

## **The Offerings Of Leviticus (Part Five): The Peace Offering, Sacrifice, And Love**

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This series on the offerings has attempted to emphasize that Jesus Christ is the object of the sacrificial laws—He is the One described in them. He is the ideal of the whole burnt offering, the meal offering, and the peace offering, as well as the sin and trespass offerings. They offer us a concentrated view into His character, magnified in many other places in the Bible.

Once we begin to understand that the offerings are in many cases also describing the way God intends mankind to live, it opens possibilities to understand Christian living principles of great variety and depth. Leviticus 1-5 is jam-packed with vital information, especially concerning the level of dedication to holiness to which God wants His children to rise.

Therefore, we must not allow ourselves to avoid or ignore their instruction. The sacrificial laws are archaic only in the sense of when God originally gave them and in that they no longer need to be physically performed. Because they describe Jesus Christ, our model and example—because He is their object—they are pertinent to our time. We must be mindful that, spiritually, they are just as applicable to us today as they were for Christ in His day because we are to walk in His steps (I Peter 2:21).

Romans 15:1-2, 5 bears directly upon this important principle:

We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. . . . Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.

The crux of this message is that we are to be likeminded. The emphasis is on not pleasing ourselves. This is especially evident in the burnt and meal offerings, in which Christ is pictured giving Himself in service wholly to God and man. What He did was done for others. Philippians 2:4 confirms our responsibility, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

This theme continues further in Romans 15:3-4, "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.' For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Here, we are dealing with the Old Covenant and the letter of the law—or are we?

No, we most assuredly are not! Verse 4 says these things are written for those under the New Covenant. The Old Testament was recorded for our learning, for the spiritual edification of New Covenant Christians. Recall how Hebrews 10:1 says the law has a shadow of good things to come. Shadows lead to a reality; there cannot be a shadow without a reality. The reality is the Lord Jesus Christ. He fulfilled the spiritual intent of these laws, and we must strive to do the same.

We must make every effort to see a pattern of attitude, obedience, and standards in these "archaic" laws that illustrate so much more of what God wants us to strive to attain than we may have ever understood before. We may never attain to those heights, but God wants us to strive nonetheless to do our best.

### **A Devoted Spiritual Dynasty**

Perhaps I Peter 2:5 will help us understand why this striving is necessary: "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." It helps to consider the word "house" meaning something a bit different from the common definition. Most commonly, we think of a building people live in. Here, "house" can just as easily mean "dynasty," as in the "house of David."

God is building us up into a dynasty, a spiritual house, a spiritual Family, one that we know will last forever. Verse 5 adds that God is forming us into a holy priesthood, the purpose of which is to offer up acceptable spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ. Verse 9 confirms that we are already a royal priesthood. This is especially important in light of the sacrifices, because those sacrifices were the activity of the priesthood under the Old Covenant.

Those priests went through the entire ritual physically. God does not require us to follow those procedures, yet He does require us to understand the spiritual concepts and apply them to the best of our ability. Why? Because we are being built up into a spiritual Family whose function is to glorify God by offering spiritual sacrifices that He will accept.

We must not allow ourselves the liberty of detaching ourselves from this by saying, "Well, that is really interesting information and nice to have, but of what value is it?" It is of great value, as the prophet Malachi clearly shows. In Malachi 1:6, God chastises the priesthood for the irresponsible manner in which they were carrying out their charge from God: "'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." Those are strong words for failing to offer sacrifices pleasing to God.

The priesthood may not have come to a deliberately reasoned conclusion that the worship of God was something unimportant, but their inner disrespect surfaced in their slipshod and lackadaisical approach. God says He looks on the heart (I Samuel 16:7), and His evaluation of their performance is that they considered their responsibility of offering sacrifices to Him to be shameful. Their real problem lay in their heart. Distracted by concerns they considered more important, their goal of being a whole burnt offering dedicated to God became a secondary occupation for their attention and energy.

The focus of their attention may easily have been given to functions and duties considered normal, everyday concerns, not sin per se. Nevertheless, these things are of lesser importance than fulfilling their charge from God. They reply to God in a manner that can be interpreted as offended surprise, asking, "In what way have we despised Your name?" God replies that the food they offered on His altar was defiled (Malachi 1:7).

Recall that a basic feature of the offerings is of God eating a meal. The altar is His table, and the sacrifice is His food. The fire consuming the offerings pictures God devouring it. As a result of "eating" the meal, He is satisfied just as we would feel a sense of well-being following a fine meal.

God, however, is not satisfied with the sacrificial "meals" the priests of Malachi's day offered; He complains of their poor quality. They give Him no satisfaction and are not acceptable.

The quality of their offerings had become so poor as to be downright evil. The priests would never have served such blemished beasts to a leader they could see, but they gave them to the invisible God. Their faith was so weak that He was not only out of sight, He was almost completely out of mind (Psalm 10:4)! They had no thought of the greatness of His power; His merciful, loving providence; the desire of His concern for their well-being; or of His nearness to them. They apparently never gave it much thought that He was aware of all they were doing!

King David was cut from an entirely different bolt of cloth. The books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles clearly portray the external flaws in his behavior. We see his lust and adultery, his scheming deceit in conspiring to have Uriah die in battle, his childrearing errors, and his mistakes within the intrigues of government.

Like us, David was encompassed with human nature. In principle, we do many of the same things as he did, and also like him, it is an ever-present reality. It can break out at any time we get far from God and let our defenses down. However, in the Psalms we receive insight into his heart. In them, we see the real man, the one after God's own heart, and this forms the basis of God's judgment of him.

Malachi teaches us that we must strive to offer to God the best we can. Not everybody is the same. Each of us has our own package of abilities, intelligence levels, and skills. We have different attitudes about things and circumstances. We have been reared in different kinds of environments, and so our attitudes toward things are not always the same. We have different sins and weaknesses to overcome.

On the one hand, the ideals of the offerings are shown in the life of Jesus Christ, but on the other is the reality of what we are. We do not come anywhere near the ideals; we are frequently unstable and inconsistent. God nonetheless wants the general trajectory of our lives to be consistently aimed toward achieving them.

We all have our peaks and valleys. God is not overly concerned about the occasional valleys we go through as long as we are consistently bouncing back, making strenuous effort to bring the very best offering we possibly can into God's service. This approach will work to produce the maturity God desires to see in us; the image of Jesus Christ will be formed. This attitude will produce the satisfaction in God and us that is the fruit of the peace offering.

### **What Will Sacrificing Produce?**

Isaiah 53 presents an entire chapter about the Lord's Servant sacrificing Himself. Notice verse 10: "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand."

The word "pleased" does not mean that God's mind was merely inclined in that direction. Rather, it carries as a strong undercurrent of a sense of satisfaction, even pleasure and delight. Why would one have a sense like this in relation to an excruciating and painful experience such as Christ experienced in His crucifixion? Because God foresaw the overwhelming good that it would produce.

Recall that the peace offering shows us that God is satisfied because man is in communion with Him. A man is satisfied because he knows he is accepted by God, that he is in fellowship with and sharing with Him. The Priest, Christ, is satisfied because, as the common friend of formerly estranged parties, He is happy to see them sharing due to His work. Each party encompassed by the peace offering is at peace with the others.

On the eve of His crucifixion, as He takes them through the New Testament Passover service, Jesus tells His apostles, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). He is certainly not looking forward to the pain of sacrificing His life but to what would be accomplished as a result of His sacrifice. It would be the major means of producing peace between God and man. He knows His sacrifice would make possible a Family born of God.

God repeatedly shows that, whether in a family, business, nation, or in any aspect of God's creation, *peace is a major fruit of sacrifice*. Most specifically, for us it means sacrificing ourselves in keeping God's commandments and fighting human nature, holding it in check. It means being a living sacrifice by not conforming to this world or yielding to the base demands of human nature. The peace offering reveals the consequence of truly loving one another: Sacrifice is the very essence of love!

Psalm 119:165 confirms this principle, "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble." Human nature is enmity against God, and it rejects God's law (Romans 8:7). The result is continual warfare with God and between men. No one who breaks God's law as a way of life can have peace, at least not the kind of peace God gives. Jesus says in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you."

The world can produce a level of tranquility from time to time, but it is not the peace of God. When a person sins, it seems as though there is a feeling, a natural fear, that wells up. Even before the sin occurs, one invariably seeks to make sure no one else sees it happen. This does not display a mind at peace. Immediately following a sin, the fear of exposure arises, and the sinner begins justifying, at least to himself, why he has done such a thing. If caught, he justifies himself as Adam and Eve did before God.

In simple terms, God is showing us the consequences of breaking His laws. If one were at peace with God, he would have no need to hide himself. With a clear conscience, he need not lie, justifying and shifting the blame on to others. No one who breaks God's laws can have peace. However, one who loves God's law will not only keep the peace he already has but will add to it as its fruit and reward.

### **A Solution to Keep From Stumbling**

Psalm 119:165 promises another wonderful benefit: Nothing causes those who love God's law to stumble. "To stumble" indicates faltering along the path to the Kingdom of God or even to fall completely away from God. This provides great encouragement and assurance regarding security with God, meaning that we will not be turned aside by the difficulties along the way.

Instead of fear of exposure and a guilty conscience, we will be assured because God's Word says so, as I John 3:18-19 confirms: "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." What a confident life we can live by following God's way!

Another New Testament passage, I John 2:8-11, parallels the psalmist's thought:

Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Consider these verses in relation to the meal offering, representing the devoted keeping of the last six commandments. Hating a brother would be breaking those commandments in relation to him. It might involve murdering him, breaking the marriage bond through adultery, stealing from him, lying to or about him, or lusting after him or his possessions.

Verse 10 parallels Psalm 119:165 exactly when it says, "But he who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him." I John 5:3 defines love: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." The New Testament strongly affirms that loving one's brother is keeping God's commandments in relation to him, and this provides us strong assurance and stability along the way.

I John 2:11 then shows that the blindness of darkness envelops the eyes of one who hates his brother, that is, breaks God's commandments in relation to him. This blindness produces stumbling and fighting, and thus he has no peace.

It is particularly disturbing if the brother spoken of in these verses also happens to be one's spouse, father, or mother. Old people today stand a high chance of being shunted off into a convalescent or old-age home, if only for the convenience of the adult children. Is that honoring a parent, or is it in some way contemptuous? Are the children unwilling to make sacrifices even for those who brought them into the world? Will this course of action produce peace? Will it produce a sense of well-being in either party?

John says, "He who loves his brother abides in the light" (verse 10), implying that love produces its own illumination. Illumination is what enables a person to see in the dark. Light contrasts to the darkness, blindness, and ignorance of verse 11, which result in stumbling. Illumination indicates understanding and the ability to produce solutions to relationship problems. The difficult part is laying ourselves out in sacrifice to express love. If we fail to do this, we may never see solutions to our relationship problems.

### **Sharing in the Offering**

Leviticus 7:31 says, "And the priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons'." The breast named here is what we call the brisket. In the ritual, it was waved before God by means of the offerer holding the brisket in his hands and the priest then laying his hands on the offerer's hands. The offerer then advanced toward the altar by himself as though he was presenting his gift to God. Upon reaching the altar, he returned to the priest with the brisket and handed it to him, signifying God giving that portion of the offering to the priest and his sons.

Jesus Christ is our High Priest, and I Peter 2:9 clearly declares that the church is a royal priesthood. Numbers 18:8, 10-11 adds:

And the Lord spoke to Aaron: "Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings, all the holy gifts of the children of Israel; I have given them as a portion to you and your sons, as an ordinance forever. . . . 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."

Sons and daughters indicate the family of the priest. It surely included his wife as well, but this was all God needed to say to make His intention clear. Spiritually, the altar represents God's table, and the sons and daughters are the brethren in the church, the Family of our High Priest. Since we are eating from God's table, this shows us in communion with God. It also shows us doing or having a portion in the work of the priest and as having a claim on the sacrifice.

All who have communion or fellowship with God must share that communion with His priests and His children, the rest of the church, our brothers and sisters. If one brings an offering, he shares in it. There is an interesting example of this in Acts 2:41-42, beginning on the Day of Pentecost and continuing for an unknown time thereafter: "Then those who gladly received his 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." The sharing with brothers and sisters is plainly expressed in the words "fellowship," "breaking of bread," and "prayers."

Verses 43-45 add, "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." It almost seems as if the godly fear, wonders, and signs sprang directly from the sharing spirit and the sacrifices made by those who gave.

Can we feast with God and ignore His other guests? A person in communion with God *must* be in communion with all who are in communion with Him. Do we see the oneness this implies? We are all eating of the same sacrifice, the same meal. We are all being fed and strengthened by the same Spirit, and God expects that we share what we have with our brothers and sisters.

This era of the church has never experienced anything similar to the first era, but before the end time is over, we may. In the meanwhile, we should open our homes in hospitality, sharing our experiences in life with one another. We should be praying with and for each other to assist in drawing us together in unity.

Christ is our supreme example in all things pertaining to life. What did Christ do to bring us into oneness with the Father? Whatever He did we must, in principle, also do as burnt and meal offerings, keeping the commands of God with all our heart in complete devotion. In His final teaching before His crucifixion, He sets a very high standard: "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). *As* means "equal to."

He also says in verse 13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Jesus laid down His life step by step and then concluded it by submitting to crucifixion for our well-being. Those sacrifices produce peace and unity with God for those who accept His sacrifice and submit to the burden of bearing one's responsibilities before God.

The conclusion is inescapable: The peace that God gives is directly linked to sacrifice and love. Our Father began the process by so loving the world that He sacrificed His only begotten Son for its sins. The Son followed the Father by magnanimously giving His life in sublime submission to the Father's will following laying down His life for them and us day by day.

All of this begins the process for us so that we can have peace with God and His Spirit can shed His love abroad in our hearts. The process of producing peace, harmony, and unity is thus also directly linked as a result of our sacrifices in devoted obedience to His commands.

The burnt, meal, and peace offerings are meaningful illustrations of what is necessary within our relationships to produce peaceful and edifying fellowship that truly honors and glorifies God.

### **Be Clean**

We must consider another important factor in relation to our service to God and man and participating in the blessings of the altar. Notice Leviticus 22:1-7:

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel, and that they do not profane My holy name in those things which they sanctify to Me: I am the Lord. Say to them: 'Whoever of all your descendants throughout your generations, who goes near the holy things which the children of Israel sanctify to the Lord, while he has uncleanness upon him, that person shall be cut off from My presence: I am the Lord. Whatever man of the descendants of Aaron, who is a leper or has a discharge, shall not eat the holy offerings until he is clean. And whoever touches anything made unclean by a corpse, or a man who has had an emission of semen, or whoever touches any creeping thing by which he would be made unclean, or any person by whom he would become unclean, whatever his uncleanness may be—the person who has touched any such thing shall be unclean until evening, and shall not eat the holy offerings unless he washes his body with water. And when the sun goes down he shall be clean; and afterward he may eat the holy offerings, because it is his food.'"

I Peter 1:16 says, ". . . because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy,'" which is precisely the lesson contained within Leviticus 22:1-7. Our holy God is clearly saying, "Those who serve Me must also be holy." *Holy* essentially means "set apart," but it also carries with it the sense of "different," which helps explain why a person or thing is set apart. Certain factors or characteristics distinguish the set-apart one or thing, making it different from persons or things of the same kind.

*Holy* also has the sense of cleanliness or of being undefiled. God can just as easily be saying to the priests and their children, "I am a clean God, and I want those who serve Me to be clean." In this case, His transcendent purity of intent and character sets Him apart from others or things that people may consider to be god. He is therefore completely undefiled.

The Leviticus passage mentions leprosy, a corpse, and semen. We must not forget that, when this was written, God was addressing a carnal people. Thus, the instruction is couched in physical terms, but we must look for spiritual meaning within the physical instruction.

The Tabernacle, altar, priesthood, furniture, vessels, and all of the rites have spiritual significance, and Paul writes that they are "shadow[s] of good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1). Leprosy is a horrible, dreadful disease, thus it is a type of a spiritual disease. It is externally visible in its disfigurement of its victim's body. At times, there can be running sores. It probably does not parallel any one spiritual disease, but rather it symbolizes any number of sins that disfigure a person's character and/or attitude.

Both a corpse and semen possibly represent carriers of disease. Something causes a person to die, and all too frequently, it is an invisible, internal disease, of which infections and cancers are examples. The widespread AIDS virus is a good example. It can be carried within a man's semen into a woman's body. The carrier may look healthy externally, but a deadly disease is present. Only the carrier may know of its existence within him. A corpse and semen represent sins that are not easily perceived. Withdrawal from participation in the fellowship requires the sinner to exercise discipline, as he may be the only one aware of his problem. Creeping things are also defilements from sins that are less obvious. Perhaps in this case, it might be problems with one's attitudes like resentment, bitterness, envy, jealousy, and lusting.

Regardless of what rendered a person unclean, he was not allowed to participate until he cleaned himself by washing in water, a type of the Holy Spirit. Even then, he was still considered unclean until evening of that same day. This process was a form of excommunication. The unclean person was symbolically excluded from communion with God and held unfit to eat of the holy food of the altar, symbolizing the Word of God, until he had cleaned up his act. Verse 7 distinctly says he was free to eat of the holy things only after the sun went down. Even given this permission, he was still eating in the dark! Though accepted back into fellowship, he was still somewhat removed from full exposure to the light of God's throne until the next day, when complete communication with God was restored.

Taking steps to rid ourselves of uncleanness has awesome ramifications when we grasp how burdened we are with the potential for sin. The apostle Paul labels himself as a wretched man who greatly needed deliverance (Romans 7:24-25). Despite what we can do on our own—and God requires us to strive to do so—complete deliverance can only come through the work of Jesus Christ. It is essential that we know this, yet it is perhaps beyond our full understanding and appreciation that God is so merciful and full of grace to provide the sin offering that precedes us! If it were not for these elements—because we are so full of spiritual creeping things and spiritual leprosy—we would never be permitted to eat from the Lord's table.

I and II Corinthians offers us great comfort by showing that, though one may be cut off from the body, he can return once he has cleaned himself through repentance. It shows that even though he is denied close communion with God because of some spiritual uncleanness, he still remains tied to God through the New Testament priesthood. Disfellowshipping is intended to be a temporary corrective tool.

I Corinthians 5:4-5 says, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The purpose of



excommunication is to save the person from his uncleanness that is destroying his communion with God and others in the fellowship. Therefore, if he can still be saved, that person is not completely cut off from God.

II Corinthians 6:14-17 adds more information to this subject.

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

Paul asks four questions that provide comparisons that clearly urge us to avoid or depart from what is unclean so that we can be at peace and in communion with God. Fellowship with God and being allowed to eat spiritual food from His table are clearly conditioned upon our not falling into uncleanness but instead striving to maintain the purity provided by Christ's sacrifice.

Our part in striving to maintain the purity is to follow Christ's example of thorough dedication in fulfilling the requirements of the burnt and meal offerings. Doing so in no way earns us the fellowship privileges expressed in the peace offering, but it does show God our understanding of faith, love, sacrifice, thanksgiving, and the links between total devotion to Him, Jesus Christ, our fellow man, and His wonderful purpose. God has invested a great deal to provide this for us. The least we can do is give back to Him full devotion in our life as a living sacrifice.