

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Peace Offering – Fellowship: Leviticus 3

Imagine, for a moment, that I am a happily married man, which I am! Imagine, also, that I love my wife very much, which I do! Imagine, further, that I try very hard to avoid upsetting her, which, again, I do try to achieve! Imagine, however, that, one day, I do something which upsets her very much. What am I to do, to put things right, to make amends? I know. I will go out and buy the biggest box I can afford of her favourite chocolates. I do so. I give it to my wife, saying how sorry I am for what I had done. She accepts my apology. She is duly placated. She enjoys the chocolates. We are back to where we were before I offended her. Everything is fine. The enjoyment of our long-term relationship is restored. Well and good.

Now, many people would say that I had given my wife a Peace Offering. However, in the proper sense of the term, as defined in the Bible, that would not be so. Strictly speaking, I would have given her a Trespass Offering, which is not today's subject.

Imagine, then, a rather different scenario. Imagine, as before, that I am a happily married man, which I certainly am! Imagine, as before, that I love my wife very much, which I certainly do! There is no outstanding grievance between us. All is well. Imagine, then, that, thinking about this, I ask myself, "How can I show my wife how much I really love her? What can I do to share with her my enjoyment of our most happy relationship? I know! I will buy the biggest box I can afford of our favourite chocolates. We will sit down together with the box of chocolates, enjoy each other's company and the chocolates we both like, and share together our mutual appreciation of the joy of our long-term relationship."

Now that **would** be a Peace Offering. Not as something necessary to make peace, or even restore peace, but rather a celebration of the peace which already exists. Note, it's the same box of chocolates, but enjoyed for a very different reason.

Generally speaking, the Old Testament offerings give us a better understanding of the content, the substance, of worship, the true worship, spiritual worship, Christian worship. They outline the sort of thoughts that fill our minds when we are in a true spirit of worship. They are not connected at all with what we can do. We offer to God that which is well pleasing to Him, that is, the fragrance and sweetness of the Person and work of Christ. The offerings set out, in a special manner, types, or pictures, given by the Holy Spirit, of the glory of the Person, and the value of the work, of the Lord Jesus Christ, and also the blessings which have become ours as a result of what He has done. They instruct us in things which we could not otherwise have learned. Today's subject is The Peace Offering, which signifies the worshipper having fellowship with God and man in the enjoyment of a settled peace. It is the result of possessing and enjoying peace which has already been established, rather than the work necessary to establish that peace.

Let us now turn to the Bible itself and check whether my suggestions stand the test of Holy Scripture. For this, we should really start by reading Leviticus 3:1-17, which give us the Details of the Peace Offering in its constituent parts. We should also read Leviticus 7:11-36, which is the Law of the Peace Offering. That is, it explains the way in which the Peace Offering had to be celebrated. While we are bringing these things together, we should also bear in mind Psalm 118, the Psalm of the Peace Offering, which tells us what it felt like for the Lord Jesus to be the answer to all that the Peace Offering signifies. As time permits, we must return to that later.

First of all, what do we learn, overall, from Leviticus chapters 3 and 7? They tell us that the value to God of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ is so great that the peace established by it can be fully enjoyed by all the different parties involved. There is that established by the death of Christ which God Himself enjoys. There is that which Christ personally Himself enjoys, as the fruit of His death upon the Cross. There is that which can be enjoyed collectively by the Christian church, as such. There is also that which can be enjoyed by each individual Christian believer. Furthermore, all the parties involved can share that enjoyment with each other. The appropriate words to give us the right idea about The Peace Offering are words like peace, prosperity, praise, fellowship, communion, celebration.

Let us begin by considering that the word the Bible uses to signify a Peace Offering is used consistently throughout Scripture. A prime feature of The Peace Offering is that it is a voluntary offering. It is offered willingly. It is not obligatory. It is also a sweet savour offering. That indicates that what is being offered is rising up to God as a sweet savour. That is, what is being done is acceptable to God. It pleases Him, it gives Him pleasure.

Then, apart from the many examples of the use of the term Peace Offering itself, there are special cases which are particularly instructive. For instance, in Psalm 40, we get a marvellous summary of the major offerings detailed in the opening chapters of Leviticus. In verse 6 of that Psalm, we read, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required." Careful study of the words used there, and comparing the usage of the same words throughout Scripture confirms that it is fair to read that verse like this. "Peace-offering and meal-offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required."

It is common knowledge that, in the Psalms, generally, we get the expression of the feelings of men who have gone through a variety of experiences, both pleasant and painful, with the help of God, indeed with the joy of the felt presence of God in those experiences. Further study makes plain that in some very special Psalms, called for convenience the Messianic Psalms, we are given a special insight into what it felt like to the Lord Jesus Himself to go through many of life's experiences, again both pleasant and painful, and in some cases even death itself, in the conscious knowledge of the presence of God. Psalm 40 is one of these Psalms.

This is such an important matter that we have to ask ourselves, "Is there anything in the New Testament to justify this assumption that The Peace Offering in Leviticus 3 and 7 and the reference to it in Psalm 40, are intended to give us a picture of something that can only be fully true in the experience of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself?" The plain answer to that important question is, "Indeed there is!" The very words that we have read from Psalm 40 are quoted verbatim in Hebrews 10:5, 6 and 8. The clear exposition there of what Psalm 40 is foretelling is that only in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ can be seen the fulfilment of what Psalm 40 refers to in the offerings. The Epistle to the Hebrews in particular is full of references to the fact that the Old Testament ceremonial offerings were nothing in themselves. Their true value is that they looked on to the one perfect offering, the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the Cross of Calvary. The fullness of all that Christ achieved in His death is so great that no one type would or could be sufficient to spell out all that was accomplished by that perfect sacrifice. But, Christ having died and risen again, God has been proven to have been perfectly right in forgiving men who acted in accordance with His instructions in the days before Christ came into the world. We learn, from Romans 3:24 to 26, that we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." That is, God was right in the days before Christ came into the world in forgiving men on the basis of the Old Testament offerings, because they all looked on to that supreme, once and for all sacrifice made when "once in the end of the age ... (Christ) appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself", as Hebrews 9:26 affirms.

In addition to that, we have a lovely, if a little oblique, reference to the same thing in Ephesians 5:2, where we can justifiably read, "walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and hath given Himself for us a burnt-offering and a peace-offering to God for a sweet smelling savour." There we have it. These Old Testament pictures are intended to teach us that when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross, He laid the only true basis for worship, true worship, spiritual worship, to arise from worshippers on earth to God in heaven. We read in John 4:23-24, "the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." That takes us a stage further. The consistent teaching of Scripture, in both Old and New Testaments, is that worship flows from the completion of a sacrifice which is fully acceptable to God. Only the final, full revelation of God as Father in the Person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has made it possible for true spiritual worship of God as Father to arise voluntarily from willing hearts rejoicing in the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins. Only the death of Christ has made the forgiveness of sins available. Not only that, but we find that our hearts are in tune with God's own heart in thinking right things, holy things, spiritual things, about Christ personally and the value to God of what Christ has done.

Before we look at some of the details of The Peace Offering, let us recap. Peace, perfect, lasting, spiritual peace is now available because Christ has died and risen again. Those who enjoy that peace by faith can worship God in the enjoyment of the knowledge that God Himself enjoys, even more than they do, all the beauties and perfections of Christ personally, and the value to God of His sacrificial death. Indeed, God has demonstrated that fact in that He has raised Him from among the dead. It is a wonderful thing that saved sinners on earth can share with God in heaven the celebration of the perfection of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We enjoy, together with God and man, what God has made known to us of Christ.

Now let us see how the details of the Peace Offering in Leviticus 3 and 7 graphically illustrate what the New Testament plainly teaches. Going down the verses, we notice that The Peace Offering was a voluntary offering. It was open to the offerer when he came, and, within prescribed limits, what he offered. Hebrews 10:19 to 22 affirms that we have constant, immediate, unhindered access into the very presence of God at all times. Then, again, The Peace Offering was a sweet savour offering. In taking the opportunity to present to God the preciousness of Christ, we know that we are offering that which is well pleasing to him. Our appreciation of the fragrant perfections of the Person and work of Christ arises as a sweet savour unto God. Again, if the offering was to be a fair picture of the perfection resident in Christ, the animal must be completely without flaw.

In some offerings, the male animal is specified as being appropriate, in others, the female. In The Peace Offering, the offering could be either the male or the female. What can we learn from that distinction? There is only one way to find out. We must compare Scripture with Scripture and the usage wherever the concept is introduced. That is the only true way to arrive at a conclusion about what we are intended to learn. When we do that, the distinction becomes reasonably clear. When the male is specified, we are directed to think about God's side of the matter, that is, the revelation of what God has done in Christ. When the female is introduced, it is more the worshipper's apprehension and appreciation of what God has done that is involved. Sometime, check it through for yourself. I, for one, am satisfied that the usage confirms the suggestion. It fits.

Consistent with all offerings, all the fat, the sweetest part of the animal, must be given to God, Who Himself knows best the perfections of His Beloved Son. The blood shed and applied on and round about the altar, testifies to the fact that the peace enjoyed has been secured on a righteous basis. As we read in Colossians 1:20, "He has made peace by the blood of his cross". Most of the flesh of the sacrifice must be burned upon the altar, in token of the fact that the righteous claims of God had been fully met. The application of the fire served to bring out the aroma of the sacrifice, which then arose to God as a sweet savour. The more intense the fire, the sweeter the aroma that arose to God as a sweet smelling savour.

We learn in chapter 7 that the use of oil was prominent in the way The Peace Offering was celebrated. A reminder, surely, that all the Lord Jesus did, in life and in death, He did in the energy and power of the Holy Spirit. Significantly, leaven, which in Scripture is always a symbol of evil, was permitted, but it must be carefully controlled. There is no reference to leaven in verse 12, which speaks of Christ personally. There can never be any suggestion of evil attaching to Him. However, there is a reference to leaven in verse 13, which brings us, the offerors, into the picture. Even there, the leaven had to be carefully controlled. There is no suggestion of the leaven being active. It has been in the oven and baked, judged in the presence of God by the application of fire. Furthermore, the offering must not be stale, but absolutely fresh. Then again, no uncleanness could be permitted in anything which represented Christ.

The manner in which the offering was presented had a delightful significance, too. The **breast** of the sacrifice was **waved** in a **horizontal** movement which released the full savour of the offering **before** the Lord, in appreciation of and enjoyment of His love. Similarly, the right **shoulder** was **heaved** in a **vertical** movement **unto** the Lord, in appreciation and enjoyment of the power and ability of Christ to secure everything for God.

I have already suggested that Psalm 118 gives us an idea of what it felt like to the Lord Jesus to be The Peace Offering. Bearing in mind what we have been considering, we cannot be surprised that the Psalm is full of expressions of appreciation and praise. It is surely right that He Who bore the Cross, and made the supreme sacrifice, should have a major role in the celebration of the victory which He Himself gained.

Through the work of Christ, and in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit, we have the joy and privilege of being constrained to enter into the enjoyment and appreciation of all that God has wrought in Christ. We revel in all that we have had revealed to us of the glories of the Person and the value of the work of the Son of God.

As the Apostle John says in 1 John 1:3-4, "that we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." The hymn writer must have had the truth of those words in mind when he penned the words:

*"By Thy grace Thou now hast called us
Sharers of Thy joy to be
And to know the blessed secret
Of His preciousness to Thee"*

Well, that's it! I think I'll go out now and buy that box of chocolates!

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