is our confidence and boldness so that we do not unnecessarily condemn ourselves. As mentioned earlier, there is a tension between the two extremes of excessive guilt and feelings of worthlessness in contrast to the casual, careless, irresponsible, "God will just have to take me as I am" disregard of our responsibility to glorify God in all we think, say, and do.

This is why John says, "God is greater than our heart." He is ever willing to accept us as Christ—even though we personally bring Him blemished offerings in our life's experiences—as long as our attitude has not turned to trampling the sacrifice of His Son underfoot and treating it as a common thing.

We will never enter into God's acceptance and fellowship based on any work of offering we sacrifice to Him. The only thing He will accept is the unblemished offering of Christ's life, and because it accompanies or precedes us into His presence, we are accepted, have communion with Him, and are fed.

The Priest's Children

Another aspect of this offering is important for us to consider more closely: The priest's children are also specifically named to receive of the peace offering. Notice Leviticus 7:31-32: "And the priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons'. Also the right thigh you shall give to the priest as a heave offering from the sacrifices of your peace offerings."

Compare this with Numbers 18:9-11:

This shall be yours of the most holy things reserved from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, shall be most holy for you and your sons. In a most holy place you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you. This also is yours: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and your sons and daughters with you, as an ordinance forever. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.

Whom do the priest's children symbolically represent? This is important because they were also to eat directly of the offering and be satisfied. We have already seen that Christ is symbolically portrayed in several guises, as offerer, offering, and priest. Remember also that Christ is one with the church. We are parts of His body; we are "in Him."

The Old Testament also characterizes the church in several symbolic guises. For example, all of Israel represents the church as the children of God in pilgrimage to its inheritance. At other times, it is specifically represented as those who have made a covenant with God. Here, the priest's children—or at other times, the entire tribe of Levi—symbolize the church in another specific mode: in service to God. In being permitted to partake of the sacrifices, the priest's children stand for the church in communion with God. God shows through this that he who offered an animal in order to feast with God could not do so without also feasting with God's priests and their children.

In this, we have a small window into I John 4:20: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" It also ties into I John 3:17: "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

The two great commandments are absolutely, inextricably linked, and for them to produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness represented by the peace offering, we must keep them in tandem in real time. Today, all who really have communion with God must share that communion with His priest, Christ, and His "children," the rest of the church, the offerer's brethren.

Notice a practical application of this recorded in Acts 2:41-46:

Those who gladly received [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord, in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.

It is easy to see the church's oneness in this practical circumstance. What we do to share in and contribute to this unity is something each of us needs to explore. The possibilities are almost endless, if we keep our eyes and ears open and think of practical applications among those we fellowship with. This is a way to produce peace, and is it not our responsibility to be both peacemakers and our brother's keeper?

The overall lesson we should learn from the peace offering is that it represents the effect, the consequence, of devotion given directly to God and devotion to God given in service to man. This effect is commonly called "peace" and, in an overall sense, pictures all in harmony.

We must remember, though, that "peace," as used in terms of this offering, does not convey mere tranquility. This is why commentators cannot arrive at a consistent name for it. The word connotes a great deal more. Like *shalom*, it implies abundance in every area of life, even prosperity and good health. It also suggests thankfulness for blessings received and deliverance from difficulty. Is it any wonder that most researchers feel it was the offering most commonly made? We should make this offering every day—on our knees giving thanks, praise, and blessing to God for His abundant mercy and providence.