

The Great Feast

(the Peace Offering)

Leviticus 3 & 7

Preface

I used to think that the five basic offerings in Leviticus were the most boring sections in the Bible. I'm not a Jew, I'm a New Testament believer. Why should I even care about these offerings? There could actually be many answers to that question, but one answer that I like comes from the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:17, when he says that Old Testament festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths are a "mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." Paul, several times, gives us windows into the Old Testament when he quotes verses or passages from the Old Testament in his New Testament letters. He reveals a part of the Old Testament that was written as a picture of Christ. And how many things therein are shadows and pictures of the real thing, Christ! Therefore, today, we get to explore in the Word what a Christ we have, even in the Levitical offerings!

In the beginning chapters of Leviticus, there are five basic offerings: the burnt offering (chapter 1), the grain offering (chapter 2), the peace offering (chapter 3), the sin offering (chapter 4), and the guilt offering (chapter 5).

We often read the Word too fast, skipping over many details in an attempt to finish a particular portion or to grasp the main idea of a passage. We glance and skim, and we fill in the blanks with what we have read in the past or what we have heard in a sermon. My hope for each reader is that there could be a new-found desire to see the significance and the unspeakable value in each word, in each verse, in the order of writing, in the presence of a specific word, or even in the absence of a particular word—that we could all see how careful and thoughtful the Author was toward this wonderful, living book called the Bible. C.H. Mackintosh has the same burden in saying, "We know there is nothing in the Word of God without its own specific meaning; and every intelligent and careful student of Scripture will notice the above points of difference, and when he notices them, he will naturally seek to ascertain their real import. Ignorance of this import there may be, but indifference to it there should not. In any section of inspiration, but especially one so rich as that which lies before us, to pass over a single point would be to offer dishonor to the divine, and to deprive our own souls of much profit. We should hang over the most minute details, either

to adore God's wisdom in them, or to confess our own ignorance of them. To pass them by, in a spirit of indifference, is to imply that the Holy Ghost has taken the trouble to write what we do not deem worthy of the desire to understand. This is what no right-minded Christian would presume to think. These [details] we should seek to apprehend, and no doubt they arise out of the special design of the divine mind in each offering" (Mackintosh, 1861).

Chapter 3: The Great Feast

Imagine being in a gathering of people eating a great feast. Everyone passes around pieces of warm, cooked meat, freshly-baked cakes. The smell of lamb broth and the sound of sizzling fat fill the air, among yells of rejoicing and thankfulness. Over the noise of the conversation, a chorus of trumpets announces the people's praise to all the surrounding tents, even reaching to the surrounding countries. Only hours before, an Israelite had entered the tent of meeting with a lamb and a crowd of friends and neighbors ready to celebrate a recent blessing from God. The Israelite's face is full of gratitude as he passes around the food, talking with you and all his friends about what God has done and how delicious the Lamb is. This is the peace offering.

The peace offering, interestingly, gets the most real estate among the other basic offerings. Leviticus chapter 3 includes much instruction as to the altar—what can be offered, how to offer it, etc. Fast-forward to chapter 7, and you'll find out about the feast that takes place after the altar; what can be eaten, who gets to eat it, how long they can eat, etc. Chapter 3 is the altar, chapter 7 is the feast.

On the most basic level, just as the name of the offering suggests, we can have peace with God after being alienated from Him and His people's commonwealth (Eph. 2:12-14 & Col 1:20). But what does it actually look like to have peace with God? What would we do? What would God do after bringing us back? This is what I would like to look at in the peace offering. To say it outright, we would eat. After peace with God is accomplished through the offering, the people enjoy and eat. The offering, which is a picture of Christ, highlights Him as our food and enjoyment, shared in sweet and joyful fellowship. God is enjoying Christ, the priests are enjoying Christ, the offerer is enjoying Christ, and anyone else who came along (that is clean) is enjoying Christ. Christ is the center of everyone's feeding and enjoyment in this picture!

The central thought in the peace offering is fellowship, both with God and with His people. Not only is there a *sweet aroma*—something only God can enjoy, just like in the

burnt offering—but here the worshiper is introduced, not as a bystander, but as a participant. The offerer gets to join God in eating the offering. Not only him, but all those who are around (who are clean, Lev 7:19) get to eat the offering. If you had participated in the burnt offering, you might have stood around the altar with the offerer and all the priests, gazing in awe at the whole thing being burnt up, seeing the flames and smoke that would sooth and satisfy God, watching as the whole offering turned to ash. And in view of such a marvelous scene, you and the others would bow your heads in worship, but still walk away with nothing for yourselves. It is not so in the peace offering. They beheld something “capable [not only] of emitting a sweet odor to God, but also of yielding a most substantial portion for themselves, on which they could feed in happy and holy fellowship” (Mackintosh, 1881). This is the first offering that is offered up “as food” (Lev. 3:16). God is eating, the offerer is eating, the priests are eating, and anyone else who came along is eating. To answer the question, “What does it look like to have peace with God?”—it looks like a big feast: God enjoying Christ, and all of God’s people enjoying Christ together.

The parable of the prodigal son has something of the thought of the peace offering. In it, there are many inspiring parallels, but I will only make mention of one. When the prodigal son finally comes back home, what does the father do? He slays the fattest calf, and the entire household has a huge feast. The father of the prodigal son says, “bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate...and they began to celebrate” (Luke 15:23). How sweet this picture is: the son, who was far off, has been brought back to his father, and they both, with many around, enjoy the best, fattest calf. I encourage the reader to stop here and quickly read Luke 15:11-32 keeping the peace offering in mind.

In the peace offering, you can’t get away from this, what C.A. Coates calls a “festive character.” In Deuteronomy 27:7, God commands Israel, after they cross the Jordan and enter the good land, to “sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 27:7). The first thing that God wanted them to do after entering the promised land was to eat and rejoice! What better of a way for them to do that than through a peace offering.

His Own Hands

Having looked at the overall scene of the peace offering, let’s dive into a few details. In the next few sections, I will discuss how different words and phrases tell us what the peace offering could mean for us today. First, there is a phrase that describes how the offerer brings the animal to the altar, which is with “his own hands” (Lev. 7:30). Why would the Bible need to say *his own hands*? Isn’t that already implied? C.A. Coates attributes a lot of

meaning to this specific instruction. He says that it emphasizes not merely “looking to enjoy what others bring, or complaining of the lack in others! What are you bringing with your ‘own hands’ to contribute to the pleasure of God, and to priestly food, and to the common joy of the fellowship?”² This word from Coates brings to mind the teaching of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:26: “What is the outcome then brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” It’s easy to attend church events and services with no sense of responsibility, expecting someone else to bring the enjoyment and to carry the whole thing. For some gatherings this may be appropriate, but the principle of “his own hands” is good in general for our fellowship. How enjoyable and supplying could our gatherings be if each person had the thought to bring his or her portion with their *own hands*.

The Breast, Right Thigh, and Leavened Bread

As mentioned earlier, we get to feed on Christ as the peace offering, but what exactly do we taste? Or to ask it in another way, what specifically are we enjoying or apprehending of Christ? The person of Christ is so big and exhaustless, “yet rarely do we pause to consider who this Christ is, how wonderful He is, how marvelous He is, how preeminent He is and how sufficient He is. Oh, what a Christ! Eventually, all of who He is, all that He has done, and all that He has accomplished is being worked into us.”³ By looking at the following details of the offering itself, we hope to explore more and more of this unlimited Christ. Each part of the offering reflects an attribute of who He is and can inspire us to know the Lord *in that way* in our walk. Let’s take a look at some parts of the peace offering that are eaten: the right thigh, the breast, and leavened bread.

Think back to the big feast at the beginning of this chapter, with many people eating, passing food around, and giving thanks. Each person takes a little bit of this, a little bit of that. A priest may have a plate of *the breast* of the offering handed to him. He might think, “why do we priests get to eat *the breast*?” Is there a reason God chose *the breast* to give to the priests to eat? *The breast* typifies Christ’s love. Many of us have experienced this kind of love and cannot be more confident that this love is very different from our own love. When I finally came to receive the Lord and what He had done for me, I was absolutely sure that I had never experienced that kind of love before. The love that God has for us and “has poured out into our hearts” (Rom 5:5) is far deeper and stronger than any other kind of love. Eventually, this love that we have received and enjoy starts flowing out. In fact, the Lord Himself commanded the disciples to love one another, just as He has loved them (John

13:34). On the one hand, the Lord commanded this, but on the other, how could you not exude such a love as you are feasting on the very source of this love! Concerning this, Coates writes, “But as [the breast] being food it becomes characteristic of the person who eats it; it forms him spiritually. The divine thought is wonderful — that there should be a priesthood so nourished upon the love of Christ that they take character from it! The effect of eating the ‘breast’ would be that we should love as Christ loved, and God would have everything in priestly service moved by that mighty mainspring.”⁴

Another piece of meat that the priests get to eat is the *right thigh*, or sometimes translated right leg or shoulder. This piece of offering signifies Christ’s strength. Sometimes we are strengthened simply by “feasting” with the saints. Experiencing Christ’s strength doesn’t always look like leading a gospel campaign or giving a conference; sometimes you gain just enough strength to stand and go on. To have this experience is so valuable. Even if you barely muster up the energy to get out of your house and attend a gathering with the saints, and even if most of the time the meeting isn’t glorious and overcoming, for some reason you leave the gathering feeling strengthened. There is something formed in you that is solid and lasting. To simply stand is not a small thing. To stand may look like committing your Tuesday nights for a prayer gathering, or setting aside 5 minutes every morning to read one Bible verse. There are many people who don’t end up making it out of the house for this or that gathering. They don’t even have enough strength to call a brother or sister. Even some who used to live for the Lord stopped standing and have fallen away. Oh, how we need the strengthening from the *right thigh*. Even Daniel, whom God called “highly esteemed,” came to a point where all his “natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and [he] retained no strength” (Daniel 10:8). While Daniel had his face to the ground, the Lord touched him and strengthened him to stand. Eventually Daniel said, “You have strengthened me.”

Experiencing Christ’s strength is only part of eating the *right thigh*. Coates takes this a little further by saying that the right thigh refers to the “strength of Christ’s walk.” He asks, “How could one walk as Christ walked except by feeding on the ‘shoulder of the [peace]-offering?’” This means that not only do we have Christ’s strength to strengthen us in our own walk, but we have strength to walk just as *He* walked (1 Jn. 2:6). We’re able to be intimately familiar with all the steps Christ took while He was here on earth. I think many can attest that when the Lord gives them strength, it isn’t for going about this earth in their own way, but for following *His* footsteps.

Leavened bread is also another dish you would see at the table here, and arguably the most confusing portion of this meal. Isn’t leavened bread a bad thing? Doesn’t it signify something mixed and impure? It makes sense that *unleavened* bread is at the table, because

in many portions of the Bible unleavened bread typifies the Lord as being pure and unmixed, totally set apart for God (see chapter two on the fine flour). Why then would God allow the offerer to bring *leavened* bread?

I find Coates' answer to that question very striking, "This implies the recognition and acknowledgment of what we are in ourselves. It secures a spirit of lowliness and self-distrust, and leads one to walk softly."⁶ You have to appreciate how realistic Coates' comment is. Could we ever really say, "It's not I but only Christ in this fellowship! I need to get rid of every bit of the self before I can have any fellowship with God or the saints!" No way. In reality, we realize that we are still very much in a mixed condition, and we would be lying if we said we have no sin (1 Jn. 1:8). We really need the Lord to guide us into the right way to handle this. It's easy to go too far one way, and to be overly occupied with how fleshly and "mixed" we are. At the same time, we can't deceive ourselves and pretend like we don't have anything of our flesh in the mix. Both are true, and you have to know how to put those facts in their right place. May the Lord bring about a proper balance between the two and help us have a healthy understanding of who we are so that our walk can be soft and lowly and our fellowship can be meek and open. Too often we are overtaken by our own thoughts and own opinions, to the point we are subconsciously closed to one another in our fellowship. After all, why do you need the fellowship when you already have the best way or the right answer? Having this "leavened bread" on the table, we realize who we are and that in fact we do really need each other and the fellowship we offer. To have such an unhindered fellowship with the saints, we can't lose sight of this. "It keeps us sober as to ourselves, and considerate and forbearing as to others."⁷

Spiritual Freshness

In Leviticus chapter 7, there were three ways someone could sacrifice a peace offering: by way of thanksgiving, vow, or free will. If any of them offered by way of thanksgiving, they were to enjoy this feast only the day of. If someone offered as a way of keeping their vow or by free will, they were permitted to eat it the day of *and* the next day. No one was ever permitted to eat the meat from a peace offering on the third day. What does it mean that there was a time limit for eating the sacrifice? It can mean this: that the Israelites could never get too far from the sacrifice. They could never enjoy eating the meat too long after the moment of sacrifice itself. Today, our fellowship and worship must directly involve Christ (the sacrifice), and if it doesn't, it becomes an abomination. The very fact we are able to fellowship and worship is because of the sacrifice of Christ. It should be carried out that way. If our fellowship begins with Christ as the source, shouldn't it

continue with direct relation to Him as well? The Galatians lost sight of how to continue in close involvement with the Lord, so the apostle Paul had to ask, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3). This verse, although pertaining to the Galatians’ growth rather than simple fellowship, still shows us how easy it can be to deviate from the very source of that fellowship, enjoyment, and life itself. It’s possible that the Lord may give you five words to speak, and anything that follows could be distant from what the Lord is speaking at the time. However, it may be tempting to fill up the time in the church gathering, or you may have a lot to say about that portion in the Bible. How careful we should be to stay close to a fresh “sacrifice.” Sometimes we are tempted to dwell on stories from twenty years ago, how the Lord delivered us from something or stirred up something. Let us not depend on those for food. May we always have fresh enjoyment of the Lord on our lips. Sometimes the Lord initiates some kind of fellowship, and it’s clear He is involved and present. For example, you start a home gathering because many around you are desirous and seeking the Lord. After a few months, you have to ask the Lord, “Are you still here? Are you still involved?” It’s possible we could go a long time before asking this question and could miss where the Lord is actually moving. If we didn’t have such a living God we wouldn’t need to ask this question, but what a picture we have in the Old Testament that reminds us we should never get too far from where the Lord is. May we not be satisfied with last week’s meal, but always look to have something fresh to bring to others in fellowship.

What’s the significance that the vow and freewill offering could be enjoyed longer than the thanksgiving offering? Without going too far into the implication and special design of each of these grounds of offering, I would like to point out the significance of the length of time during which the offerer could eat the meat of the offering. The length of time that the offerer can eat the meat depends on, to use Mackintosh’s words, the “spiritual energy”⁸ that was from God Himself. The spiritual energy behind thanksgiving, which is a reactionary sacrifice, is not as great as the spiritual energy behind a free-will or vow sacrifice. For a thanksgiving offering, when God directly does something in our lives, whether it be acts of mercy or of kindness, we can’t help but respond in thanksgiving. An Israelite may have gone out to his field and saw that they were able to reap one hundred-fold more than last year, and said, “Wow, God is so good and has blessed us greatly! Let’s go to the tent of meeting tomorrow after the burnt offering and bring our peace offering of thanksgiving.” Additionally, in 1 Kings, King Solomon reacted to his answered prayer to receive wisdom and discernment by offering peace offerings and throwing a feast for his servants (1 Kings 3:15). These kinds of offerings are reactionary. The worship and

fellowship centered on these thank-offerings are related to the favor from God or act of God upon the offerer. But eventually, the Spirit seems to move in us in such a way that we start to worship voluntarily, like in the freewill or vow peace offering, even if nothing has happened to us or for us. No longer are we just thankful for something that God has done, but we from ourselves are initiating praise and worship. Take Daniel, for example. In Daniel chapters 1- 8, Daniel mostly reacted to what God was doing. God gave dreams to two kings. Of course Daniel interpreted those dreams and was very involved in what God was revealing to others and himself, even getting his own vision from God, but all of it was still reactionary. Then in Daniel chapter 9, Daniel read the Bible and, of his own accord, prayed to God, being entirely focused on God's wants and needs. No longer was Daniel only reacting, but he could initiate a prayer for the things on God's heart. At one point he prayed to God for something to happen "for Your own sake." If you want to see how focused Daniel was on God and His interests, count how many times Daniel used the word "Your" in Daniel chapter 9. Who Daniel was had started to change, and eventually he became a person who didn't wait for God to do something but rather someone who could initiate such worship with the center focus being God Himself and His desires. Similarly, when someone offers a prayer or sacrifice of their own accord, Mackintosh says that the resulting fellowship "will be of a more enduring character." Hence, there is an extra day to enjoy the feast for the vow and free will offering. When you bring something to fellowship that isn't just a reaction but from a desire to offer something to God for His people, there is a more lasting enjoyment. People can enjoy what you bring for a longer period of time. But whatever ground or motive initiates the peace offering, the worship and fellowship that follows must always be connected with and close to the precious sacrifice of Christ.

Conclusion

Isn't this such a joyful picture? The peace offering carries with it the sense of fellowship, feasting, enjoyment, and togetherness. In its details we can see the love and strength of Christ, the humility in acknowledging our mixed condition, and the need to sustain a fresh enjoyment in our fellowship.

May our view of our fellowship be elevated as well as our view of who this Christ is that we feed upon together. We can taste the love of Christ and in turn love others with this same love. We can taste the strength of Christ's walk and be strengthened to walk just as He walks. We can realize who we are, and we can go on in a soft and meek way. The Lord gives us responsibility, and we can bring, with *our own hands*, something to the table for all to enjoy.