

Leviticus

Chapter 3

Peace Offerings

13.08.2005

We have seen on television some awful bombings in the past few months. One of the possible results for our society, especially if bombs occur here, could be fear. People may cower in their homes, not willing to go anywhere.

If that is true, then one of the signs of a very healthy peaceful existence is surely the opening up of homes, and the welcoming of people in to eat and share together. Imagine the euphoria if one day George W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden could honestly welcome each other into their homes for a friendly meal?

Impossible? Nothing is impossible for our God. He is the king of peace, and Jesus can change enemies into friends because of the power of his death and resurrection.

We have seen it in the New Testament. In Acts 9, Ananias prayed for Saul of Tarsus to become a Christian. Saul would normally have tried to arrest or kill Ananias. However, Jesus had changed him, and we are told that after he was baptised, they ate. In Acts 10, Peter is given a vision declaring all food clean, and straight away he agrees to visit Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who was to be the first Gentile Christian. When Peter went back to Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians were livid that he had eaten in a Gentile's house. When Peter explained what God had done, and how God had accepted even Gentiles when they believed, the Jewish Christians were ecstatic. Eating the meal was a very concrete expression of the fellowship and peace between them.

The first Christians placed great significance upon eating with other Christians. In Acts 2:42, one of the 4 things that they devoted themselves to was eating with each other. It shows that they put their fellowship into practice, and I believe it was an extension of the peace or fellowship sacrifice.

This peace or fellowship sacrifice is described in great detail in Leviticus 3 and Leviticus 7. It shows God's Old Testament way of formalising,

authorising and legitimizing the bonds of fellowship between people.

Dinner is a very fitting conclusion to the agreement process.

If, in Old Testament times, two clans in Israel had fought and then made peace, then Leviticus 3 would have been used to formalise, authorise, and legitimize the arrangement.

It was a sacrifice to celebrate making good friends. When King Solomon opened the Temple in Jerusalem, he made an enormous sacrifice. Over 14 days, he offered 20,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats using these regulations.

The peace offering was also used to express thanks, and could also be a freewill offering, or as the result of a vow.

Last week we looked at the burnt offering in Leviticus 1. This offering is like it, yet different. As in the burnt offering, a person making this offering could use an animal from the herd or flock. It had to be without defect. The offerer laid his hand on its head, killed it and blood was splashed around.

However, unlike the burnt offering, the animal could be male or female. It could not be a bird, and only the fat, the kidneys, the caudate lobe of the liver and the fat tail of the sheep (if it was a sheep), was to be burnt on top of a burnt offering. The rest of that sacrifice could be eaten.

However, the priest had to do something before the fat was burnt and the animal eaten. He was given the fat, the breast, and the right thigh of the animal. The fat and breast were then waved in front of the altar as a wave offering. The fat was then burnt, and the breast became the property of all the priests, while the right thigh became the property of the sacrificing priest.

The rest of the meat had to be eaten by the people for whom the offering was made. But it was important to note that the sacrifice had not

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finished when the meat was taken away for cooking. Leviticus 7 gives “use by” dates for the meat. If the offering was for thanksgiving, then it all had to be eaten that day. If it was as the result of a vow, or as a freewill offering, it had 2 days in which to be eaten.

Leviticus 7:17-18 says *Any meat of the sacrifice left over till the third day must be burnt up. If any meat of the fellowship offering is eaten on the third day, it will not be accepted. It will not be credited to the one who offered it, for it is impure; the person who eats any of it will be held responsible.*

The sacrifice to formalise, authorise and legitimise their peace and fellowship, included their proper relationship with God.

If they chose to ignore God’s desires, then God would not credit them with the benefits of the sacrifice.

For Israelites, repairing friendships always included repairing their relationship with God. If they rejected God’s role, then they were not accepted. But also, if the sacrifice was a sham, with no repairing of human relationships, then the fellowship meal was a farce and the offering was not accepted.

Jesus said in the New Testament, in Matthew 5:23-24. *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

Jesus said that in the middle of a passage talking about murder, hate and suing people. This passage does not say you have to be right with people before you can be right with God. Rather, it is saying to the people in an on-going relationship with God, do not live a sham. Do not assume God will accept your offerings willy nilly.

We know that since Jesus’ death we do not need animal sacrifices. Yet as we appreciate the many

blessings of his sacrifice for us, (which include being forgiven, having unlimited fellowship with God and unity in Christ), we must still be ever vigilant to ensure that our fellowship with God and our fellowship with each other is open, honest and forgiving. That is why hospitality is such an important Christian gift. To share over a meal, or over a cuppa, or something like that is vital.

Living in fellowship needs to be more than words, so let us remember to practice hospitality.