

The Offerings Of Leviticus (Part One): Introduction

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The apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." Men marvel at the immense grandeur of the heavens and the awesome power displayed in multiple billions of stars lighting it as they silently soar through space. We gasp at its possible age, knowing that God is eternal and that He lived endlessly into the past before He brought forth His creation. The great distances involved between heavenly bodies speak of the breadth of His thinking. Everywhere we look, we see signs of breathtaking intelligence, both in the complexity and the order of His mind revealed in what He has made.

In Psalm 111:2, the psalmist asserts, "The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them." Surely, we Christians do not take God's creation for granted but diligently seek to know what He is like by observing what He has made. The Bible is perhaps His most accessible creation, giving written evidence of His eternal power and divinity. Each day, it is within reach, ready to be thoroughly examined. Like the towering heavens, His book is deep and broad. Great human minds have critically examined it, and thinking they have found flaws, they sometimes take it to task. However, those who boast against it are later found to have been in error. They die, but the evidence of God in His creation continues unabated.

Paul later writes:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

God's works *are* great—so great that our finite minds can grasp only the simpler things. Nevertheless, what we do grasp we are capable of appreciating, and sometimes we exalt in the intelligence, wisdom, and providence of our great God, thrilled that we can comprehend even a small part of His majestic mind.

The closer we scrutinize what God has made, the more perfect it appears. When we first examine manmade products, we may not see any flaws, but upon closer scrutiny, the imperfections become apparent. If we focus a magnifying glass or microscope on them, obvious imperfections leap out. The works of God, however, are different. The closer one looks, the greater the magnification used, the more wisdom, beauty, and perfection are revealed.

Multiple Uses

Reflect for a moment on how adept God is at creating materials with multiple uses. At times, it seems as though everything God creates has more than one function. Consider air. We seldom give it any thought, but we are breathing it in and out constantly. Each breath supports life because the oxygen in it goes into our lungs, and then our blood distributes it to every cell in our bodies. Yet, that same

air also supports fire, which can kill us or be harnessed to serve us mightily. Do we not appreciate fire when the weather is cold? What if no air existed to support combustion or distribute heat? Besides not being able to breathe, we would have to live in cold houses, as well as without an innumerable number of items that require heat to make them.

In addition, air transfers heat to bring us warm weather, and simultaneously, it carries moisture, which falls as rain, enabling us to grow food. Moving a hand through it causes us to feel its resistance. It is so insubstantial as to appear as nothing, but the faster one moves an object through it, the more closely its molecules bunch together. When the air moves fast enough against a canvas sail, it will move a ship of great tonnage. It seems like magic because we cannot see the air that is propelling the vessel.

Air is a mass of tiny, invisible molecules. With the proper application of a couple of laws, air will lift a huge 747 off the ground and transport us thousands of miles in a matter of hours. Thus, thousands of pounds of metal, fuel, rubber, and people fly through the sky supported by a gas so insubstantial by itself that it cannot bear even one person's weight.

In addition, air provides for the transmission of the fragrances of a savory meal, flowers, perfume—or the rank smell of garbage. It also conveys the sound of one's voice or makes it possible to hear beautiful music. No air, no sound.

This illustrates how lovingly providential and economical the mind of our great God is. By comparison, man is a vanity, a mere mortal likeness of the great Creator. Men must usually make one tool for each job he wants to do.

Much of what God creates has multipurpose use, and the closer we look, the more brilliance, majesty, intelligence, love, and power we see in what He makes. In a sermon, one church of God minister observed that a simple cell, the kind one could take from any part of the body, is about as complicated as New York City! Since he was not a biologist, his illustration may not be totally valid. However, it vividly demonstrates the vast difference between God and man.

Using God's Multi-Use Word

God's Word is like His other creations. Like air, it too has multi-faceted uses. In fact, it seems as though its uses are inexhaustible. It does not matter whether one lives in the time of Abraham, Moses, David, Ezra, Christ, or now. Its directly stated words or their spirit will apply. God's Word is so infinite and pure that it is always valid, always true, always applicable, and always an inexhaustible source of guidance. Jesus says that God's "word is truth" (John 17:17). Solomon adds, "Every word of God is pure" (Proverbs 30:5), and David writes, "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times" (Psalm 12:6).

Psalm 119:17-18 states, "Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep your word. Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law." The author of this psalm has the right idea. Asking God for guidance into His Word should be our request each day. Understand, however, that it is one thing to deem the Bible a great book because of its reputation—it is another to study the Bible soberly, seeking for instruction in righteousness. This we *must* do.

Solomon instructs us in Proverbs 2:1 on the necessary attitude toward it: "My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you. . . ." We should treat God's Word like treasure, as

something precious. We should not treat it merely as something expensive but personally desired and used as our guide to life. Possessing it in this manner is within reach if we stretch ourselves or make sacrificial effort to have it. It is such a powerful tool that we should approach it as if it is the pearl of great price. Yet, this treasure is not something put in a safe-deposit vault and taken out only to look at on rare occasions. We are to seek it so that it can produce success and beneficial results in us. It is the most useful tool readily available to man to guide him in the most important area of life—his relationships with God and fellow man.

Verses 2-6 continue Solomon's thought:

. . . so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

These verses add a great deal of understanding about how vigorous and persistent our efforts should be toward possessing the treasure of God's Word. The phrase "incline your ear" (verse 2) pictures a person cocking his head and cupping his ear with his hand while straining to hear—understand—more distinctly. It depicts exerting physical effort, and the word "heart" shows we must apply strenuous mental effort as well. Admittedly, God's Word is not always easy to understand. It is a tool that requires varying levels of skill to use. At times, we must research patiently and diligently in many areas of Scripture to get as comprehensive a picture of its teaching on a given subject as possible.

In verse 3, "cry out" more literally means "invite to come." It is admonishing us to be open-minded as we research its pages. Our heart easily deceives us through lifelong prejudices and biases because we have passively accepted them as true. When God's Word challenges them, we are often moved to defend them. "Lift up your voice" adds greater intensity to "cry out," showing that we should not be passive regarding these biases. We need to search into them sincerely, and if we find them to be wrong, reject them.

By reminding us that the things we consider to be valuable usually have to be laboriously dug for and brought up from the depths, verse 4 urges us to pursue the riches of God's Word seriously.

Verse 5 then introduces an exceedingly interesting and essential principle we need to know for our growth. Proverbs 1:7 informs us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," but Proverbs 2:5 adds that the fear of the Lord is also a goal in our search for wisdom. This is important to understanding "knowing God" because the thrust of the Bible reveals that we can only come to know Him by obeying Him, by striving to be morally perfect. The fear of the Lord is a major motivator in producing conformity to Him and His will. It helps us enormously to reverence Him deeply, and if we do, it will result in sincere obedience from the heart. In this context, the Bible essentially equates the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God.

Verse 6 confirms that God is the source of all ethical authority as well as the blessings that flow from obedience to the knowledge of Him. The preceding verses urge obedience to Him as the principle of life because it results in knowing Him. Therefore, the fear of the Lord, the knowledge of God, understanding, and wisdom are all part of the same spiritual "salad." They are inextricably linked as necessary for those who want to please God and live the abundant life He intends for His children.

Though we can properly define them as technically different from one another, in reality, they cannot be separated. The glue that holds them together is obedience to what we already know while we strive to improve all of them together. Verse 9 to the end of the chapter expounds the benefits of our search for this treasure.

In Psalm 119, the author shows how many varied and distinct elements are in fact linked in order to comprise a whole generally called "the law." The same principle holds true of those elements of Proverbs 2:1-6. The psalmist asks God to deal bountifully with him (Psalm 119:17-18), so he can keep—obey—what he learned as he searched out each element. This shows that we need to consider the whole package in Proverbs 2:1-6 because each of these elements draws on the others for support while simultaneously producing fruit toward the others.

Biblical Imagery

II Timothy 3:16-17 proclaims, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." All Scripture is indeed inspired, but we do not necessarily find all Scripture inspiring. There are many reasons for this, but the reality is that we tend to avoid portions of it. For some it might be the long lists of "begats"; for another it might be ancient history; and for a third, prophecy. Some parts of Scripture are more valuable to us at one time than another. However, it is certainly true that all of it is valuable according to our circumstance, and God has made it available when needed if we will tap into it. As He says, we are to live by God's every word.

In an overall sense, the Bible is about government: God's, man's, and the self's. It shows how man rejects God's government through sin; how man's rule over others is abusive; and how man needs to learn to govern himself, or nothing will ever work for the good of all. Yet, it is also a book about faith, hope, love, and deliverance from our desperate circumstances, for each of these is important in how one responds to or uses government.

Romans 10:4 makes an important statement about what our objective in life should be: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Here, *end* does not mean "conclusion" as in "done away." If the law was done away, sin could not exist because Paul states, "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Rather, *end* should be "goal" or "purpose," meaning that this verse names Christ as the object of the Bible. The law—indeed, the whole Bible—is aimed toward Him. He is its target. Paul is saying He is what the law produces; He personifies its intent.

Ephesians 4:13 adds considerably to this concept: ". . . till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." What a tall order! Yet, it is the supreme goal of life. He is the Standard, the personification of perfect faith, love, mercy, kindness, government, etc. The purpose of the law is to guide us to an understanding of the height, breadth, and depth of the mind of Christ, which motivated His attitude and obedience. The law may seem to describe Him in broad strokes, but when one looks closer, beyond the mere statement of a law, we find a great deal more of His character and personality revealed.

The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is filled with imagery. *The American Heritage College Dictionary* defines *imagery* as "a set of mental pictures or images; the use of vivid or figurative

language to represent objects, actions, or ideas." The *Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Word Finder* adds, "figurative illustration, especially as used by an author for particular effects."

An artist uses oils and watercolors to communicate a concept on canvas. Likewise, we think, write, and speak in word pictures. In this sense, the Bible is God's picture book, even though it is entirely words. An image's value lies in what it communicates to the mind. For instance, water is a frequent biblical image. The image of water conveys refreshment, sustenance, cleanliness, and life to everyone anywhere on earth. When used within a biblical context, water's imagery can lead a person to greater understanding because he can meditate upon all of these ideas to discern more specific spiritual, moral, and ethical applications of what God is communicating.

Symbols and Types

We can also call the Bible's imagery "types," "symbols," "emblems," "tokens," "similes," "metaphors," or "allegories" because they communicate instruction. However, for simplicity, these articles will employ the general words "types" or "symbols." In the Bible, there are typical persons, things, events (including ceremonies and rites), and times. In general, the majority of them are typical of Christ, some aspect of His church as a body, or of us, His brethren.

In the passage beginning in Galatians 4:21, Paul draws upon the imagery of Old Testament personalities and their relationships to provide helpful instruction to Christians: "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?" He is essentially asking, "Do you understand the instruction contained in the following episode drawn from Genesis?" Alternatively, "Do you comprehend what is in the law and its application to a New Covenant Christian?"

Verses 22-24 then add:

For it is written that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar. . . .

He gives us this example and then specifically tells us that what is seemingly a simple historical narrative is actually an allegory. In other words, as important as the story is in its effect on the continuation of the promises, it also has continuous application in certain spiritual circumstances. What at first seems only to be an interesting historical reference has a dual use. Much of the Old Testament fits this usage, providing us with valuable spiritual instruction through its examples.

Even some books are typical. For example, Genesis provides the foundation for many important things to come and states God's overall purpose. Chapters 1-2 tell us of re-creation and of mankind's responsibility to dress and keep it. Dressing and keeping has as much to do with God's spiritual purpose as it does maintaining the earth. These chapters also lay the groundwork for marriage, which in itself contains spiritual instruction within it. Chapter 3 tells us how this world became as it is and gives the first hint of Christ's sacrifice.

In chapter 12, God's spiritual plan clearly gets underway and introduces us to Abraham, a type of the Father. As the history progresses, it shows us Isaac as a type of the Son, Rebecca as a type of the

church, and Jacob as a typical overcomer. A bit later, Joseph is shown as a type of Christ, a Forerunner and Savior of His people. As the book ends, Israel descends into Egypt, the land of sin, unaware of their danger because of their seemingly good life and prosperity.

As the story continues in Exodus, the pattern of spiritual redemption is acted out. As the book opens, the Israelites are aware they are living in sin and slavery, and they appeal for a deliverer. God supplies him in Moses, a type of Christ as Deliverer, Lawgiver, and Judge.

Leviticus, through the sacrifices and their attendant ceremonies, deals with access to God, devotion, and holiness. To some, this is a mysterious and utterly useless book. However, when its intent is understood, it becomes a veritable spiritual diamond mine to those seeking to know God, our Savior, and the many requirements to follow in His footsteps.

Numbers reveals typical patterns of experiences and trials we must face and overcome during our Christian pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. We see how people wilted under the pressures of their wilderness wandering and how God's leadership and judgment was expressed in His reactions. In addition, the spiritual leadership of Moses and Aaron emerges in their handling of and growth in bearing their responsibilities.

Deuteronomy contains final instructions and the recalling of many events and their meanings before Israel entered the Promised Land. These numerous types are a rich source of wisdom and understanding, and we have only scratched the surface of the first five books! As Paul did in Galatians 4, we can find valuable spiritual lessons when we look beyond the story on the surface.

The Value of Old Covenant Ritual

This series will focus on the book of Leviticus and specifically on several of the sacrificial offerings that have important bearing on our Christian lives. We can learn a great deal about devotion, commitment, holiness, suffering, sacrifice, perfection, righteousness, the surrender of the self, and knowing God. This section of the Bible has been long neglected by far too many Christians due to unfamiliarity with the spiritual purposes of the offerings.

We must never forget that Jesus clearly states in Matthew 5:17-18, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled." God inspired Jesus to say this for very good reasons, perhaps thousands of reasons that can be contained in one brief statement: They are not destroyed or done away with because they still have practical spiritual application. They are still useful for living the Christian life, being in the image of God, and knowing Him. To destroy them would constitute a great loss, for which we would be the less.

Hebrews 9:1, 8-9; 10:1 augment this thought:

Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. . . . [T]he Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience. . . . For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with

these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

Scripture clearly teaches that the Old Covenant ceremonies are symbolic of essential New Covenant spiritual truths. Further, the author reinforces this by saying they are "a shadow of good things to come." The verb "having" in Hebrews 10:1 is a present active participle, expressing continuous or repeated action. This means that the Old Covenant ordinances of divine service and the sanctuary are still valid and effective teaching vehicles.

Where there is a shadow there must also be a reality. In this instance, the reality is the life of Christ—the reality we are to strive to emulate as closely as we can, "as dear children," as Paul puts it, to be "a sweet-smelling aroma" to God (Ephesians 5:1-2).

In Luke 24:27, Jesus buttresses this concept while instructing the two men on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection: "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Jesus draws teaching from the books of Moses to show parallels with His own life.

Be careful not to make the careless mistake of thinking of the offerings as childish, insignificant, primitive, or barbaric. Undoubtedly, they are different from what we are culturally familiar. However, these quoted scriptures make it clear that God intended all along to use them as teaching vehicles. To those under the Old Covenant, the offerings looked forward to what would occur. We look back on what occurred and accept the spiritual intent of the teaching as applicable to us under the New Covenant.

The sacrifices of Leviticus stood at the heart of the worship of God under the Old Covenant. The overall image we may retain from them may indeed be of an endless number of bulls, sheep, goats, and birds slaughtered and burned with profound solemnity on a smoking altar. However, there is absolutely no doubt that they prefigured the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in His death by crucifixion. Less understood is that they also foreshadowed the depth of His consecrated devotion to God and man in His life. Even less understood is how they demonstrate the life we also are to exemplify as living sacrifices.

Is not being living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, and not being conformed to this world but being transformed by the renewing of our minds into the image of Christ our Redeemer, to be at the center of our lives once we are redeemed (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:13)?

Follow the Leader!

Hebrews 2:10-11 forcefully reminds us of this:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

The word translated "author" is from the Greek *archegos*. It means leader, "pioneer," "forerunner," or "captain." It can even mean "trailblazer" or "scout." An *archegos* is one who goes before, doing things with the intent that others should follow. Christ fits all these descriptions. He is our example,

and Paul says to the Corinthians to follow him, Paul, as he followed Christ. Did not Jesus Christ and His apostles lead intensely sacrificial lives, representing God in submission to Him and in service to the brethren and the world?

Paul writes in Romans 8:28-31:

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, 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.

Here is God's purpose plainly stated. Those He calls are to be conformed to the image of His Son, clearly tied to the theme of creation where God says in Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." We have a small part in this greatest of God's creative works. We must yield to that purpose. We must surrender to it and allow its power to carry us along to perfection. But it requires faith, conviction of its rightness, and devotion to its requirements. This creative process requires sacrificing our former lives with their sinful desires in submission to the details of God's purpose for us. This is our small part in this vast operation ongoing already for about 6,000 years.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." In I Corinthians 15:31, he adds to this concept of sacrifice: "I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily." How do we crucify ourselves? Every time we submit in obedience to God's instruction as part of His purpose rather than unresistingly following the dictates of human nature, we are sacrificing ourselves to God and His purpose.

In the sacrifices of Leviticus, there are many types. Even though we are members of the body of Jesus Christ, we cannot conform to every aspect of every offering. The reason is that they are not all intended for us individually. All of them will give us insight into Christ's character, but not all of them will apply directly to us. Yet, for those that do, we must strive to understand their practical applications and apply them to our lives.

We can mine a great deal of useful and sensible instruction in Christian living from the sacrifices of Leviticus. Next month, we shall begin to explore the burnt offering.